

# “BARGAINING” AND GENDER RELATIONS: WITHIN AND BEYOND THE HOUSEHOLD

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## ABSTRACT

Highlighting the problems posed by a “unitary” conceptualization of the household, a number of economists have in recent years proposed alternative models. These models, especially those embodying the bargaining approach, provide a useful framework for analyzing gender relations and throwing some light on how gender asymmetries are constructed and contested. At the same time, the models have paid inadequate or no attention to some critical aspects of intra-household gender dynamics, such as: What factors (especially qualitative ones) affect bargaining power? What is the role of social norms and social perceptions in the bargaining process and how might these factors themselves be bargained over? Are women less motivated than men by self-interest and might this affect bargaining outcomes? Most discussions on bargaining also say little about gender relations beyond the household, and about the links between extra-household and intra-household bargaining power. This paper spells out the nature of these complexities and their importance in determining the outcomes of intra-household dynamics. It also extends the bargaining approach beyond the household to the interlinked arenas of the market, the community and the State.

## KEYWORDS

Bargaining models, bargaining power, gender relations, household economics, social norms, altruism

## I. INTRODUCTION

The nature of gender relations – relations of power between women and men – is not easy to grasp in its full complexity. But these relations impinge on economic outcomes in multiple ways.<sup>1</sup> The complexity arises not least from the fact that gender relations (like all social relations) embody both the material and the ideological. They are revealed not only in the division of labor and resources between women and men, but also in ideas and representations – the ascribing to women and men of different abilities, attitudes, desires, personality traits, behavior patterns, and so on. Gender

relations are both constituted by and help constitute these practices and ideologies, in interaction with other structures of social hierarchy such as class, caste and race. Neither uniform across societies nor historically static (as numerous studies of different cultures, regions and communities bear out), they may be seen as largely *socially* constructed (rather than biologically determined).<sup>2</sup> The process of this social construction, however, is inadequately understood, as also how particular forms of gender inequalities are maintained, and by what means they might change over time.

Recent growing interest among economists in intra-household dynamics impinges on these questions. For instance, there has been an increasing criticism of “unitary” household models which assume that household members seek to maximize utility on the basis of a set of common preferences represented by an aggregate utility function, and a common budget constraint. A range of alternative household models use the game-theoretic approach to incorporate a more complex understanding of how family decision-making occurs, variously allowing for individual differences in preferences, in budget constraints and in control over resource use. Although most do not explicitly address gender asymmetries they can accommodate such asymmetries, and thus provide a useful approach for analyzing gender relations and point economic thinking in a new direction. At the same time, these formulations, consisting mostly of formal models, are restricted in their ability to incorporate the full complexity of gender interactions within households, and the simultaneity of various processes and forms of decision-making. In addition, most say little about gender relations beyond the household.

This paper outlines some aspects critical for understanding intra-household dynamics from a gender perspective that existing household models either miss out altogether, or do not adequately address. For instance, most models characterize this dynamics as a form of “bargaining,” but typically say little about the complex range of factors, especially qualitative ones, that might determine bargaining power; what role social norms and perceptions play in the bargaining process; what effect gender differences (if such exist) in the exercise of self-interest might have on bargaining; and so on. Such factors can impinge crucially on the accuracy of theoretical formulations, empirical predictions and policy interventions, and must therefore be given cognizance in framing hypotheses, data gathering and analyses.

Equally, models and policies could go awry if intra-household dynamics are assumed (as they often are) to exist in isolation, without examining the extra-household socio-economic and legal institutions within which households are embedded, and how these institutions might themselves be subject to change. The paper seeks to provide pointers on this count as well, extending the bargaining approach beyond the household to the inter-linked arenas of the market, the community and the State.

For this purpose, I both use and emphasize the usefulness of what I term “analytical description” for capturing the complexity and historic variability

of gender relations in intra- and extra-household dynamics. By analytical description I mean a formulation that seeks to comprehensively spell out both qualitative and quantitative factors that might impinge on outcomes, without being pre-constrained by the structure that formal modeling imposes, or by data limitations. A formal model could be seen as a subset of analytical description; and empirical analysis based on the model as a further subset. All three – analytical description, a formal model and empirical analysis – can in different ways extend our understanding about how gender relations get constructed and contested within and outside the household.

## II. BARGAINING AND INTRA-HOUSEHOLD GENDER RELATIONS

Are you suggesting that women should be given rights in land? What do women want? To break up the family?

(Minister of Agriculture to the author at an Indian Planning Commission seminar on Land Reform, June 1989)

Whether or not so intended, the Minister’s reaction implies at least two assumptions about the family: that its stability as an institution hinges on the maintenance of unequal resource positions between women and men; and that economic self-interest plays an important role in intra-family gender relations, which would be revealed with particular starkness in gender conflict over a critical form of property such as arable land. Such a picture of the family is a far cry from that implicit in much of standard economic theory, namely of the family as an undifferentiated unit governed primarily or solely by altruism.

The latter picture is today difficult to defend in the face of growing evidence to the contrary.<sup>3</sup> Households/families (I will use the two terms interchangeably<sup>4</sup>) are recognizably constituted of multiple actors, with varying (often conflicting) preferences and interests, and differential abilities to pursue and realize those interests. They are arenas of (albeit not the sole determinants of) consumption, production and investment, within which both labor and resource allocation decisions are made. And evidence from many regions reveals persistent gender inequalities in the distribution of household resources and tasks.

A number of economists are today grappling with such complexities, within and outside the game-theoretic format. Most take as their starting point a critique of Gary Becker’s (1965, 1981) unitary model of the family,<sup>5</sup> agreeing that it is problematic. This model treats the household as a single entity in relation to both consumption and production. It assumes that all household resources and incomes are pooled, and that resources are allocated by an altruistic household head who represents the household’s tastes

and preferences and seeks to maximize household utility. There is less agreement, however, on alternative approaches to intra-household interactions. These approaches cover a diverse range: cooperative, noncooperative, collective, or some mix of these. In varying degrees they seek to incorporate the social reality of the family as described in anthropological and sociological writings. Differences between the approaches, outlined in several excellent review articles, do not need detailed repetition here.<sup>6</sup> Suffice it to mention their broad features. Barring the “collective models”<sup>7</sup> which make no assumption other than that the outcome will be Pareto efficient (and which attempt to uncover the decision-making rules and processes through empirical analysis), all the others characterize household decision-making as some form of “bargaining.” A brief outline of the bargaining framework is therefore warranted.

Within the bargaining approach, intra-household interaction is characterized as containing elements of both cooperation and conflict. Household members cooperate insofar as cooperative arrangements make each of them better-off than noncooperation. However, many different cooperative outcomes are possible in relation to who does what, who gets what goods and services, and how each member is treated. These outcomes are beneficial to the negotiating parties relative to noncooperation. But among the set of cooperative outcomes, some are more favorable to each party than others – that is, one person’s gain is another person’s loss – hence the underlying conflict between those cooperating. Which outcome will emerge depends on the relative bargaining power of the household members.

A member’s bargaining power would be defined by a range of factors, in particular the strength of the person’s fall-back position (the outside options which determine how well-off she/he would be if cooperation failed), also termed as the “threat point.” An improvement in the person’s fall-back position (better outside options) would lead to an improvement in the deal the person gets within the household.

The early formal critiques of the unitary model used a cooperative bargaining approach, and relaxed only the assumption of common preferences while retaining that of income pooling (Marilyn Manser and Murray Brown 1980; Marjorie McElroy and Mary Jean Horney 1981), adapting to a two-person household John Nash’s (1950, 1953) formulation of cooperative “bargaining problems” within game theory. Household members bargain over the use of the pooled income, the outcome depending on their bargaining power, determined by their respective fall-back positions. These depend, in turn, on what McElroy (1990) terms extra-household environmental parameters (EEPs) such as parental wealth, a person’s nonwage income, and the legal structure governing marriage and divorce. These cooperative models assume the attainment of Pareto optimality in household decisions, enforceable and binding contracts, and symmetrical

positions between the parties in relation to information availability and bargaining ability, and say little about the actual process of bargaining.

In contrast, the "noncooperative" models relax many of these assumptions, including those of Pareto efficiency, income pooling, and enforceable and binding contracts. In addition to allowing differing preferences between individuals, they allow for individual production decisions and asymmetry between the parties with respect to information and the rules of the game (see Frances Wooley 1988, and Ravi Kanbur and Lawrence Haddad 1994, among others).

In between are models which combine both approaches, recognizing the possibility of "separate spheres" of activities while cooperating over, say, the production and/or consumption of some joint goods or activities. For instance, Shelly Lundberg and Robert Pollak (1993), who pioneered the notion of separate spheres, point out that for many small decisions in a marriage, divorce is not a credible threat should cooperation fail. Rather, people may remain within the marriage but withdraw into separate spheres, defined by, say, a division of labor based on socially recognized gender roles that emerge without explicit bargaining. This withdrawal option would constitute an "internal" threat point. The parties would, however, still bargain over jointly shared goods and activities, such as meals and child care, with the bargaining operating like a Nash cooperative game. In other words a noncooperative solution is used as a threat point in a cooperative game (also see David Ulph 1988; Christine Jones 1983; and McElroy forthcoming).

These "nested" separate spheres of noncooperation within the household may also be defined by separate semi-autonomous loci of production and consumption (Michael Carter and Elizabeth Katz forthcoming; Katz 1992). In Katz's (1992) alternative "reciprocal claims model," each household member has a distinct income stream and makes resource allocation decisions subject to her/his own budget constraint; any transfers of income, labor, land and other resources between individuals are explicitly recognized; and household resource allocation is treated as a set of individually determined allocation choices. Inter-member resource transfers are bargained over between the parties concerned.

Attempts to test the relevance of alternative models (excellently reviewed in Haddad *et al.* forthcoming, and Doss 1996) indicate a considerable justification for rejecting the unitary model, or at least for "shifting the burden of proof" to those defending it, even though there is no clear answer as to which alternative model might be the most suitable.<sup>8</sup> Rather as Katz (1996: 19) argues, "unitary, cooperative, non-cooperative and 'collective' decision-making rules may all co-exist in the same household," varying by the type of resource or expenditure.

How we characterize the household impinges not just on academic analysis but also critically on policy. Policy-makers in many countries,

assuming a unitary model, have typically directed resources to male household heads, assuming equitable intra-household sharing of resources or benefits thereof. A bargaining model would suggest that policies and resources be directed differently, taking account, say, of the gender of the recipient, insofar as the welfare, efficiency and equity implications could differ by gender. Also it would point policy-makers (seeking to affect intra-household allocations) to interventions in addition to price changes, such as legal and institutional changes (see also Haddad *et al.* 1994).

While bargaining models have contributed in interesting ways to household analysis, it is critical to think beyond the restrictions imposed by fully specified models, and to move toward a less restrictive formulation which incorporates qualitative aspects and greater complexity. In other words, the bargaining *perspective* or *approach* has particular usefulness in examining gender relations, in the application of which we need not be restricted to game-theoretic formulations (see also Seiz 1991). Some of these aspects could no doubt be incorporated into formal models, but there would still be limitations imposed by structure.

In any case, my purpose here is to focus, through the lens of gender, on some dimensions which are critical to bargaining outcomes, but which most discussions of household bargaining treat as exogenous and outside the realm of their analytical specifications, such as the following:

- What determines intra-household bargaining power? Bargaining models define bargaining power in terms of fall-back positions, but their specification of what factors impinge on these positions tends to be rather narrow: few specify factors beyond income (earned or unearned); even fewer explore qualitative aspects of power.
- Are there differences in the relative importance of factors which determine fall-back positions? Clearly not all factors would carry equal weight.
- What is the role of social norms in determining bargaining power and in setting the limits to what is bargained over? Again there is inadequate discussion on this, as also on the possible endogeneity of the norms, viz. of norms themselves being the subjects of bargaining.
- How are bargaining processes and outcomes affected by differences in individual perceptions (about needs, contributions, etc.) and pursuit of self-interest? In particular, is women's relative deprivation due in part to their failure to perceive their true self-interest, or to their being more altruistic than men? Existing discussion on these questions is limited, and much of it problematic. The possibilities of bargaining on behalf of others and of coalitions within households are also not considered.
- What are the links between intra-household bargaining and bargaining outside the household (e.g. in the market, the community and the State)? And what determines extra-household bargaining power?

In the sections which follow I examine these neglected dimensions. Although many of the illustrative examples are taken from rural South Asia, the issues discussed have wider relevance.

### A. Determinants of intra-household bargaining power

Any attempt to identify the determinants of bargaining outcomes must grapple with several complexities. First, a wide range of factors could define a person's bargaining power, some quantifiable, such as individual economic assets, others less so, such as communal/external support systems, or social norms and institutions, or perceptions about contributions and needs.

Second, some resources are both determinants of a person's bargaining power vis-à-vis other resources, and themselves need to be bargained for. Take arable land. We could argue that land-owning women would have a stronger fall-back position and therefore greater bargaining power than landless women vis-à-vis the allocation of household subsistence. But, to gain a share in arable land may itself require bargaining, and a somewhat different set of factors would determine women's bargaining power in relation to land. This could also be seen as sequentially interlinked bargaining. Similarly, social norms both affect the outcomes of bargaining and can themselves be subjects of bargaining.

Third, in bargaining for something like a share in arable land, insofar as the social or legal legitimacy of any share at all for women may first need to be established, the outcomes of intra-household bargaining would be preconditioned by the outcomes of extra-household bargaining with the community and the State (as elaborated later).

Fourth, the outcomes of bargaining at one point in time, by strengthening or weakening a person's fall-back position, could affect the outcomes of bargaining at a later point in time. For instance, assets accumulated in one round of bargaining would affect the threat point and therefore outcomes in the next round. Such “iterative” bargaining could be between the same parties, or between different parties (e.g. a property settlement favoring a widow or divorcee in one marriage could strengthen her bargaining power in a subsequent marriage); and it could apply to both the short term and the long term (see also Sen 1990, for examples).

Fifth, the outcomes of bargaining need not result from an *explicit* process of negotiation between the parties; they could even result from implicit differences in bargaining power. For instance, a man in north India rarely has to tell his sister that he will break all contact with her if she demands her share of ancestral land. That he can do so at low economic and social cost to himself, but at high potential cost to her, may be enough for her to forego her claim. Indeed the fact that one party can get a favorable outcome without open contestation suggests a considerable bargaining power.

Sixth, in a limited sense, relative bargaining power within the household/family could be revealed in who participates in decision-making and about what. Hence, women who participate in decision-making concerning, say, agricultural production or cash expenditure in the home may be said to have greater bargaining strength than those excluded from such decision-making altogether. But more fundamentally, relative bargaining power is revealed in whose interests prevail in the decisions made, namely in final outcomes: in the intra-family distribution of resources, goods, services and tasks, the treatment meted out by family members, the control exercised over resources, and so on.

Consider some of these aspects in more detail.

*i. Bargaining for subsistence within the family*

What determines a woman's bargaining power within the family in relation to subsistence needs such as food and health care? 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 subsistence goods (including food) and services: endowments (what a person owns, such as assets, labor power, etc.) and the exchange entitlement mapping (the exchange possibilities that exist through production and trade, which determine the consumption set available to a person with given endowments).<sup>9</sup> Typically for rural families, the most important endowments would be arable land and ability to labor; and the exchange entitlements would be determined by the possibilities of using these endowments for production and trade (including seeking employment, in the case of labor), and by the structure of factor and commodity prices.

However, we could extend this list to incorporate other entitlements which do not derive from private ownership nor usually from market exchange. At least three appear important: traditional rights in communal resources, traditional social support systems, and support from the State and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).<sup>10</sup> Further, impinging on all the factors mentioned would be *social norms* embodying accepted notions about the division of labor, resources, etc., and *social perceptions* about contributions, needs and abilities (and therefore about who deserves what).

It could thus be suggested that a rural person's bargaining strength within the family vis-à-vis subsistence needs would depend (given the exchange entitlement mapping) especially on eight factors:

- ownership of and control over assets, especially arable land;
- access to employment and other income-earning means;
- access to communal resources such as village commons and forests;
- access to traditional social support systems such as of patronage, kinship, caste groupings, etc.;



- support from NGOs;
- support from the State;
- social perceptions about needs, contributions and other determinants of deservedness; and
- social norms.

These factors would individually and interactively affect 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 her/his bargaining power over subsistence within the family (although, as will be elaborated below, factors such as norms and perceptions also affect bargaining power independently of the fall-back position). Inequalities among family members in respect of these factors would place some members in a weaker bargaining position relative to others.<sup>11</sup> Gender is one significant basis of such inequality.<sup>12</sup>

While my focus here is on the determinants of well-being if cooperation should fail, it is important to note that many of the factors which determine a person’s fall-back position also influence her/his ability to make contributions within the relationship. If a woman loses her job or her assets, it both worsens her fall-back position and diminishes the income she can bring into the family. This dual effect can lead to marriage dissolution and family abandonment in periods of severe crisis (such as a famine), as discussed further below.

These determinants of bargaining power can complement or substitute for one another. The significance of the first two factors, namely command over property (especially land) and access to employment, in strengthening a rural person’s survival ability outside the family, is self-evident; that of access to communal resources and various external support systems needs some elaboration, as do social perceptions and social norms.

In rural economies, village commons (VCs) and State forests are especially important for two reasons: one, they provide a wide range of items essential for daily use, especially to the poor whose dependence becomes critical during drought and famines (Agarwal 1990); and two, their products, typically gathered by women and children (Agarwal 1991), provide women with an independent source of subsistence *unmediated* by dependency relationships on men. Women usually have use rights in VCs by virtue of their membership (through birth or marriage) in the village community, whereas their access to the cash economy and (in areas of strong female seclusion) to the marketplace itself, may be constrained and dependent on the mediation of males (Agarwal 1994a).

Similarly, social support systems of patronage, kinship, caste groupings and even friendships (namely, various forms of “social capital”), can prove critical during economic crises. These support systems are constituted of relationships between persons or social groups in which usually

considerations other than the solely economic take precedence, falling under the rubric of “the moral economy” (James Scott 1976). They typically relate to nonmarket transactions, such as interest-free credit from relatives or friends, or inter-generational transfers between parents and children. Again these support structures can prove especially important for women (Agarwal 1990).

Other external systems of potential support, such as the State and NGOs, can add to a person’s intra-household bargaining power both by a direct provisioning of subsistence (e.g. widow’s pensions), and indirectly by increasing access to employment, assets, credit, infrastructure, etc. Many NGOs, in particular, have in recent years helped enhance household subsistence possibilities in these and other ways, including by helping people to challenge biases in State laws, policies and their implementation.

However, these interventions could either increase or decrease *women’s* bargaining power, depending on their gender bias. Organizations which enhance credit and income-earning opportunities for women relative to men, such as the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh and the Self-Employment Women’s Association (SEWA) in India, would strengthen women’s bargaining power. NGO interventions which enhance only men’s access to land or credit, would weaken women’s bargaining power. The same holds for State interventions. Gender-progressive organizations, including women’s groups, can play a particularly important role in directing State policies and laws in women’s favor.<sup>13</sup>

In other words, the first six factors listed, by impinging on women’s and men’s subsistence opportunities and access to resources from outside the family, would affect their bargaining power and so their access to subsistence within the family as well. The last two factors, namely social perceptions and social norms, can affect subsistence distribution both directly, in that intra-household allocations depend on perceptions about deservedness and on prevailing norms of sharing within families, and indirectly by impinging on the other six factors. Social norms is a vast issue and is therefore discussed in a separate section. Consider that of social perceptions.

#### *ii. Social perceptions and bargaining power*

There can be, and not uncommonly is, a divergence between what a person *actually* contributes, needs, or is able to do, and *perceptions* about her/his contributions, needs or abilities. In particular, a person’s contributions may be undervalued because of her gender or race. The work women do might be labeled “unskilled” and that which men do as “skilled” simply because of their gender, even if the tasks done by both require equal amounts of skill. Perceptions about contributions can also depend on how “visible” the work is: home-based or unwaged work is often seen as less valuable than work that is physically or monetarily more visible.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, women’s

contributions to the household are typically undervalued not just by family members, but often also by policy-makers and bureaucrats implementing development programs.<sup>15</sup>

Similarly, perceptions about needs may differ from actual needs. In many parts of the world, women's needs are underplayed and assumed to be subordinate to or even synonymous with the "family's" needs, while for men the distinction between family and personal needs is widely accepted and sanctioned.

Such perceptions affect intra-household allocations and bargaining power. Systematic undervaluation of women's contributions or needs, in a system where these are important distributive principles, would reinforce gender-related deprivation. Women and girls would receive less because their contributions to the household are seen as being less valuable than that of men or boys – what Sen (1990) terms "perceived contribution response"<sup>16</sup> – and/or because they are seen as needing less (what one could term "perceived need response"). Here strengthening the fall-back position of a rural woman, say, by providing her better access to village commons may have less than the desired effect, if what she gathers (as nonmonetized items) is seen as having less value than the cash a man brings in (even if the imputed value of the gathered items is more). Such undervaluation is not confined to developing countries. The Western feminist debate on "wages for housework" arose from the recognition that unwaged work was "invisible" and perceived as having little value. Paula England and Barbara Kilbourne (1990), drawing from studies of American households, argue that women who earn cash have more bargaining power than those who are solely housewives because of, among other things, the cultural devaluation of housework. Women's entry into wage labor could thus be one way of increasing their intra-family bargaining power not just directly, but indirectly by increasing the perceived legitimacy of their claims (see also Sen 1990).

At the same time, a woman's bargaining power outside the household, say in the labor market, is also affected by perceptions: e.g. solely on account of her gender she may be perceived as having lesser ability or commitment, or to be only a supplementary earner. Gender, as also race, have been known to define perceptions about abilities, and to lead to discriminatory hiring and payment practices. Rural women in many parts of South Asia, for instance, are paid less than men even for the same tasks, on the assumption that women are less productive, although few productivity studies have been conducted, and some which exist show the contrary (Agarwal 1983). Incorrect perceptions can thus reduce a woman's bargaining power in relation to family subsistence not only by leading to an underestimation of her needs and an undervaluation of her waged contributions, but also by affecting her "worth" in the labor market, thus limiting the mentioned potential advantage of her seeking waged work.

It may be noted that perceptions impinge on social norms but are not the same as social norms. For instance, norms might define on what principles family food is shared: say, contributions and/or needs, but the translation of those norms into allocations would depend not just on actual but perceived contributions and needs. Social norms relate to customs that are established. Incorrect perceptions could get institutionalized as social norms, such as in systematically lower wage rates or lower subsistence allocations for women than men. But perceptions would usually be only one among several factors influencing norms, while also affecting bargaining power independently of norms. Like norms, perceptions may themselves be subject to contestation and change.

*iii. Do all factors carry equal weight?*

Clearly not all factors affect bargaining power in equal extent. However, even the few economic studies which list factors that might affect intra-household bargaining power do not discuss the need for prioritizing.<sup>17</sup> Identifying the more critical factors (these would vary by context) is especially important for policy.

In agrarian economies, for instance, of the first six factors listed as affecting bargaining for subsistence, effective command over landed property holds a privileged position for several reasons. For illustration, consider evidence from rural South Asia, although the points made are of wider relevance. First, the rapid decline in forests and VCs, especially in semi-arid areas, is effectively eroding this source of supplementary economic support for the poor, and especially women (Agarwal 1991). Second, erosion is also occurring in social support systems of patronage, kinship and caste groupings.<sup>18</sup> The decline in kin support is especially apparent among communities which have become poorer over time, the effects being dramatic in tribal communities traditionally characterized by a high degree of communal and intra-gender cooperation in work and social life. Among them, and elsewhere, the worst affected are usually women, especially the widowed and aged.<sup>19</sup>

Third, the returns from wage employment and other income-earning means are themselves often linked with access to land: for instance, rural nonfarm earnings in South Asia are substantially greater among households with some land, relative to the totally landless (G. K. Chadha 1992; Rizwanul Islam 1986), as is the probability of women finding wage employment (James Ryan and R. D. Ghodake 1980). Families with some land also have a higher reserve price for their labor, which can push up aggregate wage rates (K. N. Raj and Michael Tharakan 1983; Pranab Bardhan 1984). Effective rights in land can thus strengthen women's fall-back position not only directly but also indirectly by improving returns from other income sources.

Fourth, especially the elderly are able to use property, in particular landed property, to bargain for better care and support from their families (M. L. Sharma and T. M. Dak 1987; B. Raj and B. G. Prasad 1971). For some the mere fact of possessing land helps; others may use landed property and valuables for explicit bargaining, promising favor to those family members who serve them best, as elderly women are noted to do in northern India (Sharma and Dak 1987). Migrant children's remittances to parents may also be associated positively with the latter's property status.<sup>20</sup>

Fifth, land rights could prove crucial during severe subsistence crises, as during drought and famine. In such contexts, poor rural households first dispose of assets such as jewelry, household utensils and small animals, keeping the productive resource – land – till the last (Agarwal 1990). While disposing of the more liquid assets first makes economic sense at the household level, it also has important gender implications. The items noted to be disposed of first are often the only ones women own, while land is typically in men's names. As a result, women tend to be left with both a weaker fall-back position than men, and a more diminished ability to contribute to family income. During famines, an oft-noted outcome of this shift in bargaining power and contributions is the abandonment of wives and children by men (whose outside options, especially where they have land, do not deteriorate in equal degree).<sup>21</sup>

Sixth, land rights can, over time, help women negotiate less restrictive social norms and better treatment from husbands. The situation of South Asian women who traditionally had rights in land, as among communities which practiced matrilineal or bilateral inheritance, is indicative.<sup>22</sup> They enjoyed substantial freedom of movement and interaction outside the home, often controlled the household food stores, and, as observed among the matrilineal Khasis of northeast India, ate before their husbands, if the latter were out late (Agarwal 1994a). All this is in contrast to the patrilineal northwest, where women's lives are circumscribed in numerous ways that limit their livelihood opportunities. Similarly, women who were landless but who have, in recent years, acquired independent plots from the government or through NGO support, report an enhanced sense of economic security and self-confidence (and therefore negotiating ability), and improved treatment from husbands and kin (Agarwal 1994a).

In other words, command over private land could strengthen rural women's bargaining power in ways that merely enhancing wage employment opportunities, or stemming the erosion of common property resources, would not. Although illustrated by South Asian evidence, arable land carries similar weight for rural women in Africa and Latin America.<sup>23</sup> In more urban industrial contexts, however, property other than land would be of greater importance. But the general point is that prioritizing/weighting factors which affect bargaining power are important both analytically and for policy.

This raises an additional issue: what affects bargaining outcomes of the prioritized factors, say of family land, which are exogenous in some contexts and endogenous in others.

*iv. Bargaining over family land*

Contestation over subsistence resources, given one's endowments, is only one level of bargaining. A second, more basic one, involves bargaining over the endowments themselves. At this level, the factors determining women's bargaining power become even more complex. For instance, a daughter's ability to successfully claim a share in parental landed property (assuming she is not voluntarily given it) is likely to depend especially on the following factors:<sup>24</sup>

- the existing inheritance laws;
- the social legitimacy of her claim, that is, whether the claim (even if legally valid) is perceived as socially valid by her community;
- her educational status and legal literacy;
- her access to government officials who administer land-related matters, register land inheritance claims, etc.;
- her access to economic and social resources for survival outside the support systems provided by contending claimants such as brothers or kin; and
- her economic and physical access to legal machinery.

In other words, individual women's attempts to acquire a share in family land could require interlinked contestation outside the household as well, such as contestation with the community to establish social legitimacy for women's claims to independent land rights, contestation with the State to make inheritance laws gender equal and to ensure their better implementation, and so on.

Gender differences in *intra-household* bargaining power are thus linked with the person's *extra-household* bargaining power, such as with the community and the State. This would be especially so in contestation over landed property, since control over arable land helps define (and is also defined by) wider access to economic, social and political power (Agarwal 1994a). What factors might affect women's bargaining power in the market, the community and the State are discussed later.

## **B. Social norms**

In the literature on intra-household economics only a few authors explicitly recognize the importance of social norms and model them. Of those that do, some treat them as exogenous (Lundberg and Pollak 1993), while a few recognize the possibility of their being endogenous (e.g. Agarwal 1994a;

Folbre 1995 and forthcoming; Hart 1993; and Katz 1996). But major gaps remain in spelling out the nature and specifics of social norms in particular contexts, and how they may affect bargaining. This section seeks to fill some of these gaps.

Norms could impinge on bargaining in at least four ways:

- They set limits on what can be bargained about.
- They are a determinant of or constraint to bargaining power.
- They affect how the process of bargaining is conducted: e.g. covertly or overtly; aggressively or quietly.
- They constitute a factor to be bargained over, that is, social norms can be endogenous in that they can themselves be subject to negotiation and change.

*i. Norms as limits to what can be bargained about*

To begin with, norms set the limits to bargaining. They can define which issues can legitimately be bargained over, and which fall in the arena of the uncontestable. At any given time, for a given society, some decisions would fall in the realm of what the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1977: 167–70) terms “doxa” – that which is accepted as a natural and self-evident part of the social order, which goes without saying and *is not open to questioning or contestation* – the “undiscussed, unnamed, admitted without argument or scrutiny.” A good deal of what is justified in the name of “tradition” would fall in this category: “the tradition is silent, not least about itself as tradition.” In contrast to doxa is the “field of opinion, of that which is explicitly questioned,” “the locus of the confrontation of competing discourses.”<sup>25</sup>

In the present context, doxa could include widely accepted norms and practices. Social norms enter virtually every sphere of activity. They may define what category of persons cannot intermarry (e.g. most patrilineal north Indian Hindus forbid marriages to close kin or within the village); the gender division of labor within the home (e.g. housework and child care are usually seen as women’s responsibilities); the gender division of labor outside the home (task specification and occupational segregation is common in both rural and urban employment, in most countries); whether women should at all work outside the home (female seclusion norms restrict this among some Hindu and many Muslim communities); who can participate most in household decision-making (e.g. older daughters-in-law who have sons may have more say than new brides); by what criterion society’s resources should be shared, e.g. “to each according to ability” or “to each according to need”; and so on.

These limits to bargaining may favor group over individual interests, or favor some groups over others (say men over women), or favor some

individuals over others (say older women over younger). They can draw legitimacy from religious or other beliefs. And they can reflect the dominant perceptions of the needs and rights of people prevailing in a community.

Somewhat less restrictively, norms may set limits to bargaining by admitting something as contestable but restricting the range of contestation: for instance, that males should eat before females and get the better quality food may be a norm in some societies, but negotiations may be possible over what allocational criterion – contributions, needs, equality, or investment (especially in children)<sup>26</sup> – is used to make allocations among the males, or among the females.<sup>27</sup>

The complexity of bargaining is less if the social legitimacy of a person's claim to some share of the contested item is recognized and only the size of that share is in dispute, than if the legitimacy of claiming any share at all is questioned. For instance, the rights of female family members to basic subsistence are usually not in dispute, although the proportionate shares may be, while *any* share for them in ancestral land might be opposed in some communities and placed outside the arena of bargaining.

The overarching nature of norms suggests that, for a start, contestation would be necessary to enlarge the range of issues which can be bargained over, and even to admit specific persons as legitimate contestants.

*ii. Norms as determinants of or constraints to bargaining power*

The kinds of restrictions to bargaining outlined above, in turn affect women's bargaining power within the household. Consider, for instance, bargaining for better subsistence. Social norms (as suggested earlier) often define by what principles family food may be shared. Food allocation norms (quantity or quality of food, or who eats first) favoring males, found, for instance, in northern South Asia, would limit women's and girl children's ability to bargain for better shares. Or the criteria justifying distributions – say, individual contributions to family income or well-being, individual needs, or investment in a person's future earning capacity – may themselves be gender-neutral, but if (as suggested earlier) perceptions about contributions, needs, etc., are biased against females, this again would reduce women's bargaining ability.

Social norms can also weaken women's intra-household bargaining position (over subsistence and other resources) by restricting their earning possibilities in various ways, such as by discouraging (or even preventing) them from working outside the home, limiting the range of tasks they may perform, institutionalizing lower wages for them than for men, restricting their presence in public spaces and so their access to markets and the marketplace, defining child care as their responsibility and so limiting their mobility and job options, ideologically constructing them as dependents and men as breadwinners,<sup>28</sup> and so on.



Similarly, norms can restrict a woman's bargaining power in relation to family land by providing justifications for upholding gender unequal property laws; by predefining men as household heads and thus as the appropriate recipients of land under land reform and resettlement programs; by necessitating that women be married into distant villages and thus limiting their ability to claim and manage any share they inherit from parents; by purdah practices that restrict their access to legal, administrative and economic institutions, and so on (for elaboration, see Agarwal 1994a).

Norms also affect bargaining power by defining the extent of voice a person has within the household (as illustrated further below), and by impinging on the possibility of "exit."<sup>29</sup> For instance, women's exit options in marriage would depend not only on their economic prospects outside marriage, but on the social acceptability of divorced women, and their possibilities of remarriage (their worth in the "marriage market"). Divorced and widowed women, older women, women with children, are typically less "eligible" than men with these characteristics.

*iii. Norms and how bargaining is conducted*

Mediated by gender, age and marital status, social norms often define how household members should conduct themselves. In many societies, behavior which is assertive and loud is much more tolerated in boys and men than in girls and women. And among women, assertiveness is more accepted from older women than younger ones, from mothers-in-law than young daughters-in-law, and from daughters than daughters-in-law.

Gendered norms thus set the stage for the form that bargaining can take, even within the marketplace. Fish trading in South India, for instance, true to its proverbial reputation, is typically associated with loud haggling and aggressive marketing. The women who earn a livelihood by this means risk being dubbed as "masculine" and being summarily rejected as role models by their educated daughters (Kalpana Ram 1989). At times the behavior of women fish vendors is even seen by the village men as sexually provocative, inviting verbal or physical abuse (Rahul Roy and Saba Dewan 1988).

Within the household again, the cultural construction of appropriate female behavior affects their ability to bargain. For instance, Tibeto-Burman women of Nepal, who are not subject to purdah, enjoy considerable freedom of movement and are significant and visible participants in all types of economic activity, including agriculture and trading. But even they are subject to subtle aspects of gendered behavioral norms. These norms impinge, among other things, on women's ability to negotiate their rights, including property claims within the family.

Consider, for illustration, Kathryn March's (1988: 19-20) description of the response of a Tamang (Tibeto-Burman) woman, Nhanu, when her family property was being divided. Nhanu had left in her parent's home an

expensive bronze drinking bowl, purchased from the profits of her trading expeditions. After her father's death, when the brothers were dividing the family property, she described the event as follows:

I sat there quietly, without saying a word, just sitting and watching as they each took their separate shares of the family property.

[Whispering] The bronze drinking bowl that I had bought that time in Kathmandu was given out in my younger brother's – Busru's father's – share.

Well! While they were dividing the shares, I thought to myself, "Oh dear! My bronze drinking bowl, the one I bought from the efforts of my trips to Kerong and Kathmandu, has been given out in Busru's father's share!" But I continued to sit there quietly.

[Loudly] Then well! my second younger brother came up to get his share. He said, "That bronze drinking bowl must be given to Elder Sister! That's the one she bought with the gallon measure of salt she was given after going to Kerong! The only thing that she bought from that salt was that bronze drinking bowl; that bowl's hers! She didn't waste even one *paisa* on that trip."

And then, right then!, he reached out and in a single sweep of his arm, Lo! he grabbed that bronze drinking bowl back and set it in a separate pile for me.

Since he spoke up, they gave it to me and I took that bronze drinking bowl away with me [laughing].<sup>30</sup>

Nhanu's reticence (which could well have cost her the bowl) contrasts with the volubility of her brothers, and underlines expected differences in male and female behavior even in communities where women are not explicitly constrained from asserting themselves.

In cultures or contexts where social norms stifle explicit bargaining or voice, women may be pushed to using implicit forms of contestation. Persistent complaining, pleading ill-health, playing off male affines and consanguines against each other, threatening to return to the natal home, withdrawing into silence, and withholding sex from husbands, are all means by which women are noted to bargain within the family, not only in South Asia, but elsewhere, as in Latin America and the United States.<sup>31</sup> These can, however, prove less effective in many contexts than more explicit forms of bargaining.

#### *iv. Bargaining over social norms*

Conventionally, economists assume that individual preferences and social norms are exogenously given. In bargaining models too, when social norms have been introduced as factors, as by Lundberg and Pollak (1993), they have been assumed to be exogenous, although rare analytical descriptions

recognize their endogeneity (Folbre 1995; Agarwal 1994a). In fact, social norms are not immutable and are themselves subject to bargaining and change, even if the time horizon for changing some types of norms may be a long one.

Indeed, a good deal of what is socially passed off as natural and indisputable, including women's roles and modes of behavior, may be the outcomes of past ideological struggles. To shift what has long been taken for granted by a community into the arena of contestation and discourse (from "doxa" to "heterodoxy") may therefore itself require bargaining. Gaining acceptance for the idea that the inequities women suffer are not biologically rooted but socially constructed would be a part of this process, as would proposing how gender relations can be differently constructed.

In relation to bargaining over social norms, there are three points of particular note: one, the role of economic factors in pushing people to challenge norms; two, the role of groups (as opposed to individuals) in enhancing people's ability to challenge norms; and three, the interactive nature of bargaining within and outside the household in effectively challenging social norms. (Virtually by definition, the arena of bargaining over norms has to extend beyond the household, since for ideas and practices to become "norms" requires their acceptance beyond the individual household.)

All these aspects are revealed when we examine contestation over purdah norms in the predominantly Muslim societies of Bangladesh and Pakistan. In these societies, as indeed in many other parts of South Asia, women caught in the poverty trap face conflicting choices between survival needs and social status within the community. Many resolve this dilemma by taking up income-generating work, some within the home, others outside it. The implications vary accordingly. Women working at home in individual isolation are unable to challenge purdah (Farida Shaheed 1989), while those working in urban factories are beginning to do so. Garment workers in Dhaka city argue:

The best purdah is the burkah [veil] within oneself, the burkah of the mind. People only say that working violates purdah in order to keep women down.

(Rahela, in Kabeer 1991: 16)

It is, however, the collective challenge posed by women as part of an organized group that is found to best facilitate this process of change, not least because those whom they need to oppose are often gender-retrogressive groups seeking to maintain, even define, specific norms. In Bangladeshi villages, women members of the NGO, BRAC (the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee, seeking to improve the economic and social position of the rural poor through group schemes for credit and income-generation), are beginning to question the legitimacy of purdah itself, as something which is defined by the elite:

When the women from rich households need to go to the town to appear in court, even to remain in town for 3–4 days at a time, this is sanctioned as [within the norms of] *purdah*. When women from a BRAC-organized group want to go . . . even for a day, to attend a workshop or meeting . . . [t]heir action is condemned as *bepurdah*. The norms of *purdah* that may be relaxed for the wives of the rich can just as easily and quickly, be clamped down on the women of other households.

(a BRAC woman, cited in Martha Chen 1983: 73)

Further:

The mullahs or religious leaders have some say on what is *purdah* or *bepurdah* but it is village leaders who have the final say. The mullahs, upon request from the elders, will start the rumour that such-and-such action or behavior is *bepurdah*. . . . In this way, the rich and elders (through the religious leaders) can determine what work is suitable or not suitable for women to perform.

(a BRAC woman, cited in Chen 1983: 73)

On the one hand, economic necessity has created the impulse to challenge these restricting norms:

We do not listen to the *mullahs* anymore. They do not give us even a quarter kilo of rice.

(cited in Chen 1983: 175–7)

On the other hand, group solidarity within BRAC has clearly strengthened women's ability to bargain both within the household and with the community. Some BRAC women narrate their experiences as follows (cited in Chen 1983: 177, 165):

Now nobody talks ill of us. They say "they have formed a group and now they earn money. It is good".

Before the village elders and union-council members abused and threatened us for joining the group, now they are silent. . . . Before we did not understand our ways, now we understand profit and loss. . . . Before we did not know our rights to rations and medical services, now we are conscious and exert pressure to receive our due. . . . Before we did not go outside our homes, but now we work in the field and go to the town. . . . Before our minds were rusty, now they shine.

Women also report that, as a result of their economic contributions and group strength, their husbands are now less opposed to them joining BRAC, and are also less physically and verbally abusive, more willing to allow them freedom of movement, and more tolerant toward their interaction with male strangers in work contexts. In other words, there has been

a loosening of restrictive social norms both within the home and outside it.

Economic analysis which treats purdah norms as exogenous, for instance in specifications of female labor supply functions, would thus be inadequate insofar as women who undertake income-generating work are able to contest and redefine the norms, thereby highlighting their endogeneity. Contestations around other social norms similarly warrant examination.

*v. What affects bargaining over norms?*

We can surmise from the above that the ability of persons to challenge norms that go against their self-interest would depend on at least three factors: their economic situation; the link between command over property and control over institutions that shape gender ideology; and group strength. The latter two aspects need further elaboration.

First, those who own and/or control wealth-generating property can exercise substantial direct and indirect control over the principal institutions that shape ideology, such as educational and religious establishments and the media (defined broadly to include newspapers, TV, radio, film, theater, as well as literature and the arts). These can influence social norms in either gender-progressive or gender-retrogressive directions.

At the local level, BRAC women's observation that the rich and the village leaders are able to define purdah norms is also striking. It links economic and political power with the ability to bend religious ideologies and social norms to one's own purpose. Some writers, while recognizing that social norms can be contested, locate the contestation perhaps too much in ideology and give inadequate weight to the *links between* gender ideologies and economic inequalities, or to economic inequalities as a significant (although not sole) determinant of relative male-female power within (and beyond) the household. Moore (1991: 8-9), for instance, notes: "[T]he relations of domination and subordination which are at the base of gender inequalities within the household cannot be explained as a simple outcome of economic inequalities," and further that "bargaining and negotiation between women and men . . . are often about definitions and interpretations, and it is for this reason that gender relations are always involved with power." I concur with both points, but if power is not to be seen as a thing in itself, we do need to ask: of what is this power constituted, and what is its source? Here the interactive effect of the economic and political appears crucial. Economic inequalities, while not the only influence, do usually play a critical role in structuring power relations, by giving some people greater authority over definitions and interpretations than others. Here we might also link women's lesser command over property with the shaping of norms that disadvantage them.

Equally, group solidarity and collective action appear critical for contesting social norms, as also apparent from the purdah-related examples. In fact contestation over norms may emerge as a by-product of forming groups for the more effective delivery of economic programs. The experiences of Grameen Bank and BRAC in Bangladesh, of SEWA in India, and of many other groups, support this conclusion.<sup>32</sup> One might say, group organization “empowers” women to confront existing sources of inequality, including those embodied in representations.<sup>33</sup> As Nancy Fraser (1989: 166) notes:

[N]eeds talk appears as a site of struggle where groups with unequal discursive (and non-discursive) resources compete to establish as hegemonic their respective interpretations of legitimate social needs.<sup>34</sup>

Feminist critiques of school and university curricula and texts, of the images and messages of modern media (radio, TV, film), of religious myths and mythologies, and so on, are a part of this effort to redefine how women’s capabilities, needs and rights are represented.<sup>35</sup> But the influence of these critiques is likely to depend on both the economic strength and the group strength of the critics (see also Folbre 1994).

### C. Self-perceptions, altruism and self-interest

Formal household models assume fully aware, and typically self-interested, individuals participating in the bargaining process. But what if some household members do not act in their own interest and therefore do not bargain to their best advantage?

For instance, Sen (1990) argues that the outcome of bargaining will be less favorable to a person the less value she/he attaches to her/his own well-being relative to the well-being of others (“perceived interest response”), and that this tends to be especially so in “traditional societies” such as India, where women may tend not to think in terms of self-interest or of their individual well-being:

[I]nsofar as intrafamily divisions involve significant inequalities in the allotment of food, medical attention, health care, and the like (often unfavorable to the well-being – even survival – of women), the lack of perception of personal interest combined with a great concern for family welfare is, of course, just the kind of attitude that helps to sustain the traditional inequalities. There is much evidence in history that acute inequalities often survive precisely by making allies out of the deprived. *The underdog comes to accept the legitimacy of the unequal order and becomes an implicit accomplice.*

(Sen 1990: 126, emphasis mine)

Some other scholars argue that women are on average more altruistic than men because they have a less “separatist” self, or are socialized such that

they are less willing than men to drive hard bargains (see literature reviewed in England 1989); or that women are more oriented toward fulfilling collective (especially children's) needs and men more oriented toward personal goods (Lourdes Benería and Martha Roldan 1987).

Are women less able to perceive their self-interest or are they more inclined toward altruism than men? Would they therefore strike weaker bargains? Consider first women's perception of self-interest.

*i. Do women suffer from false perceptions?*

The idea that women tend to have a less sharp perception of their individual interests in societies such as India, that is, that they may suffer from a form of "false consciousness" (in effect making them complicit in perpetuating their unequal position) is interesting, but debatable. The empirical evidence on this, while limited, points more to the contrary.

Observationally it is difficult to infer from people's *overt* behavior whether they are conforming to an unequal order because they fully accept its legitimacy, or accept it partially, or out of fear, or because they believe they have no other options. For understanding women's perceptions about the inequitable nature of gender relations, we therefore need to examine not only their overt acts of resistance but the many covert ways in which they express their disaffection. Empirical work which probes women's covert responses, by recording their views in contexts where they can express themselves freely, or by using participant observation methods to penetrate their "subculture," provides diverse examples of women's "everyday resistance"<sup>36</sup> to intra-household inequalities in resource distribution and control, and to their double work burdens. For instance, there are numerous cases of South Asian rural women living under norms of seclusion, covertly trying to get some cash which they can independently control, by secretly undertaking income-earning activities, or by clandestinely selling small amounts of household grain to safeguard their earnings from husbands and in-laws.<sup>37</sup> Abdullah and Zeidenstein (1982: 47), summarizing their many interviews in Bangladeshi villages, observe:

Women told us usually what *other* women have done. For example, one woman stocked rice in another woman's house so her husband could not know she had it. Another woman had a neighbour raise a goat for her so her husband would not know about it. Yet another woman has opened a *pan* business with her young son and has told him to keep their earnings a secret from the husband. Most women say that they hide their savings in holes in the bamboo, in the roof, or under piles of cloth.

In the North West Frontier Province (Pakistan), Lindholm (1982: 201) notes: "The husband considers this [i.e. a wife secretly selling grain] theft,

but the wife considers it her just dues for her work." In Sri Lanka, women coir workers "usually hide their money in different parts of the house, so that, after a beating [the woman] can disclose one place, thereby giving [the husband] the illusion she has handed all her savings to him" (Carla Risseuw 1988: 278).

Although most women spend the money they so control on family subsistence, some also spend it on their own needs (Abdullah and Zeidenstein 1982), or buy gifts for family members to win their support and affection (Luschinsky 1962) – in other words, to build "social capital." Yet others invest in goats and cows which they keep in their parental homes. This is especially typical of women living with their in-laws, where earnings have to be shared with the extended household (Nath 1984). Unequal food-sharing in a joint family may also be circumvented by women in ingenious ways, including by holding clandestine picnics with women friends (Elizabeth Enslin 1990), or feigning spirit possession to extract food items otherwise denied them (Shaheena Khan 1983; also personal observation in north India).

Equally, there are many indications from sociological studies, based on interviews with peasant women, that women by no means readily accept the unequal gender division of labor as legitimate, whether they covertly resist it or merely lament about it. White (1992: 318), for instance, recounts how village women in Bangladesh may serve tea without milk to their husbands' friends so that the men would "not think she had nothing better to do than make tea for them all day and should be discouraged from returning." Peasant women in north India comment:

Agricultural labourer men help Jat men in the fields, but for Jat women it only means more work. We have to cook more food and feed the labourers as well. . . . Women should also have fixed hours of work.

(B. Horowitz and Madhu Kishwar 1982: 17)

We women stay at home and do back-breaking work even if we are feeling ill or if we are pregnant. There is no sick leave for us. But we do not have any money of our own and when the men come home we have to cast our eyes down and bow our heads.

(Sharma 1980: 207)

All these examples, in different ways, challenge any simple notion that women in rural South Asia (or indeed elsewhere) have accepted the legitimacy of intra-household inequality.<sup>38</sup> The overt appearance of compliance ("cast our eyes down") need not mean that women lack a correct perception of their best interests; rather it can reflect a survival strategy stemming from the constraints on their ability to act overtly in pursuit of those interests (e.g. "we do not have any money of our own"). Hence although I agree with Sen (1990: 126) that "it can be a serious error to take the absence of



protests and questioning of inequality as evidence of the absence of that inequality," I would add that it can equally be an error to take the absence of *overt* protest as the absence of a questioning of inequality. Compliance need not imply complicity.<sup>39</sup>

It is also likely that while on some issues women articulate or even believe in ideologies that benefit men – for instance, maintaining that child care is women's responsibility – on other issues there is observable opposition, such as toward family authority structures, male control over cash, and domestic violence. Class factors might also affect to what degree women see their self-interest as congruent to that of the household. In northern South Asia, it is middle and rich peasant women (who benefit from their husbands' properties and face greater social restrictions on outside employment), rather than women agricultural laborers, who more typically insist that it is important to have sons for continuing the lineage, and who have a more negative attitude toward daughters (Horowitz and Kishwar 1982; Katherine Gardner 1990; personal observation).

In explaining gender inequalities, I would therefore place much less emphasis than Sen does on women's incorrect perceptions of their self-interest, and much more on the external constraints to their acting overtly in their self-interest. Or, to put it another way, what is needed is less making women realize they *deserve* better, than having them believe they *can do* better (by building their self-confidence, providing information, etc.), and by helping them to in fact do better, through strengthening their bargaining position. Grassroots organizing experience among women, in South Asia and elsewhere, also bears this out.

ii. *Altruism or self-interest?*

Unlike the notion of false perceptions, altruism (like self-interest) implies self-awareness. But altruism too can affect bargaining outcomes. The question is: are women more altruistic than men?

At one level, some of women's actions within families appear to support this view. For instance, developing-country evidence shows that poor women spend the income they control largely on family needs rather than on personal needs.<sup>40</sup> Again, women in South Asia usually forfeit their inheritance claims in land in favor of brothers (Agarwal 1994a); peasant women in north India and Bangladesh often eat last and least while feeding the best food to their sons and husbands;<sup>41</sup> and so on. A number of writers explain such actions in terms of women being socialized into acting more responsibly or more altruistically than men.<sup>42</sup> This may well be part of the explanation, but does not appear to be all of it.

First, there are significant differences in such behavior patterns across regions and communities. For instance, in contrast to women in the patrilineal–patrilocal northwest, women among the matrilineal–matrilocal

Khasis of the northeast (as noted)<sup>43</sup> don't wait for late-returning husbands before eating their evening meal.<sup>44</sup> While this could reflect differences in socialization, there are also clear variations in women's material conditions in these two contexts, with the women from patrilineal families in the northwest being much more dependent on male members than those from matrilineal families in the northeast.

Second, with limited outside options, women might well seek to maximize "family" welfare because it is in their long-term self-interest (even if it reduces their immediate well-being), insofar as women are more dependent on the family for their survival than are men. This dependence can be both economic and social. Socially, for instance, where female seclusion is strong, women need male mediation to deal with outside-family institutions; or widowhood may carry social disabilities (as in India) that widowhood does not. Also women's dependence on the family can be longer lasting than men's, given women's higher life expectancies. In the circumstances, women may well have, or believe they have, no other option than favoring family members over themselves.

Third, a woman investing more in sons than in daughters, as in northern South Asia, appears to be acting more out of self-interest than altruism, when read in the light of prevailing male advantage in labor markets and property rights, of women's need for male mediation in the community, and of their dependence on sons in widowhood or old age.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, one might ask: would altruism be so obviously sex-selective?

Thus if women forego their claims in family assets in favor of sons, brothers or the extended family, or give gifts to kin to secure their affection, these could be interpreted as ways by which women with a weak resource position seek to strengthen their family ties in order to ensure economic and social support when they need it, sacrificing their immediate welfare for future security.

A similar interpretation could fit the observation of an increasing number of Bangladeshi village women today asserting (or proclaiming their intention to assert) their land rights, while a generation ago their mothers gave up those rights in favor of brothers. Here the mothers' behavior may appear altruistic and that of the daughters self-interested. But given that today kin support structures are eroding, while earlier such support was more readily forthcoming, both actions would be congruent with self-interest.

In other words, if women expend their energies and earnings on the family and extended kin, this appears to be as consistent with self-interest as with altruism. Or both altruism and self-interest might be operating,<sup>46</sup> although it is difficult to say in what relative measure, and with what variation by context.

Stark (1995), in fact, argues that even altruistic behavior may be specifically cultivated by parents ("preference shaping") out of self-interest, to ensure that their children look after them in old age. To inculcate in the

children "an internal enforcement mechanism," parents may use the demonstration effect, by behaving in an altruistic manner toward others in front of their children.

Finally, to the extent that both altruism and self-interest motivate behavior, this mix need not be limited to women, although notions of self-sacrifice, nurturance, and so on, are usually more emphasized for women than men (Papanek 1990).

The recognition that women, *like men*, may be motivated by self-interest (rather than only or mainly by altruism), and that both women and men may be concerned with individual as well as family welfare, even if in differing degrees, and even if their *overt* actions place them on different sides of the spectrum, also focuses attention more directly on the material constraints that shape women's behavior. It cautions against explanations which are biological in their thrust ("women are by 'nature' more self-sacrificing"), or which presume deficiencies in women's self-perception or economic motivation;<sup>47</sup> just as it cautions against assuming that self-interest is the only motivating factor.

In terms of governmental as well as grassroots interventions this recognition would call for a strengthening of women's fall-back position, so that they are less economically and socially dependent on sons, husbands or brothers, rather than locating solutions primarily in raising women's awareness of what constitutes their well-being.

### *iii. Altruism and intra-household coalitions*

Bargaining models assume that each person will bargain on her/his own behalf within the household. However, just as there can be interest coalitions outside the household, so there can be interest coalitions within it, say, between co-wives in a polygamous household, or between mothers and children, or between mothers and sons.

This also impinges on the question of bargaining and self-interest in an interesting way. Even women who may be willing to sacrifice their own interest for that of family members out of altruism may strike a hard bargain with their husbands on behalf of their children. Indeed they may do so more overtly than if they were acting solely on their own behalf. That is, women's concern with "family needs" need not include the husband's needs. Some evidence from South Asia and Africa does suggest that women, not uncommonly, see their interests as congruent to those of their dependent children and potentially antagonistic to those of their husbands.<sup>48</sup> In such contexts, there need be no necessary contradiction between women's possible altruism on behalf of children and their bargaining hard with their husbands.

In light of the above, the idea of women's false-perceptions appears to have been overstretched, as also the arguments concerning the gender-specificity of altruism. At the same time, it cannot be assumed (as most bargaining models do) that women and men are motivated solely by self-interest. To the extent that women as well as men might be motivated by *both* altruism and self-interest (as appears realistic to assume), but in degrees that cannot be specified *a priori*, it would be difficult to predict outcomes (see also England 1989). The implications of intra-household coalitions in determining bargaining power could, however, be examined empirically.

### III. BEYOND THE HOUSEHOLD: THE MARKET, THE COMMUNITY AND THE STATE

We have noted at various points in the paper that women's bargaining power within the home is clearly associated with their situation outside it. Although, as mentioned earlier, some discussions of household bargaining recognize that "extra-household environmental parameters" (McElroy 1990) impinge on intra-household bargaining power, we need to go beyond mere recognition to examine how such parameters can themselves be bargained over.<sup>49</sup>

Outside the household/family, gender interactions take place in several arenas, of which three are especially important: the market, the community and the State. The bargaining approach can usefully be extended to characterize gender interactions in these arenas as well.

#### A. The market

Unlike the theoretical ambiguity about motivation that surrounds characterizations of gender relations within the household, market relations are unambiguously depicted in economic analysis as guided by self-interest. In this arena, bargaining takes its most explicit form and has been focused on widely, especially in the context of labor markets and trade unions. Given the attention that market-related bargaining has already received, I will not detail it here. What does need mention, however, is that women's ability to bargain in the market, as in other arenas, is mediated by gendered norms and practices; and that owning and controlling property (especially landed property, in agrarian contexts) is important for strengthening women's bargaining power in the market as well. Both aspects were mentioned earlier, but the former needs some elaboration.

Consider the labor market. Bargaining may occur over wages, the duration and intensity of work, work conditions, and so on. But women's bargaining power in the workplace (in comparison with men's) would be

constrained not only by gender gaps in skills, information and education but also by women's domestic responsibilities which reduce their job options; by employers' assumptions (which, as noted, may be quite erroneous)<sup>50</sup> regarding women's abilities, work commitment, efficiency and needs; by her own and her household's property status (and thus her reserve price of labor); by cultural specifications of appropriate female behavior (e.g. norms for female seclusion, or the view that public haggling by women is improper); by barriers to women's entry into trade unions and male biases within trade unions;<sup>51</sup> and so on. Many of these factors would also adversely affect women's ability to function in markets for land and agricultural inputs.

In other words, gender ideology (crystallized in social perceptions, norms and practices) and women's economic situation affect bargaining not just within the home space but also the public space. For rural women, the village community, which also often defines their workspace locationally and socially, assumes particular importance in the contestation over both gender norms and communal resources, as further discussed below.

### **B. The community**

A community could be defined in terms of a shared identity based on location (e.g. a village) and/or social grouping (religious, racial, ethnic, caste, clan, and so on). A person will generally be a member of several communities simultaneously, for instance, of a caste or religious grouping within a village (or spread across several villages), as well as of the larger village community containing several castes or religious groupings.

Like gender relations within the household, those within a community can also be characterized as relations of cooperative conflict within a bargaining framework of analysis, although with some important differences from the intra-household context, as discussed later. Consider first the general case of an individual within the community and then the issue of gender. It can be argued that an individual is likely to cooperate with the community insofar as it brings her/him greater economic, social or political gain than possible otherwise. Community membership can provide individuals with economic support (jobs, credit, help in a crisis), social support (for marriages, illnesses, deaths, etc.), and political support (say, in conflicts with other communities) which are denied to nonmembers. Hence each individual may be better off economically and socially as a part of the community than outside it. Further, community members can cooperate in specific contexts for mutual benefit, such as by jointly managing a communal resource, like the village commons.

What would cooperation with an individual on the part of the community mean? It could be argued that the community would want to retain the loyalty of its members who, in aggregate, constitute the human and material

resources of the community and its political strength. It could therefore seek to retain its individual members by promoting support networks, formulating and enforcing consensual rules, and so on.

At the same time, there can be at least three types of inherent conflict between an individual and the community: one, over the sharing of *economic* resources held in common (such as common land or a water source); two, over positions of *political* power and decision-making authority; and three, over community norms which dictate *social* behavior.

Implicit or explicit bargaining can occur between an individual and the community over the rules governing economic resource use, political positions, and social behavior, and over the enforcement of those rules. The cooperation of an individual with the community could imply her/his following the established rules, or bargaining to change the rules by discussion, protest, etc.<sup>52</sup> Noncooperation would mean withdrawing from particular community activities, or opting out of the community altogether.<sup>53</sup>

A person could opt out of a local community altogether in a variety of ways with varying implications. She/he may physically relocate permanently (e.g. migrate) for economic reasons, or for gaining greater social freedom. More drastic would be opting out of a community by changing one's social identity – for instance, changing one's religion or caste. A person leaving one community may hope to assimilate into another, but this is not always easy. In practice, opting out would not be an option available to all, and for many it may be their last resort.

In some ways the nature of inherent cooperative conflicts between an individual and a community is not dissimilar to that between household members. But there are at least two critical differences. One, since the community's *size* is larger than of a household, the costs to the community of an individual member not cooperating would typically be small or insignificant (unless the person commands substantial economic or political influence by virtue of her/his property status or political contacts within or outside the village). Two, unlike the household, the community would not necessarily be a unit of joint consumption, production or investment, although some or all members may cooperate in specific contexts, say by investing in and using a communal resource such as land or water.<sup>54</sup> Explicit expressions of cooperation or conflict between an individual and a community may also be more episodic than everyday in nature.

How does gender impinge on this formulation? For illustration consider an Indian woman belonging to a village community which is more or less homogenous in terms of caste and class. She could benefit from caste support in numerous ways, such as receiving loans or other economic and social help during crises, being able to enter into labor-sharing arrangements with other members for domestic or agricultural tasks, receiving help in arranging children's marriages, being allowed access to a well or to a piece of common land possessed by the caste group, and so on. At the same

time, there could be underlying conflict over her share of communal resources, or over caste rules about whom she may marry, or over social norms regarding the degree of seclusion she must maintain, and so on. The last (as noted) would restrict her earning options and be a particular source of conflict in poverty contexts.

However, the ability of an Indian village woman to "bargain" with the community for a greater share in communal resources, or for greater social freedom (a change in social norms), would be more limited than that of a man, for several reasons. One, women are often excluded from (or severely under-represented in) public decision-making bodies which enforce and modify the rules governing the community. Two, a woman's typically weaker intra-household bargaining power would also weaken her extra-household bargaining power (compared with men), if her husband and marital family oppose her stand. Three, where patrilocality, inter-village marriages with nonkin are the norm, married women would not have the support of kin coalitions that men have within the village.

In general, women's bargaining power within the community would be enhanced if they operate as a group than as individuals.<sup>55</sup> For instance, an individual woman who breaks seclusion norms can easily be penalized by her caste-group, say by casting aspersions on her character or shunning her. Such reprisals are less possible if a group of women decide to transgress the rules (as BRAC women did in challenging purdah norms). Similarly, it would be much more difficult for a woman acting alone to gain control over common land, or to have a voice in public bodies, or to protest sexual harassment or assault, than if she were part of a gender-progressive group or was supported by such a group. In other words, within a socially homogenous community, a woman's bargaining power with the community would stem only partly from her individual economic and political position, and more particularly from gender-progressive coalitions within the community.<sup>56</sup>

In a multi-caste, class-heterogeneous village, there would be at least one important difference compared with a relatively homogeneous village: the bargaining power of women would be affected not only by whether they belonged to a group and of what size, but also by their caste and class positions within the village. In the sharing of communal resources, for instance, the negotiating strength of low-caste or poor peasant women, even if they formed a group, is likely to be weaker than that of high-caste or rich peasant women whose caste or class as a whole commands greater power in the village.

Noncooperation in the sense of opting out of the local community altogether may be even less of an option for village women than men; much would depend on the woman's fall-back position defined by her ability to survive, economically and socially, outside the local community. Among factors which could impinge on this are the following:

- her personal property position and overall economic status: women owning, say, landed property would be less dependent on the community for economic survival than those without; also personal property positions could be translated into political strengths outside the village community;
- her skills (including education), information access and associated economic opportunities independent of the community;
- the economic and social support provided by her household/family; and
- material and social support from outside the community and family, such as from women's groups, other NGOs and the State: this could include earning opportunities, housing, legal support and (say, from women's groups) emotional (confidence-building) and social support.

In other words, here a woman's fall-back position could depend on her direct rights in property, her access to extra-community economic opportunities and social support, and her *intra*-household bargaining strength. The *inter*-household political dynamics in the village would impinge on this as well.

### C. The State

The framework of cooperation–conflict and bargaining is also relevant in characterizing women's relationship with the State (although again not in the same way as for *intra*-household relations). Consider the relationship of gender-progressive women's organizations to the State. The demands of such organizations (and of many other NGOs) are typically directed both at the State and against it. The State has the power to enact laws and formulate policies and programs in women's favor; to increase women's access to productive resources, employment, information, education and health; to provide protection from gender violence; to influence discourse on gender relations in the media and educational institutions; and so on. All these are potential areas of cooperation between the State and gender-progressive groups. However, the same State can also use its resources and coercive apparatus to reinforce existing gender-retrogressive biases within the family and community, constituting a situation of conflict.

It could of course be asked: what would be the State's interest in cooperating with gender-progressive groups and responding sympathetically to their demands? Several interlinked factors impinge on this: one, such a group could build up political pressure, perhaps with the support of oppositional political parties and/or the media, with implications for voting patterns. Two, there could be implicit or explicit pressure from international public opinion and international aid agencies (White 1992). Three, the State might recognize the inefficacy both of market mechanisms and of its own machinery in implementing programs which it sees as essential for



development, such as programs for literacy, health improvement and poverty alleviation. In India, the State's attempts since the mid-1980s to enlist NGO support (and especially the support of women's groups) for literacy and health programs reflect this recognition. In other words, on several issues the interests of the State and of gender-progressive groups could coincide. Cooperation by individuals or groups with the State could take the form of supporting it politically (say, via votes), providing it legitimacy in international and national fora, desisting from "disruptive" activities such as demonstrations, pickets and strikes, and so on.

At the same time, the State may only cooperate with NGOs over certain types of programs, such as welfare-oriented programs for the better delivery of health and educational services or for providing income-earning opportunities to the poor. State support (in nonsocialist regimes) is less likely for programs which call for a major redistribution of economic resources, such as land, insofar as such programs could adversely affect the interests of the State's main political constituencies. In other words, within the framework of cooperation-conflict there can be some issues over which the State would be willing to cooperate and others over which there would be explicit conflict.

Further, the State itself can be seen as an arena of cooperation and conflict which take place at multiple levels. For instance, the State may gain consensus for passing gender-progressive laws and policies, but face resistance from the local bureaucracy, judiciary, police, or other arms of the State apparatus in the implementation of these measures. Again, some departments or ministries within the State apparatus may pursue gender-progressive policies within an overall gender-retrogressive State structure and development framework. Women's bureaus or ministries set up in many countries after 1975 (the beginning of the United Nations Decade for Women), are cases in point. Likewise, there may be gender-progressive individuals within particular State departments: in every South Asian country, it is possible to name individual bureaucrats (male and female) who have played crucial positive roles in this respect, typically, but not only, in response to demands by women's groups.<sup>57</sup>

On the one hand, therefore, there would be gender-related negotiation between elements of the State and non-State organizations, institutions or individuals; on the other hand the State itself is an arena of contestation between parties with varying understandings of and commitment to reducing (or maintaining) gender hierarchies. These contestations can be between State officials within a department, between different tiers of the State apparatus (such as policy-making and policy-implementing bodies), and/or between different regional elements of the State structure.

Such a conceptualization implies that the State is not being seen here as a monolithic structure which is inherently, uniformly or transhistorically

“patriarchal,” as argued by some (e.g. Catharine MacKinnon 1989). Rather it is a differentiated structure through which and within which gender relations get constituted, through a process of contestation and bargaining.<sup>58</sup> Such a conceptualization does not deny the empirical realities of State-functioning in many countries as having been more gender-retrogressive than gender-progressive. But it does mean that the State could be and has been in some degree subject to challenge and change in this respect.

In this process of contestation, women’s bargaining strength with the State could depend on a complex set of factors, such as whether they are functioning as individuals or as a group (their strength would be far greater as a group, as with community-level bargaining); the group’s size (their bargaining power would be greater the larger the group); and their ability to muster support from the media, oppositional parties, and from individuals and groups within the State apparatus. The degree to which the State is democratic and whether institutions within the country, such as the judiciary, can act autonomously of the ruling political party, would also impinge on the outcomes of women’s interactions with the State, as would the extent of sensitivity to gender-related concerns prevailing within the country and internationally.

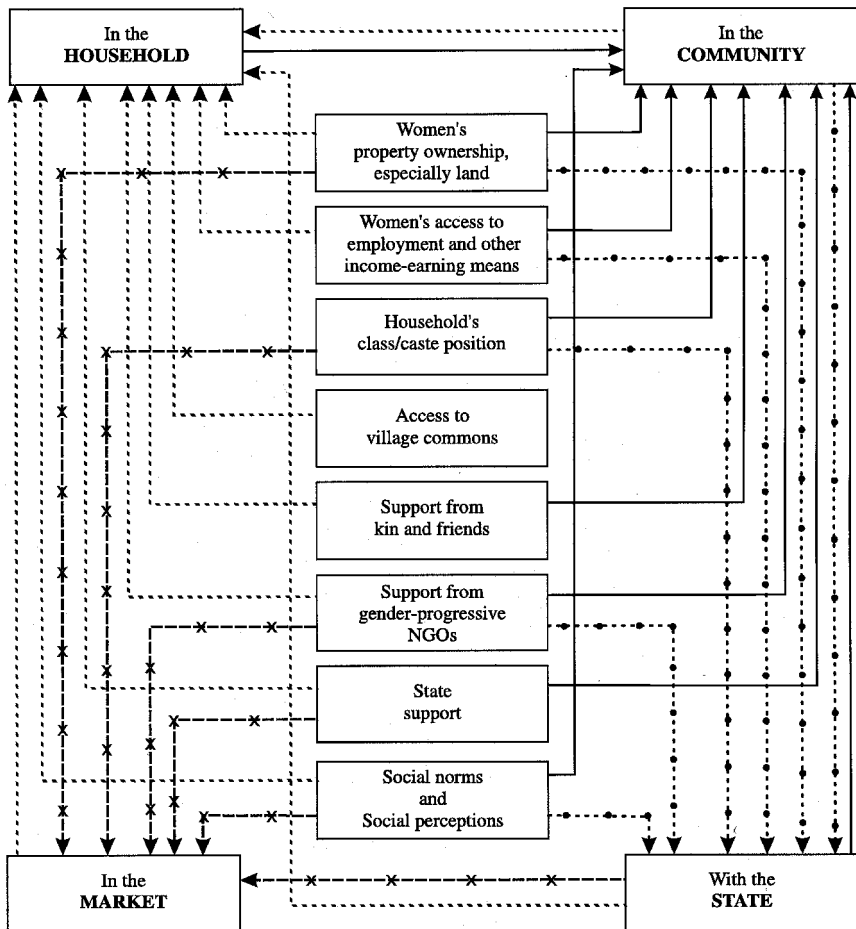
#### **D. Interactions: the household, the market, the community and the State**

The household/family, the market, the community and the State, as noted, can be characterized as four principal arenas of contestation. Gender relations get constituted and contested within each.

Each arena simultaneously impinges on a woman’s bargaining power. For instance, consider the flow diagram giving the factors discussed earlier as likely to affect women’s intra-family bargaining power in relation to subsistence. Some of these factors (e.g. women’s property status, support from gender-progressive groups, and social norms and perceptions) would also affect a woman’s bargaining power within the community, the market and the State, and through these affect her intra-household bargaining power indirectly as well.

In addition, the four arenas may be seen as interactive, each with the others, embodying pulls and pressures which may, at specific junctures, either converge (reinforcing each other) or move in contradictory directions (providing spaces for countervailing resistances). For instance, a State may pass laws, define policies and promote programs that favor women’s interests, while some communities within the country may resist the implementation of these measures: the situation in parts of South Asia, at several points in time, could be so characterized. Or the State, the community and the family may reinforce each other in strengthening, say, the

FACTORS LIKELY TO AFFECT RURAL WOMEN'S BARGAINING POWER  
(IN RELATION TO SUBSISTENCE) IN DIFFERENT ARENAS



strictures on women's social and sexual conduct, as has happened under many Islamic regimes. Or State policies may be congruent with the dominant interests of the community but individual families may find that their economic and market-linked interests are in conflict with the norms set by local communities. Many poor rural households in Bangladesh today are cases in point: here a push toward Islamization by the State, and supported by local communities, has dictated greater female seclusion, but such strictures (as noted) are now being contested by many poor women (often with the tacit support of their husbands) who find that these norms seriously limit the family's livelihood options.

Essentially, the local communities can be seen as playing an intermediate role between the State and the individual or the household, in defining and enforcing people's social obligations and social practices, including those concerning appropriate forms of behavior and communal economic activity. At the same time, not all members of a community need conform to what is specified by the community's influential members. To the extent that the State as a whole (or significant elements within it) maintains a relatively gender-progressive position in policies, legislation and implementation, it provides space for individual women or individual households to exit from or openly contest a community's gender-retrogressive stranglehold. It also provides space for women to build organized resistance against gender-retrogressive practices prevailing in the community and/or household.

It is notable that gender-progressive coalitions and associated collective action can prove important determinants of women's fall-back position and bargaining power in all four arenas, as outlined at various points in the paper. Indeed women in groups speak "in a different voice." As a woman from BRAC put it:

The most important thing I learned from the Samity [organization] is that we are strong as a group. We can withstand pressure but alone we are nothing. A house cannot stand on one post. Put a post in each corner and it is strong! With the Samity behind me, people think twice before harming me.

(Hayat Imam Hunt 1983: 38)

#### IV. IN CONCLUSION

The first step is to measure whatever can be easily measured. This is ok as far as it goes. The second step is to disregard that which can't be measured. . . . This is artificial and misleading. The third step is to presume that what can't be measured easily is not very important. This is blindness. The fourth step is to say that what can't be easily measured really doesn't exist. This is suicide.

(cited in 'Adam Smith' 1972: 290)

This paper has focused on some of the features of intra- and extra-household dynamics that have received inadequate or no attention in the formulation of household models or in discussions of the bargaining framework and gender relations, and which can critically affect the outcomes of those dynamics. Ignoring these features may not be suicidal for most economists, but it would certainly indicate blindness, and could most certainly prove misleading.

In broad terms, these relatively neglected dimensions concern especially four types of issues:

- (i) The complex determinants (especially qualitative ones) of bargaining power in relation to specific resources, the differential importance of those determinants (e.g. the particular significance of landed property in agrarian societies), and the extent to which the determinants themselves are subject to contestation and change – all this mediated through the lens of gender.
- (ii) The short-term exogeneity but long-term endogeneity of social norms, and the varied and crucial roles they play in setting limits to bargaining, in determining bargaining power for that which can be bargained over, and in influencing how bargaining gets conducted.
- (iii) The co-existence of both self-interest and altruism as motivators of individual action.
- (iv) The inter-related nature of bargaining within and outside the household, the embeddedness of households within a wider institutional environment, and the role of groups/coalitions as determinants of bargaining power.

Some of these aspects could be incorporated into formal models and empirically tested with the gathering of appropriate data. For instance, it would be possible to take better account of factors, in addition to say incomes, that affect bargaining power, and to identify the more important determinants in specific contexts. The paper has suggested some of the factors that are likely to affect gender differences in intra-household bargaining power in relation to subsistence, and the special importance of command over land in agrarian economies. These aspects could be tested empirically. The idea of intra-household bargaining coalitions could also be examined empirically.

But some of the other aspects discussed relate to qualitative dimensions on which systematic information is often difficult to gather, and/or which cannot readily be integrated into formal models. One such issue is the role of social perceptions in the valuation of people’s contributions and needs, and the undervaluing of women’s contributions and needs. Perceptions are difficult to incorporate in formal specifications or to quantify. Another issue is the complexity of social norms, on some of which systematic data could be obtained (e.g. marriage practices), but others would prove more elusive.

Equally complex would be a formal specification of bargaining over social norms. A third issue is that both self-interest and altruism are likely to motivate people's actions, but we cannot determine *a priori* which (or what mix) would prevail in what context, and how gender, age or identities based on class, race, religion, nation, etc., would affect the motivations. In the circumstances, it would be difficult to predict the outcomes of bargaining, or assign values to various parameters. And a fourth issue is that households operate within a larger institutional setting (of community, market, State, etc.); hence predictions based solely on household-level bargaining models could prove inaccurate. At the same time, formal incorporation of these institutional features may be confounded by complexity and lack of information. The difficulty of including them in formal specifications and testing, however, should not preclude recognition of the importance of these factors; and here accompanying analytical descriptions would be illuminating.

In fact, the issue of collective bargaining and collective action, when extended beyond the recognized space of the market, and covering negotiations not just over economic resources but also over social norms and cultural constructions of gender, opens up a whole new area of analytical work. While this cannot be examined here, it clearly has important implications for future extensions of theory and policy. Therein lies a challenge.

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#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Studies on gender and micro-economic outcomes are too numerous to list here, but on gender and macro-economics see especially *World Development*, special issue on "Gender, Adjustment and Macroeconomics," 23(11), 1995.
- <sup>2</sup> Biology (pregnancy, child-bearing, etc.) may have influenced the historical construction of some aspects of gender relations, such as the gender division of labor. But biology cannot explain the entire gamut of gender inequalities we observe today, nor even the perpetuation of an observed gender division of labor (e.g. technical developments have minimized the importance of muscular

- strength; contraceptive technology reduces the disability of frequent pregnancies; and a variety of possible arrangements make child care a less binding constraint). In any case, the considerable variation of gender relations across cultures indicates the enormous importance of nonbiological factors.
- <sup>3</sup> For interesting discussions on problems associated with a unitary conceptualization of the household, see among others the writings of economists Cheryl Doss (1996), Nancy Folbre (1986, 1988), Lawrence Haddad, John Hoddinott and Harold Alderman (1994), Gillian Hart (1993), *IDS Bulletin* (1991), Elizabeth Katz (1992), Bina Agarwal (1994a), Naila Kabeer (1994), Julie Nelson (1994), Notburga Ott (1995), Janet Seiz (1991) and Amartya Sen (1983, 1990); and anthropologists Jane Guyer (1981), Olivia Harris (1981), Henrietta Moore (1991), as well as others in Jane Guyer and Pauline Peters (1987). In addition, a critique of unitary household models is implicit in the writings of a number of economists (mentioned below) who have formulated alternative models.
  - <sup>4</sup> Some scholars distinguish between "household" and "family" (e.g. A. M. Shah 1973), but I have used them interchangeably, given the empirical variability of these units across regions, and their definitional variability across the literature (Guyer and Peters 1987; Pauline Kolenda 1987). For instance, households can be commensal and residential units, and/or units of joint property ownership, production, consumption and investment, or they can constitute some intersection of these dimensions. They also vary in membership composition from units of single persons, to those of parents and children, to those with additional relatives: siblings, grandparents, and so on.
  - <sup>5</sup> Also referred to as the common preference model, the altruistic model or the benevolent dictator model.
  - <sup>6</sup> See especially, Doss (1996), Haddad *et al.* (1994), Haddad, Hoddinott and Alderman (forthcoming), Hoddinot (1991), Katz (1996), John Strauss and Duncan Thomas (1995).
  - <sup>7</sup> See Francois Bourguignon and Pierre-André Chiappori (1992), Martin Browning, Bourguignon, Chiappori and Valerie Lechene (1994) and Chiappori (1988, 1992).
  - <sup>8</sup> Some argue that since available data don't usually permit us to test hypotheses that could help us choose between the bargaining and neoclassical household models, the analytically simpler neoclassical model is preferable. This is not an adequate reason for dismissing the bargaining approach, but merely strengthens the case for further data gathering. Also as Katz (1996: 16) notes: "Even if the same predictions can be generated . . . in a unitary framework, it may be asked why parsimony and not descriptive accuracy is the relevant . . . criterion for the choice of model."
  - <sup>9</sup> Sen, in this context, does not expand on how families or individuals arrive at a certain endowment position.
  - <sup>10</sup> The category, NGOs, is broadly used here to include organizations that differ in size, the social backgrounds of their members, their objectives, ideological positions, issues taken up, forms of operation, and so on. Some might have a mass base, others small memberships. I will use the term "gender-progressive" NGOs or groups for those whose activities are centrally or partially aimed at reducing gender inequities. This could include organizations with mixed (male and female) membership but with a specific gender focus in their activities, as well as women's groups promoting gender-specific programs. "Gender-retrogressive" implies the opposite.
  - <sup>11</sup> This approach could be adapted to the situation where persons withdraw into separate noncooperative spheres of activity, while maintaining some "spheres of

cooperation" vis-à-vis goods and services that are jointly produced and/or consumed.

- <sup>12</sup> Some suggest that women's child-bearing and child-rearing responsibilities could also weaken their household bargaining position (e.g. Anne Marie Goetz, personal communication, Sussex, 1992). In my view the effect of this factor is difficult to judge *a priori*. In South Asia, for instance, on the one hand, frequent pregnancies and caring for a large number of young children could reduce women's bargaining power, say by limiting their employment options. On the other hand childlessness, equated with barrenness, could lead to divorce (Mead Cain 1988). Again having sons could increase a woman's bargaining power, but having only daughters could weaken it. Also the extent of women's reproductive responsibilities varies across cultures, and much depends on what autonomy a woman can exercise with regard to how many children she has, her access to child care support (through relatives or the State), and her *husband's* contribution to child care.
- <sup>13</sup> For a definition of gender-progressive groups, see note 10. For the role such groups can play, see especially Agarwal (1994a). Folbre (forthcoming) similarly emphasizes the role of what she terms "gender coalitions."
- <sup>14</sup> See esp. Agarwal (1986) and Sen (1990).
- <sup>15</sup> See e.g. Tahrnunessa Abdullah and Sondra Zeidenstein (1982), and Anne Marie Goetz (1990).
- <sup>16</sup> Sen focuses only on "contributions" as the principle underlying distribution. In fact, as noted below, notions about legitimate shares can stem from a range of principles, of which contributions is but one: see e.g. Patrice Engle and Isabel Nieves (1993), and Amy Farmer and Jill Teifenthaler (1995).
- <sup>17</sup> Guyer (forthcoming), an anthropologist among economists, does however implicitly prioritize wealth and assets.
- <sup>18</sup> See Jan Breman (1985) and Simon Commander (1983) on eroding patron-client relationships; and Cain, Sayeda Rokeya Khanam and Shamsun Nahar (1979), Jean Drèze (1990), Walter Fernandes and Geeta Menon (1987), Eirik Jansen (1983) and Kabeer (1994), on declining support from kin.
- <sup>19</sup> See Agarwal (1990), Drèze (1990), Fernandes and Menon (1987), Jansen (1983) and Sarah White (1992).
- <sup>20</sup> E.g. Robert Lucas and Oded Stark (1985) found this in relation to sons' remittances to parents in a study for Botswana.
- <sup>21</sup> In this context it needs stressing that a woman's fall-back position here diminishes *simultaneously* with her potential contribution to family income, since factors such as her ownership of assets and access to employment affect *both* her fall-back position and her ability to contribute economically to the family's well-being. Hence in a severe crisis, while the sharp decline in the wife's fall-back position may improve the husband's bargaining situation, this would provide him little realizable advantage given the simultaneous (and severe) decline in her ability to contribute to joint well-being, so that it would still be in his economic interest to abandon her. On this point, Partha Dasgupta (1993: 329) thus misinterprets my paper on drought and famine (Agarwal 1990) in attributing to me the argument that a collapse of the woman's fall-back position relative to her husband's *in itself* leads to her being abandoned in a famine.
- <sup>22</sup> Bilateral inheritance: ancestral property passes to and through both sons and daughters; matrilineal inheritance: ancestral property passes through the female line; patrilineal inheritance: ancestral property passes through the male line. The complex workings of these inheritance systems in South Asia are detailed in Agarwal (1994a).



- <sup>23</sup> See, among others, Jean Davidson (1988), Jeanne Koopman (1991) and Agnes Quisumbing (1994) for Africa; and Carmen Diana Deere (1985) for Latin America. Also, in relation to famines, Michael Watts (1983) notes that in Nigeria, small livestock, typically owned by women, are among the first casualties, and Megan Vaughan (1987) describes women's increasing dependence on men, due to reduced outside options, during the Malawi famine.
- <sup>24</sup> For an empirical elaboration of the relevance of these factors in the context of South Asia, see Agarwal (1994a).
- <sup>25</sup> Within "the field of opinion" Bourdieu further distinguishes between orthodoxy and heterodoxy. He does not fully spell out this distinction, but implies that orthodoxy would be at one end of the spectrum and heterodoxy at the other, the former representing one dominant system of beliefs and the latter representing several alternative systems of beliefs.
- <sup>26</sup> In a study of food distribution among Guatemalan households, Engle and Nieves (1993) found considerable variation among families in the principles underlying observed distribution. See also Farmer and Teifenthaler (1995) for a discussion on some of the other criteria. The principles underlying intra-household distribution of subsistence are not only of academic interest but have a bearing on public-policy interventions, such as child subsidies or school feeding programs.
- <sup>27</sup> Of course, even equality as a criterion could translate into several possible allocations: Farmer and Teifenthaler (1995) suggest at least six different ways by which food might be allocated to children, all in keeping with particular notions of equality that the parents might hold. For instance, parents may care about equitable food *inputs* that affect health or about equitable health *outcomes*, and each of these could be measured in terms of absolute equality, proportionate equality or equality of shortfalls. But these choices would typically reflect individual judgments, rather than socially established norms.
- <sup>28</sup> See Claudia Goldin (1990), for an interesting historical account of women workers in the USA being fired on marriage, and married women not being hired by many manufacturing firms in the 1940s. She notes: "Social consensus had been formed on the necessity for married women to remain at home with their children and on the need for their husbands to support them" (p. 6).
- <sup>29</sup> On "voice" or "exit" as ways of expressing discontent within an organization, see Albert Hirshman (1970) and note 53. See Agarwal (1994a), Carter and Katz (forthcoming) and England and Kilbourne (1990) for applications of these concepts to intra-household bargaining.
- <sup>30</sup> In the above quotations, the insertions are as given in March's paper.
- <sup>31</sup> For South Asia, see Jenneke Arens and Jos Van Beurden (1977), Lynn Bennett (1983), David Mandelbaum (1988) and Carroll Pastner (1974). For Mexico, see Martha Roldan (1988). For the USA, see Viviana Zelizer (1994) who notes that in the early twentieth century, when domestic money was still a husband's property, "a wife's chances of additional cash were limited to . . . asking, cajoling, downright begging, and even practicing sexual blackmail. If these techniques failed, there was also a repertoire of underground financial strategies, ranging from home pocket-picking to padding bills" (p. 141).
- <sup>32</sup> For the Grameen Bank, see Mahabub Hossain (1988) and Rushidan Rahman (1986); and for SEWA, see Kalima Rose (1992).
- <sup>33</sup> It has been argued by some (e.g. Bourdieu 1977) that the interest of the dominant groups would be to maintain the space of the undiscussed, and that of the dominated to reduce it by exposing the arbitrariness of the taken-for-granted, and by bringing issues hitherto seen as "private" into the public domain – that is, by redefining the boundaries of doxa.

- <sup>34</sup> Fraser also elaborates on how discourses about women's needs tend to be structured by the power relations between women and men.
- <sup>35</sup> For India, see Kamla Bhasin and Bina Agarwal (1983), Uma Chakravarti (1983), Narendra Kalia (1979) and Prabha Krishnan and Anita Dighe (1990).
- <sup>36</sup> See Scott (1985) for an elaboration of this term.
- <sup>37</sup> See Abdullah and Zeidenstein (1982), Jansen (1983), Charles Lindholm (1982), Mildred Luschinsky (1962), Jharna Nath (1984) and White (1992).
- <sup>38</sup> Although my focus here is on women's resistance to intra-family gender inequalities, there are also examples from Asia of women's covert resistance in the workplace. See, for instance, Aihwa Ong (1983) on women electronic factory workers in Malaysia claiming spirit possession to resist strict factory discipline; and Angeline Nandini Gunawardena (1989) on frequent absenteeism, tardiness and irregular work hours during peak cultivation seasons among Sri Lanka's women plantation workers. Based on her eighteen months of fieldwork Gunawardena notes: "Rural women . . . simply did not comply to the dominant forces operating in their lives, but devised means by which to skirt, side step and bend the system, so to speak, to their advantage whenever possible." She calls this strategizing for maximizing self-advantage.
- <sup>39</sup> Sen (1990), while recognizing that deprived groups may comply for many different reasons – habit, hopelessness, resignation, etc. – sees this as resulting in their willingness to accept the legitimacy of the established order rather than in their covertly resisting that order. He writes (1990: 127): "Deprived groups may be habituated to inequality, may be unaware of possibilities of social change, may be hopeless about upliftment of objective circumstances of misery, may be resigned to fate, and may well be willing to accept the legitimacy of the established order." Bourdieu's (1977: 167–70) notion of "doxa" and Antonio Gramsci's (1971) characterization of "hegemony" are also of interest in this context, but neither writer explicitly addresses nor resolves this issue, although Gramsci's writings suggest an emphasis on consent via internalization.
- <sup>40</sup> See Benería and Roldan (1987), Rae Lesser Blumberg (1991) and Joan Mencher (1988).
- <sup>41</sup> See Agarwal (1986), Drèze and Sen (1989) and Kabeer (1994).
- <sup>42</sup> See Hanna Papanek (1990), Ursula Sharma (1980) and White (1992).
- <sup>43</sup> Patrilineal: the wife takes up residence with the husband and (with or near) his patrilineal kin. Matrilineal: the husband takes up residence with the wife and (with or near) her matrilineal kin.
- <sup>44</sup> Women in traditionally matrilineal and bilateral communities also often openly challenge their husbands in ways that women in patrilineal communities usually do not (Agarwal 1994a).
- <sup>45</sup> See especially Papanek (1990) and Cain (1988) on the economic insecurity that north Indian and Bangladeshi rural women in particular face, in the absence of a son. Sons improve a woman's bargaining power in her conjugal home with both the husband and his kin. Vanessa Maher (1984) describes a similar situation in Morocco.
- <sup>46</sup> See also England (1989), Folbre (1994), Lucas and Stark (1985) and Sen (1982), the last especially on the need to accommodate "commitment" as a part of behavior, commitment defined in terms of "a person choosing an act that he believes will yield a lower level of personal welfare to him than an alternative that is also available to him" (p. 92).
- <sup>47</sup> Folbre and Heidi Hartmann (1988) note that by virtue of their association with the family and home, women have come to be portrayed as relatively "non-economic," naturally altruistic creatures. This portrayal has been used to justify

women's lower wages and limited job opportunities, but "women's commitment to family is not necessarily a function of their preferences or their productivity. It is often constrained by the reluctance of other family members to help with housework and childcare responsibilities" (p. 195).

<sup>48</sup> In many African societies, the mother-child unit has a "relative autonomy and separate identity" (Guyer and Peters 1987: 207). In India, Aileen Ross's (1961) grading of emotional closeness in eleven types of relationships among Hindu joint families in Bangalore city, put the mother-son and brother-sister relationships in the top two positions, and husband-wife as second to last. And Maher (1984: 115-16), notes that in Moroccan villages: "women look on husbands and fathers as potential enemies and sons and brothers as potential allies in the struggle they engage in to mitigate the power of the former over the conditions of their existence".

<sup>49</sup> Folbre (forthcoming), in her discussion of "gender-specific environmental parameters," and Agarwal (1994a), appear to be among the few who, in different ways, have engaged with this question.

<sup>50</sup> See e.g. Michèle Barrett (1980) and Radha Kumar (1989).

<sup>51</sup> On women's experience in trade unions, see e.g. Veronica Beechey (1987) for the United Kingdom, Folbre (1994) for the USA, and Rohini Hensman (1988) for India.

<sup>52</sup> Noncompliance with community rules could be seen as a form of implicit bargaining. But sanctions for some forms of noncompliance could be severe, even involving ostracization, in effect exclusion from the community, as noted by Agarwal (1994a) in cases of women breaking sexual taboos in parts of India, and by Margaret McKean (1992) in cases of people breaking rules governing the use of common property resources in Tokugawa Japan.

<sup>53</sup> For some interesting parallels, see Hirschman's (1970): *Exit, Voice and Loyalty*, which argues that individuals can express dissatisfaction with an organization (a firm, a political party, etc.) in two ways: exit and voice. That is, the person can opt out of the organization altogether, or give voice to dissatisfaction by protesting to the authorities. Organizations which have a high price associated with the exit option - loss of life-long association, defamation, deprivation of livelihood, and so on (as could also happen in relation to a community) - could repress the use of the voice option as well: "Obviously, if exit is followed by severe sanctions the very idea of exit is going to be repressed and the threat will not be uttered for fear that the sanction will apply to the threat as well as to the act itself" (pp. 96-7).

In my formulation, voice would constitute a form of bargaining; and the effectiveness of a person's voice, as well as her/his ability to pay the price of exit, would depend especially on her/his fall-back position.

<sup>54</sup> There is a growing theoretical and empirical literature on whether, and under what circumstances, individuals would cooperate as a group for economic gain from a common pool resource: see especially Jean-Marie Baland and Jean-Philippe Platteau (1993), Elinor Ostrom (1990) and Robert Wade (1988); and on some gender aspects see Agarwal (1997).

<sup>55</sup> Elsewhere (Agarwal 1994a, 1994b), I distinguish between four forms of resistance to the social order: individual-covert, individual-overt, group-covert and group-overt. My argument is that group-overt resistance would usually be the most effective.

<sup>56</sup> For elaboration and illustrative examples see Agarwal (1994a).

<sup>57</sup> See also, Bishwapiya Sanyal (1991: 23), who found, in his meetings with a number of bureaucrats and State planners in South Asia, that many were "intensely critical of inefficiencies within the government, and were often very appreciative of . . . NGOs who had organized the poor, made demands on the government on

their behalf, and thus, had facilitated social reform." NGOs, likewise, while complaining about obstructive social officials, also mentioned "good bureaucrats" who helped them even against the recommendations of fellow bureaucrats.

Goetz (1990) found interesting differences in the attitudes of male and female field-level bureaucrats in Bangladesh. In village-level credit programs, for instance, women bureaucrats were much more sympathetic to the constraints faced by village women and were less susceptible than their male colleagues to being coopted by the local male elite.

<sup>58</sup> Here I come close to R. W. Connell's (1987: 130) conceptualization of the State in the context of Western democracies.

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