



Unpacking 'gender' in India's Joint Forest Management Program: Lessons from two Indian states

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India's Joint Forest Management (JFM) Program

- Collaborative sharing of forest management responsibilities and benefits between state and communities living in or near forests

- Reservations for women and marginalized groups (Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST)) on Joint Forest Management Committees (JFMCs)



Photo: N Hegde / LIFE Trust

Conceptualizing participation



Empowered participation

Nominal/passive participation

'Participatory exclusions' as paradoxical situation whereby exclusion can be experienced even in seemingly participatory institutions

(Agarwal 2001)

Intersectionality

→ Multiple axes of social differentiation (gender, age, socio-economic status, ethnicity/caste, etc.) intersect and co-constitute each other to create unique social locations (e.g. Crenshaw)



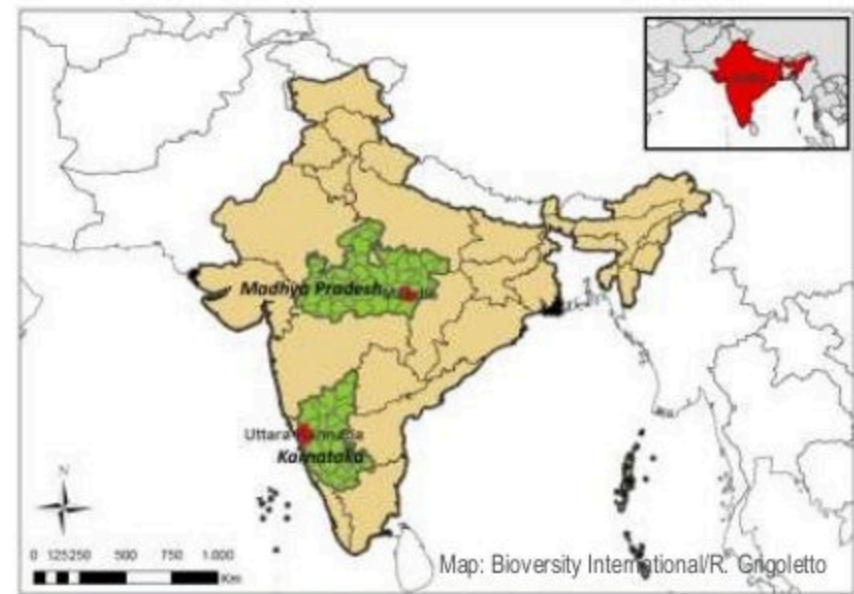
Situating the Study

Uttara Kannada District, Karnataka

- Lush, high forest cover (80%)
- Model state for JFM
- Hindus (70%), SCs (8.1%), STs (2.4%)
- Brahmins (upper caste Hindus) large landholders, *betta* lands
- STs and SCs most forest dependent
- Relatively high formal education
- Range of livelihood options (areca nut, spices)

Mandla District, Madhya Pradesh

- High (degraded) forest cover
- Few active JFMCs
- 21.1% ST (Gond, Baiga, etc.)
- STs highly forest dependent
- Low formal education
- Few livelihood options, high poverty



Methodology

In-depth, semi-structured interviews (in private) w/ 100 local women and men, 5 villages per site

- Farmers – different ethnic, socio-economic, age groups
- JFMC exec. comm. members
- JFMC presidents
- Forest Department
- Panchayat
- NGO staff
- Women's self-help group members



Photo: Priyanka Kothi/CARD

Gendered exclusions in JFM

Reservations for women on JFMC exec. comm. but:

- “Women are too busy”
 - Meetings held at inconvenient times
 - Mobility constraints
 - **Brahmin women are “only a little bit engaged” in forest activities**
 - Lack of knowledge and awareness about JFM
 - Lack of formal education and self-confidence
- Gender norms dissuade women’s participation in public fora
- “When the women speak, the men tell them: ‘Shut up, you don’t know what you are talking about’, and they say ‘don’t speak in front of everyone’”
- (female Pancha farmer, Mandla)

Ethnic Exclusions in JFM

Reservations for STs and SCs on JFMC exec. comm. but:

- Competing work schedules
 - “For those [landless labourers] who are dependent on the daily wages, they will follow their work first and not attend” (female NGO staff, Uttara Kannada)
- Lack of formal education and related insecurities
- Physical isolation and communication barriers
- Social norms and inequitable power relations that dissuade certain groups from participating in public fora
 - “The Pancha and Aheer talk more here. The Gond and Baiga: they are the most illiterate, so they don’t speak up. They really don’t know very much.”
(male Pancha farmer, Mandla)

Gender Meets Ethnicity in JFM

Social relations are structured along both ethnic and gender lines.

“There is one woman that I know [in the JFMC]. Her name is Yenki (pseudonym). She belongs to the Siddhis too. That's why I know her. The others I don't know, they are from another caste.”

(female Siddhi farmer, Uttara Kannada)

Gender Meets Ethnicity in JFM

Not all women (or men) are the same

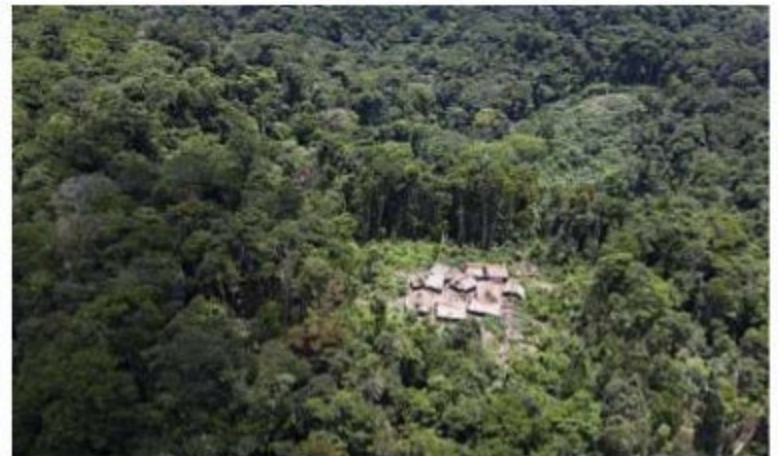
- Uttara Kannada
 - ST and SC women are more active than Brahmin women in forest activities, but *Brahmin women occupy seats reserved for women (!)*
- Mandla
 - Baiga women are most forest-dependent but most marginalized in JFM



Photo: S. Burman/CARD

Key messages

- Gender intersects with and cannot be dissociated from other factors of social differentiation -- focus on 'women' is not enough
- The emphasis on differences between dominant and marginalized groups, and grouping marginalized ethnic groups, can conceal important differences among them
- Qualitative methods, even applied at small scale, can shed light on processes of social inclusion and exclusion





Thank you

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