



DOING GENDER DOING GEOGRAPHY

Emerging Research in India

Editors

Saraswati Raju
Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt



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To David Sopher (1923–82), my mentor and teacher who taught me to be empathetic toward the marginalised, the peripheral and the neglected. My location at the Centre for the Study of Regional Development, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi fuelled the spirit further.

Saraswati Raju

To those from whom I learned geography: the teachers in Lady Brabourne College, Kolkata; my other teachers Professors Sunil K. Muni; Pradip K. Mukhopadhyay and late Shri Arabinda Biswas; and those at Calcutta University, in particular, Professor Suprova Roy. This volume is also a gift to, and an effort to speak with, my students in Burdwan University. They all inspired me to pick up the courage to ask difficult questions and seek simple answers.

Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt

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Preface

Until the 1970s, gender had remained invisible in the analyses of social space and place in the discipline of geography. Terms such as 'mankind' were widely used, and it was assumed that they implicitly meant 'everyone', and 'included' women automatically. Even behavioural approaches in human geography started with the premise that communities and social groups were homogeneous in their interactions with the environment. Consequently, any specific and separate reference to 'women' was largely unwelcome. It took the efforts of many to contest the misogyny implicit in such terms as 'mankind' or in other contents of geography. In recent decades, the androcentrism implicit in the way conventional geographers perceived and explain the world has thankfully been challenged widely by a number of geographers. Feminist geographers have shown that men and women interact differently with place, and that many of the gender relations are 'stretched over' space, that is, they are essentially spatial in nature. The recent contributions to feminist geography have successfully offered new interpretations of place and have redefined space, as well as thrown new insights into men and women, gender roles and gender relations. If in the early days geography seemed to be on a warpath with feminism, those days are well and truly over. After the initial collision, feminism and geography have now reconciled and each has now enriched the other in significant ways. This mutual enrichment has happened through an epistemological rethinking. The wider use of cross- and inter-disciplinary research methodologies has led to more intensive rethinking of geography itself as an increasing number of geographers adopt the 'gender lens' in their research. New and gendered perspectives on geography as a discipline have emerged.

Geographers in India have been studying gender through their disciplinary lens over the years as evidenced by the growing body of geographical writings on gender. The early days were marked by a reliance on well-tested and widely accepted statistical methods

that use various kinds of numerical data. It is possible that this was done to carve out hitherto unwelcome niches without completely destabilising the established order. Indeed, such 'subversion of the order by collusion' has been one of the preferred political strategies widely propounded by feminists. Such strategies, as against the strategy of direct confrontation or 'flowing against the stream' are equally potent as political manoeuvres. The outcomes in both cases are not very different, and indeed, the recent spate of feminist writings in Indian geography, exploring and using innovative methods to explain geography from the perspective of gender, provide evidence to the changes that are shaking the monolith of Indian geography.

The content of the book reveals that this volume draws mainly from the writings of Indian geographers working on gender from geographical perspectives. If they have raised their voices, pushed the research frontier into a less-trodden field at some risk, the book is an attempt at creating spaces for them so as to claim their arrival. This is purely an intentional and political act on the part of the editors. In the present sensitivities and contestations toward the Anglo-Saxon/Eurocentric hegemonies, we wanted to place upfront the importance of local context and legacies that have shaped knowledge production in Indian geography. We also wanted this book to trace the changing contours of theoretical and methodological shifts in research on gender in geography. Through this book, we are initiating a dialogue with more established feminist scholars who currently hold the hegemony over knowledge production in feminist geography. Above all, we may also succeed in drawing the attention of the feminists to the growing body of research being done by geographers on gender in India.

We would like to position our book as a pioneering and significant intervention in bringing upfront Indian geographers' contributions on understanding gender and, through it, help enrich the discipline of geography itself. We are confident that the volume would have significant uses for postgraduate and research students not only within the discipline of geography, but also from other disciplines engaged in gender studies as well as for those working towards the betterment of women and men's lives from outside the academia and from within the civil society. Through this volume, we are also initiating a dialogue with internationally-based scholars working with feminist methodologies and seeking Indian feminist scholarship in

the field of Indian geography. We hope that this book will provide them with the much sought after material on feminist ontology and epistemologies from an Indian perspective.

As we sign off, it would not perhaps be out of place to talk a little about the process of shaping this book together, the fact that we came from different academic and personal backgrounds — Kuntala, from a large regional university in India and later at the Australian National University (ANU), and Saraswati earlier at an affiliated postgraduate college at Gwalior and then at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi. This is not coincidental. Our backgrounds have both differences as well as similarities. For example, researching gender in either of these locations would have had a very different trajectory, leading to different experiences and exposures. At the same time, however, we both were ‘doing gender in geography’ at a time when the androcentric tenor of the discipline was stark, inhibiting innovative thinking amongst Indian geographers. The commonalities in our background meant that we had much to share. For example, enshrined in the Indian tradition of geography, we both were somehow made to answer: ‘What has geography got to do with gender?’ One would think that in today’s world such a question would seem rather unbecoming, but it made us more aware of ourselves as women, and encouraged us to think differently.

In the context of contemporary global scholarship in geography such a question would sound ill-informed, and yet strangely we were made to respond to this question even by feminists based in other disciplines. It was an excellent starting point for both of us, because this question actually helped us to critically interrogate: ‘Indeed, what and how geography can add to the feminist understanding of gendered lives in India?’

If there were moments of resistance, we also had our share of support that cannot and should not be undervalued. It is an impossible task to list the innumerable inspirational sources/persons in our long journey and yet Saraswati would like to acknowledge the academically exciting as well as challenging environs of her University that allows one to explore uncharted paths to one’s heart’s delight. However, it was the Vice Chancellor’s Fellowship award at the ANU in the summer of 2008 which provided her with requisite time and space to embark upon this project along with Kuntala. Kuntala would like to thank the ANU for providing an enabling and refreshing

environment after her many years of service to the University of Burdwan. We would both like to thank the Resource Management in Asia Pacific Program at the Crawford School of Economics and Government, ANU College of Asia and Pacific, where the idea of this volume took full shape.

Saraswati Raju
Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt

Introduction

SARASWATI RAJU AND KUNTALA LAHIRI-DUTT

The term ‘gender’ has a long history and a range of meanings. The root of the word can be traced to Latin, ‘*la: genus*’, meaning ‘type’, ‘kind’ or ‘sort’. It is also connected to the Greek root ‘*gen*’, meaning ‘to produce’. In popular parlance the terms ‘gender’ and ‘sex’ are often equated, but although biology or sex might form the basis of gender, gender is quite different from sex. The term ‘sex’ denotes biological differences between males and females, and ‘gender’ conveys what individuals would conceive of their roles as males and females, roles that are largely sanctioned and ascribed by society. In other words, gender refers to how societies set the behavioural, social and cultural rules for being a man or a woman.¹ That is, gender involves the way society creates, shapes and rewards the notions of femininity and masculinity.² We can even see gender as something we do within specific social constraints, making gender identities fluid over time and space (Bradley 2007).

In some languages, gender signifies grammatical usage — a type of noun-class system, which may be classified as masculine or feminine. Yet, another set of languages may apply the term ‘gender’ in a neuter-grammatical sense without attaching any masculine or feminine connection to the meaning of the word. The word ‘*linga*’, part of the vernacular Hindi, which originated in the classic Sanskrit

¹ The French philosopher and writer, Simone de Beauvoir, in her classic text *The Second Sex* argued: ‘One is not born, but rather becomes a woman’. This view emphasises that gender is more a result of culture than nature, the differences between men and women being socially constructed.

² See Ann Oakley’s influential early work *Sex, Gender and Society* of 1972 on this subject. Oakley was among the earliest sociologists to develop ideas about socialisation to explore how gender is learned and femininity and masculinity are socially constructed.

language, is one such term which requires a qualifying prefix ‘male’ or ‘female’ — *pung-linga* and *stree-linga*, respectively — if it is to be used to mean biological sex. Interestingly, these two languages also do not have equivalent term to denote ‘gender’. In the absence of such a term, ‘*linga*’ is used in an expanded way, that is, *prākṛitik linga* (natural/biological sex) and *saamajik linga* (social sex or gender) (see Bhasin 2003).

Of late, however, the term ‘gender’ has gained a popular currency and is being (mis)used even for differentiating males and females as biological beings — ‘gender-ratios’ as opposed to ‘sex-ratios’, for example. However, ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ are no longer seen as mutually independent of each other. It has been argued that male and female socialise into gendered roles through their sexed bodies, whereby sex as the biological identity of individuals plays out how they internalise certain values and behavioural codes as social beings (Nicholson 1995 quoted in McDowell 1999).

Since gender is a social construct, gendered encodings — behavioural norms for women and men — vary over space and time. Today, many women and men do things which were socially not acceptable till recently. Again, these social norms are not the same for all women in every location or context. In India, this is evident. For example, the recent development reports show how the spatial context and the geographical location where women live make major differences to even their longevity. Women in Kerala can expect to live longer by a margin of 18 years as compared to women in Madhya Pradesh despite little difference in per capita income between the two states. Moreover, women have differential access to space and place; often, public places such as streets, office buildings and institutional spaces are overtly masculine. In recent years, both popular and academic literature in India has brought out the gendered nature of public spaces/places in India (Desai 2007; Grace 2003; Phadke 2007; Niranjana 2001).

Such spatial overlapping with specific gendered attributes cuts across cultures. For example, residential patterning in North American cities has clearly identifiable physical correspondence with women-headed households, particularly of marginal groups; travel patterns have become gendered with suburbanisation and increasing use of private transportation; labour market outcomes have been interlinked with women’s spatial access to opportunities.

Examples abound to indicate the spatially-embedded processes of differentiating between women and men and the ways such spaces selectively allow men to produce and reproduce power and privilege creating gendered geographies. Why this should be so is an intriguing question and the answers lie in the complex interplay of social structures and institutions embedded in locational specificities which significantly inform the place practices of women and men (Spain 1992).

Apart from several markers of identity such as age, sex, ethnicity/race and membership in particular linguistic group, spatial locations contribute significantly towards identity formations. It can only be expected that such an important aspect of our human identities will become a subject matter of close scrutiny by feminist geographers. For them, the positioning of gender as a separate conceptual category against the rather immutable category of sex has proved as invaluable. For they could theorise gender relations as spatially variable phenomena ‘across a range of different scales ... not only between countries and over historical time but also in everyday spaces and interactions’ (McDowell 1999: 105).

Taking full advantage of theoretical developments in other disciplines, geographical research started offering increasingly complex and persuasive explanations and understanding of place and its interface with gender. As the field gradually matured, alternative explanations questioning some of the established notions involving gender, space and place also arose. It was argued, for example, that feminist geographical scholarship was essentially produced by relatively affluent sections of scholars without enough sensitivity to difference amongst women from other subaltern locations such as women of colour, ethnic minorities and those who are poorer. These processes brought in a wide range of discussion on how knowledge is situated, produced and valued and how locally-relevant research has to be acknowledged (*Belgeo* 2007: *passim*, see [Chapters 1 and 2](#) in this volume for elaborations on many of these issues; also, McDowell 1999). One such example is the much debated binary separation of spaces into ‘public’ and ‘private’ — both as the outcome of ideologies of domesticity for women on the one hand and the reinforcement and reproduction of those ideologies through spatial configuration on the other — which could be challenged when contextually placed. For many poor women in rural India,

boundaries between the public and private are often blurred as much of the agricultural work is carried out within home premises and as women take their children along to the fields. Similarly, in some urban locations, a public street essentially dominated by the presence of men in the morning may turn into a semi-private space in snug winter afternoons for women in the neighbourhoods.

In 'doing gender', the place did not remain just a 'thing in itself' — a passive locus/container as the 'unchanging backdrop against which life is played out' (Lefebvre 1991 quoted in Mitchell 2000: 215) — but turned into a historically and socially-grounded existential and gendered space. This space constitutes and is constituted by socially produced and signifying aspects, and consequently the meanings of space were expanded to include the imagined and symbolic. Thus, space was no longer simply seen or defined abstractly or subjectively-discursively; it has an existential reality. In other words, the epistemological tensions/boundaries between what constitutes space and place became increasingly blurred. Framed thus in mutually interactive framework, space and place, it is argued, open up potentially latent sites for critical engagement with gender and patriarchal structures — that is, as to how the gendered realms get enacted, re-enacted, constituted and reconstituted in mediation with specific spatial context.

With this as a backdrop, this volume attempts to foreground the ways gender is seen to operate in space/place through an understanding of how the space/place itself is conceived and shaped. In doing so, we address, although tangentially, issues involved in discussions related to the recent 'spatial turn'³ in social science research in general and gender studies in particular so as to re-emphasise the explanatory power of space and place. This has unfortunately become diffused in the contradictory tendencies that

³ The past two decades have witnessed a questioning of and a shift away from the overarching theories and grand narratives which have been insensitive to differences and localised specificities. That geography matters in unravelling the processes and events in the existential lives of humans has now been increasingly acknowledged across the social science disciplines including geography — a paradigm that has often been referred to as the 'spatial turn'.

characterise geography today — of the two extremes of pure objective ‘scientism’ and the deconstructive and mutative post-modernist scholarship.

The first ever publication in India on the geography of gender, the chapters in this volume are by Indian geographers working on gender. It would have been possible for us to invite international scholars or relatively more established scholars from India to contribute to this volume. Such an act would probably have made our editorial tasks somewhat easier, but to reiterate the reasons already stated in the Preface, we want to showcase the contextualised processes of knowledge production in Indian geography. In addition, the book helps to trace the changing contours of the travelled trajectories of Indian geographies of gender and highlights the less audible voices. Last, the book also brings to the centre-stage an example of collaborative knowledge production, which itself is a feminist political act.

In bringing gender into focus, geography in India has largely followed the conventional and accepted tools of research and at the same time has ventured into several newer ways of looking at the issues at hand. Interestingly, while more qualitative methods are being explored and increasingly getting recognition, quantitative studies are also being undertaken alongside. Opinions vary about the efficacy about one methodology over the other. It is not our intention to enter that debate within the space of this volume — some of these issues are dealt with by the editors in their respective chapters. Let us say that the kind of questions being asked and the scale at which they are being pitched would determine what methods to use as research concerns/questions should inform the research methodologies rather than the other way round.

As a largely androcentric discipline seeped in positivist traditions, geography in India had difficulty in moving away from empirical/quantitative data-based analyses and adopt purely qualitative and ethnographic research. Yet dissatisfaction with empiricism is quite palpable and recent research has begun to see the emergence of mix-method approaches. The pairing of chapters in this book with diverse methods, even as the issues are similar, is thus done with the purpose of foregrounding the parallel processes of knowledge production and methodological diversities/shifts.

Although ‘our geographies’ of gender are very different in their contents and methodologies to ‘their geographies’, we recognise that

there are many in-between categories that allow us space to establish a dialogue within the disciplinary fold of Indian geography as well as with internationally-based geographers and other scholars working on gender from their disciplinary perspectives. In order to have a meaningful dialogue, it is important to communicate our research to a wider audience in a language legible to non-specialists. Very often, feminist language tends to be obscure and the text is somewhat dense for uninitiated readers. In shaping this volume, we have tried to keep the language accessible.

We do not claim an exhaustive coverage of themes on gender that are being studied by Indian geographers either in terms of content or geographical coverage. For example, we have no exposition on the theme 'gender and environment' which is clearly 'geographical' in nature. This may be both a limitation on the editors' part in not being able to locate a geographer in India who has worked on the theme or, more importantly, a telling sign on the state of current affairs in geography of gender that nothing is readily available on this issue. However, we do feel that the collection represents the emerging concerns and the changing research tools in doing gender in geography.

The chapters are grouped under three broad themes: 'World of Work'; 'Reproduction, Survival and Care'; and 'Domestic and Public Spaces'. Following the brief joint introduction by the editors, the first part consists of two papers by the editors. Drawing largely from her experiences of formative years of geography of gender internationally and nationally, Saraswati Raju ([Chapter 1](#)) maps out the emergence of (research) subjects as gendered and spatially anchored having a bearing on existential realities in their day-to-day lives. Based on an extensive literature review and her own struggles within the discipline, she lays bare how gender, space and place intersect to create geographies of their own. In so doing, she makes a strong case for claiming legitimate spaces for gender concerns in geographical knowledge in India. In tracing the trajectory of geography of gender as it evolved elsewhere and in India, Raju engages briefly with the politics of knowledge production and its contextualisation, and identifies certain stumbling blocks and ways to circumvent them in a pragmatic manner.

The second chapter, by Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt, has two distinctly separate threads. One thread is pedagogic and explores the feminist

research methodologies to present the geography of gender as a legitimate, relevant and popular research field with a focus on India. The second thread hinges upon her argument that to understand gender research in Indian geography, one must situate both geography and feminisms in India and understand their growth and resultant hierarchies and historic inequities. She argues that the ongoing engagement of Indian geography with the scientific project of modernity in India attributes a unique positivist nature to the studies of gender in the discipline. According to her, feminism in India is expressed differently and arises from a different context; geographical studies of gender in India have different interests, agendas and issues and that they present an increasingly compelling voice that needs to be heard by those who dominate feminist knowledge production in international geography.

Various aspects of women's formal and informal world of work is the subject matter of the chapters included in Section I. Arpita Banerjee ([Chapter 3](#)), while suggesting a clearly identifiable upward-rising trend in terms of women moving to cities for work, points out how marriage and accompanying household responsibilities intersect women's pathways to work. For example, married women may be formally working, but if they are married and working, their married statuses override their working status. In the official record-keeping, they are most likely to be identified as 'associational' migrants who have moved along with their husbands on account of marriage.

It is not incidental that most of the young women workers in labour market are unmarried. At the same time, however, Banerjee argues that an expanded and anonymous urban environment helps women to break away from the traditional gendered roles to some extent. These dynamics vary according to the locational and size specificities of urban centres — larger versus smaller. The opportunities they provide play out differently in terms of caste/class/ethnic intersections. In general, however, urban locales seem to encourage women to expand their activity spaces.

In contrast to Banerjee's macro study of urban centres for India as a whole, Pallabi Sil explores the gender and space dynamics in the small town of Burdwan in [Chapter 4](#). Deviating from the usual take of globalising processes as exploitative in terms of women's increasing burden, Sil argues that these processes have created a

trans-local situation which has motivated middle-class women to reconfigure space and places. This has been achieved through newer forms of economic transactions in terms of adopting individualised ways of income generation suited to their own skills, ability to invest and familial positionalities. Thus, even as the overall burden may have gone up, new and tacit possibilities have been created for these women to expand their social and economic spaces.

Drawing from research on the Swarnajayanti Gram Swarojgar Yojana (SGSY) in Burdwan District of West Bengal, Gopa Samanta ([Chapter 5](#)) looks at the viability of microfinance and group approach as poverty-alleviating strategies for rural women as well as the problems underlying the functioning of such groups. The author contends that the SGSY scheme must address specific contextual needs and requirements rather than act as restrictive instruments. According to her, geographical factors specific to a given location such as variations in transport facilities, the availability of local market and/or the mismatch of indigenous skill and acquired skill of women for livelihood activities become significant in influencing the outcomes of microfinance activities.

Taneesha Devi Mohan's chapter ([Chapter 6](#)) is on high-end women workers operating from homes in conservative Delhi; she talks about how, for such workers, a certain degree of blurring of the spatial and the temporal boundaries which separate the public (workplace) and the private sphere (home) had occurred. Although these women have crossed over the domain of work traditionally associated with men, being at home means that they also take care of gender-encoded familial responsibilities — in many cases more than the women who go out and work. For their male counterparts, home or outside as a workplace does not seem to make any significant difference. Thus, home-based work seen in the popular discourse as 'flexible' and therefore more suited to women's needs' conveniently re-endorses the primary constructs of men as 'bread-earners' and women as 'homemakers'. In this sense, home-workers only re-articulate the age-old gendered norms. What makes it worse is that home, even as a workplace, continues to be framed as private domain outside the reach of public scrutiny.

The chapters in this section hint at several parallel processes. While certain spaces are liberating, even if in a limited sense, certain others seem to be constraining. Even if questioned in principle, one

can perhaps see how working from home may be interpreted as a tacit consent to socially assigned roles to men and women — many a times internalised by women themselves. And yet, as argued by many feminist scholars and endorsed here as well, these constructs seem to spill over to formal labour markets as well where marriage and domesticity not only intervene women's pathways to formal work, but also act to influence the 'suitability' of occupational avenues for them.

Section II consists of two chapters engaging with survival and healthcare of young children using very different methodologies. Hassan's study ([Chapter 7](#)) examines the spatiality of gender relations in India as articulated through differential survival chances of girls and boys, that is, child sex ratios (CSRs) in the age group of 0–6. Using district-level data from the Census of India and Population Foundation of India, the author maps the CSRs to identify regional patterns therein. Accordingly, there exist vast areas of what he calls 'survival disadvantage' for the girl child in the north and northwest of the country. Patches of this 'survival disadvantage' were also seen in the southern states. He concludes that the often talked about north–south divide whereby the south is seen as having a relatively better gender regime for women as compared to the north is getting blurred as far as CSRs are concerned. The author cautions that in the absence of any corrective measures, the sex-ratio regime of the north is likely to expand and obliterate the distinctively differing regionally gendered landscape in the country.

On a very different scale, Manisha Singh's chapter ([Chapter 8](#)) explores the interface between household gender dynamics and child health in the city of Lucknow. Using the concept of spatial embeddedness of existential lives as an entry point, she argues that the locational specifics of a given neighbourhood, through its social network and 'demonstration effects', significantly shape women's lives independent of their religious locations — Hindu and Muslim in this case — and their responses to child health. She differentiates between mixed (Hindu–Muslim) and isolated (Muslims) neighbourhoods as backdrops for the possibility of 'pull up' and 'pull down' effects on health of adjacency to different types of people or places. This study reveals that isolated locations are likely to have more watertight hierarchical set-ups between the rich and the poor than the intermixed locations, affecting the interchange in

ideas and values and consequent bearing on child health indicators. Neighbourhoods where the rich and the poor live in close spatial proximity seems to provide scope for ‘social learning’ as also ‘social checks’ on acceptable behaviours in so far as child health is concerned even as the private domain of the household remains largely unaffected by such neighbourhood effects.

The last section opens with Sanjeer Alam’s Chapter ([Chapter 9](#)), which focuses on married women’s decision-making processes within the families. Using macro-level data from the National Family Health Survey, the author argues that women’s exclusion from decision-making processes demonstrates a multidimensional character. At times, it is the structural determinants whereas at another it is the agencies of change that emerge as the most powerful explanatory variables. In yet another case, the processes appear to be affected by geographical location. Thus, in a complex, mutually constitutive manner, family characteristics, acquired individual attributes such as education and work status, and broader structural variables of class and caste interact in consonance with spatially-embedded contexts. Of these, however, spatial characteristics seem to override the influence of other factors as even after controlling for all other variables significantly influencing women’s decision-making power, women in the northern/eastern region of India are far less likely to participate in decision making than those in the southern/western region. The author contends that such an observation calls for further investigation into nuances which are spatially entrenched and are quite distinctive in enhancing/impeding women’s decision-making power, independent of the factors explored and examined in his research.

Tanusree Paul ([Chapter 10](#)) explores the gendering of presumably neutral public spaces such as markets, playgrounds, business districts and so on in the metro city of Kolkata. She observes that despite the city’s relatively better image as compared to other metros in term of treating women, these public places clearly emerge as the locales where sex-differentiated practices are acted out whereby humans create and recreate social structures through their bodily practices. Women cannot be in public spaces without legitimising their presence for a purpose, quite in contrast with men who have socially sanctioned ‘hangouts’. The association of gender with public spaces gets further complicated when other dimensions such as age and time of the day are considered. Late evening and nights make

otherwise familiar places prohibitive for women. The author concludes that public spaces continue to remain sites that replicate the tenacity of asymmetrical gender relations observed in the society at large.

To sum up, the place-specific nuances and complexities of women's gendered experiences are captured as snapshots rather than in their entirety in this volume. While certain locales, by virtue of their particular set of socio-economic and cultural attributes, may contribute to spatially-anchored gendered experiences, gendered experiences may also be framed by the overwhelming and almost universally accepted norms, creating differences and integration of spaces and places at the same time.

Engendering the Androcentric Discipline of Geography and Claiming a Place: Revisiting the (Un)familiar

SARASWATI RAJU

What is gender? It is perhaps a dated inquest in present times and yet I want to start with such a question! When, in the proverbial Victorian sensibilities, girls were admonished for being heard rather than being seen, when boys were told not to be sissies when they cry or when young girls were punished for attempting to climb trees like boys, behavioural codes were being ascribed for boys and girls in certain ways suppressing their capabilities to be exactly the ways they were. Boys have tear glands and they can cry; girls have vocal cords and limbs and they can speak and climb trees! And yet, there are, almost everywhere, differential codes of conduct for boys or girls or for that matter, men and women. When Rani Laxmibai fought, she became a *mardani* (like a man) because women did not fight, while Indira Gandhi, the former prime minister of India, was often lauded as the ‘only man’ in her cabinet for her strong political overtures!

Simply put, this is what we call gender — a socially, superficially imposed construct as to what boys and girls, men and women should or should not do. This essentialised construct of sex as different from the artificially imposed gender made it possible for gender to be theorised as ‘the cultural or social elaboration’ of ‘absolute [biological] sexual differences between women and men and, importantly, women’s supposed inferiority in matters of physical strength and mental agility’ — and as such ‘amenable to change’ (McDowell 1999a: 107). The discourse around gender has been much nuanced at present, that is, sex and gender are not seen as delinked from each other now as was the case earlier. Scholars have argued that as sexed bodies, men and women are made to achieve and maintain

a particular state of embodiment. In such a state, sex and gender play onto each other as a legitimised performance, any 'deviation' from this standardised code takes one to queer studies, to issues in the transgender and transsexual realm. However, I want to leave aside these very well-conceived, evolved and at the same time contested discourses interconnected with sex and gender and their constructs to return to gender as it is basically understood.

What, has geography got to do with gender and its construct and why should we bother? Indeed what and why?

Without much rhetoric or indulgence in theorising about the subject matter, is not geography the relationship between the (hu)man [*sic*] and the environment — built and the natural — expressed through spatial practices in terms of adaptation, changes and modifications? If we agree on this over-simplified, yet some core concepts in geography, would the behavioural codes that make men and women gendered subjects change the environment — space/place–human relationship, that is, would men and women relate differently to environmental–spatial stimuli and constraints? More generally, would the gendered constructs influence and/or inhibit how people experience and interact with other humans and non-humans in the lived-in world? Would certain privileges or opportunities be open or closed to men and women because of their gendered locations?

Those studying gender in geography would say an emphatic yes to these and many more similar questions, and also substantiate their claims.¹ I am one of them trying to put my arguments across in this chapter, in as uncomplicated a manner as possible, indeed a formidable task to assert that *gender matters in how geographies are created*.² Before engaging with gender and geography, I would like to bring to the forefront two points: (a) one of the most important outcomes of gender relations is that it not only reinforces, but also

¹ It is ironical that I speak of 'substantiation' while talking about gender because one of the preoccupations of scholars in this area is questioning the particular manner in which knowledge is produced in a so-called 'scientific' manner.

² It is rather frustrating that each time gender is brought into geographical enquiry, there would still be someone questioning its legitimate place in the discipline often asking, 'is this geography'? Also, see, Datta and De (2008).

‘solidify hierarchies and relationships of *power* in a society’ (Cope 2002: 45) by creating multiple marginalities and excluding privileges; and (b) women and gender constructs are not monoliths. Caste, class, religion and ethnicity intercept gendered locations. For example, it is well-documented that in India, women from higher castes face stricter spatial codes as opposed to those belonging to lower castes (Carr and Jhabvala 1996; Grace 2003; Raju and Bagchi 1993b). Women from different class locations often have a clash of interests when it comes to environmental consumption and management which is essentially because poor women are more likely to depend on nature-linked activities for their survival in contrast with women from more affluent classes and so on (Sarin 2008).³ I take note of multiple locations and proscriptions and nuanced complexities of multilayered gendered existence in which, following Archer’s (2004) argument, all axes of differentiation may not be equal. That said, my prime engagement here is with gendered locations and spatiality and how they are mutually and constitutively anchored (Agarwal 1994; Buhler 2001; Huq-Hussain et al. 2006; Raju et al. 1999; Seager 2003).⁴

Despite or perhaps because of awareness of how incredibly rich and fast growing scholarship on the geography of gender has become, I neither claim an exhaustive review of the repertoire of the literature on gender nor do I attempt to trace every possible strand of argument there is across the globe on the theme — it is an impossible task, at least within the purview of this chapter. My attempt here is in the manner of stocktaking, tracing the arduous journey that the sub-field has crossed through to reach where it has — the maturing of the field

³ In an excellent exposition on gender and nature relationship, Madhu Sarin (2008) quotes an incident where a Munda tribal man got women from his community to beat women of a lower status tribal community who were cutting firewood from their protected forest — a show of the zeal with which men of his community were protecting their forest. Possibly an atypical extreme case, as Sarin points out, the above example illustrates how the complexity of power dynamics of class and gender between communities and between different sections of the same community play out in a situation of conflict over management of dwindling forest resources.

⁴ I am also not looking at the postmodern engagements with deconstructed categories of gender making it so fluid at times that at worst it preempts feminist methods to be meaningful and at best opens up animated debates about feminist methods and feminist politics (McDowell 1997; also see Raju 2002).

internationally — as much as to argue for positioning gender firmly within the orbit of geographical research and teaching in India. Our geographies would remain partial without it.

The chapter is organised in four sections. The first section reviews a wide variety of literature, not only from various facets of life, but also from different contexts in order to critically show how gendered constructs produce different spatial experiences for men and women and impact their lives. I use examples, not necessarily from geography per se, but from non-geographical sources as well that fall directly within the realm of geography. Although not sequentially so, such understanding had indeed provided a backdrop to become the stepping stone for establishing the sub-field of the geography of gender, even if unevenly. The second section traces the historical trajectory of the sub-field internationally to then place the Indian situation in perspective in the third section. In locating India so, I am informed by my firm belief that knowledge is situated and produced contextually and should be placed and evaluated thus.⁵ Accordingly, I frame my discourse on the geography of gender against the larger terrain of geographical knowledge as it developed in India. The last section contains brief reflections along with a discussion on the politics of knowledge production and its bearing on research agendas in general.

Gendered Locations and Differentiated Responses

Natural Resources and Access

It is well documented that women's dependence on common property resources is disproportionately higher than that of men because they are the prime users of these resources (Robbins 1998). This is essentially because of the gendered division of labour within households. According to the NSSO Report (2004), 41 per cent of women in India indulge in free collection of fish, and firewood including minor forest products; in northeastern states, with their mountain economy, this percentage is much higher.

Water collection is another task disproportionately shared by women. In Asthana's study (1997) of seven Indian villages, which covered 490 households, the proportion of women (above 15 years) in the household emerged as a significant factor in choosing a safe

⁵ See fn. 24.

source of drinking water irrespective of distance travelled. As almost 79 per cent of this water was carried by women, a household with a higher proportion of women had a higher capability of bringing water from a long distance. Not surprisingly, the proportion of adult men in the household had no effect.

A study from Banaskantha in northwestern Gujarat points out, for example, how despite an improved drinking water situation following the state-installed scheme, water collection continued to remain a time-consuming process. Village women spent an average of three hours per day fetching water out of 15–16 working hours throughout the year whereas the family as a whole spent almost four hours for the same — the time allocated by daughters was 83 minutes, by sons 12 minutes and by husbands 15 minutes (Interagency Task Force on Gender and Water 2005). James et al.'s 2002 survey showed that during summer each woman spent an average of seven hours a day to fetch water.⁶

In addition to the time and effort spent, women cover immense distances to collect water and free goods. In the central region of Malawi fuelwood collection was almost entirely carried out by girls and women with men pitching in only in exceptional cases. What is noteworthy in this case is that households that tended to collect more frequently from places farther away from home were not only large in size, but also had more women members (Brouwer et al. 1997).

Although women are primarily responsible for domestic and commercial water, their needs can significantly differ from that of men. For example, although Sri Lankan and Nepali women worked on their husbands' plots with similar water needs (in terms of adequate water supply for growing crops), they had different opinions regarding water deliveries. Nepali male farmers were most concerned about enough water at the start of the rice season to soften the soil for land preparation — their prime responsibility — whereas the

⁶ A survey carried out in 1994 in the African countries of Ghana, Tanzania and Zambia showed that the time devoted to water carriage, primarily by women, ranged on an average from 135 hours per annum (22 minutes per day) in Zambia to 565 hours (93 minutes per day) in Tanga (Tanzania), whereas the load-carrying effort ranged from 4.4 ton–km per annum (12 kilo–km per day) to 24.7 ton–km (68 kilo–km per day), respectively. The figure of 24.7 ton–km per day is equivalent to carrying a 20 kilo load over 3.4 km per day (Calvo 1994; also see Rathgeber 1996).

women stressed the importance of water availability during the entire season to suppress weed growth (Zwarteveen 1997; Zwarteveen and Neupane 1995). As Zwarteveen (1997) observes, gender differences in water needs may be caused indirectly by women and men having different crop preferences.

Women's direct and indirect dependency on nature have led to intricate theorising by scholars who saw nature as feminine and culture as masculine (see, Mies and Shiva 1993; Shiva 1989). They saw an important connection between the oppression of women and the oppression of nature and argued for women's intrinsic affinity with nature. This strand of thought has come to be known as 'Ecofeminism'. Admittedly simplified, it can be said that the discussions on Ecofeminism assume two basic forms: one around the (female) body and the other around female subordination/oppression. The 'natural bond' as envisaged by the proponents of Ecofeminism is thus based on the procreativity that women and nature are capable of and the latter argument draws from the exploitation of (inferior) nature by (superior) culture.

Shiva's work has been extremely influential internationally in this regard and yet Ecofeminism has also been equally contested as a theory, even as women/gender/natural resources studies are pursued. The basic argument running through the criticism is that women's affinity has nothing to do with the so-called 'feminine' qualities of care and nurturing but is reflective of their pragmatism which emanates from the gender divisions of labour and distribution of opportunity which are closely connected with nature (Agarwal 1992; Jackson 1993; Raju 2006b). For example, in the remote Himalayan village of Dungari-Paitoli, women prevented men from selling the community forest which was to be converted into a potato seed farm. Unlike the women, who would have been deprived of free collection of fuel and fodder from the community forest, the men were more interested in the commercial conversion because it would open up their access to income-generating prospects and other modern means of development such as roads and so on (Agarwal and Anand 1982).

Gendered Spatiality, Mobility and Labour Market Outcomes

Although it is known that lack of access to formal labour markets has implications for reduced bargaining power for women within