

# **Unsettling the Order**

## **Gendered Subjects and Grassroots Activism in Two Forest Communities**

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## ABSTRACT

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The 1990s witnessed a shift in the rhetoric and policies towards people's participation and gender equality in environmental issues and rural development. People are increasingly expected to take responsibility for the development of their own communities. Against this background, the thesis investigates the gendered implications of the changing nature of natural resource management and rural development, by directing attention to women's agency. In case studies from rural areas in India and in Sweden, the thesis examines the implications of women's organizing for local forest management and rural development. It analyses the ways in which dominant ideas about development and gender equality shape the spaces in which women take action and how gendered discourses are produced, maintained and unsettled in dynamic relationships in context specific and general ways.

The research draws on theories on gender, development, environment and women's empowerment and is grounded in participatory and feminist methodologies. A collaborative inquiry with the women in Sweden enabled an approach that allowed looking beyond women's customary absence from local organizations and how they might be included in them, to understanding how women themselves framed needs and issues. The women in Sweden and in India did not organize themselves solely around resource issues. But in many ways, the issues were implicit as the women in the communities showed: it was impossible to separate the forest issues from the others. Organizing as 'women' was neither natural nor self evident. Through their organizing the women consciously constructed a space for themselves. Paradoxically, in Sweden, where gender equality has been actively pursued as the bedrock of modern societal organizing, the space to organize as women was hedged around with ambiguities. In India, the women used the opening provided by a women's programme and its accompanying discourse of gender inequality and women's oppression to create an alternative space from which to act and bring about change. The research has implications for how local management and gender equality are conceptualised in theory and in practice and importantly for the framing of policies that seek to bring about gender equitable and sustainable resource management.

**Keywords:** Gender, local forest management, women's organizing, rural development, participatory action research, feminist praxis.

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I dedicate this thesis to the memory of my grandmother, Chand Rani Arora, a woman of insatiable curiosity and willingness to keep learning.

# GLOSSARY

## India

BOJBP	Bruksha O' Jeevar Bandhu Parishad – the forest organization/movement that started in Kesharpur village.
Dharna	Protest actions
Mahasangha	The forest federation spanning Nayagarh district.
Mahila Samiti	Women's group
Padayatra	A campaigning march on foot or a 'journey on foot.
Satyagraha	Non-violent protests and hunger strikes.
Sindoor	Red powder used in the hair by married women.
Oriya	Language spoken in Orissa

## Sweden

Bygd	Settled area
Fäbodrar	Pasture areas in the forests
Fäboväsendet	The system of summer pasturage
FTPP	Forests Trees and People Programme
Glesbygd	Sparsely populated areas
Gubbe	Old man.
Hushållningssällskap	The rural economy and agricultural societies
Kvinnoforum	Women's forum
Socken	Parish
SLU	Sveriges Lantbruksuniversitet (Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences)

## NOTES

All translations of quotations from Swedish literature and from the field work in Sweden are my own. In certain places where a suitable translation was difficult, I have left the original in parentheses for Swedish speakers.

Smaller quotations have been given in the body text while longer quotations have been indented. The quotations that have been paraphrased are in 'single quotes' while those that are cited verbatim are in "double quotes". 'Single quotes' have also been used to enclose a term draw attention to its use which may be contested or under revision.

Italics have also been used for emphasis.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction: three places and partial connections

#### A tale of three places ...how it all began...

*Place: A shady corner of a village in Nayagarh district in Orissa, India. February 1999.*

It was towards the end of February, but Orissa was already getting warm. Summer was approaching. At least 30 women from a women's group had gathered to talk to me. However, answering their questions about why I wanted to write about them was not all that simple. They asked me if I was married and how many children I had. I was reprimanded for not wearing bangles or *sindoor* that showed that I was married (I was getting used to that now). Some women sang a song about how women and men together looked after the forests and the welfare of the village. I was then told that it was my turn to sing. They were not taking no for an answer. (The message was: If you want our information, you had better entertain us first). I managed to croak out a song, after which they began to tell me about themselves (probably to pre-empt any more singing on my part). I got to hear about their group, about all the work they did in the village, their negotiations with violent husbands and nasty mothers-in-law, struggles with rich landowners and their work for everyday village life. They spoke positively about the forest committees, but also about their non-involvement in formal decision-making and about the problems of not being able to speak about and relate the work they did to the forests at forestry forums.

*Several months later, another place, a few thousand miles away- A cottage by the lake in Drevdagen, an out of the way village in Sweden, June 1999.*

It was an evening after midsummer but it was still cold outside. Thirteen women sat around an old fashioned fireplace in the middle of the one room cottage. The hordes of mosquitoes outside were kept out firmly by the closed door. The discussion centred on why we had decided to meet. Kerstin stoked the fire vigorously:

After the *gubb*-conference on the forests last weekend.....when they 'forgot' to invite us.....it is about time we form our own network. We could take up things that women are interested in so that we all know that we have support from each other....

Cecilia: I am interested in the social issues. For a living countryside, we must look to the village as a whole (*i sin helhet*)....if we are ever going to be able to get anywhere with the forests.

Kerstin: I called around before this and spoke to some people about forming a women's network. I spoke to ...SJ.... at the *Hushållningsällskap*. He gave me some tips. And then he said... aha, have you come so far...you have someone from SLU in your group.

I squirmed in my place, glad to be of help, but not quite sure how I would live up to it:

How do you think I could be of help? I could document all that you do and talk about and maybe we could use that to think about what we are doing. And I could find out what other women's networks have been doing and what has been written on them and ...

*The third place: Forests Trees and People Programme office, University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) in Uppsala, November 1997.*

We were in a room constructed out of temporary partitions and overfull bookshelves that tilted precariously with FAO manuals on how to go about development. Piles of papers and books covered every inch of the room as I tried in vain to find a place to sit. Diane and I listened to Axel's account of meetings that he had been to. He had met men from a village and its municipality in north-western Sweden who were trying to find ways to revive their forest community by working locally with the forests.

Axel: There are things happening here, people struggling for rights to the forests...issues that we have been working with in the countries in the South for years....that nobody is looking at. We could learn so much from each other...

Diane: We can't just keep talking and devising solutions for the South and not see that we have similar problems here.

Axel: We need to look at ourselves and start from where we are.

My presence in these three places and the interactions with the people involved encapsulate how my research began and the turns it took. The visits to Nayagarh and Drevdagen showed me that women in these villages preferred to work through their own groups when it came to local development and resource management. In both places, I heard the women saying important things about needing to link the forests to other aspects of village life to be able to succeed in their struggles. Why was that proving to be so difficult? After my visit to India, another constant thought in my mind was 'what did the women get out of my research'? Was my thesis going to be a book that would address another stack of books and a world of people far from their lives? Or could I do it in a way that might be relevant for the women that I spoke to? I came to the conviction that the future research had to be

useful for the people immediately concerned. And that these issues needed to be seen in a 'global' perspective - that there were processes taking shape in the 'developed' North, not dissimilar to those in the South. Studying them together, I believed might offer fruitful insights for issues in both places.

This thesis is an account of negotiations with what may be regarded as three constraining discourses. By discourse I mean the textual but also the social and material practices, that lead one to take for granted that the local management of forests is mainly about the forests and the institutions for its management; that the correct way to go about scientific inquiry is to have the right questions, and that an egalitarian discourse and greater individual equality and freedom gives 'women' greater space for (collective) agency than a context where inequality is an obvious condition of life. I was confronted with these in the course of writing the thesis but they emerged during early phases of the research. In the thesis I have tackled them in various ways – I begin with the questions that I pose in the following pages.

### **A changing world and some questions**

The 1990s have been a decade of state decentralisation both in India and in Sweden. Policies have been adjusted to 'market forces' and global processes are complicit in reorienting notions of the rural community and in shaping people's access to and control over natural resources and local development. At the same time as important decisions over the environment are taken in distant places, there has also been a shift in policies towards people's participation and gender equality in the management of natural resources and local development. People are increasingly expected to take responsibility for the welfare of their own communities. In several places men and women living close to resources like forests or water bodies have organized themselves in various ways for the future of their homes in the countryside.

Sustainable local resource management and development, in theory and in practice, commonly is assumed to be accomplished by cooperative action between both women and men. This has been considered possible by designing better institutional forms for resource management. In this thesis, the aim is to study the gendered implications of the changing nature of management regimes for natural resources and rural development at the village level by directing attention to women's agency in these contexts. There are two currents running through the thesis that are related but may also be seen separately. One is to problematise the processes by which rural development and local forest management are defined, particularly in the case in Sweden. This is related to the other current which is to conceptualise how ideas about gender equality and women's empowerment correspond to the space that the women have to exercise agency in the two places. These two currents are closely related to the ways in which the research was conducted.

The specific questions that I study stem from an empirical basis – rural development and local management initiatives in two forest communities. They arose from my interest in supporting men and women to re/gain rights over their

immediate environment, and to open a greater space to be able to act in relation to the forests. In the two cases that I study, one in villages in India and the other in a village in Sweden, women and men have tried to play a more active and responsible role in the future of their villages in their parts of the world. These are two examples where communities in relatively peripheral areas of the country (in relation to State and other decision-making structures) have sought to 'redefine' their relationships with the forests and the environment around them. Women in both these places chose to organize themselves as 'women' to work for themselves and their communities. This decision became contentious.

Against the background of the changing nature of resource management and rural development and the rhetoric of local participation and the willingness of research and development practice to make space for this cause, the thesis deals with three interrelated questions:

(i)

What are the implications for 'rural development' and 'local resource management' when women in the community organize themselves? How are rural development and local management constructed in these efforts?

The thesis follows the processes of women's organizing in Nayagarh and Drevdagen. The ways in which the women organized and the responses to their organizing provide important insights into gender relations in processes of rural development, and about the space that the women had for exercising agency in their particular contexts. The villages are situated in two 'out of the way' (Tsing 1993) forest communities where the political meaning of their geographical location played an important part in gender relations and in villagers' work with rural development and the local management. By tracing processes that unfolded around these issues in these two out of the way places, I analyse 'marginality' as one important discursive field that intersected with ideas about gender, and shaped the subjectivities of men and women and, in turn, the process of local development and forest management. I describe how this notion of marginality is elaborated but I also question it and in doing so, examine how actors from different institutional settings - the university, village institutions, development agencies - challenged and reproduced relationships of power in the processes of local development and resource management in specific 'marginal' spaces. I explore how discourses on local management and development are constituted in everyday practice and in the research literature. This turns attention to my own role in the process and my methods of inquiry:

(ii)

What does the opening up of the space for defining the research question imply for research that aims to support local efforts?

The different methodologies used in the two sites further alerted me to the importance of my position and relations with others in the researching process. In

the thesis I try and analyse my position and highlight the roles that I played in the unfolding of research process. Lastly but importantly I look at:

(iii)

What does women's organizing mean in terms of equality and empowerment for the women and conversely how do dominant ideas about 'empowerment' and 'development' shape the space that the women have as agents of development in their particular environments?

Studying local management and women's organizing in two different contexts in the South and the North helped in understanding the particular in each as well as in understanding and interpreting local experience in the context of global processes of environmental and economic change. Discourses on equality between men and women or on women's empowerment in the two contexts acquired a different significance when examined side by side.

Not only the contexts but also the conceptual frames used to understand such processes are different. These differences have led me to think about the specific ways in which knowledge is constructed in (and about) the two countries and about the conceptual categories that are used. The main attention of this thesis is on the case in Sweden. However, by using the case in India as a frame of reference and *vice versa*, I was enabled to question the categories and to understand how they were being constructed in each particular context: local management and development, the forests, equality and independence, empowerment. Rather than focussing on general national and cultural differences, I look at the ways in which local management and rural development are framed in the societal discourse on gender and equality mobilised by men and women in both places. By exploring how these understandings gave meaning to and challenged wider discourses in society, I take the discussion beyond the micro-politics of the villages to identify and comprehend a wider discursive context that was constitutive of and constituted by the women's efforts.

But before I explain this any further, I now turn to sketching the field in which I work. This is followed by a more detailed account of the study sites from which the questions arose.

### **Local management and development: a gendered empirical field**

There are many movements around the world in which people are struggling for the right to use the forests around their homes and to have some local control over the resources they depend on for survival and local development. The movements share a common understanding that local livelihoods as well as the sensible management of natural resources depends on local access and capacity to plan and manage their environment. Rights and control over the forests pose an increasingly serious problem all around the world. Diminishing forests in India, the almost total

disappearance of natural forest in Sweden,<sup>1</sup> commercial forestry and other practices have caused changes in the environment, local survival, and livelihood strategies in both countries. This has increasingly given rise to public debates that focus on biodiversity, environmental sustainability and issues of democracy in relation to local development and the management of resources.

Accompanying these trends has been a shift in the policies of both countries. The participation of local people in local development and management of resources (to different degrees) has been placed on the agenda in a larger context of political decentralisation. The forests occupied and used by villagers in many parts of India are typically State property. In Sweden, apart from small private forest owners, a large part of the forest land especially in northern Sweden is under the control of the State and large forest companies. Policies in both countries have evolved in the context of a growing consensus among international aid agencies and among some governments, both in the North and the South. These endorse local management or participation as the paradigm for the sustainable development of rural areas and forests, a shift that Sheona Shakleton *et al.* (2002) call a paradigm shift in questions of resource management.

In India, the State has been involved in Joint Forest Management initiatives, and Swedish aid has supported community groups in India in their efforts to achieve local forest management. But such moves have been slow to be adopted within Swedish domestic policy. Sweden's nature conservation policy however has called for 'innovative methods of local management with the participation of different groups' (Skr. 2001/02:173:85). There have also been efforts supporting public participation in the management of nature reserves (Naturvårdsverket 2003).

Local groups composed mainly of men have been taking over the protection and in some cases the management of forests in India and are engaged in struggles with authorities for a measure of rights. In Sweden some community groups in the countryside have tried to show that local rights over resource management are linked closely to local development and the survival of their communities in the countryside. However, in the multitude of local action groups working with local development in the countryside and in the context of a devolution of political responsibility, what local management and development mean is not necessarily self-evident. Research, mainly from India, has shown that the groups which hope to herald a new form of local democracy might be far from democratic. Women in particular are excluded in different ways: they either are physically absent from local forest management forums or they find it difficult to actually influence the decisions taken. Research also has shown the degree to which women are responsible for everyday activities that make forest protection and the existence of the communities possible. Despite the fundamental importance of their work, women are either marginalised in decision-making processes or their possibilities for exercising agency are curtailed *vis-à-vis* men. The goals of environmental

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<sup>1</sup> Though cultural geographers and others have shown how what is considered natural was also created in interactions with humans. The difference is that present forests are mainly single aged with young trees.

sustainability and local democracy may well undermine those of gender and social equality and entrench inequalities (Agarwal 2001; Lama 2004; Sarin 1998). This thesis goes beyond these issues to study two instances of how women organized themselves to try and overcome some of these disadvantages. By looking at the attempts to achieve local management from the women's group and not the 'community' I choose to take a vantage point that is seldom taken in analysing development activities in the countryside. In doing so, I foreground women's and men's relationships within and outside the village, the stakes that they had in them, the negotiating of power relations and processes that may otherwise be taken for granted.

## **The studies**

The research was situated in three different physical contexts. Here I briefly describe the places and the people and show how they are linked in my research. Earlier in the chapter I described two of them as out of the way places. According to Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing (1993) out of the way places are located in the boundaries of nation states but are considered by the urban majorities to be isolated and peripheral. "The authorities of national policies is displaced through distance and the necessity of re-enactment at the margins" (*Ibid*:27). However, the politics of the centre and the periphery in these two places in India and Sweden are also overlaid by other relationships of power that the two places share by virtue of being part of the same world. There are connections between them that are political that become apparent in localised and specific ways. The third place that I mention here is the university of which I too was a part. Universities are meant not to have a politics and yet in their role as formal producers of knowledge, research and education are enmeshed in relationships of gender and power.

### *Two sites of struggle...*

Nayagarh district of Orissa is where the *Bruksha O' Jeevar Bandhu Parishad* (BOJBP - Friends of Trees and Living Beings) community forestry movement took root. Accounts of scattered and active protection of the forests in the villages of Nayagarh exist from as far back as the 1950s. It was in the village of Kesharpur that they were given form and spread through networking activities all over the district from the mid-1980s onwards. Many areas had been severely degraded but consistent protection efforts bore fruit and after relatively few years, the forests took root again, springs that had turned to a trickle started flowing and wild animals began to be sighted in the new forests. Forest protection and management was carried out at great cost and at great personal sacrifice. The forest land was owned by the state and the villagers had no legal authority for the work that they put into the forests. By 1992, the movement had spread to almost the entire district and the men from the villages formed a larger federation called the *Nayagarh Jungle Suraksha Mahasangha* (The Nayagarh Forest Protection Federation). On my first visit to the BOJBP in Kesharpur in 1993, the movement was already regarded within development circles both nationally and internationally as a beacon for community forestry. I found that women had been actively involved in activities such as *Padayatras* (footmarches), in dharnas (protest actions) and in

arranging forest festivities but were not members of the BOJBP nor were any women, part of its decision making arenas. I was told by Narayan Hazari, one of the founders of the movement, "...the *purdah* (veil) is a great inhibitor in our society ..." (Arora-Jonsson 1995). At that time I took his words at face value. However, the present research led me to question the many ways in which ideas about the *purdah* are reinforced and kept in place amidst discourses on women's empowerment and independence.

Further fieldwork in 1998 in the area showed that the women in the villages of Nayagarh had formed several groups in order to work with issues of interest to them and to be able to avail of programmes for women's development. In group and individual interviews several spoke of needing to have a federation of their own if women were to have any meaningful role in the joint forums for community forest management. The spirit and purposefulness of the women was contagious as I tried to understand how they exercised agency in questions of development and management. Their agency lay uncomfortably in the accepted descriptions of local management given by the men in the movement, in the literature on 'community' forestry, and in the absences in institutional approaches, such as how natural resource management related to the larger field of rural development. I realized that it was from the vantage point of the women that I wanted to understand local management. The usual allusions to 'needing to make women aware' or 'have them join the associations' was far from the ways in which the women themselves spoke about their actions.

The other site of struggle is the village of Drevdagen, a small village in northern western Sweden in the county of Dalarna. For a long time the forests around the villages in this area had sustained the livelihoods of the people as small scale farmers and foresters. As timber became a valuable commodity for the national economy, the men began to work as loggers and drivers (*körare*) employed by the state and forest companies. The women continued to tend to the animals and the farm and later also found employment in the growing public sector. Increasing rationalization of farming and forestry in the 1950s closed the forests as the main source of livelihood for the men and several families migrated to urban centres in search of work. The villagers began to protest the logging practices of one large forest that owned the forests around Drevdagen and left large clear-cuts in its wake. According to the villagers the clear cutting not only made their landscape ugly, destroyed important hunting areas and the opportunities for tourism, but also contravened certain clauses in environmental legislation.

Drevdagen in particular is a village known in the country for its long struggle with the authorities to keep its school from being closed down. In 1995 the villagers formed the Drevdagen village association to work on development activities in the village. The forests formed an important part of their agenda. The village association believed that greater local rights to the forests would ensure more sustainable management of the forests, provide employment for some men and open up opportunities for tourist activities in an area hard pressed for alternative sources of employment and services. Their first plan - to work with a nature reserve close to the village - was turned down by the county authorities but

the struggle continued. It was at about this time that some of my colleagues in the *Forests Trees and People Programme* came in contact with the village.

The association, which was dominated by the men in the village, began to concentrate on the struggle for some rights in the management of the forests around their homes. The emphasis on the forests pushed the women's more immediate concerns into the background. This led to the women in the association to drop out of the association. They chose instead to work in other ways wherein they were not constrained by the formal atmosphere of the association meetings. These initiatives resulted in many more women deciding to form a loose network of working groups through which they could work with issues close to their hearts. They chose not to define the form of this network, and they trusted and expected that the form would emerge and develop as time went on.

### *...and a university*

The *Forests Trees and People Programme* (FTPP) was a *Food and Agriculture Organisation* (FAO) supported network that encouraged people working with community forestry. It was organized through network 'nodes' located mainly in countries in the South. Its northern European office was based at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU). FТПP (Sweden) was responsible for facilitating the global networking activities of the programme and publishing the *Forests Trees and People Newsletter*. FТПP's initial contact with Drevdagen through Axel showed us clearly what was already becoming more visible: the problems that many local communities faced in the South were not all that different from those in the North, *i.e.*, few rights over their immediate environment, distance from decision-makers, the adverse effects of macro structures such as international commerce, the impact of conservation thinking, and much more. At that time, in 1997, I was working with the FТПP in Sweden and contemplating studying community forestry networking activities. My previous experience in Nayagarh had shown that community forestry did not always mean 'community' but often meant 'men.' I believed it would be interesting to study how gender relations were negotiated in this context in Sweden - a country that had recently been hailed by the United Nations as the most gender equal in the world.

I had previously studied the FТПP's networking activities from the perspective of the people responsible for the functioning of the network, such as NGOs, development agencies and universities (Arora-Jonsson 1999a). Research in Drevdagen I felt could provide the possibility to understand networking from another end. As I contemplated doing research, Diane who worked with the FТПP, said to me, "Help us understand the relevance of the activities we are supporting." Research in Drevdagen felt like an opportune way of doing so. A collaborative inquiry, as a form of participatory research with the women in the village, I believed would provide the necessary space to decide what was and what was not useful in this context, as the women discussed with each other what was important to them.

### The collaborative inquiry

There has been increasing criticism within science of the objective nature of inquiry. Although still the dominating notion of how research is carried out, 'objectivity' in scientific inquiry has been questioned extensively, especially by feminist scholarship. The inadequacies and inconsistencies of such a process are legion (see Alcoff and Potter 1993; Denzin and Lincoln 2000a; Fonow and Cook 1991b) and I shall not go into them here. Instead I choose to explain what I tried to do.

The purpose of the inquiry was twofold. First, for the women in Drevdagen to be able to choose the questions that they wanted to pursue and for us to design the inquiry together, and second, for me to be able to leave a conceptual frame of the inquiry open to their (our) categories. The inquiry provided a location for me from which to view initiatives for rural development and forest management. There were certain reasons that prompted me to ground my inquiry with the women in the village. The fact that I worked mainly with women was due to early experiences in these two places that told me that there were other viewpoints and ways of working that did not always coincide with the norm. I wanted to use "different criteria; perspectives and values than those dominant now...and present not a more encompassing knowledge but rather a "less encompassing knowledge" (Grosz, 1993:208). While my intention was to conceptualise the process and not the women, I had chosen to work with the women in order to do so. I was aware of the fact that by doing so I might be reinforcing the differences between them and the formal associations, differences that they may have negotiated in other ways. However, the intention with the collaborative inquiry was to provide a space for other views and insights to come forth. Not doing so would have meant accepting the existing order of things as the 'natural' instead of understanding how they were constituted.

Where most studies tend to study local resource management from the perspective of the organisations for their management, I look for how meanings are given to local forest management and rural development in everyday life by the women in the villages. I started research from the empirical field of rural development, and the two places rather than from within a discipline. It thus became necessary to turn to a range of literatures that helped me to think about the "everyday world" of the two case study sites "from where the questions originate" (Smith 1987:91). In the next section, I outline some of the important bodies of literature relevant for the questions in the research.

### **Women's activism, rural development and resource management: within and between literatures<sup>2</sup>**

As a study of women's activism in the context of rural development and resource management in two different geographical areas, this investigation takes place as a

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<sup>2</sup> This subtitle and the following section title are taken from Treleaven (1998).

conversation within a number of partly overlapping but also discrete bodies of literature. The two different contexts have their own conceptual frames for studying the issues although there is also some common ground.

First, I divide the many different strands of literature into two rubrics: Gender and the environment, and literature on Women's organizing. The purpose of sorting the literature in groups is not to make a framework to understand women's activism in general, but to point to the literature that has been relevant in helping to think about the processes in Nayagarh and Drevdagen. Secondly, I outline the absences in the literature to study cases such as these, and the possibilities provided by the two case studies to take the discussion further.

### *Gender and the environment*

"Struggles over resources are shaped not only by material forces and political power but also by the ideologies and understanding of what is meant by the environment" (Bhavnani, Foran and Kurian 2003:16). What counts as work and whose definitions of the forest are taken as legitimate are crucial in understanding processes of power and gendered exclusion.

#### Women and the forests: recovering women's work

Since the early decades of development work in the South there has been growing concern with the distinct roles and interests of women as the managers of natural resources, especially forests (*e.g.* Agarwal 1992; Guijt and Shah 1998; Harcourt 1994). Feminists have linked gender differences and resource management in ways that cover a wide spectrum. The bonds of the feminine to nature, and women's unacknowledged work in the forests in Orissa and more generally in India have been the subject of considerable research (Abramovitz 1994; Apffel-Marglin 1996). Eco-feminists contend that there are parallels between environmental degradation and the oppression of women, and a mistreatment of both by a male-dominated instrumentalist science (Mies and Shiva 1993; Shiva 1989).<sup>3</sup> Ecofeminism has been important within feminist thinking for treating the non-human world as an active subject, not as a resource to be mapped or only a cultural construction. However, such a perspective also essentialises women and gendered concerns (*c.f.* Agarwal 1992), and it is not very useful in understanding and problematising the complexities and differences among and between women and men in their relationships to natural resources. However, eco-feminism is not homogenous and Chris Cuomo (1998) provides an overview of newer and older strains.

Feminist environmentalism, as articulated by Bina Agarwal, argues that people's responses to the environment need to be understood in the context of their material reality, their specific forms of interaction with nature and their dependence on its resources for survival - a gender division of labour, property and power (1997).

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<sup>3</sup> They share with 'deep ecology' (Devall and Sessions 1985) the conviction for the need for a new cosmology.

Research has pointed to the absence and exclusion of women from the new institutional arrangements put in place for resource management, specially forest committees and federations (Agarwal 1992; Agarwal 1997; Hildeyard et al. 1999; Sarin 1998). Agarwal shows how these new organizations and committees may even erode former customary rights and access that women had to the forests. At times a shift to new institutions could replace older customs, causing a breakdown in traditional rules of reciprocity and mutual aid with regard to the forests (Agarwal 1994).

Feminist political ecology (Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter and Wangari 1996) synthesises some of these approaches and emphasises an approach based on the gendered sciences of survival, gendered environmental rights and responsibilities and, as in my case importantly, gendered environmental politics and grassroots activism. While a gender division of labour and power are important factors that I take up, the thesis aims to look specifically at how grassroots activism by the women disturbed existing divisions of labour and power.

#### The forests in Sweden: a male domain?

Literature on women's relation to the forests in the Swedish context is sparse. The few exceptions are some studies of the *fäboväsendet* (the system of summer pasturage) in the north of Sweden, which since the middle ages and in some places even after the advent of commercial forestry, was women's work and shepherds were mainly women (Montelius 1977b:37). Researchers studying the forests, especially in northern Sweden, have pointed to its close links to masculine activities and identity. Ella Johansson's study identifies how work in the forests, with the increasing commercialisation, helped to create a certain kind of masculine identity among the men who worked in the forests as well as etched out the forests as a male sphere (1994). Studies in the northern forest communities have shown how both men and women tended to view men's activities in the forests as 'work' while other activities, especially by the women, were not regarded as work and thus women's activities were erased from the stories of how forest communities live and survive (Hansen 2000; Kaldal 2000). This is significant considering the importance of work in Swedish society (*c.f.* Westholm 1997) and as a marker of gender equality (Hobson 2000). The separation of women from the forests is echoed in different ways in other places in Sweden and also in some academic writing (*c.f.* Ednarsson 2002). On the other hand, Johansson shows how social constructions of the forests have changed over time (2000) while Ann-Kristin Ekman points out that present day hunting teams in the forests that symbolise 'tradition' and are a site of male camaraderie in contemporary Sweden, are a fairly modern invention (1983:77).

Dominant and masculine images in relation to the forests did not and do not always directly correspond to the time that men and women spend in the forests or the work that they do there. The masculinised image of the forest is not merely an abstract image but sets the nominal space for what it is ideally permissible for embodied and real men and women to do within larger gender and power relations. At this point I turn to how women's organizing is shaped by these

images, and might or might not challenge dominant ideas about what makes a 'man' or 'woman.'

### *Women's organizing*

Women have been active in environmental and rural development activities both in Sweden and in India. In this section I start with a brief overview of selected literature on women's organizing in India and Sweden and then go on to look at three cross-cutting themes in the literature – formal and informal organizing, taking action publicly, and constructing a collectivity.

Women's environmental activism in the rural areas of India has received considerable attention, especially since the *Chipko* movement began to be written about (Guha 2002; Shiva 1989). The *Chipko* (which literally means to 'cling to') movement is perhaps the most widely known environmental movement where women as principal actors hugged trees to prevent commercial felling and, in doing so, challenged fundamental tenets of the State's development policies. The issue of environmental degradation was linked in this movement to women's increasing toil for fuel and fodder (Shiva 1989) and also provided the grist for women's struggles in other areas.

Women's groups working with livelihood issues and development work in rural areas has been the subject of extensive research (e.g. Jain et al. 1980; John 1999; Kabeer and Subramanian 1999; Kumar 1999; Purushottaman 1998; Sundar 1998). Women's groups have often mobilized within their villages against the sale of *arrack* (liquor) and, as a widespread movement in Andhra Pradesh became the focal point of media attention. Susie Tharu and Tejaswani Niranjana present an interesting account of how political parties tried to annex this grassroots initiative to a variety of contemporary discourses about the nation and its women, thereby positioning feminist theory and practice in a curious set of contradictions (2001:516).

Literature on women's organizing in the rural areas in Scandinavia has been overshadowed by feminist theorising on urban women's movements and by feminism's own urban origins (Brandth 2002). More recently, however, studies have pointed to the substantial number of women active in the countryside in Sweden both within local action groups composed of both women and men, and also those working within their own networks (Bull 1993; Bull 1995; Rönnblom 1997). Women are less likely to be the chairpersons in local action groups (Herlitz 1998). Both Gun-Marie Frånberg (1994) and Marianne Bull (1995), writing about women *eldsjälar* or firesouls in the countryside, point to how the women's work often leads to general mobilisation in the countryside. But they, along with Malin Rönnblom (2002) also bring attention to the incompatibility of the women's ways of working with the municipal bureaucracy and established politics. In the case studies that I present, my main intention is to look at how the organizing by the women in the two places related to other groups and issues in the village arena and how gender relations were constructed by their activism. I examine the literature on the forms taken by the women in their organizing, the attention to overtly

public and political acts in some literatures, and on the processes of constructing a collectivity.

#### Formal and informal organizing

It has become almost a truism that women choose to organize themselves in informal and action oriented groups rather than within centralized organisational forms. In studies of local action groups in Sweden, Ulla Herlitz points out the significance in women's groups in the countryside from the 1980's onwards of the 'network' as a working form (1996). An informal network model (Forsberg 2001) and informal, action oriented groups set up parallel to established associations and political parties have been preferred by many women's groups in the countryside (Bull 1995:3; Rönnblom 1996). Research from other parts of western Europe suggests that women demonstrate a preference for informal above formal rural development activities as they fit in with their general situation – their needs and resources (Bock 1999:7). According to Maud Eduards women in Sweden are choosing more and more to organize themselves outside established structures (2002). In India research by Sangeetha Puroshottaman shows how women's collectives in Maharashtra linked themselves to a network of NGOs to effect change in their villages (1998). Analysing the women's movement in India at the beginning of the 1990s, Nandita Gandhi and Nandita Shah write that as opposed to the separate groups started in the 1960s in the West, women in India have by and large preferred to create space for women within existing organizations in order to make such organisations more flexible, accessible and sympathetic to women's voices, alongside autonomous groupings (1992:295). Some of these preferences are reflected in different ways in the women's efforts in Nayagarh and Drevdagen. Clearly, each instance is contextual. But the question that I believe is interesting in light of the two different places that I study, is what the forms adopted by the women may suggest about the context in which they act. How important is the 'public' nature of their organizing?

#### Taking Action Publicly

A tendency within some feminist research, especially that on women's environmental action, has been the preoccupation with public acts (Reed 2000:366). Several instances of such acts have been recorded in India as, for example, the famous *Chipko* movement mentioned earlier. In relation to women's activism at Greenham Common in the United Kingdom, Sasha Roseneil shows how in action taken publicly women deconstructed their old identities while at the same time they forged new ones (1995). In an analysis of collective action on the forests, Agarwal distinguishes women's involvement in resource management as having a propensity towards agitational actions, in contrast to the cooperative organizations that are often dominated by the men and are more long-term. In collective action where both women and men may be involved, Agarwal points to how collective action literature assumes cooperation (or the lack of it) to be a voluntary act. This need not always be the case (2003:3). She also suggests that women's rich social networks in the villages might offer the potential for building cooperative organizations for more sustainable forest management, from which they are otherwise excluded. Women's networks and actions related to their

villages tend to take up multiple issues, and do not take on the recognizable, more permanent forms that are seen as viable organizations within development work. The women may well be carrying out similar activities as the men but without the legitimacy accorded to the male dominated organizations from actors within and outside their communities. The cooperative organizations dominated by the men have often been the starting point of analysis for research, often with an interest in a single issue such as the forests. The two cases in this thesis pose interesting questions about women's motivations in one-off actions and about their interests in single issues.

An understanding of their everyday work and agitational actions thus needs to be seen in relation to a conceptualisation of women's agency. I have found it useful to think about the women's organizing in terms of Eduards' conceptualisation of agency. According to Eduards (1992:96), the seemingly gender-neutral concept of agency has an obvious male bias. "Agency is limited here to the capacity to initiate, guide and control developments – 'to executive power' ...The collective actions of women are also measured against this yardstick." In the two cases that I study the women's organizing was an assertion of and exercise in agency. In the words of Eduards, "By defining the need for women to act together as women, oppression comes, in principle under attack, since sexual power relations are built on the notion of human, gender-neutral, agency" (*Ibid.*). Besides this, what 'action' is, may itself vary from context to context as it may from male to female - as becomes clear when the actions taken by the women in the two places are seen side by side in chapter eight.

#### Constructing a collectivity

Lastly I come to a presupposition of unity that is linked closely to action. Eduards writes that "the more women act, the more divided they seem" (1992:95) and yet in taking action together they challenge the boundaries that have been placed between themselves and where politics may be done (Eduards 2002:78). However, the erasing of boundaries, even in collective organizing does not have to be given, as I investigate in the thesis. This has meant trying to understand the women's actions beyond those reasons offered by their social location.

Writing about women's activism about forestry issues on northern Vancouver Island, Maureen Reed found that women held contradictory positions with respect to the issues that they acted on at different times and in different places. She argues for an idea of embeddedness to interpret the meanings of women's activism without dichotomising their activist choices into 'progressive' and 'conservative' camps (2000).<sup>4</sup> Reed explains their activism by delving into the complexity of their lives in northern Vancouver and illustrates how their agendas were contained and inscribed for them by localised norms and practices. I look at some of the norms and practices at work in the two sites by studying the choices made by the

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<sup>4</sup> In Indian politics, what is progressive or not takes on an increasing urgency in view of the increasing visibility of women in nationalistic religious movements (Jefferey and Basu 2001 (1999))

women in the two places and the ways in which they gave form to wider discourses but also challenged them by their actions. An assumption in Nayagarh and in some of the literature on development and gender is that once women's groups are organized, women tend to work together harmoniously and that the groups lead to women's empowerment across a broad front (e.g. see Everingham 2002 on *mahila sanghas* as feminist groups). Yet in Nayagarh, in taking public action together were the women's experiences of the boundaries of caste and class erased? I take up these questions by viewing women's organizing and building of a collectivity through a conscious effort (or struggle) for solidarity that was not self-evident even in the fairly homogenous and small village of Drevdagen.

### **Absences and possibilities**

The literatures sketched above are in several instances overlapping and traverse a number of disciplines. In situating the study cases *vis-à-vis* the literature I identify some of the absences in the literature, and the possibilities for taking the discussion further. The five issues that I take up in this section are: the accepted principles for organizing development; the outsiders; the village as a site for 'doing gender'; activism for whom and for what?; and the partial connections in the thinking about gender and development that emerged in the analysis of the two cases.

#### *1. Accepted principles for organizing local development in the two places*

Gender studies within questions of environmental management and rural development have shown inequalities in the terms of engagement. Women in rural areas in Sweden have been shown to be positioned negatively in terms of access to credit and subsidies (Herlitz 1989). Gunnel Forsberg shows that in certain areas in Sweden, including the western forest counties where the case study site is located, women get lower salaries but also tend to be more educated than the men. (Forsberg 1997b:47). According to Tora Friberg (2004), the rural areas with their lack of services on the one hand and the care-taking that women on the other hand are supposed to carry out have the potential to trap women in unequal relations.

In India high mortality rates, lack of education, ill health, lack of participation in decision-making structures and other forms of discrimination against women have been documented widely. Women's presence in management committees is important in bringing about change in their favour and ensuring them a voice in the management of resources (Agarwal, 1997). The structure and form of the committees, however, may not always provide openings for their voices and for the issues they may want to take up. As Rönnblom (2001) points out in the context of local level municipal institutions in Sweden, to be able to be a part of such organizations, and be present, does not necessarily mean that women can influence them. Going beyond overt discrimination and the fact that women are often excluded from decision-making related to development initiatives, it is useful to examine the process in everyday life that keep such relationships in place.

By looking at local management, starting from within the arenas for decision-making, as much literature on local resource management does, you would see what you do not find, that is, the presence of women. Such an approach is not irrelevant but it is limited. You do not see the ways in which the processes of development and management are constituted, or that there may be alternative organizing principles. Women's absence might not just be a question of exclusion but a choice consciously taken. By choosing to study local management as problematic in the everyday (*c.f.* Smith 1987) the assumptions underlying work with rural development, and the boundaries of the 'local' in local management, became apparent. In both study sites, for example, the study of women's collective action meant looking at activities outside the dominant definitions of what constituted local management. In chapter 7, I examine some recurring principles in how rural development is envisaged in the two sites.

### *2. The outsiders*

Outsiders have been important in helping development activities to start off in villages in Sweden especially in the case of women's groups (Bull 1995; Frånberg 1994; Ronnby 1995). However, with some exceptions (*e.g.* Mattsson 2002), there is little literature that has conceptualised the roles of outsiders in the processes of local development in general and their part in norming local development and management. Analysis of these interfaces has been somewhat more in focus in India and in development research in the South (Cooke and Kothari 2001b; Mosse 2002; Sundar 1998). There is a need to focus on not just how the research subjects, but also on how researchers and development practitioners in various roles, shape and define rural development and local management. The study of the processes in the villages, mainly in Drevdagen, leads me to examine how resource management and local development are mediated by the symbolic and physical value of the forests and through social relations between people from both inside and from outside the village. By probing beyond the self-evident definition of local management other definitions were brought into focus and underscored how the "power to name is a function of social relations" (Treleaven, 1998:4).

### *3. The village as a site of 'doing gender'*

Studies on women's activism in the rural areas related to community and environmental issues have highlighted women's roles in creating a new place for doing politics. There are studies on how women's activism has confronted state authorities (Brú-Bistuer 1996), multinational companies and commercial loggers and challenged the basis of the state's policies (Guha 2002; Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter and Wangari 1996; Rönnblom 2002; Shiva 1989). Corresponding analyses and studies of how their organizing relates to other initiatives in their own communities is limited.

In Drevdagen, several women explained their exclusion from the forest project by the fact that the forests had always been a male domain. Images of the forests as 'masculine' impinged in material ways on the women's actions. The women claimed that this made it difficult for them to challenge the authority of men within

the association with regard to the forests, regardless of how much time they or the men spent there. The challenge is to understand the implications of grassroots activism for gender relations within the community, for the definitions of local management or development and visions of a living countryside. By looking at the day to day dynamics and changing subjectivities in the course of their action, I highlight localised norms and practices in the public arena of the village as yet another place where gender and power is established in its specific ways but is also contingent on meanings constituted in the wider society.

#### *4. Activism for whom and for what?*

The institutional literature that has highlighted women's absence from decision-making does not necessarily deal with what women themselves want from rural development initiatives and local management, or their visions for these activities. Nor does this literature deal with what these absences and preferences mean for women as 'women'? The literature on women's environmental action such as the *Chipko* movement (Shiva 1989), and that of women's collective action for a specifically gendered issue, such as the anti-arrack movement (Tharu and Niranjana 2001), has not been linked. The focus has been to study the wider implications of their actions for their community (e.g. Bull 1995; Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter and Wangari 1996; Shiva 1989) as well as the tensions *vis-à-vis* established political structures (e.g. Rönnblom 2002). It was thus important for me to look at what the women themselves might want from initiatives in the villages, for themselves, and for their community, and if and on what terms they wanted to join the formal associations or committees. How did their actions affect their relations within the community, or bring about changes in their own subjectivities?

#### *5. The 'partial connections'*

Organizing by the women in the two study areas posed a challenge to the existing gender and power relations (c.f. Edwards 2002; Frye 1983). Their own and others' doubts, and resistance to their organizing also made apparent the space available for them to act in each place. Previous research has pointed to how oppressive social environments can impair agents' self-worth and agency (c.f. Mackenzie 2000) and impose internalized constraints (Kabeer 2001:38). The prescriptions circumscribing women's behaviour in the villages in Orissa related to these concerns. Despite the longstanding and vigorous women's movement in India, patriarchy remains deeply entrenched, influencing the structure of its political and social institutions (Harriss-White 1999; Sen 2000). In comparison, the women in Drevdagen have far greater rights as individual women and as citizens. Nevertheless, the discourse on equality, rather than providing the space for the expression of collective agency by the women, proved to be a limiting factor and a constraint that they had to overcome. National and international discourses on gender equality in a peculiar way played a part in the resistance offered to the women's organizing but also fed into women's own doubts about organizing in a single-sex group.

By situating the two cases in the same thesis, wherein one context is considered 'developed' as compared to the other, I examine how ideas about development, equality, progress and modernity in the two places further our understanding of normative concepts like empowerment (chapter 10). The cases together provoke questions about aspirations informing development and empowerment. Assumptions underlying what it means to be empowered, be developed and about what growth, progress and gender equality might mean, become apparent in the practices of men and women working towards local development and management.

Using Donna Haraway's (1991a:113) phrase it is the 'just barely possible connections' (though she uses it in a different context) or, as she cites Strathern, the partial connections where the players are neither wholes nor parts (2003), that are revealing. In this thesis these connections became apparent in the thinking about 'development' and the ways in which it is linked to the ideas about 'gender' (c.f. Baaz 2002; Mohanty 2003; Pieterse 2003). By using two cases clues were provided for understanding the links between the notions of development, progress and modernity that existed in 'diffracted' forms in both places. By looking at women's grassroots organizing both in Nayagarh and Drevdagen, the thesis seeks to understand the assumptions that inform thinking on local resource management, development, and gender equality, and also helps to "redefine what is political and what is environmental, as well as what is just and equitable" (Rocheleau 1996:19).

### **Tensions in the research design**

There were three main phases of this research and these are reflected in the structure of the thesis. The initial period consisted of field studies in Sweden and in India where I identified issues of interest in terms of community forestry and gender relations. The second phase was a process of collaborative inquiry designed together with the women in Drevdagen, that arose from the understanding formed by my preliminary studies, and the women's expressed needs and desire for change. The third phase has been the writing of this thesis where I have analysed the process of the collaborative inquiry, a process that has benefited from having the material from India as a frame of reference. There are several tensions in this thesis that I elaborate below. The lived and felt experience of carrying out the research was a messy and unpredictable contingent history. Below I try and make the design and the unpredictability as transparent as possible.

#### *Shifting frameworks*

I had started by looking at community forestry and gender. Initial interviews led me to want to concentrate my attention on women's agency in their work with rural development and local management. The attention shifted yet again when, as a result of my involvement in the collaborative inquiry, the micro politics in the village and at the university came into focus. Further, the collaborative inquiry

opened up the space for negotiating the research question for the inquiry that was of relevance to both the women and myself. The implication of opening up the space was that the inquiry was unpredictable and the framework for understanding and analysing the process changed as the process itself unfolded. So, mine is not a seamless argument. While I had thought of looking at the cases in the framework of the community management literature, my intention of conducting the research from the point of view of the women in the communities made this approach inadequate and revealed some of the norms underlying institutional theories. New discourse on the politics of women's organizing supplanted earlier discourses although I also build on the previous.

This in turn made a comparison with Nayagarh in terms of strict categories difficult. There were concurrent shifts in theoretical frameworks. The process of analysing and writing involved further thinking through of these concepts on my own. These were discussed with the women in Drevdagen once in a discussion that took place after the closure of the inquiry process itself and once again, with some of them who commented on a paper that I wrote. The collaborative inquiry moved the discussion from the issue to the process, to understanding how the 'social arrangements' around the issues of local management and village development. Rather than trying to explain certain social phenomena, in this case the initiatives for local resource management/village development and the women's organizing it became possible to think about the ways in which social relations were constitutive of these issues (*c.f.* Smith 1987). Some of the most significant moments of the inquiry are difficult to conceptualise. The energy that arose amongst the participants was felt and experienced as important. But how might moments and energy be analysed? As one of the participants who spoke to me about our process said to me after she read my paper,

I don't know really how to describe our process...there was an upswing.... among us and in the village then ....it felt that we could do things...

### *Research with women on rural development*

The epistemological approach to the overall research was guided by the need to be attentive to questions of importance for the women in the two case studies. It was driven by the need to question established positions and look for categories not obvious at first sight. A more conventional approach to research on local forest management initiatives would necessitate starting with the formal institutions that sought to work with local management and development. That choice would by itself set the frame for the research. Starting outside of them, I believed I might be able to see beyond the obvious assumptions on which the initiatives were based.

Taking a stand or positioning oneself in a particular way is seen to undermine the need to speak to everyone and reflect everyone's views equally. Not infrequently I was asked by students and researchers of rural development and resource management if, in a study of rural development and especially resource management, a field so obviously controlled by men, I had not committed a basic

error by partially choosing to research with just women in both Nayagarh and Drevdagen. Haraway (1991:196) writes,

We do not seek partiality for its own sake, but for the sake of the connections and unexpected openings situated knowledges make possible. The only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular. The science question in feminism is about objectivity as positioned rationality. Its images are not the products of escape and transcendence of limits....(*they are*) views from somewhere.

On the other hand, a group of men speaking for their village or about resource management as representatives are rarely questioned about the bias entailed by their claim to be speaking for their village (a bias both Nayagarh and Drevdagen showed). The image of a 'farmer' or a 'villager' is that of a man. The system that presents itself as neutral and without gender is often built upon the heterosexual male as the norm. Feminist research has shown how mainstream research uncritically adopts the norm and in the name of objective research, has sustained and legitimated male experiences of the world as neutral (de Lauretis 1989a; Edwards 1995; Harding 1998; Hirdman 1990). Even in participatory research, "gender was hidden in seemingly inclusive terms: 'the people,' 'the oppressed', the 'campesinos' or simply 'the community'. It was only when comparing...projects that it became clear that 'the community' was all too often the male-community" (Maguire, 1996:29-30).

Having said that, I need to point out that it was clear that not every woman thought in the same way and that there were critical differences among them. Caste, class, age, family ties, the kind of employment were some among many distinguishing features that created differences in interests, power and future visions among them. However it is not and was not my intention to conceptualise the *women*, rather the *process* of local development and management and discourses on them that are saturated with unspoken ideas about gender and power relations. My intention was not to compare and contrast the women's way of organizing with that of the men's in the association and forest committees. I wanted to understand how the women exercised agency within the constraints that they found themselves in and what they wanted from rural development initiatives. This approach brought into focus discordant and noisy categories of analysis, often those that I had not thought of to start with - dreams and practice, collective action and individual freedom, the importance of individuals and *gemenskapsrelationer* (community relationships); and a gender power order that can constrain action but also open up ways forward. The intention became to work towards unsettling some of the practices that made it difficult for the women to work with local development ('to effect other subjects of vision').

### *Participation and the writing*

The collaborative inquiry in Drevdagen and the writing about the processes in the village are not one and the same thing. The idea behind the choice of the inquiry

process was for us to work together and analyse our process together. The tension between the lived and felt experience and the interpretation and formalisation of that experience that the writing entailed worried me a great deal initially. However, I came to realize that as a doctoral student the requirements for me to relate to literature and conceptualise the process (especially in relation to India) were beyond those that were of interest to my co-researchers. One of the women exclaimed when we discussed my thesis and I wondered how I was ever going to write about it, "...oh, that is Seema's secret." They were more than happy to let me do it on my own. At the time her statement was troubling for me. But as I realized later, every inquiry is not an academic thesis and a thesis is something other than the research experience itself. The women theorised the inquiry and moved it forward by their practice and by taking action while my practice and action is theorising. Thus in both our ways we make this constructed division between theory and practice redundant (I discuss this further in chapter 6). In retrospect it has meant, as Smith writes, to explicate the social organization of our experienced world that passed beyond what was immediately and directly known (1987:89) at the time of our discussions together.

Another way of asking this question may be Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury's question of what the text is actually for (2001)? While they pose it in the context of articulating a participatory worldview, my objective is more modest: to try and think of those who may read the text and what use it may have for those of us who were part of the inquiry together. This is a difficult question as I realized that the doing of the research and this text (thesis) that came from it are for different audiences. My purpose through the narrative form of the text is to foreground gender and power in rural development initiatives and the attempts at forest management, to open up a discussion on these issues with researchers but also to be able to discuss it with others outside the academy and use the writing to think so as to be able to learn for myself. If the writing that is my practice now, proves useful for the women and of relevance in this form, it would be an additional benefit.

The fact that I was differently situated from my co-researchers (see further chapters six, eight and eleven) was made all the more obvious when I withdrew into the academic cloister. As a doctoral student working on rural development, I felt it important to theorise what our process meant for future work in this area within the academy. While it was the inquiry and thinking and writing about it that was my focus during my involvement in the village, in writing about it I once again look back at the issue, local forest management. I analyse the implications of the inquiry and the organizing by the women in order to think about and clarify the social organization that was implied but not explicit when discussing local forest management and rural development. By directing attention to the process of the women's organizing *vis-à-vis* initiatives of rural development and local resource management, I wanted to highlight the 'space off'<sup>5</sup> in the spaces of rural development and local resource management that keeps them in place.

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<sup>5</sup> De Lauretis, borrowing terminology from cinema writes of the 'space off', the elsewhere of discourse here and now, the blind spots of its representations. She

### *Different places in the North and South*

I discuss working with the same issues, at about the same time, in two geographical places with very different conditions, and fundamental cultural differences. Cross-cultural studies often aim at abstracting emerging patterns and developing conceptual frameworks and models which are distanced from the empirical cases, in order to discuss what is universal and what is specific (*c.f.* Tillmar 2002:18). The aim of this study is not to compare situational variables and highlight differences or trace similarities, although those did emerge in the research process.

In places located in such different parts of the world, global space is often transformed into a time sequence. The West becomes the inhabitant of modernity that is in several respects interchangeable with development and westernization (Pieterse 1991). By freezing time (as I do explicitly in chapter ten) I acknowledge and try and go beyond the ‘crisis of the comparative method that has accompanied the crisis of developmentalism’ (*Ibid*:19). I have tried to be constantly aware of this tension while analysing processes in two places gender and wealth indices are glaringly different. In the same way the rural space in the two played an important part in the conceptualisations of the places as far from centres of official power. As Zygmunt Bauman puts it eloquently, “Not all city life is modern; but all modern life is city life. For life to turn modern means to become more like life in the city” (1995:126).

The two cases were used “to go beyond initial impressions” (Eisenhardt cited in Tillmar, 2002:19) in each context. Rather than abstracting patterns I have used them to understand the specifics in each case, but also to see the discourses that shape specifics, that is, the complex circulation of ideas in a world with many links. These cases are not merely two instances of discrete cultures placed in a comparative status but experience the contingent history of complex power relations in their own countries and in a larger world order.

### *The side by side ‘comparison’: A diffraction?*

It was in the writing that the two cases met. I have so far refrained from calling it a comparison since the thesis does not attempt a formal, conventional case comparison. Instead, the material from each case is used to look for issues that may not be obvious at first glance in the other case and to ask questions that may not have been asked otherwise, both in terms of the dynamics experienced in the

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writes, “I think of it as the spaces in the margins of hegemonic discourses, social spaces carved in the interstices of institutions and in the chinks and cracks of the power-knowledge apparatus. And it is there that the terms of a different construction of gender can be posed – terms that do have effect and take hold at the level of subjectivity and self-representation: in the micropolitical practices of daily life and daily resistances that afford both agency and sources of power...” (de Lauretis 1989b:25). Somewhat differently Haraway (2003) articulates what I understand is a similar construct, the ‘significant otherness’ of the discourse or the issue at hand.

study sites but also in terms of the literature that is normally used or associated with such studies. This moves the focus from the similarities and the differences in the topics to be compared and to be able to examine them in their own settings and discursive frames. This process of mutually informing interrogation is not a process of simple reflection as one would expect from a mirror, but a process of diffraction. The two in parallel brought to light insights into the different ways in which the actors justified their actions, the response from their environments, and the diverse ways in which the women made meaning of their actions. The diffracted light revealed the tenuous threads that joined the two worlds in Drevdagen and Nayagarh in an increasingly globalized world. The concepts used by the actors in the two places provided instances of surprising linkages as well as absences.

I had started the research by looking at two similar cases in different parts of the world. This was the first stage. During the research process I realized how differently the questions in the two countries had been treated in research, thus having very different conceptual frameworks. It was useful to see issues of resource management and gender *vis-à-vis* feminist theories on organizing. This second stage meant situating the cases in their contexts, in the contextually grounded experiences and recognizing difference and complexity with each other but also within the places.<sup>6</sup> The third stage in my realizations however led me to appreciating the connections. The examples that I begin the thesis with invoke notions of development and equality in both places. Local management and democracy are constructed in a context of forest communities in both places though in their specific ways, but also within overlapping discursive contexts. It was here that I turned to language and to read the accounts of women and men that I encountered during my research as ‘text’. I employed theorisations of power, discourse analysis and an understanding of subjectivities as aids to understanding the ways in which meanings were produced in the contexts where I was working.

Analyses that attempt to cross national and racial boundaries produce and reproduce difference in particular ways. It is often done through analytic categories that are supposed to have cross-cultural validity, typically formalized as variables and indicators. Research within the collaborative inquiry provided its own categories and analytic process. In the thesis, it is these experiences that I relate to the case in India. Taking into view cases ‘North-South’ helped to “widen the analytic circle” (Fortmann 2004). I believe this is an important contribution to the ongoing development of methodologies of writing where a comparison does not have to be held up to a standard framework that is in itself never culturally neutral. Understanding the different ways in which meanings are produced and challenged reveal the complex and specific political choices that caution us from ahistorical and universalizing categories (*c.f.* Mohanty 2003). At the same time, in such an endeavour, recurring aspects in the politics of every day life also reveal links between them that in turn pose new questions about gender and power.

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<sup>6</sup> For example, unlike in India, rural development as a field in Sweden has an uncertain existence in studies of the countryside.

## Overview of the thesis

The thesis is divided into five parts. **Part I: Introduction and methodology** continues with *Chapter two, Methods of Inquiry*. This chapter presents the overall methodological approach, both conceptual and practical. I outline the literature and the thinking to which I turned and that guided and helped conceptualise the research process. This is followed by a presentation of the tools that I used in analysing the material generated from the 'field'. I then look briefly at the practicalities of the methodology, *i.e.*, the doing of the research in the field. With that I turn to illustrate the methods of analysis in the thesis and more specifically, an explanation of the ways in which I dealt with the two cases.

This chapter seeks to present the groundwork for answering the question of participatory research in the second question in the thesis, *i.e.* to explain what I mean by the opening up of the research space. However I have chosen to answer this question by bringing it up in three places- chapters 2, 6 and 11. A detailed process account and reflections on the collaborative inquiry are presented in chapter six. I do this in a separate chapter in combination with the empirical chapters for two reasons: the methodology of the collaborative inquiry also forms a part of the empirical data that and also because the inquiry follows chronologically after chapter 5. By placing the methodology also as part of the process description I have wanted to show the ways in which methods influence the outcome of the research. The reflections on the overall methodological approach are discussed in chapter 11.

**Part II: A frame of reference-the study in India** has one chapter. *Chapter 3, Forest relations and the women's brigades: everyday life in Nayagarh*, presents the case study from Nayagarh which I use as a framework in the analysis that is presented in the later chapters. I begin with an introductory background to how forest livelihood questions and gender and development have been treated in the relevant literature. This is followed by the case study in Nayagarh and an account of the forest movement and how 'gender' became an issue within it. I then shift the focus to look at rural development and community forestry from the point of view of the women's groups active in Nayagarh. I look at the women's attempts to create alternative spaces and at the implications of their actions on processes of rural development and community forestry.

**Part III, The studies in Sweden**, comprises several chapters. *Chapter 4, Tales from the Field: forests, gender and the Swedish periphery* provides a brief background to the Swedish national context. Women in Drevdagen were not considered to be self-evident actors in questions of forestry and the chapter examines in a historical perspective some of the forces that led to the construction of the forests as a masculine domain. It also presents an understanding of references to marginality and the centre-periphery dichotomy that were inescapable in the discussions in Drevdagen. The attempt is to discover the interfaces where policies meet people in their everyday lives, in local action and in people's visions for a living countryside. The chapter thus takes up some of the

major debates in the country about living in these areas, and the literature that addresses these debates.

*Chapter 5, Living in Drevdagen* provides the village setting and discusses how the villagers developed and elaborated ideas about marginality and, their views on local management. These notions were important to how village women and men conceptualised and challenged the meanings given to rural development and forest management in the village. This chapter also introduces the various actors, including myself and my colleagues from the university in our involvement in the village. It seeks to illustrate our divergent trajectories and also provides the background for understanding our various relationships in the village. *Chapter 6, Turn to action: collaborative inquiry in Drevdagen*, is a description of the research process and where I describe the methodology used and the approach adopted in Drevdagen. This chapter deals with the politics of constructing the space for an inquiry together with the women that was relevant, both for me and the women, in the village. It ends with some reflections on the process and contributes to answering the second question on the opening up of the space for defining the research question.

The next part of the thesis, **Part IV, Relational dynamics and strategies** consists of chapter 7 and 8. *Chapter 7, Organizing as Women: making space for a House of Dreams* starts with a description of how the research process was formed by the women and myself and what the women wanted from the inquiry. This is followed by stories told by the women about their lives and experiences of living in the countryside and my reading of these stories. This chapter contributes to understanding women's gendered subjectivities in relation to life in the village. It illustrates how the women drew on prevalent discourses to give meaning to their experiences but also complicated these images (it provides an understanding for answering questions one and three in the thesis).

In *Chapter 8, Unsettling the Order: the dynamics of rural development and local forest management*, I analyse what women's organizing means for rural development and local forest management in Sweden in light of the process in India. The chapter analyses how rural development and local management are constructed. It is here that I examine the gendered nature of rural development initiatives and the assumptions underlying such work. This chapter also looks at how outsiders, like myself and my colleagues from the University, are complicit in defining the nature of rural development.

**Part V, Analysis and Conclusions** comprises three chapters. In *Chapter 9, Making Sense of Local Management as Rural Development*, I relate the insights derived from the studies to the literature on rural development and resource management. I look at how many women imagined local management and work in the village in relation to policies and village organizations through which they were normally carried out. I concentrate more specifically on the Swedish context and problematise what gender equality and rural development may mean in this context.

*Chapter 10, Women are like boats: discourse, policy and collective action*, is where I explore the connections between the two case studies and use them as referents (or diffracted images) more specifically. Discourses on the environment and gender equality influenced the women's thinking and were also challenged by them. This chapter is less about how gender was done, as in the case of chapter 8 and more about the meanings given to gender and by extension, to development. I analyse the space the women had in the two places, to organize themselves and what that reveals of the specific contexts in which they acted. It also sheds light on the notions of development and empowerment in the two places which were extended outside of their societies, influenced by similar thinking, yet acted in very specific ways. *Chapter 11, Concluding Reflections* contains as the title implies some thoughts on the research. I go back to the three questions with which I started and look back at the outcomes of my negotiations.

The contributions that this thesis seeks to make lie firstly in problematising local management especially in Sweden in a changing environmental and political situation wherein devolution and a slowly increasing rhetoric on participation is gaining ground. Secondly, it is to analyse how assumptions about development and equality and empowerment take shape in reference to collective and individual agency. The primary motive is not only to contribute to gender theory but to use a different angle within ideas about local management that draws attention to the complexities that cannot be ignored. Lastly but importantly I outline a methodology that may provide an opportunity to link the academic world to that of the research subjects in order to come to meaningful questions of relevance to both.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Methods of inquiry

*Philosophers have interpreted the world in various ways. The point however is to change it.*

*Karl Marx, Eleven theses on Feuerbach, 1845.*

#### Introduction

In the introduction to this thesis I referred to three constraining discourses that I encountered in the work with which this thesis research is concerned: that forest management is mainly about the forests and the institutions for its management, that the correct way to go about scientific inquiry is to have the right questions and that greater individual equality presupposes greater space for collective agency. In this chapter I discuss the conceptual and methodological means by which I negotiated these constraints.

Beginning with the first, I outline very briefly the work of some institutional theorists and go on to the work of other researchers who argue for the importance of viewing resource management and local development as embedded in its social and material context. The work of the latter has been particularly relevant in the cases that I study as a focus on formal institutions tends to make invisible the role of those whose voices are not easily heard within them, especially those of women. The social context and the location of the two study sites as marginal in wider power relations were thus crucial in understanding processes of development. In order to situate my study in its particular social and material context I turned to participatory and feminist methodologies. These proved valuable in forming the relevant questions for the women in the village in Sweden. In this chapter I discuss at length why I chose to work in this way and explain some of the principles that underpin feminist and participatory methodologies. Since most of the literature on gender and resource management comes from countries in the South, I felt that an inquiry in Drevdagen would provide the space for conceptual categories to emerge out of the process.

In the section that follows I turn towards poststructural and postcolonial feminist writings that helped me to think about how women and men in their language reproduced and transformed a social order as they drew on a repository of meaning in language and discourse. These theoretical tools that I outline opened up an important means to go beyond accepted interpretations and to look for the 'space off' in the flow of everyday life. They were useful in theorising on the contrasts between the two countries in ways that went beyond comparing or contrasting them within a single framework. Following this, I discuss the practicalities of the approach in the 'field' and the material that was generated

from my work with the women and men in the villages and outside. The chapter ends with an explication of how I carried out the analysis in the thesis.

## **The social and material contexts of local resource management and rural development**

Institutions have tended to be a primary concern of theorists of local resource management and rural development (*e.g.* Agrawal and Gibson 1999; Gibson, A.McKean and Ostrom 2000; Ostrom 1990; Ostrom 1998). These studies have made important contributions to understanding the management of resources at the local level. But it has almost become an axiom that any research dealing with the access to and management of natural resources needs to start by looking at the institutions put in place for their governance. The institutional approach was in part prompted by the rejection of the community (with its overtones of an organic whole) as a conceptual tool for understanding the differing interests in resource management (Agrawal and Gibson 1999). It was believed that through a focus on institutions it would be possible to study the divergent interests of multiple actors within communities, the interactions and politics through which these interests emerge, and the outcomes of such political processes (*Ibid*). Heterogeneity<sup>7</sup> among people has been looked upon as a challenge that can be overcome by crafting innovative (Varughese and Ostrom 2001) and equitable (Agrawal 1997; Agrawal 2001; Agrawal 2003) institutional arrangements. However, others have drawn attention also to how local interests outside of institutions have an important role to play in the equitable management of resources. Researchers have argued for a need to understand the local political and livelihoods interests that determine outcomes in natural resource and development issues (Carruyo 2003; Sarin et al. 2003; Wollenberg, Anderson and Edmunds 2001), in order to ‘to open up spaces’ for the poorest users in organizations and institutions (Edmunds and Wollenberg 2003:5) that often get dominated by the elite (Singh 2004).

The critique of institutionalism has been prompted by the focus within this approach on the individual actors active in the institutions (often taken as coterminous with the organizations that have been set up for resource management), divorced from their social context, by the neglect of everyday gender and power relations, and by an understanding of the informal ways in which resource use and access is negotiated (Clever 1998b; Jackson 1998). “Great claims are made in theory and practice for the empowering nature of increased women’s participation in the institutions of local decision-making and management of natural resources...However there is little work on how such empowerment is effected” (Clever 1998b). Frances Clever for example points to the need to understand the “non-project nature of people’s lives” that also governs resource management and development and argues that the interactions of daily life are as important in shaping outcomes as public negotiations (2002:38). This is

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<sup>7</sup> Research has shown that heterogeneity in the group composition might even help in successful management (Baland and Platteau 1996).

particularly relevant in understanding women's agency, especially in their roles as the "unofficial actors of development" (Kabeer 1994:xi). It is in the interactions of daily life that gender and power relations are negotiated and the environment and its management are shaped by these social practices. At the same time resource management plays an active part in constituting relations of gender and power (Leach 1994). Attention to everyday interactions has been central to this research.

Foregrounding the social context in my research also helped to make sense of how to deal conceptually with the material that I had. It also brought into focus how the physical context (the geographical space) of Nayagarh and Drevdagen played a special role in local commentaries on resource management and village development. In chapter one I describe both instances as 'out of the way places' (Tsing 1993) that are characterised by a politics of marginalisation that was contested even as it was elaborated. It is a marginalisation developed in language, that is, in dialogue with state policies and regional politics rather than in their isolation in relation to what is perceived as mainstream society (*cf. Ibid*). Nayagarh and Drevdagen are, nevertheless, very different out of the way places. Drevdagen is situated in what is referred to, as the *glesbygd*, the sparsely populated areas in Sweden. The *glesbygd* is not only a geographical naming but has its layers of meaning that I discuss in chapter three. Like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's phrase for the 'third world' (1990), the *glesbygd* may be regarded as a proper name for a generalized margin. The areas of the *glesbygd* were born out of a contradictory marginality: made marginal partly by attempts to bring these areas into the ambit of the welfare state. In Nayagarh marginality was constructed as a result of the inability of the state to reach these areas, especially in the case of the forests, despite the pervasive presence of various arms of government such as the forest department.

The thesis is placed within different political and intellectual understandings of marginality. In both places marginality is developed in relation to particular political and urban cultures. But then there is the issue of 'marginality' between the two places. Nayagarh's marginality calls into questions a variety of inter-relations. Orissa is one of the poorest states of India and India, at the time of the study was in turn marginal in international rankings though increasingly less so. On the other hand Nayagarh is a district in Orissa that is comparatively well off in the light of poorer districts with large tribal populations.

My focus is on negotiations of gender relations but this is placed in the context of an asymmetry in relations with the various organs of the state. By placing gender at the centre of my analysis, I found that "many social spaces were negotiated within one geographical space and time" (Mills 2003: 693). I do not regard the conceptualisation of marginality and the centre-periphery distinction as being parallel to gender. Rather I look to the analytic space created by the tension in which marginalities occasioned by geography or living in the periphery are gendered and in which marginality is source of both constraint and creativity (Tsing 1993:18). It is not marginality *per se* that I focus on in the thesis but more precisely its relevance in understanding how marginality, as the 'local and peripheral' intersected with gender in conceptualising the process of local

management and development. With this I turn to the assumption within some research that the right question and a certain distance is a prerequisite in carrying out research. Here I write about the thinking that helped me to bridge the distance in power between the research subjects and myself and yet, as the section after that, ‘tools of analysis’ demonstrates, to also try and keep a critical and reflexive approach to the research undertaken together.

### **Bridging the distance**

The common notion of the role of research and of the university is to produce knowledge. This knowledge is then supposed to be disseminated to others. To take an example of this, I cite a section from the white paper on environmental policy in Sweden that discusses the role of universities and the academia in contributing to the new environmental policy.<sup>8</sup> It states, “Universities and colleges (*högskolor*) and individual researchers have an important role in producing, managing and spreading knowledge to various actors, not least the local actors (Skr. 2001/02:173). We as researchers decide what needs to be researched, how it is to be done, and what we lift out of its context. This is an important responsibility. But why do we do it? And for what purpose?

Although these are important questions, they are often taken for granted and not often questioned. As I explained in the previous chapter I wanted to position the research from the point of view of the women in both places who were trying to work with development issues in their villages. I was resolute that the research needed to be of use and of relevance to them, something that I had felt pricking me constantly as I guiltily stole time from the women in Nayagarh. This was consonant with my larger understanding of knowledge being created everywhere and yet of the power that research can exercise because of the privilege of defining what knowledge is. And although I was inspired by Paolo Freire’s praxis, it was not an ‘emancipatory project’<sup>9</sup> that I had in mind. I wanted to keep the framework of the inquiry open to the possibility of embracing its own concepts, to be of practical use, and to be accountable to the research subjects. Audrey Kobayashi has written,

A *critical* perspective transcends methodology to view qualitative methods as a basis for challenging dominant ways of understanding, and for exploring the contradictions that give rise to social inequities and patterns of marginalization. It demands an ethical positionality.

This was an important starting point but like her I felt the need to go beyond critical scholarship to an activist scholarship that also required a commitment on

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<sup>8</sup> I choose to take up this particular document among others that have a similar view on research since I shall refer to it later in the thesis.

<sup>9</sup> To me this had connotations of an outsider coming in and knowing that the world needed to be changed just there. I did not know yet what the women wanted.

the part of the researcher to become involved in social change. My bias leans towards change not merely for the world at large but especially for positive change for the women involved (*cf.* Kobayashi 2001:56).

The collaborative inquiry in Drevdagen was framed within wider processes of 'development' work in the village and the efforts towards local management of forest resources. Through collaborative inquiry I sought to develop knowledge for action in the spirit of Freire's *praxis*, which he describes as the connection between action and reflection (1970). From my point of view it was a way of bridging the divide between 'practice' and 'theory', *i.e.* my research at the university and the lives of the women in the *glesbygd*. Although I speak of theory and practice, theorizing about experiences and discussing our lives during the inquiry also may be seen as our practice or rather as taking place within our practice. They are not always two separate activities. The writing of this text is, however, a different kind of theorizing though that may also be seen as my practice (*cf.* Cuomo, 1998:142). In several places in the thesis, I have tried to clarify by putting in parentheses what I really mean by theory in those particular contexts. On the whole I consider theory to be that which has helped me to think about the world, not explain the world (*cf.* Smith, 1987:54).

Incongruously, in view of the process that took shape, although I knew I wanted to work with the women in order to bring about change that was useful to them, I had approached the study not from an understanding of feminist research but from a tradition and understanding of action research. Working together with the women, however, led me to a *feminist praxis* (Treleaven 1998) that grew out of our process, and to feminist epistemologies that helped me understand and think about what was taking place all around me. In the course of my research with the women in Drevdagen (and by the fact that the research became controversial both in the village and in the university), I was drawn to feminist theories that helped me to think about what was happening around us. This helped me to understand power relations and negotiations as part of all action, learning and knowledge creation. I believe now that it is difficult to carry out participatory research without grounding in feminist epistemologies.

### *Participatory Methodologies and Feminist Epistemologies*

There is no one definition of Participatory Action Research (PAR). To quote Reason and Bradbury's working definition:

...it is a participatory democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing...and creating new forms of understanding...In many ways the process of inquiry is as important as specific outcomes. ...the 'language turn' drew our attention to the way knowledge is a social construction: the action turn accepts this and asks us how we can act in intelligent and informed ways in a socially constructed world (2001:2).

As Reason writes elsewhere, participatory research is about research with people and not research on people (1994).

Literature on Participatory Action Research draws its roots from varied traditions and has taken many different forms. Kurt Lewin's social experiments in the 1940s are seen by many as the origin of action research. The Tavistock institute in London and its practices with social democracy created its own traditions. The term 'emancipatory action research' gained ground in the upheaval of the 1960s movements and many at that time were inspired by the liberationist writings from the South which advocated the critical role of education and conscientization (*e.g.* Fals-Borda and Rahman 1991; Freire 1970). There were parallel movements in the development context based strongly in the collective action of people, as in the work of Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) in India (Fernandes and Tandon 1981). Marxist theories, critical theory, social constructivism, theories on learning are some of the many theoretical underpinnings for the great diversity that today constitutes action research. Action research has been practised as systemic inquiry in the field of management (*e.g.* Checkland 1994; Checkland and Holwell 1998), within environmental issues (*e.g.* Bawden 1995; Flood 1998; Pretty and Chambers 1994), has become a beacon in developmental work (*e.g.* Holland and Blackburn 1998; Pretty and Chambers 1994; Scoones and Thompson 1994), within pedagogy (Freire 1970), in the practices of human inquiry (Heron 1996; Reason 1994), and in much else.<sup>10</sup>

Surprisingly, feminist research has not been acknowledged in much of this work, despite substantial literature in this area that deals with epistemological issues that have close parallels to thinking in action research. The practice of working and researching with the women in my case study sites led me to feminist theory that helped me in identifying patterns and practices that up to that point had remained experiential. In these theories (in this context suggestions for explanations or aids to thinking), I recognized patterns of recurring relationships around me, which I had felt instinctively but which theory helped to become clearer. While I scanned the participatory literature, I realized that few authors had taken up these questions in ways that recognized gendered tensions and power. Lesley Treleaven writes, "In the Academy, theorizing action research was a field populated, until recently, mostly by men (although there are, of course, women who have been active in this field, especially in education)" (1998:118). Patricia Maguire's dissertation in 1987 pointed to male bias in participatory research and theorized feminist participatory research (1987). The thinking of feminists such as Treleaven (1994; 1998), Maguire (1996; 2001), Patti Lather (1991) and Liz Stanley (1990) have been an important influence in shaping my own research framework.

Feminist theories helped to explain and enable me to think about the events experienced during the course of my research. They also drove home the

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<sup>10</sup> For a detailed account of participation see Reason and Bradbury (2001), in development work, Fals-Borda and Rahman (Fals-Borda and Rahman 1991), Leal (1999), in environmental systems and action research (Bawden 1995).

importance of clarifying for myself where I stood, and how I understood the processes of knowing and knowledge. And, that the researcher can, or rather should be held accountable. Teresa de Lauretis, for example, conceptualizes the ‘essential difference’ of (Western) feminism as not a difference between woman and man, nor a difference inherent in woman’s nature but a difference in the feminist conception of woman, women and the world (1989a:3). Referring to the Italian feminist Cavarero she writes that no other political or social thought but feminism has seen fit to consider the paradox of thinking sexual difference through the categories of a thought that is supported by the non-thinking of difference itself. This paradox, writes de Lauretis, is not only discursive but grounded in a real contradiction for women in a world designed and governed by men, a conceptual and experiential contradiction in which women are necessarily caught as social beings (*Ibid.*:26).

With the caveat that none of the following applies to all feminisms, some important assumptions underlying the literature on feminist methodologies are: action-orientation, reflexivity, attention to the affective components of the research and the use of the situation at hand (Fonow and Cook 1991a:2), themes that resonate strongly with action research. Action research challenges the ‘myth of static research and inquiry’ (Tandon 1996:21) that builds upon the notion that there is a truth ‘out there’ to be uncovered by the researcher.<sup>11</sup> Action research was an appealing starting point for my research insofar as it argues for *acting* as a basis for learning and knowing.<sup>12</sup> It was important to me that the research felt relevant to those who were part of it and that it created practical knowing, a knowing gained through practice, knowing *how to* do something and for something (Reason 1994:42). This meant that emphasis in the research was not only on understanding or expanding theory (thinking on the subject), but also on linking the theorising closely to practice, in what Freire has called *praxis* or reflection for action (1970). Referring to a dictionary of Marxist thought Lather writes of praxis as ‘philosophy becoming practical’ (1991:12). Citing Buker she writes that, “the requirements of praxis are theory both relevant to the world and nurtured by actions in it, and an action component in its own theorizing process, that grows out of practical political grounding” (*Ibid.*:12). This formulation is linked closely to feminist praxis where, as Stanley paraphrases the Marxist dictum, “The point is to change the world, not only to study it” (1990:15). In the early stages of the research I also drew on Jurgen Habermas’ communicative rationality (Outhwaite 1996) and systemic thinking. But as the inquiring gathered pace, it was feminist epistemologies that provided the richer understanding of the power and gender relations.

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<sup>11</sup> This does not mean that action researchers are the only ones to do so.

<sup>12</sup> “This formulation of action research, going back to the work of Kurt Lewin, was recaptured in Latin America and subsequently became the basis for participatory action research (Fals-Borda 1985). It emphasized the notion of action as a legitimate mode of knowing, thereby taking the realm of knowledge into the field of practice” (Tandon, 1996:21).

Underpinning the notion of action is an understanding that the social relations of the act of research are complicit in the result. As Sheri Gorelick states, “The production of science is not an operation (or indeed an autopsy); it is a relationship” (cited in Maguire 2001:63). This is an understanding that is central to feminist research as well as to action research. It stems from a constructionist paradigm that assumes a relativist ontology (that there are multiple realities), and a subjectivist epistemology (that the knower and respondent co-create understandings) (c.f. Denzin and Lincoln 2000b:21). It means that you accept as a researcher that you influence what the result is going to be. I thus understand participatory research as a scientific method that challenges the assumption of conventional social science as neutral, objective and value free. But I also felt the need to go beyond a relativist assumption where “all positions are rendered equivalent” (Grosz 1993:194). Feminist research has importantly directed attention to how power relations are implicit in what is produced as knowledge and science.

Being part of the action within the group (and recognizing action as a form of getting to learn and know) was a compelling factor for me to clarify my positions throughout the act of research, and to be questioned by others on this position. Haraway writes that the problem is to be accountable for our specific ways of making meaning.

Feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object. In this way we might become answerable for what we learn how to see (1991b:190).

This turns our attention also to reflexivity or of ‘reflecting critically on the self as researcher’ (Lincoln and Guba 2000:183). Action research with its potential attention to the relationships involved in the research process, together with feminist theory thus provided an important meeting point in my research.<sup>13</sup> Martin writes about participatory research that, “... the power imbalance that exists in conventional research is in participatory research to some extent shared between the parties involved. While the ‘outside’ researcher observes, s/he is also being observed” (Martin, 1995:85). This may be true of all research but in participatory research, the goal is to make this explicit, so that the researcher may be questioned and is accountable for the process. This stance gave rise to several problematic questions that I reflect upon in the last chapter. I was situated differently in relation to the women’s groups in Drevdagen and Nayagarh as well as to my colleagues and the men working in the villages in Drevdagen and Nayagarh. In both places I was identified as a researcher, from the city, and as a (new) mother. Different parts of these identities intersected and were important at different times. In Drevdagen, I was much younger than most of the other participants. Coming

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<sup>13</sup> There has been a debate within feminism recognizing that although feminist theory is gaining recognition within academic circles, in order to do so it has lost some of the activist roots that made it so vital. *E.g.* Feminist academics have been criticized for doing theory ‘for’ instead of ‘with’ people (c.f. Lather, 1991:xviii).

from India, I was from another culture, obviously different and knew little about living in the *glesbygd* until I began to work in the village. In Nayagarh there was an evident class difference among us which was not the case in Drevdagen. Compared to my male colleagues from the university who had been active in development aid as professionals and consultants for several years, I was younger, a Ph.D. student, and in terms of development had previously carried out research and worked with a small NGO in India.

Another aspect of participatory research that appealed to me was that experience, as much as cognition and action, is considered as a valid way of knowing.<sup>14</sup> It is perhaps not so surprising that researchers within the field of education or pedagogy (with its attention to theories of learning and knowledge) have been proponents of action research. This has also been vital to (and much debated<sup>15</sup>) within feminist research. “An important contribution of feminism to knowledge creation has been the way feminists have explored feeling and experience as sources of knowledges and as guides to analysis and social action” (Martin, 1996:84). It has been central in the feminist practices of consciousness raising, the questioning of scientific discourses, and in creating new social spaces. I wanted to be able to be open to different dimensions of knowing - in action, cognitively, and from feelings and emotions.

In the participative inquiry process we created space for reflection and tried to make sense of our individual and joint experiences within the group and outside of it. In Nayagarh it has meant paying attention to the stories that the women chose to tell and to how they wanted to relate them. I use the term experience as elaborated by de Lauretis as:

...the general sense of a process by which, for all social beings, subjectivity is constructed. Through that process one places oneself or is placed in social reality and so perceives and comprehends as subjective (referring to, or even originating in oneself) those relations – material, economic and interpersonal – which are in fact social and, in a larger perspective ,

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<sup>14</sup> The contributions of phenomenologists have been significant in this aspect. “These contributions legitimated experience as a basis of knowing. This gave the impetus to human emotions and feelings as valid modes of knowing, along with action and cognition” (Tandon, 1996:21).

<sup>15</sup> There has been considerable debate on ‘experience’ within feminist theory. Early feminist conceptions of ‘woman’ based on common ‘experiences’ of oppression or motherhood etc. have been criticized for using white, urban, middle class, western women’s ‘experience’ to include all women everywhere and thus implying that there is a generalizable ‘female experience.’ Subsequent analysis has pointed to the great diversity of cross cutting principles that give rise to experiences based on class, race, sex, geography etc. I was made all the more aware of this by working in the two different contexts. The defining characteristics of women’s identity means looking at the context that they act within, their dilemmas, who speaks for whom and how the groups represent themselves.

historical. ..For each person, therefore, subjectivity is an ongoing construction, not a fixed point of departure or arrival with which one interacts with the world. On the contrary it is the effect of that interaction that I call experience (1984:159).

This way of knowing is a confirmation of everyday experiences as a legitimate source of knowledge, and of the importance of a concern with the local and the specific. Referring to Fonow and Cook (1991), Treleaven writes that collaborative inquiry may be seen “as a form of praxis (that) integrates the formation of theory with practice by taking everyday situations to hand in order to produce explanations and ways forward for the particular group of women in the study” (1998:121). Feminist praxis (e.g. Treleaven) thus turns our attention to everyday situations, situations that are changing and relations that get rearranged. Paying heed to experiences thus does not imply that they are fixed and unchanging or non-contradictory. On the contrary, the collaborative inquiry in Drevdagen highlighted differences and the course of inquiry also showed that the ways in which we understand our experiences can change.

The inquiry was situated in the village among a variety of social relations and practices. I was struck by the changes that occurred in the village and in the relationships during the course of our inquiry, though I cannot say that I had not been forewarned that such changes might occur. I think of Ingrid’s words to me when I broached the idea of a collaborative inquiry in the village, “We change our minds so often, and you will have to work really hard to keep pace with us.” Needless to say, I was no exception. We all brought with us into the inquiry ideas, thoughts and opinions that changed through time. Relations (and subjectivities) changed not only within the group but also with those outside and these changes were significant for the spirit of the group. I discuss this further in chapter six in a discussion of changing subjectivities and in the growing conviction within the group that women’s possibility for change lies in the everyday (c.f. hooks 1990), and that the source of power is situated in the space of daily human relations (Lauesen cited in Leal and Opp 1999).

At the outset, I felt it important also to clarify how the research was to be carried out and for what purpose. By asking of the research, the *how* and *for what purpose*, the question becomes one of ethics not science. Cuomo writes, “Science can inform ethics by providing data, models, feedback and projections of risk and impact. All the while, ethics must question science’s models, methods, goals and assumptions.” My intention here is, however, not to discuss ethics as such, although it is integral to the research, but rather to see the process as a different way of doing research. In discussions about participatory research and about the ethics of the research process, it is often mentioned that the people who participate in the research seldom see the end results and have little to gain from the process. Many researchers have discussed translating reports for the consumption of their subjects or taking back and presenting the results in the place itself. As far as I was concerned, being part of the inquiry did not imply merely that one takes back the ‘results’ (my thoughts and analysis) to the material reality (which has probably changed by then) from which they were derived, nor that one takes information to

use elsewhere and for other purposes. It was a recognition that we need to be able to relate to other ways of knowing, to be open and humble and situate oneself in the research for what I hope are “better accounts of the world, that is, ‘science’ ” (Haraway 1991b:196). Carrying out my research in this way was not merely a question of being ethical. Much like Reason and Bradbury, I believe that,

The political imperative is not just a matter of researchers being considerate about their subjects or acting ethically: it is about the democratic foundations of inquiry and of society (2001:10)

### *Co-operative/collaborative inquiry - research circle*

In my reading of the literature on participatory research, as I looked for ways to structure the researching process after the first phase, co-operative inquiry (Heron and Reason 2001) seemed to offer an open, democratic space for collaboration through negotiation, on the terms of all those involved. John Heron and Peter Reason describe co-operative inquiry as a way to work together to:

...understand your world, make sense of your life and develop new and creative ways of looking at things and furthermore learn how to act to change things you want to change and find out how to do things better. Co-operative inquiry is thus a form of action research; it is concerned with revisioning our understanding of our world, as well as transforming practice within it (*Ibid.*: 179).<sup>16</sup>

This approach has a correlate in the Swedish ‘research circle’. The research circle<sup>17</sup> in Sweden can be said to have evolved in the 1970s from a tradition of study-circles that dates back to the beginning of the 1900s and that played an important part in the growth of the popular movements of the 1970s. One form of the research circles that exist today has its roots in Lund University, where a need was felt for an exchange of ideas between academics and trade union activists in more flexible forms than the conventions of the academy allowed (Holmstrand 1997:98).

A research circle builds on collaboration between participants where ‘everyone’s knowledge and experiences are of equal worth and use. The participants have mutual respect for each other and for one another’s competence. Further, when a research circle starts there is a wish among the participants to bring about some change (Eriksson cited in Härnsten 1994:15).

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<sup>16</sup> For a more detailed understanding of co-operative inquiry see Reason, 1994, Heron and Reason, 2001, Heron, 1998.

<sup>17</sup> For a more detailed account of research circles in Sweden, see Holmstrand (1997).

More significant to my research was, however, Treleaven's description of what she called a collaborative inquiry (1994). Her description of engaging in praxis, explicitly recognizing gendered tensions, and attempting to unsettle them, came closest to what I saw unfolding before me.

These authors offered to me an inspiring way to look upon research and to understand the world, and an appealing form of methodology for carrying it out. They provided the justification for producing knowledge as an output of a participatory process, wherein people brought their own knowledge and experience to co-creating an analysis and conclusions that might lead to new ways of thinking and acting. It provided the possibility to count as research a process in which the participants themselves shape the inquiry and together structure the process.

### **Tools of analysis**

As I began to write the analyses, I needed to find ways to negotiate the third discourse that constrained my work. It was to the work of poststructural feminist writers that I turned to understand questions of power and resistance and the contradictions from the 'fields'. It necessitated the discussion on development and gender with which I start the next section. I then outline the conceptual tools that helped me in my analysis: gender as an analytical category, theorisations of power, resistance and agency, the use and analysis of discourse in its different forms and an understanding of subjectivity. The aim is to give a brief outline of the concepts and then explain how I use them in my work.

#### *Theorising development & gender*

Throughout chapter one I referred to development activities to mean the changes undertaken by the women and other groups within the village. Development is a term that is highly loaded. Initially I consciously avoided using the term, choosing instead 'livelihoods' or 'well-being' to circumvent the baggage of 'development,' laden as it is with implicit assumptions of a linear progression towards a future already possessed elsewhere. However, I choose to use it here, firstly because men and women, both in Drevdagen and Nayagarh, spoke of development activities, which in its most direct form, I took to mean the changes that they wished to see in their villages. Secondly, because development was also something that was sought by outsiders to be done for them (for example in State and regional policies, development agents), it was an important frame of reference. Moreover, I came from the department of *rural development studies* and thus carried assumptions about 'local' development with me that needed to be examined.

I start first with the second meaning of development as something that was meant to be done for the women and men in the villages. The case study of Nayagarh is framed very much within a 'development context.' There was the women's development programme, there were development agencies and NGOs active in the field, funds were applied for from Indian and foreign development

agencies and the government had started several development programmes, many of them specifically aimed at women, such as the Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas. Plainly visible here, in my opinion, is the way in which the concept of development is linked to 'women.' Drevdagen was perhaps where I was more wary of using the term development. It was not a 'development context' as it is normally understood, located as it is in a country in the North with a relatively high standard of welfare. Yet, I found that there were similar assumptions being made about development. Referring to the terminology used for the rural areas in Sweden, Forsberg criticises the use of the term 'rural development,'

Is it really underdevelopment that is the problem in the countryside? And if it is so, underdeveloped in relation to what? In the term is an assumed criticism of the countryside from the point of view of the city and the urban as the norm. The countryside is compared to this and is considered different (1996:36).

Yet, the women in Drevdagen themselves spoke of development; but the meanings that they gave to the term differed from the dominant discourse in both places. Local management meant giving an alternative meaning to development. It was something that the men and women wanted for themselves. It was development 'from below.' This made it important for me to theorize development rather than just discard it. To conceptualise the processes in both places, feminist literature on postcolonial development<sup>18</sup> has been useful to understand, question and expand 'development.' Light Carruyo writes,

Development as a field of research and practice provides a language to talk about the relationships between nations and economies, but continues to struggle with understanding the complicated relationships between people. Understanding these relationships, as well as people's hopes, dreams, visions and the meanings that they give to the process of improving their quality of living, is at the centre of understanding development (Carruyo 2003:200).

I have found this understanding of development with its emphasis on the struggles over meaning and encompassing dreams and hopes of people trying to improve their lives useful not only to understand development in Nayagarh but also in the context of Sweden. Development does not look the same in every context and progress is defined locally. However the usage of the term also shows surprising similarities in dominating assumptions in the two places of what development is and how it was meant to take place. And in both places, 'doing development' was linked to gender – to ideas about equality between men and

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<sup>18</sup> There is no simple definition of post-colonial development studies as Ruth Frankenberg and Lata Mani point out. They theorize the term in three different instances and illustrate how it can be different in different contexts and histories (2001). In its basic sense postcolonial feminism pays serious attention to the experience of Western colonialism and its ongoing contemporary effects.

women and about empowerment. The case studies indeed suggest that development and gender are inextricably interconnected and often regulated through similar institutional means.

There is a tension in the way that I use the term 'gender' in this thesis. Drawing on the distinction made by Rajeswari Sundar Rajan (1999), I use gender not only as an analytical category but I study how it is made into an 'issue'. 'Gender' as an issue, a problem (*Ibid.*:2) in the South has been seen as something that needs to be dealt with within development and resource management. In its narrowest sense, it has been translated to mean women – and has meant the inclusion of women, empowerment of women, and recognition of women. In Sweden, this issue of gender is framed as equality for everyone. Sweden has a special term, *jämställdhet*, to denote equality between women and men. It is not a category of analysis and Eduards provides some useful thoughts on how *jämställdhet*, gender and *kön* (translated literally to sex but used also used in the sense of gender) are used in Swedish and wider feminist and gender literature (Eduards 1995).

In Drevdagen, gender was seen as an issue of equality and responsibility, such that everyone (especially the women) was 'free' to be and 'needed' to be a part of village development and its organizations. It meant arguing for women's inclusion in associations and committees. In the background also was an awareness of the debates about the out-migration of women from the countryside that had caused a great deal of consternation among politicians. 'Women' have been an important factor in public debates about rural depopulation. In some research as well, the limited options available to women in male-dominated rural communities has been debated and shown to be a cause of women's flight from the rural areas (Dahlström 1996). In India, the fate of women has been closely linked to mainstream development agendas and not only due to feminist efforts. "Suddenly women are everywhere. Development experts cite 'gender bias as the cause of poverty in the Third World'; population planners declare their commitment to the empowerment of Indian women; economists speak of the feminization of the Indian labour force" (Tharu and Niranjana 2001:494). "Gender' as a point of crisis in the cultural, social, and political space of nation (Sundar Rajan 1999:4) is linked closely to development and the modernizations of 'woman.' "Development is still the measure of the status of countries of the Third World" (*Ibid.*:10) and debates on gender have meshed directly with and actively reconstituted prevailing conceptions of India's national identity, and the reconfigured primacy accorded to development (John 1999:110).

The need to include women in local organizations is a position that recurs also in Nayagarh but here it is also linked to empowerment. The assumption is that empowerment logically follows development, and *vice versa*, and that the one comes with the other. As Naila Kabeer writes,

The persuasiveness of claims that women's empowerment has important policy payoffs in the field of fertility behaviour and demographic transition, children's welfare and infant mortality, economic growth and poverty alleviation has given rise to some

unlikely advocates for women's empowerment in the field of international development, including the World Bank, the major UN agencies and the OECD-DAC group (2001:17).

In such invocations of gender and empowerment, "...women' seems to stand in for the subject (agent, addressee, field of inquiry) of feminism itself. There is a sense, therefore, in which the new visibility is an index of the success of the women's movement. But clearly this success is also problematic" (Tharu and Niranjana 2001:495). The need to contextualize and understand women's agency in its specific environment, and to question assumptions about what development, empowerment and gender meant for the women in each case became an important research question in both Nayagarh and Drevdagen.

Development visions are context specific interventions and yet development is also about being ahead, pulling the present behind and building futures in relation to particular pasts (*c.f.* Tsing 2003). According to Ien Ang, the nature of global capitalist modernity is such that at the international level the option for the non-white, non Western 'other' is either to 'Westernize' or be ostracized from the 'world community' or 'family of nations' (2001:402). 'Development' has been positioned as the way to reach this state of Westernization, with assumptions of a linear progression into modernity that has been synonymous with what Ang terms as the white/Western hegemony. Jane Parpart and Marianne Marchand call for a need to deconstruct this development discourse, and to go beyond the need to see women from the South as vulnerable, helpless victims. They write, "The post-colonial literature, with its focus on the discourse of the powerful, offers important insights into the forces silencing women, but it has less to say about the way women actively construct their own identities within the material and discursive constraints of their lives" (2001).

By studying women's attempts to gain influence over their environments in two very differently 'developed' places in relation to their centres but also in relation to each other, I bring together very diverse experiences. Participatory inquiry with women in Drevdagen brought up important questions of the space they had for exercising agency and determining what counted as development. By contrasting this with the material from India, I study how recourse to what may appear as similar discourses by various actors in the two places, have very different material effects. This opens up a space for deconstructing dominant notions of development and the effects it may have on the lives of real men and women.

### *Gender as an analytical category*

Gender as an analytical category is the organization of social relations between and among men and women. Although there are gender differences among men or among women, linked to ideas about sexuality (Connell 2003), in its most common usage gender refers to the social differences ascribed to the male or female body, the knowledge that establishes meanings about sexual difference (*c.f.* Scott 1988). Using de Lauretis' allegory of 'technologies of gender,' "we might then say, (like sexuality) gender is not a property of bodies or something originally

existent in human beings, but the set of effects produced in bodies, behaviours, and social relations, in Michel Foucault's words, by the deployment of a complex political technology" (1989b:3). And yet the body is important or, as Moira Gatens puts it lucidly, there is no neutral body, "...the subject always is a sexed subject." There are at least two kinds of bodies; the male body and the female body. The very same behaviours (whether they be masculine or feminine) have quite different personal and social significances when acted out by the male subject on the one hand and the female subject on the other. As she writes further, if one accepts the notion of the sexually specific subject, that is male or female subject, then one must dismiss, or at least as I see it, seriously qualify the notion that patriarchy only can be characterized as a system of social organization that valorises the masculine gender over the feminine gender (1991a:145). I pursue this argument in chapter eight. Furthermore this reasoning also applies to other differences like colour and age that are vested in the body. I thus regard gender differences between the sexes not as the natural order of things, but historically, culturally and socially created. Sexual difference plays an important role in organizing social relationships and differences in power. Both gender and sex are forms of knowledge. They are articulated by language, and their meanings have changed over time and across cultures (Scott 1999:71). Thus it is the articulation of sexual difference that becomes interesting to study and how relationships of power may be consolidated by appeals to sexual difference (*Ibid.*:78).

It follows that I accept that there is no overarching patriarchy that subjugates women to men (*e.g.* Bhavnani, Foran and Kurian 2003; Pringle and Watson 1990). Gender relations are established in both multiple and complex ways and take different forms in different institutional contexts. "Different societies differ...on the specific social interpretation that they give to biological difference... Some societies allow large areas of overlap in the lives of men and women while others are organized in ways which maintain a rigid segregation" (Kabeer 1999:5). In some respects Drevdagen and Nayagarh fall into these two different categories in the interpretation they give to biological difference: one where overlap is regarded as desirable and the other where the ideal is a segregation between what women do and what men do. But my research also shows that ideal images of social practices need not correspond to how life is lived in the everyday. Conflicting practices thrive at the same time and in the same place. By looking at gender relations in each particular context one is able to see how power and gender relations express themselves in particular ways. Issues of gender cannot be seen in isolation from issues of class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation (Bhavnani 2001; hooks 2001; Spelman 2001) and other 'axes of difference' (Fraser and Honneth 2003). Gender relations are dynamic and continually in motion.

Nevertheless, there is a regularity in gender relationships as they recur in very recognizable forms within particular places. Norms are challenged by both women and men but a great deal of effort is also spent in trying to reproduce them by both women and men, accounting for what some feminist research has called the 'sluggishness' of gender relations. One difference between men and women as groups is, as Kabeer writes, that men have a collective interest as men in organizations of social life which give them a privileged status; they do not only

have a strategic gender interest in resisting attempts at transformation, but also have the greatest capacity to resist such transformation (1999:28). While struggles take place on a terrain that is already skewed, different groups can and do exercise power. In the thesis I thus look at the instances that women did exercise power *generatively* (Cooper 1995; McNay 2000)<sup>19</sup> and the processes that took shape around them.

What may be considered instances of equal relations between individual men and women exist within larger orders of inequality between the sexes, where being male is privileged and women are disadvantaged (Florin 2004:7). These individual and group processes are mutually dependent on each other. They may be likened to Maxine Molyneux's practical gender needs and strategic gender interests in the sense that individual relations are those that are manifest in day to day life and strategic interests are those that are a product of the underlying inequalities (1985). But as I discovered, while it is difficult to separate the two, the individual and the collective do not live harmoniously and processes of individual and collective equality may themselves be conflictual.

Now that greater knowledge about other communities has made it increasingly difficult to sustain the idea that there is something 'natural' about the organization of gender division of roles and responsibilities in any particular community, resistance to change has tended to take on the rationale of the 'sanctity of culture' (Kabeer 1999:7). This according to Kabeer moves us away from disputes over 'facts' to disputes over 'values,' over not how things are but should be. But as she points out culture is constantly changing and in many ways this becomes apparent in both case studies as women and men in both places question dominant images of Indian or Swedish culture.

### *Power, resistance and agency*

Power may be seen as a matrix structuring social relations (Cooper 1995:2) of development and resource management in the villages of Drevdagen and Nayagarh. The concept of power and the question of how to analyse it has been central to debates in the social sciences. Foucault's understanding of power as relational and as emanating from everywhere has been fundamental to how I understand relationships of power being negotiated during the course of my research. In his conception:

...power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society (1990:93).

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<sup>19</sup> A great deal of feminist literature has theorised on Foucault's conceptualisation of power as relational and power's productive capacity. Both McNay and Cooper offer interesting examples that I outline in the following sections.

This conceptualisation of power has enabled feminists to move from an oppositional discourse where power is something that men possess to looking at the greater complexity of women's experiences. "Where there is power, there is resistance and yet or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (*Ibid.*:95). Power thus may be seen not as a resource to be possessed but rather as pervasively filtering through everyday life through language and practices.

Power can thus be seen as both oppressive but also productive and generative (Cooper 1995; McNay 2000). This in turn has consequences for understanding agency. Criticising Foucault's work for the neglect of the view of the subject and for neglecting the 'specificity of the sexed body' (Grosz 1990) even in his theses on sexuality, feminists such as Lois McNay (2000) and Davina Cooper (1995) have built upon his work for an understanding agency on the part of subjects that may also exercise power. According to McNay the terms resistance and dislocation have in some respects truisms in that are used to describe any situation where individual practices do not conform dominant norms and impute to them a kind of inherently subversive status. She suggests however that if one was to accept that individual practices never reflect overarching norms in a straightforward fashion, then the widely deployed notion of resistance loses analytical purchase (2000:4). She believes that a more precise and varied account of agency is needed to explain the differing motivations and ways in which groups struggle over, appropriate and transform cultural meanings and resources. In this sense, agency may be seen in attempts to manage the often discontinuous, overlapping or conflicting relations of power and as autonomous action in the face of often overwhelming cultural sanctions and structural inequalities (McNay 2000).

According to Eduards, the seemingly gender-neutral concept of agency has an obvious male bias. Agency is limited here to the capacity to initiate, guide and control developments – "to executive power". The collective actions of women are also measured against this yardstick. She believes, however, that women's collective actions have a value in themselves. "By defining the need for women to act together as women, oppression comes, in principle under attack, since sexual power relations are built on the notion of human, gender-neutral, agency" (1992:96).

Such an exercise of agency is relational but it is also an expression of power as productive and generative. It has the potential to disrupt the relations of power that keep in place gendered norms that are a source of domination. In such a case resistance to the *status quo* may be countered by resistance to change in everyday material practices. Like others (*e.g.* Rönnblom 2002; Treleaven 1998:55), I believe that a distinction has to be made between resistance to change on the one hand, and resistance to the *status quo* on the other. Women's organizing leads to resistance but resistance also leads to organizing (Eduards 2002:14). In the thesis I seek to theorize how power relations are realized not in relation to one particular institution, such as a University (*e.g.* Treleaven, 1998) or the formal political system (Rönnblom, 2002), but in two sites where various actors from different

institutional settings, such as the village arena, development agencies and the university, challenged and reproduced relationships of power in specific 'marginal' spaces.

Cooper (1995:21-24) uses a paradigm with four modes of power: ideology, force, discipline and resources. It is the fourth mode – resources as power, that I want to point to specifically. Although Foucauldians reject the notion of power as a resource, Cooper suggests the converse. She writes mainly about resources that may be possessed by individuals: money, legal rights, time. In this thesis access to resources as a mode of power has been an important way to think about the forests and resource management. "Resources are not only material assets, they are effective arguments, symbolic contracts, labels, texts, and informations" (Jackson 1998:317). The work with the forests impacted upon social processes, decisions, preferences and relationships. The forests as a resource to which everyone theoretically had equal access and yet only some appeared to have the authority to do so made the negotiations around it complex and provided glimpses of how power was negotiated.

Participation in the struggle for local management of the forests and village development was interwoven with a variety of structural power relations. In Drevdagen some of the important crosscutting axes along which relations were organized were age, whether one was native to the village, the family one belonged to, class and in Nayagarh also caste. These axes intersected with each other and were more or less tangible in different situations. In both places, there was the issue of an unequal relation between the centre and periphery invoked by the local women and men but also by outsiders active in the villages. In relation to each other as cases there is another spatial relation of power, between a modern and 'developed' country and one that was on the path to modernisation, a difference not directly tangible but latent in the references to how development was explained in both places. These differences were not parallel to gender but were gendered.

"Power is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself" (Foucault 1990:86), that it is not perceived as political. By studying how power is realized in everyday interactions, the social is given political meaning. What is political is "not defined by the *locus* of its operation but by its nature as a *process*" (Hay 2002:3), that is, by acknowledging the relations of power at work. Thus I see politics taking place not only in relation to the centre and the state organs but between and among women and men in the space of the villages and at the university.

### *Discourse and Subjectivity*

Discourse and subjectivity are two interrelated concepts that are used in this thesis to understand the relations of power and the struggle over meanings in relation to local development and management. Here, I first briefly review some of the ways in which discourse is understood and then describe how I have used discourse/s in the thesis. Definitions of discourse span a whole range of meanings. At its most

basic level discourse is definable as language in use. However, discourse is also much more than language. Discourse may be seen as the set of social practices that make meaning and have material effects. In other words one way of using discourse, as defined by Foucault is to understand it less as the actual utterances/texts that are produced but as the rules and structures which produce particular utterances and texts (see Mills 1997:7). “This necessarily draws attention to the power of discourse to delimit topics of analysis and to the power to *make* discourse” (Bacchi 1999:41). The first, *i.e.* the power of discourse, may be seen in discursive practices that provide subject positions, as subjects are produced through power-knowledge relations (Foucault 1990). By analysing these utterances and texts proponents of discourse analysis have sought to shed light on the rules and practices that are taken for granted, *i.e.* to make visible processes by which meanings are established and taken as obvious. It has been considered important to move from more obvious interpretations to look at subtler and more insidious discriminatory and insidious discursive practices (Mills 2002:208) in order to be able to interrupt them.

Discourses are, however, not fixed but are the site of constant contestation of meaning (Mills 1997:16). Subjects are able to engage in novel actions and to modify social conditions, *i.e.* they have the power to make discourse, and they possess self-awareness. Following Julian Henriques, Wendy Hollway, Cathy Urwin, Couze Venn and Valerie Valkerdine’s definition, I employ the concept of subjectivity to refer to individuality and self-awareness – the condition of being a subject – but understand in this usage that subjects are dynamic and multiple, always positioned in relation to particular discourses and practices and produced by these – the condition of being subject (1998:3).

In the thesis I use the material produced during the course of my research (information from notes, transcriptions from recordings, journal entries etc.) both as descriptive of the particular contexts, in some sense as a ‘realist tale’, but also as discourse. While a realist tale is an attempt to provide an account of ‘what happened’ I also analyse the description as text to foreground what is the background in the realist descriptions. As Treleaven puts it, I have tried to adopt an approach that required “learning to see the effects of power in contrast to seeing the expected realities” (1998:71).

### **The practicalities of the approach**

In 1998 I carried out exploratory studies in India and in Sweden to see if there was interest in the villages in working together and, if there was, what the work might be, and what the villagers’ interest in collaboration might be. I tried to create a space for undertaking a research journey together. A process account, methodology and reflections on the collaborative inquiry are described at length in chapter six. I do so in order to show how methodology was itself a part of the empirical observations or the process as it unfolded in Drevdagen and also to put in context my role in the flow of events in Drevdagen. Because I went about my research in an unconventional way in the main area, *i.e.* Sweden, and not in the

same way as in India, it alerted me to the importance of methodology and 'process' both in research and in development work.

### *In the 'field'*

#### Nayagarh

My first visit to Nayagarh was in 1993 when I visited the BOJBP (Friends of Trees and Living Beings) to speak about their work for an M.Phil dissertation (Arora-Jonsson 1995). I travelled to Nayagarh again in December 1998 when I started my Ph.D. studies to speak to the women there about their experiences of the movement for community forestry and the ways in which they exercised agency with respect to forest management and local development. When in Nayagarh I stayed in Kesharpur and made day trips to the villages to meet the *mahila samitis* (women's groups) that are at the centre of my discussion. I carried out unstructured group interviews with the women's groups, individual interviews with women in the groups, and with the men working with the forest movement. I also visited families in their homes, attended meetings of *mahila samitis* and of the BOJBP and *Mahasangha*, and carried out interviews with an NGO and other researchers working in the area. I returned to Nayagarh again in 1999 to discuss at greater depth the issues that had emerged in our exploratory discussions. I interviewed members of the groups that were most active in the district. Another interview was carried out again in February 2004 with the Oxfam officer in which, he discussed his work with Oxfam and the forest movements in retrospect.

Although I abandoned the idea of working with video as a specific research method, it provided an important tool for communication while in the field. It stimulated additional questions and discussions as we watched the videotapes of the interviews together, and provided important insights into how research methods are not merely neutral tools.

#### Drevdagen

A first meeting with a man from Drevdagen took place at SLU in 1997 where I learnt about the work they were doing in the village. Initial interviews in Drevdagen were carried out in October 1998 and May 1999 and I interviewed six men and twenty-three women in the village. The women were between the ages of 28 and 80 years though most of them were in their 40s. Most of the men that I spoke to were older. The collaborative inquiry with the women took place between June 1999 and June 2000.

We met approximately every 6-7 weeks interrupted during Christmas and summer holidays when the time in between was longer. In chapter six I write about how I established the framework for the inquiry and the methods that were used - such as story-telling, discussion of action-situations, photovisioning - as well as how ground rules were established and the facilitation of the group was carried out. Since I often stayed on in the village for some days before and after we met together, informal meetings and conversations with men and women in the village contributed greatly to developing my understanding of the village. On a

few occasions, I met some of the women who participated in the inquiry process also outside the village. The inquiry ended somewhat abruptly because of a crisis in the village although I visited the village with a group of students and met some of the women in September 2000. As a group we met again in September 2002 when we discussed what I was planning to write in my thesis. By then it was a significantly different group that gathered together. Some women who had formed the core group in the inquiry process had moved out and a few new women chose to join in our discussions. At that time, in September 2002, I also interviewed two men who had been active in the village association at the time of the main inquiry.

The material generated

The bulk of the material from Nayagarh is based on my interviews with people. Many of the interviews and discussions with the women in Nayagarh were video-filmed and the others were taped that were transcribed by me with the help from others there while I was in Nayagarh. I also have fieldwork reports, journal entries and documentation of meetings and events that I attended while I was there. The data base for my research in Drevdagen consists of interviews notes and transcripts, minutes of our joint meetings (we did not tape the conversations at the meetings and I took notes), reports and summaries written by me that were fed back into the group, the Drevdagen newsletter (especially the reports on our get-togethers), journal entries, and records of my thoughts, musings and insights over a period of 3 years, including comments made by the women on a draft paper in Swedish of my analysis. The record of my own statements are somewhat patchy since I was the one taking notes during the discussions. The notes of my own statements are based mainly on what I wrote down later in the process accounts of the get-togethers. This made it more difficult for me to analyse my statements in the conversations in terms of 'text'. My conversations and discussion with my colleagues at the university have also formed a part of the material for analysis. I do not have the insights into the relationships between outsiders and insiders involved in the process of local management as I do about the process in Drevdagen where I was also involved. Instead I look at some texts written by outsiders as one example of how this relationship is articulated (chapter eight).

I have been fortunate to have received permission to cite interviews carried out by Manoj Pattanaik in 1998/9. He was working on a book about the forest movement in Nayagarh during the time of my research. I have used his transcripts and refer to his book on the BOJBP. In Drevdagen as well I have been able to cite interviews and a report from a researcher, Madeleine Granvik who carried out an evaluation of SLU's involvement in Drevdagen in 2000. Her material provides an analysis of the situation by a person unrelated to the village and not known to me previously. The work of both researchers strengthens the case for working with multiple perspectives on the same phenomena. I now go on to explain how I analysed this material.

### *At my desk*

The material especially from Drevdagen has ranged over a number of issues and different strains. Questions were brought into the group as they cropped up in the course of the everyday lives of the participants. We did not go further with all the many thoughts that arose within the inquiry. I worried about point as I became aware of what it entailed to write the experiences as an academic researcher. What was the academic research in all of this was a question I asked myself and was asked by others at the university? Among the various threads of inquiry, I choose some to work with in this thesis. My involvement in the inquiry has helped me along the way to thought through ‘thoughtful practice’ (*i.e.* if theory is seen as thoughtful practice), with responsibility for choosing what to select and focus on in ways which are justified by the ‘lived and felt experience’ and the meanings it had for the participants.

Initial analysis has been shared with the women in the group, but the writing of the thesis is not a collaborative process although I draw heavily on our collaborative practice and thinking. Therefore when I write about the inquiry in chapter six, I switch between ‘we’ and ‘I’ and do this for a purpose. It is to distinguish between the shared experience of the inquiry process and the individual analysis presented in this thesis as I look back on ‘us’. I was a part of the inquiry and changed by it, however in most places I use ‘they’ or the ‘women in the inquiry’ because the focus was nonetheless on the lives of the women. Further discussion about my role in the research is taken up in relation to concrete events presented in the analysis in chapter seven, and in the reflections on the methodology in chapter nine. The analysis of the two cases parallel to each other is central to the design of the research. Below I briefly present the methods by which I carried it out.

#### Explicating the diffraction (comparison):

There are different levels of analysis of the material in this thesis and these I explain further at the end of the section on the tools of analysis as I explain how I analyse the different chapters. Here I give a brief outline of the methods I used to think about the quite different material from the two cases and then go on to describe how I analysed the material in different chapters.

- One aspect of the comparison has been to *freeze time* when analysing the material in their specific contexts. This has meant that I have taken as important that which was said and done at the particular time to explain the present. The other aspect of this has been to freeze the activities. By this I mean that the focus is on the action that was taken and the words that were used. These are analysed as acts that solidify meanings and an indication of the underlying assumptions or the structures of meaning rather than properties of specific people. For example this has meant scrutinising relationships of power at work in the existing situation rather than accepting tradition as an argument to explain certain behaviour.

- I have used the cases to ask questions of each other. I have first looked at the various ways in which meanings were established in each of the two contexts about the categories that were used rather than taking them as given (*e.g.* forests, equality, development). This entailed looking at the societal context and to study the discourses (*e.g.* state policies on gender, development and resource management debates etc.) that men and women call upon to explain their experiences and talk about themselves and others. I consciously *reverse the gaze* on questions such as development and gender equality, *i.e.* instead of assuming that development and equality are aspects that Sweden has reached in comparison with India, I examine instead the ways in which the concepts are constructed in each place.
- My relationship to these two places was of course different and that would also account for some difference in seeing different facets of the organizing in these places. I have tried to account for these differences as I try and locate myself in the text in both the cases. By trying to be reflexive about my work I have strived to be objective about my own subjectivity or I have tried to adopt a *critical subjectivity* (Reason, 1994).

In chapters 3, 4 and 5 I focus on the women's and men's constructed meanings that are foregrounded in a realist tale concerned with what happened. In the account of the inquiry in chapter 6 and a part of chapter 7 I focus on a 'constructivist tale' (Lather 1991) which interprets the meanings of those experiences building on a collaborative analysis undertaken with those involved. In the latter chapters, however, "I reverse the examination to make readings of the discursively constructed backgrounds within which those texts are produced, thereby foregrounding what was previously taken-for-granted" (Treleaven 1998:65) in discussions and in practice.

In chapter seven I examine the material from within the inquiry to analyse how the women took up various discursive positions as they related to discourses and practices of being women, rural or marginal, and of developing their countryside. It is important to be aware of the social and historical context in which words and practices are produced. The contexts were given new meanings and subjectivities changed in the group during the course of the inquiry as we in the group looked back on experiences differently. At the same time as I outline these subject positions I also examine how the women discursively constructed a diffuse, time bound and contextual identity for themselves that was in itself a form of collective action. Studies of collective action tend not to focus on individual subject positions, while a major part of gender and feminist studies has focussed on individual subjectivities and not on conceptualising subjectivities collectively (*c.f.* Roseneil 1995). I look to how individual subject positions were mutually constitutive of a collective position and in doing so provide some insights on two projects that normally are dealt with separately.

I study 'norms as discursive practices' (*c.f.* Wetherell and Edley 1999) that are maintained and cemented in small acts but may also be disrupted. The story

especially in chapter eight and nine “is no longer about the things that have happened to women and men and how they reacted to them; instead it is about how the subjective and collective meanings of women and men as categories ...have been constructed” (Scott 1988:6). I also illustrate how the women’s resistance to dominant discourses came from a desire to give different meanings to the work in the villages. This chapter is based on the material from the inquiry and also from my conversations, interviews and meetings with the men in the forest and village associations and committees, colleagues at my university and with the development agency in Nayagarh. Following Treleaven I have tried to treat the transcribed stories as objects of analysis, while respecting the integrity of the women’s and men’s experiences and the meanings they gave them, which are now reversed to the background. In my case, such an approach has not been entirely simple. I take this up in the last chapter.

In chapter ten, I look for the different ways in which notions of empowerment and development were constructed by different actors in relation to the two places. Here I also build upon texts by researchers on gender equality, empowerment, and development to map out the discourses that circulate in society as abstract value systems, the strains of which can be seen in the material as fragments of different discourses (*c.f.* Jaworski and Coupland 1999:7/8). I look to understand how women and men were achieving meaning at many levels, by exchanging meaning at the individual level but also by filling out patterns of social organizations, *i.e.* how micro-level social actions realize and give form to macro level social structures and how macro structures are carried through micro-structures (*c.f.* Jaworski and Coupland 1999:12). The rhetoric on empowerment and development was mutually constituted with the women’s subjectivities and shaped the ways in which they chose to organize in the different places. My concern is not with observed differences between the rhetoric and practice of empowerment in the two places, but on the politics of the discourses. It is to analyse what the ideas about gender and equality enable and what the actions they may limit and the ways in which these discourses express themselves in the politics of the personal and the collective.

It has been important to be sensitive to specificity but at the same time to be able to grasp large objects of inquiry such as the processes and ideas about development and gender that circulate in an increasingly globalized world. These ideas and discourses themselves bear the mark of a global language. I believe, like Nancy Fraser:

We also need approaches that promote our ability to think relationally and contextually, including frameworks that can connect various elements of the social totality, casting those elements not merely as ‘different’ from one another but as mutually interconnected....We need, finally, theoretical frameworks that permit us to project utopian hopes, envision emancipatory alternatives, and infuse all of our work with a normative critique of domination and injustice (1995:159).

Although it is not a theoretical framework that I provide, I hope that by mapping some of the links between what may seem as discrete discursive contexts, I am able to further thinking on the construction of domination in the two places but also to emancipation.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter outlined the theoretical and methodological underpinnings for this thesis in order to engage with the questions that I outline in the first chapter: of the ways in which rural development and resource management are constructed, the implications of undertaking participatory research for the participants and the discourses that give meaning to everyday experiences but may also be challenged. In order to answer these questions I direct attention to the social and material context of development and resource management, to participatory and feminist methodologies to be able to ground the research in this context and finally to the poststructural and postcolonial theories in order to deconstruct the obvious and understand the politics in the processes in the two places. An elaboration of the collaborative inquiry and reflections on it are presented in chapter six and reflections on the overall social relations of the research act in the concluding chapter.

I have chosen to adopt a narrative style that accommodates the histories and lives of particular men and women active in village life in these two places, at the same time as acknowledging the influences of the wider discursive contexts. Pseudonyms have been used for individuals mentioned. Some of the women involved in the inquiry in Drevdagen expressed surprise at seeing their names changed in the paper that I sent them – they might have liked their names to stay in the text; but I decided to make anonymous all the people in the stories recorded here. “Are you not doing exactly what you had not wanted to do in a participatory process...deciding for them?” I was asked by a student when I spoke of my work in class. This is one of the many questions that remain.



## **PART II**

### **A FRAME OF REFERENCE: THE STUDY IN INDIA**



The shady corner in a village in Nayagarh.



## CHAPTER THREE

### Forest relations and the women's brigades: everyday life in Nayagarh

#### Introduction

In this chapter, I examine how the women's groups that emerged in the context of a women's development programme in Nayagarh organized themselves in relation to the community forestry organizations in their villages. Formed initially as savings and credit groups as a measure to involve women in forestry activity, some of these women's groups or *mahila samitis* became the spaces from where women sought to negotiate gender relations in their villages. While I foreground the story of the women's groups, the community forestry movement and its organizations form an important background.

Thus, in the first part of this chapter, *Forests, gender and development*, before I enter into the case study, I present a very brief description of changes within forestry and the ways in which marginal spaces and needs were created in relation to larger national interests. I then look at some approaches to gender in the development discourse over time. In the second part, *Forest communities in Nayagarh*, I start with a brief description of Nayagarh, its forests, and the ways in which the women related to them. The women's groups came about in the context of a movement that began in Kesharpur, the village that became known nationally and internationally for spearheading the community forestry movement in their own village and beyond. Here, I describe the history of the movement, its philosophy, the men who were active in it, and the women who are significant by their absence in the history as told by the movement's proponents, and in the written accounts of its activities. This is followed by the main part of the chapter, which is an account of women's activism within the women's groups and of the ways in which the groups related to the forest organizations. I examine how the forest organizations that helped to build the groups responded to the increasing activism by the women, and to the possibilities that the women had to go beyond the framework of the programme.

Much of the account of the history of the movement in the first section has been taken from prior field work carried out in Kesharpur in 1993 for another project (Arora-Jonsson 1995:23-30). It is an account where I do not always question the term, 'people' when mainly men have recounted the history of the villagers' activities. I noticed in hindsight that the term 'people' is generally used instead of men and therefore, in the present text, I have put *male* or *female*, and *caste* when I do know the specific identity, or a question mark when I do not. I do this in order to try to give a more precise picture of two of the important principles by which power is organized in the community, although there are certainly others. They are aspects that are obvious to the men and women involved but that get hidden in the

generalised terminology used in reports and public documents. This choice is not to minimise the importance of the revolutionary efforts of the men working with community forestry. It is a retrospective means to highlight that it is a history of the movement as presented primarily by the male leaders of the forest movement.

The section that follows describes the women's groups and is based on field work in Nayagarh in 1998-99. The major part of the account presented is based on the activities of the most active women's groups. For the sake of simplicity, I refer to these groups as 'groups in Nayagarh' throughout the thesis and specify what village they were from only when it is relevant. Though I focus attention on the groups that were most active, I also discuss some of the other women's groups that stayed within the bound of the formal programme, in order to be able to look at the different ways in which the women's groups related to the male-dominated organizations, and examine what makes some of them challenge established authority and unequal relations. This section is based primarily on the women's own accounts of their activities, and their stories of their work. I have marked the interview carried out by Manoj Pattanaik in 1998/99 with an asterisk \* in the text. Secondary sources like books, reports and official documents are also cited.

## **Forests, gender and development**

Although India's forest area per capita is among the smallest in the world, a large portion of the country's poor rural population depends to a significant extent on forests for its livelihood (Sundar 2001:1). Environmental degradation is a central part of the discourse on forest management. A narrative of deforestation was constructed that was used by the state to extend its authority in rural areas (Jefferey and Sundar 1999:20). The explanations given for deforestation are complex and have encompassed discussion of commercial interests as well as destruction by local communities. They have been used as a description of an objective physical situation to justify intervention. This standard 'deforestation narrative' has submerged alternative constructions of the 'forest problem' and ignored the contributions of villagers in the care of the forests (*Ibid.*).

The taking over of the forests as State property began during British rule. On an all-India basis the systematic public management of forests began in 1864, with the appointment of the first Inspector General of Forests. Simultaneously, a decision was taken to convert the forests into State property. This conversion of forest land to State property continued after India's independence in 1947 when the formerly private land belonging to the former states, the *zamindars* and the *taluqadars* (big landholders), came under State control. Feudal and customary rights were eroded, and the pressure on the forests continued to increase. Although the recognition of people's rights on forests as State property existed in post independence policy, this changed over time and in the revised forest policy of 1952, the emphasis shifted to prioritising national needs (Kant, Singh and Singh 1991). Commercial interests also became significant.

Today, Nayagarh comprises the former princely states of Nayagarh, Daspalla, and Khandpada. According to the people that I interviewed in Nayagarh, the destruction of the forests since Independence had led to serious problems. Large areas of forests were converted into agricultural land and much of the bamboo forest was leased out to paper mills. The forest produce on which the poor subsisted during the lean months became difficult to obtain. Villagers faced scarcities in fuelwood and small timber. At the same time a market evolved for these products, leading to even greater pressure on the forests. In some cases, due to the unavailability of sufficient fuelwood, people (women) cooked only once a day. Construction timber had to be purchased at a high cost or smuggled out of distant forests at great risk. The indirect effects were more severe. Streams dried up and heavy soil erosion on the denuded slopes adversely affected agriculture. The management of the forests was in the hands of the forest department but little was being done.

The policy of 1952 neglected the role of the local people in the management of the forests and failed to recognize that the State machinery could not manage such a vast resource in isolation. More was being taken out of the forests than was being put back into them. Yet local populations remained dependent on forest resources, and local needs still had to be met. This led to confrontations between the State's forest department which assumed the policing of the forests, leading in some cases to violence. The marginal status of forest areas in relation to what was defined as more important national interests, led authors to identify these as 'violent environments' as different groups and interests clashed over access and control of resources (Sundar 2001). Local communities in Orissa asked to be involved in forest management and began to protect their own patches of forests.

In the past few years the thrust towards greater state control has been accompanied by a parallel move towards greater decentralisation in resource management, a shift in which the national government, international agencies and development practitioners have been important actors (Agarwal 2001; Agrawal and Gibson 1999; Krishna 2004b). Community participation in resource management has become an accepted element of the discourse on forestry, so much so that it has led researchers to question whether this is indeed a new moral economy for India's forests (Jefferey and Sundar 1999). Roger Jefferey and Nandini Sundar explain the policy change as a conjunction of two contexts: (i) a wider shift in the models of governance and trends in political theory of which the rise of communitarianism in the eighties was an important phase, and (ii), the immediate history of joint forest management in India itself (*Ibid.*:25).

There were of course various reasons given in my interviews as to the why joint forest management was introduced, depending on who was asked. One reason given was that Joint Forest Management (JFM) was an attempt to encourage participation between local communities and the forest departments. Orissa was the first state to pass a resolution on the subject in 1988. However, as Jefferey and Sundar point out, Joint Forest Management is just one variant in a range of institutional forms that require community participation. Another variant is community forest management to describe situations where management has

emerged out of local initiatives (1999:17). The community forestry movement in Nayagarh is one such instance. Nevertheless, there has been considerable criticism of the male-dominated nature of these 'local' and 'community' efforts (Agarwal 1992; Agarwal 1997; Sarin 1998). International and Indian development efforts and the accompanying literature, over the years has sought to promote more equitable gender relations and the empowerment of women. Below, I outline some of the turns taken by the debates on gender and development, as recurrent notions that may be seen in the process in Nayagarh.

## **Gender and Development**

In this section, I begin with the changing trends within development policies that have sought to address unequal relations between women and men. The following account includes not only India's policies on women and development but the wider policy context of international agencies, non-governmental organizations and other actors. I then outline some specific programmes formulated for women, that existed also in Nayagarh and that the women encountered in various ways.

The approach to understanding gender has varied over the years. In the early 1970s and 80s, insights into women's exclusion from development, and the understanding that the trickle down effect of development was not really working (Boserup 1970), signalled the origins of the WID or the Women in Development approach that sought to integrate women in mainstream development work. WID was justified also by the need for development programmes effectiveness. This was followed by the WAD or Women and Development, an approach in which the self-organization of women was positioned as a key facet of analysis and practice (see Bhavnani, Foran and Kurian 2003 for overviews of these debates ; Braidotti et al. 1994; Jackson and Pearson 1998). The Gender and Development (GAD) approach came to replace the earlier two as the ambition grew to engage with the concept of gender, that is, to deal in mainstream development activity with the unequal relationships of power between men and women. The Swedish development agency became an important proponent of the mainstreaming approach that began to gain ground (see Hannan 2000). This approach, although transformatory in its intent and its incorporation of a complex analysis of power, has been criticised for being co-opted by the development machinery. Gender was transformed to become a technocratic measure and power relations between and among men and women were pushed out of the picture (Baden and Goetz 1998; Parpart, Connelly and Barriteau 2000). It resulted in a de-politicisation of women's issues in development, and turned gender into a matter of planning and monitoring rather than struggle (Arnfred:75). I return to these issues in chapter eight, where I take up a discussion of empowerment more explicitly.

The Gender and Development approach remains dominant today among aid agencies, scholars and lending agencies in discussions of the relationships between women's inequality and development processes. Although the progression from WID to WAD to GAD is discussed "almost canonically," (*Ibid.*) in actual practice the ways these approaches are implemented or used varies from place to place, and

there is not necessarily coherence in local development praxis. As the case study from Orissa illustrates, wider debates circulating in society about women and development are given their meanings in ways that may not be anticipated, not least through the medium of development programmes for women. More recently, Kumkum Bhavnani, John Foran and Priya Kurian have argued for a 'women, culture and development' approach that places women and gender at the centre, puts culture on par with political economy, and pays attention to critical practices, pedagogies and movements for social justice. In the many conceptual debates about the relevance of the categories of 'women' and 'gender', they write: "To our minds, 'woman' is more able than 'gender' to connote agency while simultaneously implying the need for centring gendered analyses" (2003:4).

### *Women's Programmes*

In India, the women's movement in the 70s and 80s is seen to be characterised as a shift from liberal demands for greater recognition of women's labour to more radical critiques of a development process that had reinforced patriarchal relations of inequality (John 1999:110). Sundar Rajan writes that in the discourse of post-colonial nationhood in India, that is, that of 'development,' women emerge as economic subjects. Here too a historical shift has occurred, from poor women being viewed primarily as *exploited* workers in the discourse of state socialism, to a widely consensual view of women as primarily *efficient* workers in the new liberalised economy (Sundar Rajan 1999:6). These shifts can be seen translated into the practices of development programmes meant for the women.

Family planning programmes, tailoring classes and income generation activities of various kinds have continued but in several places they have been supplanted by a stronger drive towards micro-credit schemes for women. There has been considerable critique of conventional women's programmes, such as family planning, by feminists in India who point to how these programmes keep women within their roles as mothers and wives. Conventional family planning programmes make "no attempt...to reinforce or envisage more egalitarian relationships or place responsibility on the man. In the world of the family welfare programme, a man who is not a male chauvinist is a contradiction in terms" (Tharu and Niranjana 2001:510).

None the less, over time there has been increasing attention to women's self-help groups and several of the development programmes initiated for women have aimed to work through the formation of such groups. Here I discuss specifically the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), that was replaced after some years by a programme for the Development of Women and Children in the Rural Areas (DWCRA), largely because of IRDP's failures in reaching poor rural women. IRDP provided credit to poor women and men but it was cited as a manifest failure in its Mid-Term Review (Kabeer and Murthy 1999:184). Citing the work done by Mayoux, Naila Kabeer and Ranjani Murthy point to what they see as one of the main problems in the programme, the biases and preconceptions of the primarily male bureaucracy responsible for the implementation of the programme.

Three main assumptions appeared to be at play in shaping programme delivery: that cultural norms of seclusion restricted all women's ability to undertake work outside the home; that the demand of domestic and child-care responsibilities applied uniformly to all women and necessitated home-based income-generating activities; and that all were women invariably secondary earners dependent on a primary male breadwinner. These assumptions were not borne out in reality" (*Ibid.*:182).

Assumptions about women in the formation and implementation of policy recurred also in the context in the Swedish context as I have pointed out earlier, and women's programmes have been criticised for casting all women in the rural areas in one mould.

DWCRA was designed as a woman-specific programme to help to overcome the gender biases of more generic interventions. It was largely funded by UNICEF. "It exclusively targeted women from poor households for participation in a programme intended to enhance their welfare and thus precluded direct competition with poor men" (*Ibid.*:186). However, in their analysis on the literature on DWCRA, Kabeer and Murthy found that:

...a dilution of the more innovative aspects of the programme occurred through a variety of (non-) practices." For example, the explicit link between women and children in the naming led the implementing officials only to target married women and the prevailing attitude remained a welfarist one. Loans for land purchase or irrigation were conspicuous by their absence although listed as potential activities in the programme (*Ibid.*: 187-189).

The reason that I focus on the DWCRA in this chapter is because it was a programme that was accessed by some of the women's groups in Nayagarh. The shift to seeing women as workers, (though exploitative in its own form) does not always filter down in the practices of implementing agencies. It is thus often a medley of practices and fragments of different discourses specific to each particular context that one may see in the study of Nayagarh to which I now turn.

## **The forest communities of Nayagarh**

Nayagarh district in the state of Orissa lies on India's eastern coast facing the Bay of Bengal. Orissa has a greater proportion of its people living below the poverty line than any other major state in India. For most people, living off the land is a precarious occupation, since more than three quarters of their holdings are so small as to be considered marginal and uneconomic (Human and Pattanaik 2000:3). Differences in wealth are extreme. Orissa has the largest tribal population in India that, like other tribal communities in India live on the edges of mainstream

society. Much effort has been spent on trying to 'develop' them. Their homes often lie in dense forests and in the mineral rich areas of Orissa. Access to these resources has been coveted by outside enterprises, including the State and many tribal populations have exploited and had their expropriated. However, with the exception of two *Kondh* tribe villages, the villages that I visited in Nayagarh did not have any tribal residents. The villages were populated by the 'general castes' such as the *khandait*, *chasa*, *kumithi*, *telegu* that are generally low in the caste hierarchy. The villages also had *Harijan* residents living in separate hamlets. *Harijan* is a term that means 'the people or the children of god' and was given by Gandhi to those who were formerly called the untouchables. In country-wide political and social movement many have chosen instead to call themselves *dalits*, or the oppressed. In this chapter I refer to them as the *Harijan* since that is how they referred to themselves in my interviews. *Harijan* and tribal populations are also called respectively the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes because of a schedule in the constitution that seeks to address the discrimination to which they are subjected. Both the scheduled tribes and scheduled castes are vulnerable groups in the social hierarchies, not only in Orissa but in the country at large.

The forests of Nayagarh play an important part in the lives of the people and in sustaining livelihoods, especially for the tribal populations. The forests are dry, deciduous, and *sal* (*shorea robusta*) is a common species. In addition to the timber used for housing, for furniture, many men and women from farming families gather supplementary foods from the forests and other produce, called non-timber forest products (NTFPs). In varying degrees, they are dependent on the forests for fuel, fodder, medicinal plants and timber. There are also contractors who log the forests for paper, pulp and timber and they employ local villagers for this purpose. This is done legally, that is, they have contractual rights assigned by the forest department, such as the special concessions provided to the paper mills in the bamboo forests, but there is also considerable illegal logging.

The forests are an important part of the identity of these communities and especially since the community forestry movement began in this area. The forests are a site both of work and leisure. Especially for some of the women that I interviewed, the forests formed a social space in which groups of women went out together to collect fuelwood. In some villages, women also patrolled the forests for its protection. Upper caste women, however, normally did not spend much time in the forests as it was considered inappropriate for women in their caste to go to the forests on their own. Yet they still said the forests were very much a part of their lives. For the younger women, especially from the lower castes who worked in the forests, the forests were a free space, away from the rules of the villages and prying mothers-in-law, but a space that was increasingly being restricted by forest protection efforts. In the densely forested areas around some tribal villages, at the same time as being a sanctuary, the forests were also the space where the women risked coming across aggressive illegal contractors out to log trees.

Traditionally in this area, community institutions (*in formal terms mostly men and upper castes*) have managed common issues as well as resources such as ponds, temple lands. In some of the villages such institutions took up protection of

degraded forests in their immediate vicinity. Those who spearheaded these initiatives were motivated by the need to conserve forest resources to meet their needs for forest products as well as to keep them for future generations. They linked the droughts, soil erosion, water regime disruption and loss of soil fertility to forest destruction and believed that an important way forward for village development was through forest protection. By the late 1960s, sporadic efforts for protecting the forests were already present in the Nayagarh area (Kant, Singh and Singh 1991). But it was in the village of Kesharpur that the, by now famous movement, *Bruksha O' Jeevar Bandhu Parishad*, Friends of Trees and Living Beings, first began.

### **Shaping the forests: the Friends of Trees and Living Beings**

Kesharpur is a village in the district of Nayagarh. The Friends of Trees and Living Beings (*Bruksha O' Jeevar Bandhu Parishad*) that began here has now swept over the entire district. The nearest town from Kesharpur is the district headquarters (also called Nayagarh), which takes about half an hour by car. The village lies at the foot of the Binjhagiri hill, now dense with trees and foliage, but that just thirty years ago was totally bare. The Kusumi river flows past Kesharpur and is fed by the many small streams from the hill that came back to life when the forests returned as a result of the untiring efforts of the men, women and children in these villages. There were about 800 people living in the village at the time of the studies (1998-9). Castes in the village include *Chasar (Khandait)*, *Telegu*, *Gond*, *Kewat*. Most of the women from these general castes take care of the homes, backyard plantations, and village upkeep and also work on small patches of land. The men are small farmers and landless labourers. The *Harijan* women also make bamboo goods for sale. In Kesharpur, most of the landless families belong mainly to the *Telugu* and *Harijan* castes. Out of the 800 people living in Kesharpur, only 13 women were landowners. In the neighbouring village of Manapur, out of 650 people, only 12 women owned land and in Binjhagiri it was one of 250.<sup>20</sup> There are no tribals in any of BOJBP's 22 villages and no muslims in any of the villages that I visited.

Many of the *Bruksha O' Jeevar Bandhu Parishad* men cited a particular incident when talking about the inception of their organization. The story goes that a (*male*) farmer unable to find wood for the cremation of his dead brother's body, threw the body into the river. This was apparently what totally appalled the villagers. Not only was his action bound to bring bad luck but it also brought home forcefully what had become obvious: 'if the situation continued as it was, soon they might not have even fuelwood for their daily needs'. Then in the early 1970s a prolonged spell of drought occurred for six consecutive years, and it was believed by the villagers that the drought was caused by the deforestation.

Narayan Hazari, one of the founders of the movement, writes in his account that Kesharpur used to be 'bedeviled by factionalism.' 'Factions (*men*) constantly ran

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<sup>20</sup> The numbers have been put together by Manoj K. Rathi, a staff member at the BOJBP office.

to the police and to the court to settle scores against the enemy.” Then in 1954, when he had just finished his matriculation,<sup>21</sup> along with a group of people (*young men*) he decided to ‘stop the rot’ and try and bring cohesion in the village. They talked to the people (*men, women? lower caste?*) and asked them what their priorities were. He writes that everyone (*probably men from cultivating castes/ general castes*) wanted something to be done about irrigation. Through cooperative, voluntary, community labour the people (*men and women, caste?*) renovated their public dams. They constructed a lower primary school together in 1958, a middle school in 1965 and a high school in 1970 (1990).

One of the great lessons of the movement, Hazari told me in an interview, was that whenever you work for social reconstruction, you must go for education. He quoted a Chinese proverb from one of his writings:

If you want to plan for one year go for agriculture, if you want to plan for a decade go for a well from which you can irrigate the fields, if you want to plan for a century build up a school.

He believed that first priority needed to be given to education because it created the requisite human resources. A number of school teachers and other villagers (*men, general castes*) got together in Kesharpur in 1976 to decide on their future and took up the protection of the forests as one of the area’s important needs. These young men went on to become the bulwark of social mobilization, political organization and economic development, not only for this village but also for the entire area. The group decided to motivate the villagers (*men and women*) about the need to protect forests and rejuvenate the degraded hill. They began with informal discussions with the villagers (*men, women?*) and organized a series of village meetings to talk about the need to protect the hill. Finally a decision was made to protect the root stock on Bhinjagiri hill so that it was allowed to grow into trees.

The villagers (*men and women?*) decided to use an innovative method called *thengapalli* (stick rotation). Four sticks were made and one member (*mainly male?*) each from four families patrolled the hill. In the evening, they would leave the sticks on the verandah of neighbouring four families, and the persons on whose verandah the sticks were placed would patrol on the succeeding day. The group’s attention gradually moved to the neighbouring Malati hill. The people living in the nine villages surrounding these hills were approached to discuss forest protection. The villagers (*men and women*) were also encouraged to involve themselves in a plantation programme organized with the help of volunteers of the National Social Service, although the plantation was opposed by some interests. The plantation programme was carried out in the Malati hills with a lot of effort but was upturned by other villagers (*men*) at the instigation of a quarry contractor.

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<sup>21</sup> He was professor in political science at Utkal University in Bhubaneswar, the state capital, when I interviewed him in 1994.

Nevertheless, the movement continued to spread and eventually twenty-two villages joined in.

The movement based itself on the Gandhian philosophy of self-sacrifice and equality. The men, women and children in the community undertook foot marches and hunger strikes as well as continuing their forest protection efforts. In February 1982 the National Social Service unit of the Utkal University in Bhubaneswar, the capital of Orissa, with the collaboration of the Nayagarh College NSS unit, organized a workshop on forest conservation. This was attended by four (*male, general caste?*) representatives from each of the twenty-two villages. The problems related to protection were discussed. The meeting was facilitated by social workers (*male, female? caste?*), educationists (*male, female? upper caste?*), and forest department officials (*men, upper caste?*). The need for an organization to foster activities and coordinate efforts in all the twenty-two villages was articulated at the workshop. A committee was formed with proportionate (*male*) representation from all the villages, and the principal objectives of the organization were decided. The people (*men*) at the workshop decided to name the organization *Bruksha O' Jeevar Bandhu Parishad* or the Friends of Trees and Living Beings.

In 1984, the BOJBP was registered as a voluntary agency. By the early 1990s it was apparent that a major problem had developed in movement. Although villagers' motivation was strong enough to protect the forests around them, the villagers (*women and men*) often went to other areas to meet their daily need of fuelwood. As a result, the BOJBP men tried to create greater awareness across the entire area, and to find alternative means of energy. In an interview in 1994 Hazari said:

In any movement there is no finality. Some people still cut trees. But you have to keep working...I do not think a very big thing has been achieved. There are a lot of forests in Nayagarh which we have not been able to conserve. But in perspective of the progressive destruction, the movement has made a significant impact. We have covered more than 1500 villages in *Padayatras*.<sup>22</sup> So far three hundred twenty four villages have started forest protection.

Eventually the movement spread even wider into adjoining blocks. Once an individual committee had expanded to cover a number of villages, or a federation of villages, it separated to become a sister organisation (*anchalik* level committee) of the *Bruksha O' Jeevar Bandhu Parishad* (BOJBP), working in consultation with the main body. The sister organisations had full autonomy in management and administration and the number of villages varied from eight to twenty-four. Village representatives were nominated by village institutions or village meetings in the respective villages.

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<sup>22</sup> A *padayatra* is a campaigning march on foot. Translated literally it is 'journey on foot.'

Though there was no formal monitoring of the forest preservation movement, *Bruksha O' Jeevar Bandhu Parishad* was kept well informed through visits by villagers and members of sister organizations. The staff and volunteers of *Bruksha O' Jeevar Bandhu Parishad*, during their field visits also collected information about the activities in the other villages.

### *The people in the movement*

*Bruksha O' Jeevar Bandhu Parishad* (men) believed strongly in voluntarism. There was a team of about 25 committed volunteers who provided their time to the organization on an honorary basis. The group of youth (men) involved in the movement from the beginning used to carry out *Padayatras* with other men and women and other motivational campaigning in the area. As a follow up they also helped the communities in streamlining their forest protection activities. They entered the movement because of their belief in the cause of environmental protection and improvised their approach based on learning from their experiences. These volunteers were highly motivated and enjoyed the acceptance and regard of local communities and organizations.

With the growth of its activities, the *Bruksha O' Jeevar Bandhu Parishad* started recruiting full time paid workers for organizing programme activities and helping in administrative work. The staff strength of the organization went up to eleven (1993). This included one field coordinator (*male*), one office coordinator (*male*), five organizers (*two male and three female*), one worker each for the seed bank and tree nursery programme, one office assistant and a night watchman. All the staff were under the direct supervision of the (*male*) secretary. The staff came from the younger generation in the local area who had been motivated by the inspiring work of the volunteers.

Narayan Hazari was an important leader of the movement. Although he lived in Bhubaneswar, the capital of the state of Orissa, where he was a reader in public administration at Utkal University, he visited the village often. In interviews, men in the BOJBP often referred to the inspiring role played by Hazari. Joginath Sahoo was one of the first teachers to join the movement at the outset and he has become legendary among the people for his selflessness, dedication and humility. Village leaders from Kesharpur were also active and Udaynath Khatei, also known as Bapa (father), another important figure provided a link to the people of Kesharpur, among whom he was a well-liked leader. He had been the president of the BOJBP for several years when I visited Kesharpur in 1993 and was still the president in 1998/9. The movement is known for the sacrifices made by the volunteers and the villagers. A story is often told about an early meeting where the villagers invited the District Forest Officer (DFO) to support their plantation activities. On seeing the goats in the village, the DFO remarked: 'what was the point of planting trees when the goats were sure to eat them up.' This was followed by another meeting in Kesharpur where the owners of the goats were persuaded to sell their goats, for many their major source of sustenance. The *Harijans*, who were actually the most dependent on the forests, stopped collecting produce from the forests. A film made about the BOJBP members shows Joginath Sahu speaking to the *Harijan*

community. He says that he was aware of how the greatest hardship might fall on them but the only way to bring back the forests was to agree together to protect the forests.

Little is written specifically about the many anonymous women who worked to give the movement a base in the villages. Although women were never involved in decision-making, they were active in the *Padayatras* and other instances of activism, in addition to day-to-day care of the families and the village during the various functions organized by the BOJBP. Many women who later spoke of their involvement seem to have taken part in this way. Several were wives and relatives of the BOJBP leaders. The men in the *Bruksha O' Jeevar Bandhu Parishad* affirmed that when the women were also approached to join the movement, they were the first to come forward to take the oath to conserve the forests or to agree to bring about changes. According to Narayan Hazary, when the *Bruksha O' Jeevar Bandhu Parishad* went for *Padayatras* and campaigning, it was almost always the women who moved first. They also did a lot of the logistic work, like organizing the food, places to stay, and other details during the *Padayatras* and functions.

One such function was the *Banamahotsav* (forest festival) at Tulsipur that was organized on the 6 – 7 July, 1989 in the foothills of Balaram mountain. A *Padayatra*, and a workshop on forest conservation, were also organized to coincide with the festival. The organizers wanted the women also to participate in tree plantation and the workshop. The men in the village said such a thing would never be possible. Joginath Sahu and Biswanath begged the villagers to permit them to contact the women directly. With the help of girls and boys they contacted every house and the women were requested to come to their doorsteps to meet them. When they came, Joginath Sahu and Biswanath prostrated themselves at the women's feet<sup>23</sup> and implored them to come out and participate in the function. The women were moved by their sincerity and almost all women, young and old, numbering more than two hundred joined the function. They were the first ones to take the oath to conserve the forest (Hazari 1987).

The question of women's rights (perhaps only rhetorically) was taken up whenever and wherever the women were involved or sought to be included in campaigns. In the late 1980s and early 90s, the BOJBP began to organize women's *Padayatras* which were very successful. In an effort to involve more women, the BOJBP in 1987 introduced tailoring training for women as an income generation activity. A woman from the village of Asuradhipa said in an interview\*:

A tailoring training programme was established in our villages and after that meetings for forming groups among women were conducted. At the village level issues relating to sanitation,

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<sup>23</sup> In Hindu culture, "if you touch someone's feet, or prostrate yourself before them you are showing them that you respect them, and that you do not consider yourself to be above them" (Human and Pattanaik 2000:83).

pond management, tree plantations, environment protection were discussed. ...Once I had participated in a 3 day long *Padayatra* in 22 villages. Four women organised cultural activities in the villages to sensitise women on environment protection and rights of women.

Although the 'environmentalism shaded the social justice agenda' (Human and Pattanaik 2000), the BOJBP's moral appeal – for instance, to bring an end to untouchability or to exchange saplings at weddings instead of dowry or put a stop to violence against women - appealed to many women and men, and especially to women from the lower castes. In the early days, even though women were not present in the formal decision-making structures, many were active in the activities organized by the BOJBP. For example Joe Human and Manoj Pattanaik cite a BOJBP report from the time which states: "The natural environment is polluted, but...the social environment has also been spoiled due to...untouchability and dowry" (2000:77). Yet, Hazari admitted (interview 1994) that, barring a few villages like Manapur and Tulasipur, there was no involvement of women in the planning and decision-making, while acknowledging:

The scarcity of fuel is especially the women's problem as they are the ones who collect fuelwood from forests and are also responsible for making the meals. No such movement will pick up unless they come to the forefront.

He draws attention in his history of the movement to a factor he considered as holding back women's participation, "The *pardah*<sup>24</sup> system is a great inhibitor. Women do not attend the meetings of the movement. Only in tribal and dalit villages where women are wage earners and hence more liberated, they come to the meetings" (1991).

The teachers involved also made a concerted effort to include children in the movement. That this had a significant impact may be seen in the membership: many of the young men active in the movement today speak about Joginath Sahu and others who came to their schools to speak to them and encouraged them to join the movement. Similarly, a young boy of class 7 in Kesharpur recounted in an interview,\*

Children are also involved in forest protection. Once people from Sanagarada and Badagorada were cutting from our forest. When we (the children of Kesharpur) opposed them, they threatened us by showing a knife and an axe. We ran into the village and informed the elders and forty to fifty people went to the forest and caught hold of the woodcutters.

The school programmes have been an important part of BOJBP's awareness creation and of their efforts to reach out to the people. Cultural activities were

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<sup>24</sup> The veil.

organized in schools and in some ways schools became the focal point of much of the environmental activity.

### *The underpinnings of the movement*

Both Joginath Sahu and Narayan Hazari emphasized that Gandhian philosophy was at the core of their movement. They fell at the feet of the people (*men and women*) to persuade them to think about their own development, conservation and of the environment. They made this gesture usually when there was factionalism in a village and people were destroying the forests. The activists fell at the feet of those men who were cutting the trees to move their hearts. *Padayatra* and *satyagraha* (non-violent protests and hunger strikes) were other important ways to mobilize the villagers. Apart from this there was a mix of the religious.

The BOJBP also started a postcard campaign, that is, they sent postcards to villagers in neighbouring villages, asking them to join them in working for the environment. They wrote to villages that were also protecting their forests inviting them to link up 'for then they could be strong'. They also published leaflets, posters and letters that they sent to the villages and schools all around them. The BOJBP eventually started printing a newsletter called *Sabujima* where they wrote about the environment and the conservation and other activities of the villages. They organized tree planting ceremonies and eventually a forest festival, the *banmahotsav*, where people planted saplings and vowed to look after their environment.

The religious and spiritual idiom in the movement was strong and appealed to the sentiments of people. Through music and theatre and the written word, the men in the village communicated their message of environmental protection at traditional gatherings and other such occasions. "The strong religious and moral dimension to their work... gave it an imperative beyond pure self-interest" (Human and Pattanaik, 2000:74) and as I understood from the interviews in 1993, these aspects played a large part in drawing in the women. School children were also drawn into the campaigns and their teachers organized planting activities with them. They discussed the environment in school and brought these issues back home to their parents. Human and Pattanaik write about a 'green spirituality' that imbued the movement although they caution the reader not to overstate its significance (2000:80). "There is no doubt that Friends of Trees have tapped into a deep vein of 'green spirituality' that lies within rural Hinduism, a spirituality which embraces all living things."

The drive for environmental improvement, was accompanied by the leaders' effort to bring about social change, and to give up their caste identity. Some of them took on new names. For instance, Joginath Sahu, called himself *shramik*, meaning 'worker', to show that he was there to work for the people. Udayanath Khatei took on the name *Muliya* Udaya, meaning 'labourer', and Biswanath added *Sangrami* to his name, meaning 'the one who struggles'. They spoke of their movement as the *buddhagram* movement, translated literally as 'that which

brought them enlightenment'. Narayan Hazari,<sup>25</sup> who was one of the forces behind the movement in the early days writes,

The Buddhagram movement stands not only for environmental conservation, wildlife conservation, ecology development and afforestation but also for total development. It stands for development in its economic, social, political, cultural, humanitarian, moral and spiritual aspects. Apart from economic reconstruction the movement has also worked for social reform, family planning, employment generation...removal of untouchability, settlement of disputes in villages, village reconstruction through voluntary action rather than voluntary organization (because Indian society is over dependent on the government on everything) ... have been some of the social reform measures undertaken by the movement (1990).

*Bruksha O' Jeevar Bandhu Parishad* (male) members stressed the need to be independent from the larger political administration of the country. They spoke about the importance of being able to solve their own disputes instead of going to the courts and to be able to plan their own development. According to them the courts merely extracted money from the plaintiff as well as the defendant without necessarily imparting justice. They were disillusioned with the governmental system of the state and looked for solutions from within their own community. The villagers (*men*) realized that party politics creates factionalism, and that this must be avoided at all cost. Thus during elections they took unanimous decisions on which party to vote for in order to prevent external politicians making inroads into village unity. Udayanath Khatei, told me that representatives of the political parties often tried to instigate factionalism within the village so that they could be assured of at least half of the votes. Kesharpur managed to avoid this quite successfully. In Kesarpur, for the past 30 years no case had gone to the police station (Interview in 1993).

The dedication of those years is reflected in the rhetoric of the movement up to today. The following words in a BOJBP report (though these are not thoughts that are exclusive to the BOJBP) reflect that spirit of dedication and the moral conviction that they were doing the right thing:

Thoughts that beckon us,

- What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight – build anyway
- Give the world the best you have and you get kicked – give the world the best you have anyway
- The biggest people with the biggest ideas can be shot down by the smallest people with the smallest mind- think big anyway

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<sup>25</sup> He was probably one of the few who belonged to the Brahmin caste (upper caste) in the movement.

- If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish ulterior motives – do good anyway.

(BOJBP, Kesharpur at a glance)

### *Formalisation*

Problems arose when BOJBP began to get funding from outside. According to Hazari,

This is bound to happen in a society of scarcity when people see another group suddenly handling so much money.

For fifteen years, from 1970 - 1985, the volunteers survived on *gram hathapedi* (small amounts from village contributions). If any of them went to a village to organize a meeting, the only requirement was that the villagers (*women*) should feed them. Then when a fire had raged in one of the villages, the BOJBP approached Oxfam for help. Oxfam stepped in and gave them Rs 75, 000 (approx. \$1700) A few years later, they gave them Rs 85, 000 to support their activities. The money was spent mainly on stationary and postage (for their postcard campaigns and newsletter). Then the budget was increased to Rs 6 lakhs (Rs. 600,000). According to Hazari, this was a very huge amount for the villagers. They demanded that all the money be accounted for. So, the *Bruksha O' Jeevar Bandhu Parishad* decided to circulate a statement of accounts among the people.

In 1993 the BOJBP hired ten field organisers (*men and women?*). These organisers were in charge of the sister organisations and were paid partly by them and partly by Oxfam. Although BOJBP was averse in principle to being funded (in 1996, they actually returned Rs. 1 lakh- approx \$100, 000 to Oxfam), as the work expanded, they found that they could not cope with the accounting and thus began to employ people to carry out these tasks.

### Forming the *Mahasangha*

The state of the forests of Kesharpur and of the rest of Nayagarh changed dramatically once the people of Kesharpur first started protecting them. What were bare patches became clothed in green. The springs that had dried up came to life. Wild animals began to be sighted again in the forests. The movement and the forests brought the people together. The regenerated forests gave them a new identity and they began to call themselves the forest castes (*ban jatis*), a new caste united by the forests that they lived from and among. They began to receive media attention (*e.g.* article on the forest castes in the environmental magazine, *Down to Earth*), and they became known as the communities connected to a special kind of space, the forests.

In 1992, representatives of the twelve existing sister organizations and individual committees met and formed a Jatiyan Sabha. At the *Jatiyan Sabha*, they decided to form the *Nayagarh Jungle Suraksha Mahasangha* (the Nayagarh forest protection federation) that spanned the whole district of Nayagarh. They began to

work with several different activities and the structure of the *Mahasangha* evolved to fit that. As the *Mahasangha* grew, several sub-committees were established to deal with conflicts between sister organizations, or between committees, and sometimes also between villagers who came to them from villages that were not formally a part of the *Mahasangha*. The sub-committees included one on legal affairs to deal with the government Joint Forest Management and a publications committee. There was one woman in the publications committee and one in the conflict management and none in the executive committee. However, every sister organization was free to govern itself, with the BOJBP and *Mahasangh* playing a facilitative role. One sister organization decided to have one-third representation of women on the executive committee.

Relations with the government authorities varied from place in the BOJBP/*Mahasangha* area. Many forest officials were supportive of their efforts in the early days and impressed by the way the villagers were managing the forests. However, tensions began to develop with the introduction by the government of social forestry programmes. These were meant to provide fuelwood to the villagers but the villagers claimed that they were actually being used as a cover to provide cheap timber for the paper industries, at the cost of the villagers' labour and time. The villagers' experience with the social forestry programme made them wary of the subsequent programmes for joint forest management initiated by the Orissa government. Moreover, as the centre of the movement moved from the BOJBP to the *Mahasangha*, problems arose between the two. The *Mahasangha* office moved to Nayagarh town, the district headquarters, in order to be more centrally placed. The growing separation between the two organisations was reinforced by this physical distance. Tensions between them had a part to play in the working of the women's groups in Nayagarh. But before I take that up, I now look closer at the issue of 'gender' that was becoming problematic for the movement.

#### Making Gender an issue

The need for social reform, for the abolition of dowry, and for the greater involvement of women the movement, recurred often in BOJBP rhetoric. In 1987, they started women's tailoring programme and held women's classes in environmental education, sanitation and family planning – but without making much difference in their lives. In an evaluation of its activities carried out by ODA on behalf of the Overseas Development Agency, the British aid agency (the forerunner of DFID) in 1992, the absence of women in the processes centred on environmental protection was emphasized. What is striking in these reports and accounts of the movement is that although it was pointed out that women were absent from the BOJBP management and leadership, little attention is given to the women who were already in the movement - those who organized the *padayatras*, those who took part in a range of functions and those who were active in many ways in supporting the work of the men.

In their three year budget proposal to Oxfam for 1992/93, the BOJBP acknowledged: 'Women's participation in the

environmental conservation programme launched by BOJBP is poor,' But what they proposed was basically more of the same: training in health and family welfare, environmental education, and tailoring, for which they proposed the appointment of a core of women workers, although under the management of a man. However, between the proposal being drawn up and the grant being made, Oxfam insisted for the first time that there should be a gender-training workshop for BOJBP staff (Human and Pattanaik 2000:87).

Human and Pattanaik recognize the role played by Oxfam in bringing up this issue more concretely but they are also critical of the fact that Oxfam hitherto had carried out so little to address this issue.

As a result of the evaluation by ODA, funds were also provided by Oxfam to BOJBP to set up a savings and credit programme for women. Credit schemes and micro credit had become popular within the development community, inspired in part by the success in Bangladesh of the Grameen Bank. The Savings and Credit programme was introduced in 1994 and women's savings and credit groups were set up in fifteen villages. Oxfam provided funds for field organizers, field assistants and a co-ordinator to help the women in the villages organize themselves into *mahila samitis* or women's groups. This was in tune with other governmental programmes on income generation for women. In 'sensitisation camps' attended by more than a thousand women in the BOJBP's twenty two villages as well as three sister organizations, workshops were conducted to plan strategies for developing women's groups. According to Human and Pattnaik, in the workshops carried out with the women during 1994-95 and supported by Oxfam, a four-tier structure for federating the women in Nayagarh was proposed:

1. At the village level were the *paribesia mahila suraksha vahini* (PMSV), the 'women's brigade for environmental protection', reflecting the efforts of the BOJBP and the *Mahasangha* in the naming of the groups and the long term aim of involving the women in the environmental movement.
2. At the village cluster level an association of the PMSVs would form an *upamandal* (sub-council)
3. At the level of the sister organizations, three or four *upamandals* would form a *mandal* (Council)
4. At the district level, once mandals had been formed, there would be a *Mahasangha* .

Although this was also the structure that the coordinator of the programme advocated, the idea of a women's *Mahasangha* was alien to many men in Nayagarh. I will discuss this further in this chapter.

## The women's groups

My intention in Nayagarh in 1998 was to study how the women, who were absent from the BOJBP's formal structures, none the less organised around forests issues. I meant to look specifically at the women's networking activities in order to understand how they negotiated access to forests, and networked informally around forest issues. I found out quite soon, however, that most of the BOJBP families, especially the *Khandaits*, used agricultural waste as an alternative fuel that made them much less dependent on the forests for fuelwood than they had been earlier. Those women who did collect fuelwood belonged to the *Harijan* community who, at least in Kesharpur, were no longer a part of the forest committees. The women's activities in the forest were ad-hoc and responded to or circumvented the rules and regulations laid down by the BOJBP. I had assumed that the normal day-to-day functions of women's networks might reveal patterns of forest management and use, as well as decision-making, that get missed in the formal committees. However, since these activities could differ from day to day - based on availability and what was permissible - it proved difficult to see a pattern. The women's actions seemed to be more reactive than proactive, with the forest committee normally deciding what the women could take from the forests.

I realized that I needed to look at collective action or at least at actions where more than just two or three women were involved. It was in this context that the women saw themselves making a difference in the village and as doing something purposively together as women on behalf of women's interests. Doing something purposively meant that they needed some degree of organizing and it was the form of the *mahila samitis* that several women seized upon in order to make a difference in their everyday lives.

### *Small, small threads make a big piece of cloth*

The *mahila samitis* varied in the number of women involved and also in the issues that they wanted to work with, and in some places the efforts to organize the women had not resulted in groups at all. One of the women who had tried to organize a group in her village spoke of how difficult it was without support. She said,

BOJBP has not also tried to involve women. There is no continuity of programmes for the women. Whenever they organized any programme, there used to be interaction among women from different villages. They used to make friendships. The sphere of interaction was really spreading out.\*

There seemed to be a need but organisations did not just happen, and once formed needed to be nurtured. Although it is unlikely that the women were consulted when it was decided to begin with the savings and credit groups, in certain villages they became successful as a form of organisation that enabled the women to carry out collective activities.

Sometimes in a single village there could be several women's groups. A savings and credit group could normally have a maximum of fifteen to twenty women at a time. Several groups were named after famous women, as the *Lakshmibai upamandal*, and even those from further afar, as for example the *Madame Curie Paribesia Surakhya Vahini* (Madame Curie environment protection brigade). Each group had a president, a secretary and a treasurer who took turns in maintaining protocol and accounts. The groups were organized mainly within their own community which also meant that they were homogenous in terms of caste. However, there were also instances where the groups networked with each other and carried out collective action together. The coordinator of the programme, Anita Nanda was responsible for helping women set up the *mahila samitis*. She was a university graduate and had come to live in Kesharpur to work with the women's programme. The field organizers lived in the villages for which they were responsible: in some cases this was also their home village.

In a few groups the women in the villages also organized themselves according to age, though this was not something they wanted emphasised. In Abhimanpur, I met several groups together. Some of the women belonged to more than one group. In my discussions with the women they explained how they had formed their groups:

Manjulata (Lakshmibai *Upamandal*): We started with 5 women and then came 30. People used to joke about us but now we have 30 members. At that time we had to drag them to the meetings but now we just have to say there is a meeting and everybody turns up. The men used to laugh but now after seeing the work we are doing they encourage us, they even eat themselves...look after the children while we have our meetings. ..

She was interrupted by Kunni, an older woman.

Let me tell you...first there was one committee, then we formed another one and only bahu's (daughters-in-law) were members of it. Anita called it the bahu committee....The last time talk about these things came up was when somebody visited us from outside, I told the others...this will go to the foreign country and these people will say....look at them...they have a separate bahu-saasu (mothers-in-law) committee, so I told the outsiders that there was nothing of the sort.

I suppose I was doing exactly that, going to a foreign country and writing about the *bahu-saasu* committees. But that makes it all the more important to point out that they seemed to be conscious of wanting to be able to work across the bahu-saasu divide.

Anupama (whom I presume fitted into the bahu category):  
First we had a 30 member committee. We saw it as a good

organisation, then...we started a second, then...ka, kha, ga (a, b, c). Small, small threads make a big piece of cloth... small tools make a big factory...

The *mahila samitis* in these villages had links with the *mahila samitis* in other villages and were conscious of the strength this provided. Though most of them were active in their own villages where they felt they could make the most difference, they had on one occasion acted together successfully and recognized the power in that. Anita, the coordinator, and the field organizers formed the link between the various groups and kept everyday contact with the women in the villages. The *samitis* could apply for funds from the government's Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA) programme.<sup>26</sup> Although there is a difference in the staff employed by the BOJBP, that is, the coordinator and the field organizers and the women in the villages, in terms of education or perhaps their roles in the *samitis*, when I refer to the 'women' in the *samitis*, I include them as well. They played an important part in the direction taken by the groups and in several instances they appeared to identify themselves with the women more than with their employers or the programme. However, the relationship between the women in the *mahila samitis* and the BOJBP staff was not necessarily an equal relationship. The women often referred to the coordinator as *didi* or older sister. But both the women in the villages and the staff engaged in relationships that included trust – not in spite, but rather because and in full recognition of the disparity that existed between them – in class, social position, education, professional status (see de Lauretis 1989a:22 who discusses such a relationship).

### *Making a difference*

The women in their groups planted trees, cleaned and maintained village spaces, made backyard plantations (what is to be planted, how), planted trees at the outskirts of the forest and cleaned village commons. Apart from the savings and credit activities, they also carried out small businesses like making snack mixtures. Some of them were involved in looking after herbal gardens that they had set up. It was in the groups that many found the openings for working purposively. They said that while they did many of the same things individually as well, the spaces within the family were more difficult to negotiate on their own, especially where custom was reinforced by mothers-in-law and husbands.

Several groups addressed questions of male violence against women, and on what they called 'women's rights' and issues of dowry. A number of groups together challenged local elites like the male landowners, while others resisted the oppression of the police when the women sought to protect their forests. The groups also became a forum for women to take up domestic disputes. Those men who did not let the women in their households attend the meetings were approached by the whole women's group 'peacefully' and an appeal was made to

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<sup>26</sup> The DWACRA advances a rotating sum of Rs. 15,000 to the *mahila samitis* which they may use to set up small enterprises like *papad* making, wheat milling, mixture-making and so on.

let the woman to come to the meeting. This was often effective since the group had the sanction of the village and the BOJBP. Taking up such issues, however, led to reprisals and I discuss one particular case further in chapter eight. However, the women also pointed out that now if a woman was beaten, the perpetrators knew that it was not only the woman they had to deal with, but the whole women's committee. A woman in one village told me:

Earlier we didn't do all this...no courage...the men used to do everything. Because....slowly we have been coming out...we started resolving our problems ourselves...

Similarly, in the village of Binjhagiri, several women told Manoj Pattanaik in an interview,\*

No woman is harassed in our village by their family members. If any member opposed participation of the woman in any activity of the women's associations, then all the other members go to the person's house and challenge him.

Human and Pattanaik (2000:107) describe this as the 'naming and shaming' of the offender- to draw everyone's attention to the problem. More importantly it also gave the women a sense of agency.

### **Stories from the groups**

There was a marked difference when one spoke to the women in these villages where they had carried out activities other than savings and credit, from those that had kept largely within the programme framework. It was difficult to define but it was evident in their spirit when they sat together and talked about what they had done and what they planned to do. Success in their endeavour had given them the confidence that was difficult to find in the other *samitis* that worked only with income generation and credit. The three following stories are illustrative of the spirit and energy of some of the groups. I have chosen these examples because these were the stories that struck me most as symbolic of change in the villages, and where the women had created a space for themselves.

#### *The Herbal Garden*

In the village of Talapatna, the BOJBP helped the women set up a herbal garden. The idea was for them to grow trees and shrubs for medicinal purposes. It brought the women together and gave them the self-confidence of having a project of their own. The women related how they had set up the garden and looked after it:

Seema: What made you form the group? What were you thinking of?

Savitri: What could we have in our minds? We did household work, then Savita came and called all the women... talked to us...asked us what we thought about the idea of organizing ourselves...First self-introduction....discussed what we should do since alone one can't do much but together we could do a lot. Then a committee was formed, the Jyoti Prabha Paribesia Suraksha Vahini.

Anita: They got training in savings and credit.

Kamali: ...after a while we started saving...Re. 1. ...Then Mamata and Anita came. Five or seven of us sat down...they gave us saplings to plant.

Prahlad (the BOJBP secretary who had accompanied us to the village): Did you get plants?

Savitri: No, we got seeds to plant...and polythene. We packed them with soil and manure and put them in our backyards and watered them for some time. After some time saplings came out and we fixed a date in Asada (in the first month of the monsoons – July) ...planted them in the herbal garden on the day of the 'vanomahotsav' (forest festival)...So far the BOJBP hasn't done this sort of thing...This is voluntary work which we women have started. We also renovated our tank...The government was not giving money for the renovation of the tank...

Anita: And then I said....Can we afford to wait for the government? It is in our own hands.

The women's groups had got help from the men in the village to fence the garden and dig the pits. The garden provided the women with a public geographical space which was theirs. I asked the women about their other meeting places, and they spoke about their other social networks, husking rice together, exchanging utensils, but what made this different, they said, was that:

Earlier only the men resolved conflicts... even those concerning women in the families ...but now we come to the trees and discuss

This space was obviously important because the herbal garden in the village of Talapatna was one of the few villages where I sat and talked with a group of women *outside*. Normally, as soon as we walked to the centre of the village, the women refused to sit outside in full view and wanted to sit inside or in a covered verandah. Initially I thought it may be because it was sunny or too warm but even on a cold day in the village of Manapur, the women preferred to sit in a cold and dark windowless room instead of in the warm sunshine outside. It was not only the

women but the BOJBP secretary who also kept insisting that we sit inside and told me that women cannot sit outside together in a public place. However, in Talapatna it did not seem to matter as it was the women's space, although public. The importance of a physical meeting place became apparent when comparing the situation with those of the women in Manapur. The women in Manapur complained that they were unable to meet as large groups because they had no place to meet and work together and had to do their group work on packing and cleaning the snack mixtures in their own homes.

Strangely enough, although not at all restricted by social norms in the same way as the women in Nayagarh, the need for a separate geographical space was something that came up in the discussions in village of Drevdagen as well. There it was the 'naming of the space' that became controversial (see chapter eight).

### *The Road to the Village*

The story of the road is one which involved several women's groups that were spread over neighbouring villages. The four smaller villages of Talapatna, Abhimanpur, Chaddiapalli and Telapada make up the big village also called Chaddiapalli. Talapatna did not have a road going to it. It is a community of bangle makers and sellers and they had to endure great hardship to go out and sell their wares by passing first through cultivated fields which used to clog up with mud in the monsoons. The village could not be reached by bicycle so the men had to leave the bicycles as well as the bangles in other villages in the evenings. However, it was not just the economic aspect that really bothered the women; it was also a question of honour. As one woman put it:

Not having a road was a great shame for us. Because we didn't have a road, people from other villages said, why should we marry their daughters...they don't even have a road.

The cause of the problem was that the land belonged to five landowners and moneylenders who refused to cooperate with the villagers. The men had had innumerable meetings about this for the past 15 years without much success. Even the Congress Party leaders had been there and promised to help if they came to power but the problem was that they had no control over the private land. Once the *mahila samiti* was formed in this village, the women felt that this was an important issue that needed to be resolved. They discussed the issue at the level of the *upamandal* (sub-council) where several women's groups from different villages were involved. Years of talking with the landowners had not given any results, so they decided to take more drastic action. As the women put it:

One day we decided to take the pain...we will die one day anyway...we decided to lie on the Chaddiapalli road and fast.

It was the 26th of May, 1997, the time of the year when it is extremely hot. Beginning at 4 o'clock one summer morning, the women went and lay down on the main road of an adjoining village and refused to let anyone pass through.

Forty-two women from five villages joined the action. The women in the neighbouring villages (who were familiar with Talapatna's problem) heard what was going on. Many were upper caste women and they were hesitant to join them, but once the *Harijan* women went and joined in, others followed almost immediately. It was only the women's group from Telipada that did not take part. (In fact, when I spoke to the women of Hariharpur, which lies at a little distance from Talapatna, they were unhappy that they had not been able to help as they heard of the incident only later).

The men from the villages offered the women a drink of water which they refused as they lay there in the hot summer sun. Finally, three of the landowners agreed to donate their land for the road and the other two agreed to sell their land to the villagers. Once the land was acquired, the women said that they themselves built the road to the village (though another researcher working there doubted if they really built the road on their own).

When I asked the Talapatna women why their *mahila samiti* had been successful in doing so many things while others were dormant, several women gave explanations. One of the main reasons they cited was:

We have one caste...it is a small village and our men are good...that is why. In other villages, the men are afraid that the women will get more advanced than them so they don't help them...our men ...they are proud of their village.

Another woman believed it was because:

Telegus are more advanced ...we are from the Dohra caste

or

we feel good about all this. We have got so much confidence that we can do other things now.

and

all the men have respect for us.

Several women agreed that they had 'good' men. For instance they had helped them dig holes to plant saplings, put up a fence around their herbal garden and even now they helped them by keeping animals out of it. Neither were they, according to the women, very 'jealous'. Their success, they felt, was a result of the cooperation between the women and men. The explanation based on the perception that their caste was more 'advanced' needs to be qualified because during the road incident the women who took part were actually from several

different castes who had met in the meetings of the women's groups.<sup>27</sup> On meeting the women in Chaddiapalli, I asked them what had made them take part in the cause of the women of Talapatna:

It was a problem for the women and the village of Talapatna...Besides even others could use the road ...We had talked about it once at the women's *upamandal* (cluster) meeting...We didn't tell anyone, even the men didn't know about the plan. In fact the Ratnamala (forest) committee president said... why didn't you tell us?

### *Protecting the forests in Hariharpur*

In the village of Hariharpur the women had another story to tell. Political wrangling had made the forest protection committee defunct. Taking advantage of this, people from neighbouring villages began looting the forest. At the same time, stone-cutters began quarrying in the forest. Since the committee was not taking any action, the women decided to do something about the situation. They started by taking away the implements of the stone-cutters and began protecting the forest by *thengapalli*. The police came and threatened them because they were not letting the men quarry. The women then took the *Tehsildar* (revenue inspector) with them and together went to the District Forest Officer (DFO) to discuss the case and the matter was finally resolved in favour of the women.

In the meantime, the women patrolled the forest for 22 days until the men, 'shamed' by their inactivity, agreed to take on their responsibility. After a meeting attended by the men and women of Hariharpur, the BOJBP and the *Mahasangha*, the men took over the protection of the forest. While I was at Hariharpur, the women asked me if I had heard what the women of Chaddiapalli had been able to do. "What the men can't do, the women can do," they told me with a great deal of satisfaction.

Although they handed over the responsibility for patrolling the forests to the men, the women still wanted to be a part of the decisions about the forests. After this incident, the BOJBP helped them to form a *mahila samiti* in the village and the women spoke about wanting to link up with the other *samitis* working in Nayagarh. Like some of the other groups they had also begun to take up various issues besides savings and credit, especially those concerning women. One important area of work was to try to put a stop to dowry. They told me with pride that the president of their *mahila samiti*, who had recently got her son married had refused to take any dowry from the girl's family.

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<sup>27</sup> Similarly, research has pointed to how women in villages have organized beyond caste and class (e.g. Pursohottaman, 1998:62 on the *shibirs* in Maharashtra). Agarwal (2000) points to significant commonalities that cut across class, caste of women as, for example, the lack of property rights or responsibility for the household.

I spoke to the women of Hariharpur just a few days after members of the *Mahasangha* had been there to tell them about their new policy, they wanted to have two men and one woman representative from every village in the *Mahasangha*. The women in Hariharpur said that they were confused because many more than merely two women wanted to go for the meetings. They needed each others' support. It was not a representative system that they wanted. This is an issue that surfaces again in chapter eight.

### **Linked by struggle: a politics of the possible<sup>28</sup>**

These stories reveal how it was not just caste or class nor merely the fact of being women that united these women but the struggle undertaken together. Women's groups were formed in several villages but not all were active in the same way. It was where the women had united in struggle that they were able to bring about some change. The collective action that they undertook was important in building up an identity. The many narratives about action that they related were shared by women who were not directly a part of the action itself, as for example the women in Hariharpur who wanted to know if I had heard what the women in Chaddiapalli had managed to do. These narratives gave them a direction. They described a feeling of agency and of what women could do. They live as thoughts and memories and reshape habits, skills and bodily postures (*c.f.* Kapstad 2000:88).

They challenged ideas about women as passive and unable to act as a collective. They constructed themselves as 'women' but nonetheless differently from the dominating images of the quiet, submissive, shy women who are always there and form a base but are never really seen. The stories challenged the identity of women as illiterate and unable to take action without guidelines. The stories speak of the women as able to carve their own identities. In taking action for their communities they were perhaps publicly taking accountability for much of what they always do.

In chapter one I referred to Agarwal (2000:300) who writes that women are often seen to be present in 'agitational' collective action. This action in Hariharpur may be seen to fall in this category for she writes that such action is sporadic, situation-specific and can involve extra-local mobilisation for calling attention to a given local situation, or for protesting the action of some extra-local authority, usually the State. She compares this to that which requires a degree of cooperation, what she calls 'cooperative' collective action, which is continuous and requires a regular process of monitoring and decision-making in relation to local natural resources. The male forest committees would belong to that category. However, in this particular case, I believe it is partly because the activities of the women in the villages are not considered relevant to the forests that their agitational action tends to be seen as a one-off event rather than based on 'cooperative' collective action that is otherwise unrecognized in the formal frameworks of resource management. Agitational action was important in giving

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<sup>28</sup> I borrow this title from Kumkum Sangari (1993) who uses in a different context.

them an identity but it was the everyday negotiations that were just as important as the larger agitational moments.

### **The women's groups *vis-à-vis* the BOJBP and the *Mahasangha***

Many of the women's groups came into being because of the BOJBP's women's programme. I was told by Biswal, a *Mahasangha* staff member, that the *Mahasangha* viewed the formation of the savings and credit groups primarily as an effort to get the women organized so that they could be drawn into the *Mahasangha*. However, in my interviews with some of the men in the *Mahasangha* and the BOJBP, the idea of a women's *Mahasangha* was not entirely welcome. When I brought up the question of a women's *Mahasangha*, that the women had talked about, one of the men in the *Mahasangha* said to me:

At the moment we have taken up issues connected with the forests but later once we resolve some of our problems we can also take up other issues that the women want.... We do not have so much contact with the women right now. Once the *Mahasangha* is stronger, we can support the women in what they want to do. Without guidelines or ideas there is no point in women gathering. They need the *Mahasangha*'s support.

Partly because they are more likely to be illiterate, women are thought not to be capable of organizing themselves around forestry issues or participating in meaningful ways in forestry forums. Furthermore they are assumed to be busy with other, more appropriately female activities (*c.f.* Lama 2004; Meinen-Dick and Zwarteveen 1998). The point of a women's *Mahasangha* in Nagarah was thus considered unnecessary if it did not coincide with the other struggles. The BOJBP reports as well as some of the men I interviewed spoke about the need to 'motivate' and organize women and hence, the need for tools like the savings and credit groups. This view seems representative of much development literature where one often comes across the 'need to conscientize the people, educate the masses and train the women.' By placing 'agency' in the development intervention, not among those who are meant to become 'developed' closes off the space for the exercise of agency and can become an expression of 'power over' those whose lives the development intervention is seeking to better.

#### *Need to include women*

Another strand of thinking within the *Mahasangha* was one that reflected the position of Oxfam, *i.e.* the need to include women in *Mahasangha* activities. According to some of the *Mahasangha* staff, instances of women 'taking over', as in the case of forest protection in Hariharpur, made them realize that the involvement of women was important to the *Mahasangha*. This led them to talk about the role of women's groups in the restructuring of the *Mahasangha*. This was also seen as a question of equity according to Biswal. To convince those men in the *Mahasangha* who saw no reason to include the women, he said that they cited

cases when women's support had been crucial for the movement as a whole. They pointed to how women had played an important part in demonstrating against the forest department's harvesting of the social forestry plantations, for example, and also talked about the time when, in some villages, men from outside who had come to steal timber did not dare to do so since the women stood there and prevented them from touching the trees. Another reason advanced was that of efficiency. Since women worked in the forests, if they were not in some way party to the agreements to protect the forests, it would be difficult to make sure that they did not ignore the decisions made by the committees. All these indicators, they argued showed how important women were for a movement such as theirs.

Women in some villages also had been asking to be included. The *Mahasangha* spoke of trying to make 50 per cent of the membership female, if possible, at least to start with in the executive body. This met opposition from several men in the federation who cited several logistic and practical problems (who would take care of the home?). In order to ensure the presence of women, and that women's interests were not just 'represented' by the men, the *Mahasangha* planned to insist that the women come to pay their own membership fee and not just send this through their husbands. Through this they wanted to ensure that women were physically present at the meetings.

However, the envisaged structure still was based on two women and three men from every village. The women of Talapatna insisted that they would send three women and two men. In Hariharpur the women wanted to go in a group. The need for a critical mass was experienced by the women as important for their voices to be able to be heard. On the other hand, to be heard seemed to be close to impossible if not only the number but also the forms in which the meetings were conducted, were not changed. For example, in an interview,\* a member of *Sabuja Jeevan*, a sister organization of the BOJBP said:

We have decided to take women in the executive committee of the Sabuja Jeevan. The executive body meetings are usually conducted in the evening hours. It is difficult for women to attend meetings in the evening. That is why we have decided to take women leaders from three villages and the meetings would be organized in these three villages on a rotational basis so that the women from one village can at least attend the meeting.

This was one of the sister organizations that was making an effort to include women. However, how much difference this would make to the women in general and how much place the few women would have in these meetings was a moot question. Nor is it obvious that access to these meetings would necessarily be different from prevailing gender and power relations for the women as a group (as it becomes apparent in Drevdagen) or that power relations linked closely to the geography of the village would be obviated.

### Need for training

As far as the BOJBP was concerned, the *mahila samitis* were part of the BOJBP programme, included in their training for women. After having met several of the groups in Nayagarh, I was somewhat surprised when I spoke to some of the BOJBP functionaries in Nayagarh. In our discussions, they kept referring to the programme and the need for training. The initiatives taken by the women were regarded as extraneous activities to the BOJBP women's programme. The president of the BOJBP complained several times about the inadequate amount allocated by Oxfam for the women's training programmes. When I asked him why it was so essential, he said that there was no point in asking women to attend meetings and take part in other activities if they were going to come there and sit with their heads covered. They needed to be trained so that they could gain the confidence to be able to speak out.

Since financing for the women's programme was proving to be troublesome, I asked the president if it might not be a better way to involve women by the men also taking it upon themselves to bring change in the family. Instead of training they could make space for the women in their households to speak their views and not veil their faces from the father-in-law and older brothers-in-law. However, the question was considered irrelevant and he impressed on me again the importance of 'training'. In one of the BOJBP's functionaries' family home, his daughters-in-law told me that they always kept their faces covered in his presence and dared not speak. His son told me laughingly that, even they, his sons, almost did not dare to express a conflicting opinion. 'Training' notwithstanding, this was culture and tradition!

This was different from the account related by the Oxfam project officer about Joginath Sahu who had been a leading figure in getting the movement started and in sustaining it.

A lot of people don't know but Jogi babu's wife played a major role in this...although she is very shy. She was active in the initial days ...that is where Jogi babu got gendered ...from that way. He said that if it doesn't start from my family...then how can I do anything.

Despite efforts like those of Jogi babu, bias toward 'training' to resolve problems of gender relations was widespread in the BOJBP. As another BOJBP member claimed in an interview, "We have educated women to participate in the movement." The onus lay on the women to conform to the procedures laid down in the training, to save and to tailor or to participate in an appropriate fashion. Both the funds and the training for women were double edged. On the one hand they provided them with resources and the means to organize. On the other hand they were used to regulate their activities and keep their activities within programme boundaries (see chapter ten).

### *Spilling out of the frame*

The activism by some of the *mahila samitis* was not anticipated by the official programme. The groups began to question decisions regarding the funds spent on them. According to women, they had no idea about how the funds that the BOJBP got for them from Oxfam were being used. The group in Chaddiapalli said that a number of women were taken to Andhra Pradesh for a couple of days and they did not have to spend a paisa (100 *paise* make a Re.). One woman asked rhetorically:

What is the BOJBP money used for? Where is the money that we have been waiting for...the latrines or sowing machines, saplings for a herbal garden? There is money to go to Tirupati, Puttaparti and Gadpa .... but no money when it is needed. We never get information beforehand....staff members come and spend money and we never know what is happening. The women's groups are never consulted when it comes to planning the programmes.

Some of the groups began to demand that they be accepted as part of the forest committees in their village. Reporting from a youth workshop, Mamata Tiwari, a field organizer wrote in her report: "women should not only conduct environmental protection work, they should protect themselves build awareness in the society." She placed this responsibility on both men and women, as she writes: "Women atrocities have been on the rise because of the dowry system. What role does a male have in putting a stop to all this?"

The Oxfam officer responsible for the programme told me in an interview much later (2004),

Some of the women's groups eventually decided to stop with the savings and credit and continued to meet as a women's group....And then in Chaddiapalli itself, they demanded that we should be part of the village committee. At least secretary....

The women were taking the groups far beyond that of savings and credit or environmental protection. They were also speaking of linking up in a wider network, much like the forest federation. These changes were not welcome everywhere and the idea of a women's federation was cause for unease.

### *A federation of their own*

The *mahila samitis* spoke about forming an all-women's federation for women's rights because they felt that their issues would not be taken up in the forest federation. They could not wait for them to be considered important enough by the men in the *Mahasangha*, to be acted upon. These issues included violence against women, "demand" (dowry) problems, problems that women faced in the *panchayat*. Anita said:

We do not want to go the court and have long drawn out cases  
but want to be able to solve our problems ourselves

At mass meetings with women from a number of villages they had been discussing the idea of a women's *Mahasangha*. They had also organized rallies and conducted meetings with other committees. At that time (1998/9), they had village *mahila samitis* and four zonal *samitis* consisting of 20-25 village *samitis*. The possibility of forming a women's *Mahasangha* depended on how everything progressed. All the *mahila samitis* put together comprised approximately 5000 women:

At the moment we lack funds or organizers. Eventually we may even link up at the state level. We have only a token presence in politics (*panchayat*). We want to be a part of law-making. Even in the BOJBP or the *Mahasangha*, we have no place in the decision-making. They just want to make us 'statues' and not really involve us in meetings.

There was opposition by the men in the BOJBP to the women's federation. They felt that the women's programme coordinator, Anita was getting too powerful. The women's activities were difficult to control and they felt somewhat outside the women's discussions, despite the fact that the activities that the women often proposed seemed quite harmless and apolitical.

The forest committees in Nayagarh had so far concentrated on forest issues concerning, such as protection, conflicts, management, sale of forest products. In most cases, women had little control over decisions taken at village meetings and in discussions over financial resources and other issues considered important - outside contacts, formal decisions about the forests or the village. Although some of the *mahila samitis* were set up with BOJBP's help, ostensibly to get women involved in their meetings, women discussed a whole range of day-to-day issues apart from forestry. As one of the field organizers of the women's programme wrote in a report, there was no point in talking about saving the environment if the women had no power themselves. "They cannot join a movement without looking at themselves and doing something about their own potential and about gender relations." The women took up questions of dowry and violence in addition to their everyday work within the villages. Their need to take up other questions in the forest forums point to lack of other arenas open to them for decision making and action.

In 2000, the coordinator and the field organizers of the programme organized what they hoped was the first big meeting of the women's federation. All the women's groups met to draw out a strategy for their continued work. There were some aspects that had become quite clear. They wanted to form a women's *Mahasangha*. The meeting was supported by Oxfam. However, the *samitis* were already becoming the focus of contention among actors outside their own groups.

## The programme as a point of conflict

The *mahila samitis* had uncertain relations with the BOJBP *vis-à-vis* the *Mahasangha*. The hub of the forest movement had gradually shifted to the *Mahasangha* and this is also where a schism began to grow between the BOJBP and the *Mahasangha*. Joginath Sahu, who had moved himself to the *Mahasangha* and was helping to build up the federation, began to be looked upon by the BOJBP as someone who had changed loyalties. In several interviews,\* men from various villages spoke of a 'lack of interest,' an ageing leadership, and a lack of commitment among the members of the BOJBP. Over the years, the organization had become more bureaucratic and had lost its widespread appeal. In an interview one man regretted that the zeal of the 1970s and 80s had disappeared:

Gradually BOJBP became a closed organization. Even the villagers of Kesharpur were not informed and involved in the activities of the BOJBP...Whenever a visitor used to come to the organization the villagers welcomed him/her and shared their experiences. Nowadays the villagers are not even told about the visits.

The younger generation within the BOJBP felt that they did not dare oppose the leadership. "Even if we did, they would not listen to us anyway" said one young man to me. Other BOJBP members felt that once the centre of energy had moved to the *Mahasangha*, that had its office in Nayagarh, they knew little of what was happening in the movement. "People in Kesharpur are confused about the role of the *Mahasangha*." And at the same time, there was disillusionment with the BOJBP leadership.

The women were never a part of designing their own programme. The coordinator of the women's programme voiced similar frustration in an interview. When I asked her who actually decided on the programme, she pointed to the leaders of the BOJBP and Oxfam. According to her, they were the ones who decided on the programmes for the women and on how the money was to be spent. When I spoke to the BOJBP president, he complained that the Oxfam officer did not like them and that Oxfam would like to decide themselves how the money was to be spent. According to him, Oxfam was insisting on a women's bank and micro-credit schemes (hence the visit to Andhra where there have been several instances of successful schemes) and did not realise that there were several other issues important for the women in Nayagarh that needed to be taken up.

Initially, Oxfam and the BOJBP decided together on the programmes the BOJBP were going to implement, but the BOJBP believed that Oxfam was trying to interfere in their activities. Oxfam had got itself into the unhappy position of supporting the *Mahasangha* in favour of the BOJBP. They believed that the BOJBP was becoming increasingly bureaucratized and losing its base among the people, "becoming an NGO, rather than a people's movement that it used to be." This caused unpleasantness between the BOJBP and Oxfam to add to the already strained atmosphere between the *Mahasangha* and the BOJBP. Partly because of

this growing uneasiness between the *Mahasangha*, the BOJBP and Oxfam, the women's groups got drawn into the eye of the storm.

### *The mahila samitis in the crossfire*

Once many forest related activities had moved to the *Mahasangha*, the women programme remained as the major programme for which BOJBP was responsible and got funded for implementing. For its part, the *Mahasangha*, which was trying to enlarge its base, considered that the women's groups gave hope that more women could be drawn into the movement. The BOJBP were not very pleased with the *Mahasangha*'s involvement in the women's programme. They regarded it as their programme and began speaking of separating the women's programme from the sister organizations in their own operational area. In an interview with another researcher there at the time (1998), some members of one sister organization, the *Sabuja Jeevan* had become angry with the BOJBP because they said that the coordinator had been telling the women's group in their area not to attend the *Sabuja Jeevan* and the *Mahasangha* meetings. They believed that she had been instructed to do so by the BOJBP. According to the *Mahasangha*, the BOJBP did not like the women's groups interacting with the *Mahasangha*. That may have been the case or the coordinator may have thought that the women needed a stronger forum of their own. Whatever the reasons, the disagreements between the BOJBP and the *Mahasangha* were not helping the women and narrowed the choices available for the women in terms of developing their own organizations. A claim to have influence over the women's groups became important for both the male-dominated organizations in their conflicts with each other.

### *Needing to be recognized*

The success of the *mahila samitis* was often dependent on the negotiation of male/female relations in the village *i.e.* on how the women managed to establish an area of work or a set of relationships *vis-à-vis* the men in their own village. Women's activities, even where they worked for goals which concerned specifically 'women's development,' were linked to those of the men and at times supported by them. They had to interact with the men in their day-to-day life as well as when they went about these specific activities. However, in situations that could become conflictual, support from outside was important. The *Mahasangha* and the BOJBP in some ways thus provided a counterweight to the male village committees. According to one of the *Mahasangha* workers:

We held a programme planning group this year (1998) where we invited many women. Some of the women talked about how the forest committees in their villages were becoming exclusive...their links to the villages were disappearing

On numerous occasions, it was easier for women to attend meetings or workshops outside of their own villages than in their own villages. Several women claimed that it was easier for them to speak out and express their views if their

own male relatives, especially their father-in-law or older brother-in-law, were not present in the meetings and where the more immediate relations of gender and power that constricted them were not so overbearing. For example, the women of Jagannathprasad reportedly told some *Mahasangha* staff:

Why is our organization not a part of the *Mahasangha*? We are not ready to sit in the village meetings but can do so outside.

The meeting in Macchipada (see box 1) where the women from Abhimanpur had wanted to speak but were unable to do so, is one example of how women tried to gain legitimacy for their groups. From the point of view of the NGOs there, perhaps the women's accounts of cleaning the villages or building a road was not entirely relevant for their discussion on a comprehensive forest policy. However, in terms of power relations, it was important for the women's groups to be recognized by the outsiders as doing important work in their villages.

### **To be able to create a separate space?**

The presence of strong male committees was not always conducive to strong women's groups. The village of Kesharpur offers one such example. Although the BOJBP had been instrumental in helping to set up *mahila samitis*, they did not have a very active *samiti* in their own base village. When I asked the BOJBP about this, they said it was because of inefficient field organizers. They blamed the coordinator of the groups for treating her work as a job and lacking a volunteer spirit. In light of the background and history of the forest movement in these villages the lack of volunteer spirit can be seen as very negative criticism. The coordinator for her part told me that there was a girl in the village who worked for an NGO in Bhubaneswar who had incited the women against the BOJBP, by saying that the NGO would support them better. This broke up the group. She said that one of the wives of the BOJBP members had started another *samiti*. The *Harijan* women had a *samiti* of their own but it dissolved as they could not pay back the 'savings' money. Unlike in some of the other villages where strong women's groups wanted to be included in forest issues, the women in Kesharpur were not active in the BOJBP. This was in spite of or perhaps because the BOJBP had such a strong base in the village. A schoolteacher in Kesharpur remarked wryly in an interview:\*

In Kesharpur village, participation of women in environmental protection is very poor. People staying close to the station miss the train.

There were other villages where the women's groups were restricted to thrift and credit issues. In the village of Manapur the BOJBP secretary who lived in the village had helped the women's group take up the DWCRA programme. He had registered the group, for which he had travelled to the nearby town, and he did all the other work, which 'the women cannot do by themselves.' He had been of help in setting up the committee, he was also the main initiator and continued to play an

important role. He was present in my meeting with that group, and did a lot of the talking. It was difficult to know to what extent the group functioned independently (or perhaps they were hesitant in speaking in his presence). This particular group had not used the space offered by the *samiti* to take up other questions of concern to them. The group was regarded as a component of the BOJBP programme, the programme guidelines were followed meticulously, and it was considered by the BOJBP to be one of the better savings and credit groups. This anecdote does not imply that the presence of strong male committees or strong male leaders would always inhibit the formation of strong women's groups, but in this village this appeared to be the case. Sundar (1998) problematises a similar relationship in the case of the women's cooperative in Asna where she discusses the role of a NGO in

### **Facilitating Voice?**

#### **Box 1.**

A district level meeting was organized at Macchipada by Vasundhara and Sanhati (an NGO alliance based in Bhubaneswar) in order to discuss a possible comprehensive policy on community forestry. Several forest committees and Mahasangha members took part. There were about forty-five participants from various villages, of whom only two were women. Throughout the meeting they sat and listened but did not say anything. I met them the next day in their village and asked them why they had come there. They said that they knew there were going to be people from outside (the NGOs) and wanted to tell them that even women have been doing good work in their villages. But they were not given a chance to speak. One Mahasangha staff member who was there told them that they just had to put their hand up and they would have been asked to speak but they pointed out that it was almost impossible to do that in between the long speeches made by the men. "It isn't that easy for women to speak out. Nobody asked me to speak, I was waiting to be asked. Its only when we become more than half in numbers at such meetings then we will be able to speak out."

On the other hand, she told us about another Mahasangha meeting at Katrajhari where they actually did speak and this was facilitated by the form of the meeting. Since there were so many participants at that particular meeting, the organizers had reserved slots for those who wanted to speak and participants could go and give in their names. She was then assigned a slot and could speak uninterrupted about what she wanted to say.

the formation of a women's cooperative. She writes that there is always a danger perhaps need this kind of help in negotiating with outsiders and officials. But a comparison of the groups in Nayagarh indicates that there is a difference between helping to make a space for the women, and in supporting them in implementing a programme. In the case of Manapur, the help of an older man from the same village made it more difficult to circumvent established relationships of power.

Studying the absence of women in forestry user groups in Nepal, Lama and Buchy (2004) write that some of the women interviewed reported that they were

not interested in meetings of the Forestry User Groups. The authors attribute this lack of interest partly to women's lack of self-esteem, and partly to the women's difficulties in forming women-only committees because of their illiteracy and inability to implement the rules according to the operational plan. They write further that in a process where the women had no influence themselves, they would be unlikely to be motivated to take part. The case of the *mahila samitis* in Nayagarh indicates that support for programme implementation may not provide the space for women to take action. It is the freedom of being able to take up a range of questions, and to take action on them, that has proved to be crucial for the women in advancing their interests. The requirements to follow the rules and regulations drawn up by the male committees as a reference point may not be ideal from the women's points of view. The women would have little incentive in taking part in forest management if they had no power over their own lives. The *mahila samitis* in some villages thus provided one possible space where the women could take account of the everyday in their own lives, and work to change that reality, hand in hand with their involvement in forest activities. Agarwal argues that, given that women's social networks are built on a foundation of solidarity, it is likely that women's forest protection groups could successfully be built on such networks (1997:294). While this may give the women some leverage *vis-à-vis* their villages, the expectation that women will be motivated to form groups for forest protection alone may in itself be questionable in light of the obvious discrimination they experience in their everyday lives.<sup>29</sup>

Another contradiction of creating an alternative space and at the same time remaining outside of the conventional organizational framework is illustrated by the example from a *Harijan* village in Jakalla. The women here made bamboo goods and sold them in other villages in the area. The women told me:

We go far and sell our goods...rice huskers, baskets, nets... to other women...Only the women buy these things since they know the quality. That is why we have to go from village to village instead of going to the market. ...Even the men would like to purchase because they don't want to spend the money for these things....We exchange the goods for rice, wheat, potatoes, onions...everything. We do not go to the weekly haat in Gania, Daspalla....Because rice is better to get....We can't manage all the bargaining, manipulation....Other villagers sell such things in the market...those close to the market.

The women, selling the bamboo goods and those buying them had established an informal market for themselves, beneficial to both sides. For the women in Jakalla, this relationship had its costs as they had to leave the village in the daytime and their small children in the care of older siblings since the men, too, were away during the day in search of bamboo. The opening up of local *haats*

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<sup>29</sup> Many of the groups that I spoke to were not totally dependent on fuelwood from the forest and that of course has coloured my argument. But even so, I believe that it has a validity for the women involved in fuelwood collection and farming.

(markets) where women could sell their forest products (NTFPs) and other goods gives them an important leverage and much has been written about the importance of providing marketing channels for women. These are extremely important but also, as this case indicates, as soon as women do enter the markets they come under the conditions set by others and over which they have little control. In maintaining the women-to-women channels described above, by retaining the rights to be the best judge of the quality, and by exchanging in kind, the women of Jakalla and their customers had for this brief period managed to maintain some measure of control over their exchange.

The informal channels that they had created would have little power *vis-à-vis* the formal market and did not provide them with cash - which is also a source of power. The question then is, should such channels be supported in other ways rather than only opening up a male-determined marketplace for the women? With these examples I suggest that bringing women into existing structures is not always beneficial for them and may in fact be a step backwards if the conditions in which they come in are not at the same time the subject of scrutiny and change.

### **Postscript: how do you channelise help?**

Many of the groups active in Nayagarh moved towards taking up questions of women's rights, in the village and in the family, while some also demanded their right to be part of the *Mahasangha*. According to the Oxfam officer, this was an increasing source of discomfort for the BOJBP. But ever more uncomfortable was perhaps the activism of the women staff who were supporting the women's groups in talking about their own federation. The BOJBP members' remarks to me about the coordinator not really being a volunteer and not following the programme procedures, during my visit there in 1999, seemed to foreshadow the coming problems. Towards the end of 1999, funding to the BOJBP for the women's programme was stopped by Oxfam. In 2004 I spoke to the Oxfam project officer who had been responsible for the project:

I think, again BOJBP might have thought that S&C programme is more of pacifying Oxfam, as this was primarily pushed by Oxfam on the basis of an ODA review in 1992-93. So they never thought it would become such a big constituency where women would demand for rights. For that matter, any sister organization working with BOJBP might have been convinced the same way by BOJBP.....like Chadhiapalli.....as long as you are working with savings and credit, its fine...don't talk of rights... and they (the women's groups) took up violence against women quite seriously.

The BOJBP apparently resented the staff from the women's groups or any of the groups taking part in *Mahasangha* activities, or having much contact with them. On the other hand several women that I had spoken to felt that they needed to be involved there and take part in decision-making. According to the Oxfam officer,

the staff of the women's programme complained to them at Oxfam that the BOJBP officials were making things very difficult for them. Some members of the BOJBP complained if staff took their children with them to meetings or to work.<sup>30</sup> Oxfam tried to intervene but Oxfam's relationships with BOJBP were already strained because of the complications with the *Mahasangha*. Oxfam felt that the BOJBP was mismanaging the programme and mistreating the staff. Discussions between them led nowhere:

We were pursuing it hard but it came to a head on collision between Oxfam and BOJBP...It was an unfortunate decision but I said....I can't support you otherwise.

The loss of funding meant that the coordinator and the organizers who were the lynchpins in the coordination among all the women's groups, and who gave the groups a certain amount of legitimacy, would disappear. But, according to the Oxfam officer:

With these contradictions how can you support the women's programme?...I visited a lot of women's groups...I said you please carry on because we don't know how to support it...because we cannot have violence against women...

These were the structures through which the programme was supported and now the channels had closed. I wondered why the groups could not be supported directly?

How can you channelise the funds? The other problem... they (the staff of the women's programme) feared that BOJBP would not allow them to work properly.

Funding was stopped and with that, for the moment, plans for a women's federation also halted. Planning and implementation is a male-driven machine,<sup>31</sup> a machine regimented by its programmes, and one that has difficulties in taking or encompassing action outside its frame. Programmes like the BOJBP's women's programme and the DWCRA and others do provide some openings. Kabeer (1999) writes about the disjunction in the aims of the DWCRA, which she saw as innovative and that in its aims hoped to organize women around issues of concern to them. But the result of the programme in many states was that what was left of the programme was a list of activities for which women could apply for grants. As the DWCRA was practiced in Nayagarh, it was within the bounds of an income generation programme.

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<sup>30</sup> This had not been a problem when I was there. Anita, the coordinator often took her infant baby with her to the villages when she was out on field trips all day.

<sup>31</sup> I take this quote from Agnihotri (2001), an Indian civil servant writing about her work as a rural development officer in Orissa.

For those women's groups that had managed to get support, it has been through other organizations like the BOJBP, which were more established (*cf.* Puroshottaman 1998). These gave them legitimacy. However once that link was broken, there are no immediate direct channels. The only other option according to the Oxfam officer, would have been to continue to provide support through the *Mahasangha*. However, the programme officer said,

I was literally feeling bad...I was trying to tell Biswal that can we build some kind of programme...then Biswal said fine...but he can't decide, it has to come through the EC (Executive Committee) and the EC is again a male dominated area and already probably some of them might be facing the brunt in their own villages with these groups.

In Nayagarh although the links of the women's groups to the forest federations entailed a dependency on them, they also provided a certain standing for the women *vis-à-vis* the men in their communities and played a role in the women being able to take action. David Edmunds and Ewa Wollenberg write about the need for put in place processes that enable disadvantaged groups to mobilize and negotiate directly (2003:9). But how is this negotiation to be achieved in practice where women's groups are not seen as representatives of the community as opposed to the forest groups? In Nayagarh, the women continue to organize themselves in their own groups although they are scattered all over the district and few chances to build a larger network. Some of the staff members are still active in the areas where they live. How does one support their agency? And how does one link up with them?

## **Conclusion**

The *mahila samitis* that were formed in Nayagarh had varied experiences. For some, they remained important as informal credit centres while in others they became the space from which women could exercise agency in other spheres of everyday life. The alternative space that they provided for the women was important as legitimate spaces and where it was legitimate to meet and spend time for and as women; not only figuratively but also materially - a physical space in the village proved to be the start of a redefinition of themselves and of others.

The groups became an object of contention between the two organizations dominated by the men and while on the one hand they provided the groups with a certain amount of legitimacy, on the other, they narrowed their space for action. Although much of the work that they carried out through their groups was connected to the village- like cleaning the tanks, they also began to resolve conflicts and take up issues of dowry and violence against women. Not all groups were vocal and nor did all have and create for themselves the freedom to go beyond the frame. Strong male committees in close proximity may have been one deterrent in some villages as they created a dependency on individual men. For some groups, their identity crystallized by engaging in direct public action while

others derived a vicarious identity from that. Their networking both within the villages and in between the villages provided them with strength and the freedom to go out of their villages, which is otherwise not so self-evident. However, these actions were the unanticipated results of women's development and difficult to squeeze into programme frames. They also challenged the authority of established leaders of 'people's organizing' who despite their apparent shortcomings were still the spokesmen for the villages and the negotiating partners/channels *vis-à-vis* outsiders. The space created by the women was tenuous and although kept alive in different places, the dreams of a federation are still distant, perhaps because it is still too threatening.

I now turn to look at how some similar problems were approached by women and men in a very different place several thousand miles north of Nayagarh, to the village of Drevdagen. Some of the problems show striking similarities but also the very different practices in which they took shape.



Children from the Kesharpur school singing a song about the importance of the environment.



**PART III**  
**THE STUDIES IN SWEDEN**



## CHAPTER FOUR

### Tales from the field: forests, gender and the Swedish periphery

#### Introduction

The village of Drevdagen is located in an area often referred to as the *glesbygd*, translated literally from the Swedish as sparsely populated, and traditionally associated with the inland areas in north, north-west and south-east Sweden. The word *glesbygd* has long been seen as referring to large contiguous areas with sparse populations, and long distances to towns, employment and services (*Glesbygdssverket*, 1997). Another way in which villagers and others refer to their area is the *skogsbygd*,<sup>32</sup> or the forest community. The forests are intrinsic to the way of life of the *skogsbygd* and have played a major role in the sustenance and cultures of the communities since the first settlers in these areas. Ownership, access to and the use of the forests has been pivotal in generating resources, power and influence in the family, the community and vis-à-vis the state. “The forest is the shirt of the poor, their protection from the cold and their home,” goes an old Swedish saying. “The forests follow a person from birth to death” (Ersson, 1985:7).

This chapter provides a historical context to the story of Drevdagen. It is based on a literature review and complemented with references made by the villagers of Drevdagen in my interviews with them. I read the theories in the literature as ‘tales from the field’ as writers struggle with different ways to represent the rural areas at the level of the people living there. The chapter is broad in scope and is largely descriptive. A range of topics are touched on briefly in order to provide a general background to the forests and to gender relations in the periphery. It defines the ‘field’ of my research that starts from a physical place rather than from within one discipline. I examine the interface at which policies in the past and present have been formulated, and the ways in which the ‘rural’ or more specifically the *glesbygd* has been elaborated in a dialogue among policy, local activity and academic theorising.

The issues of local mobilisation and local development in Drevdagen were understood by the villagers to be linked to their ability to exercise power over their

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<sup>32</sup> *Skog* is forest in Swedish. *Bygd* is a category that is used variously in literature but also colloquially. Johansson explains *bygd* as the context – the space, time and the social relations - where there is agricultural and/or inhabited land. In this interpretation, the forest, *skog*, is the opposite of *bygd*, a place that people do not inhabit in the same way as the forest (1994: 28-30). In interviews and discussions with the people in Drevdagen, I had the impression that their references to the *bygd* included the forests in a concrete way, in the relationships they shared with each other and the forests.

environment, more specifically over the forests. Although not coherent entities, the assumption of a centre and its' periphery make possible a presumed opposition, where the very existence of the periphery may be seen to make the existence of the centre possible. The main point of the chapter is to throw light on how the relationship between power and gender relations in the periphery are intimately bound up in economic, social and cultural constructions of the forests and *glesbygd*, policy interventions, and in struggles for control. These constructions were called upon by various people in the village in order to explain the 'way things are.' Here, I look back at history to examine explanations of how they may have become that way.

In the latter half of the thesis in part IV and V, that is, in the analysis, I focus on the relations that order life in places at a particular time, rather than look at them in terms of changes over time. But references to time recurred all the time in the narratives of the people. Thus in this chapter, departing from the empirical situation and the references made to the past by the villagers in Drevdagen, I examine relevant literature on the history of the forests, gender and rural development to understand three things: the central role of the forests in the history of the place and the establishment of the forests as a male domain; the villagers' stories about marginalisation as caused by a centralized state; and what rural development might mean in the Swedish context. Since the purpose is to understand the constructions of a particular place, the literature that I refer to comes primarily from Sweden and from accounts of this part of Dalarna, that is, the area of Särna-Idre.

### **Constructing the forests as masculine**

Many women and a few men in Drevdagen spoke in my interviews of the forests as being the men's domain. Historical research<sup>33</sup> suggests that this view is more a reflection of the respondents' understanding of the present situation and existing gender relations, in the context of the forests, and not as the situation might or might not have been in the past. Berit Brandth and Marit Haugen from Norway write that forestry has traditionally been one of the most masculine rural activities (2000:345). How traditional is this tradition? The history of the forests in the study area suggests that the close association of the forests with the masculine is something that seems to have been written into history in the 1800s. These representations are related to how activity taking place in the forests, and associated with work, is described in relation to the forests. "It is through activity that gendering processes come into play" (*Ibid.*:344), but importantly it is also through the status that activities acquire and the ways in which they are represented. I thus start by examining the past through the lens of women's work in the forests.

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<sup>33</sup> Historical research on the forests around Drevdagen is not abundant. The history can be discerned from accounts that deal with the history of the mountain parishes (*fällsocken*) of Särna and Idre as well as Älvdalen further south.

### *Work in the forests: The fäbodväsendet*

The *fäbodvallarna*, (shielings) were the grazing land with small cottages carved out of forests where the villagers could stay with their animals for the summer months. A fully developed *fäbodväsende*, a pasture grazing system, existed in northern Sweden by the end of the middle ages and complemented the small farms in the villages (Montelius 1977b). The *fäboddar* were important in organizing relationships of gender in the villages. Authors point to how the cultivated land around the villages provided relatively little for the people (c.f. Holmbäck 1920; Montelius 1973; Montelius 1977b).<sup>34</sup> Cattle-rearing, especially in the mountain areas, was the main source of livelihood.

The villages had detailed rules about forest use for cattle grazing. Access to land in the forest was related to the land that a particular *socken* (parish) had in the *bygd*. Every farmer<sup>35</sup> owned land down in the village, the *slogar*,<sup>36</sup> and also had a share in the *fäboddar*. Forest land, on the other hand was owned jointly by the *socken* (Holmbäck, 1934:243). Since access in the forests was dependant upon the size and area of the village, village boundaries were often shifted in order to improve access to the forests (Montelius 1977b:23). It was not uncommon that the *fäboddar* shaped the *socken* boundaries and not only *vice versa*. As long as the villages were small and the forest land extensive, the grazing grounds were sufficient for everyone. But when villages expanded the grazing cattle from neighbouring villages came closer (Holmbäck 1934:242). In many a case, at the heart of what may seem like puzzling and unreasonable conflicts about village boundaries, were disputes over a *fäbodställe*, a *slätteräng* or a *myrslog* (marshy area used for making hay) in the forests (Montelius 1977b:23).

Villagers in Drevdagen speak of the village as a *fäbod* that was settled permanently in 1814 by people from Särna-Heden, south of the village. The new settlers moved there with a small number of cows, sheep and goats. "These were the settlers' savings and the basis of their livelihoods. The surplus milk provided butter and cheese for winter needs and the wool/fleece was carded and spun into wool/yarn" (Halvarsson 1999:7). Several women in Drevdagen spoke to me of a clear division in the past between men's and women's work. The women, they claimed, took care of the cattle and the farm while the men worked in the forests.

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<sup>34</sup> Others like Johansson 2000 have said the same about northern Sweden.

<sup>35</sup> Holmbäck presumably implies male farmer. He bases his work on archival material, which includes law books, official documents such as correspondence between the various authorities and with the *sockenmän* (parish men), royal proclamations, meeting protocols and so on. Legal documents or references, however, did not always correspond to the use and management of the forests or the customary rights of the landless. One such case is highlighted by Alinder in his reading of documents from a boundary dispute in 1725 in Särna-Idre (1945).

<sup>36</sup> The *slog* (*slogar* pl.), also called *slättermark*, were the meadows (*ängar*) in the forests where winter fodder for the cattle was gathered. (Montelius 1973:9) writes that the *slättermark* were the 'cultural meadows' (*kulturäng*) that were created with the classical weapons, fire, the axe and scythe, and then maintained mainly by the scythe.

Research has shown that these divisions between the work of men and women were fluid although fixed images of what was men's and women's work persist (e.g. Flygare 1999; Liliequist 1992:79). There are few studies on the division of work between men and women in this region, but the little information available shows that people in upper had Dalarna developed an impressive array of subsidiary incomes apart from farming (Götlind 2002). According to Anna Götlind, these subsidiary forms of income quite obviously influenced how work was divided up between women and men. The men's work in the forests included activities such as hay-making and gathering fodder for the animals and wood for daily use etc. Married women also took part in what was known to be 'male' work, for example, threshing and in some villages threshing was primarily women's work (*Ibid*). Johansson makes references to women being a part of hay-making in the forests, an activity characterised as male (1994). The work on the *fäboddar*, however, appears to be more gender differentiated.

As compared to southern Sweden, cattle-rearing in the north, especially since the middle-ages, was women's work and the shepherds were mainly women. Sigvard Montelius writes that the importance given to timber by the state in more recent years has overshadowed the important role that the forests and cattle rearing played in the economy of the area, and in understanding its economic history. According to him, cattle-rearing was the stable ground upon which the whole economic life rested and in the mountain areas, with little agricultural land, cattle rearing played an even more important role (1977b:19). Montelius cites a royal ordinance of 1686 that suggested that 'as far as possible' farmers engage women instead of boys to herd the cattle. Those who had the possibility and did not do so were to be fined. The reason for this was given as *den vederstyggliga tidelags synden*, 'the abominable sin of sodomy'. He points out other reasons that led to the proclamation of the ordinance, an important one being a systematic effort by the state to involve more women in order to free men for waging war (Montelius 1977b:37-38). According to Jonas Liliequist, the trials that followed in the wake of the ordinance were a way of establishing hegemonic masculinity. The crossing of boundaries between man and animal was closely interwoven with gender transgressions in a society where it was not the threat from effeminacy that was regarded as threatening for manhood (1992:85). The *fäbodväsendet* (*i.e.* the women's work in the forests), a bulwark of the economy, seemed to be very much a women's world, dominated by unmarried young girls. Living in the *fäboddar* in the forests in summer, they formed a close-knit female working culture based on constant association with the cattle. Men did not usually permanently stay on the *fäboddar* (*Ibid*:81). For a man this work in the forests with animals implied a loss of manhood.

In the 1800s, the demand for timber from these areas began to increase. Work in the forests became the livelihood of many men who worked in the forests in the winter to sell timber to the state and later to the sawmill companies.<sup>37</sup> Many of the

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<sup>37</sup> Although the state of the forests is not the topic of discussion, it may be worthwhile to sketch what the forests looked like in these periods. Travellers from the 1700s and 1800s describe instances of an extensively used landscape. Burned

*fäbod* cottages began to be used by them during that period. Since then, the forests have been linked to the importance of timber<sup>38</sup> while, culturally, many of the customs and traditions from the cattle-rearing years have lived on, changing form through the years. The *fäbod* in this part of Dalarna continued for longer than in the more cultivated areas of Dalarna further to the south. The construction of the forests as a masculine domain thus developed in tandem with the increasing state intervention in the forest areas and the formalisation of rights.

### *Crown Policies and the gendered construction of property rights*

An increase in mining (*bergbruket*) and an accompanying demand for timber and charcoal meant that the forests became a sought after commodity, especially from the point of view of the crown.<sup>39</sup> “The liberal ideas of the 1800’s” also played a part in the increasing move towards delineating forest land as private property (Montelius 1977a:41), a move that appears to have consolidated property rights mainly for men. Although individual ownership of land was recognized, there were also complicated forms of joint ownership and ownership regulated by marriage and inheritance (Alinder 1945). Towards the end of the 1800s the claims to land began to be formalized by the crown through the process of *avittring*, delimitation of crown land, and the forests were divided up during the *storskifte*, the great distribution of landholdings. Boundaries were drawn between what came to be considered crown land and individual landowners’ forest land. Individual landownership thus came to be seen as an important new category in the management of the forests.

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forests and naked ground are described as common. On the other hand, large areas are also described as untouched forests with large trees, snags, and dead wood. The forests of the 1800s were differently aged, multi-storied, open, marked by burned and pasture forest landscape. Contrary to this are the forests of the 1900s, especially since the changes in forestry from the 1950 where the practice of clear cuts, clearing, planting etc. have led to forests with more uniform and younger, even aged stands and a loss of old forest stands. The quantity of dead wood has also radically declined (Ericsson 1997).

<sup>38</sup> The importance of timber can be seen even today. For example, unlike the international FAO standard that measures forest cover on the basis of the covered area, Sweden does it on the basis of the timber that is available.

<sup>39</sup> The previous century, the 1700s presents a very different picture. Accounts from travellers for example refer to the disregard for timber by the inhabitants of Dalarna as they either burnt the forests to clear it for agriculture or debarked trees and left the logs to rot. Carl von Linné on his journey past the north of Rättvik in the Dalarna of 1734 wrote disapprovingly, “*ganska många nederhuggna, avbarkade tallar, som ligga nere och ruttna bort, fast de till ved eller något annat kunde employeras. På heden stodo timmerstockar långt sedan förtorkade, som till ingen nytta kunde användas, utan föruttna; ty timmerskog är till överflöd.*” His description of the forests between Stådjan and Idre is as dismal. Quite obviously changes were afoot further south in how the forests were perceived, as he went on to write that the forests of Dalarna were a rich natural resource that could be put to much better use (cited in Fries 1977).

Over time, the rights of the formal owner of the property acquired greater significance, even if the land continued to be used or managed as common property. The historian, Maria Sjöberg, writes that in combination with the land reforms, state regulations began to prioritise the individual at the cost of (among others) village organisations. On the whole this contributed to property rights becoming more precise and absolute. The collective characteristics of property rights were toned down, albeit slowly (2002:115). The intricate distribution of property in small strips of land in many parts of Dalarna is believed by many to be the result of the fact that women as well as men inherited property. Sjöberg argues that this view of individual and property rights is misleading. Research on property rights has focussed on the situation as it was for men, and has then been discussed and generalised as if it were relevant to everyone. Despite this, it is quite well known that men and women enjoyed very different possibilities regarding property ownership, different terms and legal property rights. Much of what has been taken to be the rights pertaining to individuals were rights actually held by men, although marriage was decisive in regulating property relations. She argues that, seen from a gender perspective, individual ownership in Sweden cannot be seen as established before the law of 1920 when women were declared (*myndig*) adult legal persons and acquired the legal right to both possess and manage property (2001). However, there are qualifications to be made to this argument as well. The new law applied to women in legal marriages that took place after 1920. In practice women did not have the economic right to manage land until a new law in 1950 (Niskanen 2001). Women before this time therefore, had limited and unequal scope to exercise power since it was not possession as such but management that conferred power and agency (Sjöberg 2001). However although they had little *legal* power of management there were exceptions, especially in cases where the woman was a widow.<sup>40</sup> Ironically, it was the responsibility of women to document and keep track of the innumerable small patches of agricultural land in the villages, which in Dalarna were continually in a state of transaction as a result of marriage, birth or death in the community. The women kept track of this puzzle, mapped all the new born infants, where they belonged and their intricate family relationships (Sporrong 1995:107).

What began to be seen as formal ownership in the forests was first and foremost ownership of the 'timber' in the forests, and forest work was associated with timber extraction (*cf.* Johansson 2000:57). This work was identified with men although there are references to some women taking over male activities. It appears that forest activities not associated with timber, and that were carried out by both women and men, did not necessarily find place in the formal definition of forest use. Furthermore, gendered construction of property rights during the first half of the 20th century played an important part in creating perceptions of family farming as a mainly male form of enterprise (Niskanen 2001) and by extension also of forest ownership<sup>41</sup> and work in the forests. In her thesis on the loggers of

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<sup>40</sup> An extremely interesting example of such a case has been described by Sjöberg (2002).

<sup>41</sup> Lidestav(2003), for example, shows that although it was 150 years ago that both men and women were eligible to inherit forest property in equal proportions, and

the 1800-1900s, Johansson vividly describes the images of masculinity that were created of the individualistic, hardworking lumberjacks and drivers (*körare*). The forest workers in her descriptions were linked closely to the forests as the site where timber was produced, coupled to a notion of freedom that the work in the forests provided. It is perhaps in this period that the forests as the domain of certain men became the overriding image. This definition persists even today although the economic basis of the households does not come directly from the forests any more. This masculinisation of the forests was related to ideas of who was capable of taking care of the forests, a point that I elaborate further.

### *Appropriation of forest land by the crown*

Forest policies had material consequences for structuring the space of the village and its environment. When drawing boundaries between individually owned forests and the crown land, the authorities decreed that all farmers would keep as much forest as was needed for their use, and the remaining land would be taken over as crown forest. It is interesting that the crown appropriated forest land on the grounds that they could then supply the populace with timber for building (Alinder 1945:120; Holmbäck 1934:VI). In 1865 four crown forests (*kronoparker*) were created in Särna by the crown and a fifth in 1878. Minutes of a meeting held in Särna with the villagers on the 9th of September, 1864 reveal how the crown justified its actions. A.E. Ros, the head of the *Skogstyrelse*<sup>42</sup> spoke to the villagers of the appalling state of the forests because of excessive logging to fulfil the demands of the saw mills. He justified the setting up of the crown forests by saying that the forests needed to be secured for the future and from the adverse effects of deforestation on the climate, an argument that is not very different from the ways in which the forest problem has been defined in India (chapter three). Such protection, they explained to the villagers, would be undertaken by the authorities based on scientific methods and would serve as an example to other forest owners (Alinder 1945:120). The authorities also claimed that the take over of the forests by the crown would put a stop to the destruction of the forests and to social problems like drunkenness and gambling that had resulted from the large inflow of money from illegal logging (Björk cited in Ericsson 1997:16). These forests eventually came under the control of the *Kungl. Domänverket*, the Royal Swedish Forest Service. There are men in and around Drevdagen today who have title deeds to pieces of forest land that were taken over by the state in the latter part of the 1800s, for which they claim that they were never compensated. Some relate stories of how their ancestors were cheated out of the land, as it fell under the management of the Royal Swedish Forest Service in the late 1800s. At least one person from a neighbouring village has taken up this cause and is in the midst of a protracted legal battle with the State.

As a result of the great redistribution of land holdings and delimitation of crown lands, another category of land, the *besparingsskog*, or the commons, was created

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although the number of women owners has increased dramatically, only 37 per cent of forest owners are women today.

<sup>42</sup> Now the National board of forestry.

in Dalarna (Carlsson 2001; Ericsson 1997). After the farm and village lands were determined and the borders to crown lands were decided and fixed, the next step was to allocate a portion of the land allotted to the farmers as a forest commons or *besparingsskog* (Carlsson, 2001:4). This initially occasioned considerable protest from the villagers (Montelius 1977a:42). According to Kardell, the formation of the *besparingsskog* may be seen as an effort to declare incompetent private forest owners' management. The 'owners' of the commons were not granted the authority to sell or manage the forest commons on their own, and it was not until a law in 1938 that it was made clear that the *besparingsskog* were the private property of the owners (cited in Ericsson 1997:7).

The increasing demand for timber to meet household needs, for mining and for making charcoal (*järnhantering*) was accelerated by the demand for timber from sawmills and forest companies, major actors that gained an ascendancy in the latter half of the 1800s. As male farmers gained ownership rights that could be bought and sold, the companies proceeded to buy out forest land from the men and began to log the forests in order to supply the sawmills with raw material. During the late 1800s and the first few decades of the 1900s, the sale of land by villagers to forest companies resulted in a political debate that came to be called the Norrland Question. The sale of the forests to the companies was criticised strongly by the state. The 1900s saw the enforcement of several laws, the so-called Norrland laws (1906-25), that prohibited companies from buying forests from small forest holders. The question at that time was 'were the forests managed best by local owners or by the companies?' (Sörlin 1988). The crux of the debate was between the efficiency of small-scale management by individual owners or communities *vis-à-vis* the benefits of large-scale management, a debate that in a different way is making a comeback in Swedish policy today and remains pertinent to the case of Drevdagen.

It is interesting to see how different arguments are used to further apparently similar causes with regard to the forests over time.

The division of collective forest property to individual owners would have beneficial effects on the management of forests was almost an axiom for those who in the second half of the 18th century and the first half of the 1800s were eager for reforms that would give individual owners greater possibilities for action (Pettersson 1995:130).

The state justified privatization of forest land, the so called *avittring*, by the fact that it would reduce the logging of the forests. This argument was also used to pave the way for the take over of large parts of the common forest land by the state.

In Drevdagen about 200 years later it is the villagers who wanted to stop the sale of forest land to private buyers in order to avoid possible logging. They based their argument on the fact that the vitality of the entire area depended on the communities having a measure of control over their environment. They wanted the

villages to be part of the process of managing the forests, which they knew so well. When it came to choosing between the sale to private buyers or to a state owned company, the village association lobbied for the sale to the State, since the State in some way must be answerable to the people in a way that a private company is not. Of course both these instances above point to very different contexts. Earlier the forests were meant to be owned by the farmers in the area and at present a sale that would in all likelihood be to absentee owners.

*'Having by working' and 'continuity in change'*

Historians have expressed surprise that the appropriation of the forests as *kronoparker* in Särna-Idre did not bring forth protest from the local inhabitants (e.g. Björck cited in Eriksson, 1997:17). Protests evidently occurred elsewhere, as seen by the account given by Åke Holmbäck for the area of Lima, Transtrand and Orsa (1934). One explanation may be that the forest land available in Särna-Idre was still vast, and largely inaccessible to the authorities, as compared to the other areas where pressure on land was increasing.

In their stories the villagers of Drevdagen explained that although they lost formal or statutory rights in the crown forests around the village, the villagers informally continued to exercise their user rights. Johansson uses the metaphor of *stöka*, that may explain the situation where informal user rights prevail despite changes in formal juridical ownership. The idea of legitimate appropriation and legitimate ownership through *stökande*, that is through intensive work to maintain the landscape, was very prevalent. The forests' resources became 'property' when 'work' was put into them (2000:55-56). She writes that this should not just be looked upon as a remnant from the past but as a process that has been developed and strengthened through the modern ownership system. According to her, this can be found even today in the inland areas of Norrland. Kjell Hansen writes in a similar vein, "...hard work was the link that bound together relative wellbeing with honour" (2000:133), that is, in a way it was hard work that confirmed ownership. According to Kaldar, the same forest that could bestow status or authority could give a property-less person freedom and shelter – and a worker pride over work put into it – at the same time and in the same forest. At times this created conflicts, and did not in others (2000:16).

The meaning and value of work in the forests, especially women's work none the less, changed over time. The official definitions of 'work in the forests' became that which was associated with timber extraction and this influenced how work was regarded in the rural areas as well. Research in Jämtland and Västerbotten shows that both men and women tended to highlight men's work on the fields and the forests whenever the conversation turned to work (Hansen 2000:124). A similar observation from Trysil and North Värmland is that it was the men's work in the forests that was actually regarded as 'work' (Kaldal 2000). The significance attached to men's work on farms has been noted by Iréne Flygare in a region in central Sweden. She writes that regardless of the time that the women worked or spent on the farm 'outside', 'the outside' was considered the man's sphere. This had important consequences for the position of future

generations in terms of land ownership and management (2001). The forests around Drevdagen that I refer to in the next chapter were not private property. Yet access to the forests and work within the forests had implications for gender relations in the village, just as much as gendered images of forestry played a part in ordering relations in the village.

The villagers of Drevdagen and the surrounding areas were gradually restricted by *Domänsverket* from exercising user rights like fishing, hunting, tourist related activities, firewood and lichen collecting and small-scale forestry and processing. The benchmark, according to one of the older men in the village, was a conflict over hunting rights that gave rise to a court case:

In the 1950s a slogförening<sup>43</sup> was formed in the area. In 1966 there was a court case when two moose were shot on the slog, one on the wrong side of the boundary. Then a court process started. When it came to the authorities... they said, we must act as if it is our land. The only right we villages have left is one that is applicable for everyone in the country, the *allmansrätt* (the right of public access).

Forest policy in the years after World War I aimed to increase production of timber (*virke*). These years witnessed the expansion of the forest industry and the forest as raw material for industry became all the more important. According to some authors, the forest industry's need for raw material, and the trade unions' will to secure members' employment, created a common stake and became an important factor within forest politics (SUS 2001:30). This was also the time of intense industrialization in Sweden as the rest of Europe lay ravaged by the war. Employment in the cities provided an option for many people and to some extent this created the space to negotiate the terms of work in the forests. In his book on the struggle for the school in Drevdagen, Hans Halvarsson (1999) describes the Post World War II period similarly. Working conditions in the forests and the home began to improve largely as a result of the work of the trade unions in the area.<sup>44</sup> The young boys in the villages had their lives charted out for them. They found work in the lumberjack teams (*huggarlaget*) as soon as they were old enough. During the summers there was lucrative employment for the men in the 'floating ducks' that evacuated timber down the rivers (*rallare, timmermän*). Halvarsson writes,

Incomes went up and the still contented people of those times (*tidens ännu förnöjsamma människor*) began to notice the beginning of a relative wellbeing with space for heretofore

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<sup>43</sup> An association to manage the slog lands.

<sup>44</sup> The syndicalists, a left oriented trade union movement, had many supporters in this area. Villagers in Drevdagen referred to a famous court case between the 'blackfeet' strike breakers from Mora who came to work for a forest company while men from Drevdagen and the surrounding areas were on strike. The story based on official documents has also been told in Falk (2002).

unreachable things, for example cars. Forest work and the small farms complemented each other and created a harmonious although laborious life pattern, a noticeable belief in the future and a continually increasing population, not only in Drevdagen but also in nearby communities with similar conditions (*Ibid.*:8).

Commercial forestry had helped to sustain small scale farming in this area by providing villagers with a stable basis for other activities. Technical developments and rationalisation within forest management fractured this stability (Montelius 1977a:46). Although images of masculine forestry changed in form (*e.g.* see Brandth and Haugen 2000) they continued to maintain their dominance. As the Swedish economy became increasingly dependent on these areas, their cultural and political status *vis-à-vis* the centre became one of growing asymmetry as marginality was redefined.

### **The making of the *Glesbygd***

The 1950's saw the beginning of mechanisation of work in the forests. Work opportunities in forestry began to disappear. This was the beginning of greater state regulation in prices and large-scale rationalisation in agricultural politics whose effects were to be felt in this area through the coming years. The seasonal work in the forests that the men from the villages in this area had been able to get was gradually replaced by fixed annual labour contracts. Duck floating was replaced by a network of roads that began to be used for transporting the timber.

Industrialization absorbed much of the forest labour force. In my interviews with the villagers of Drevdagen, a narrative emerged of a clear cause and effect between State policy and the ensuing migration from the village. It had a tangible presence in my conversations especially with the older generation. In the words of Halvarsson (*Ibid.*: 10):

The 1960s had barely begun when a very tangible worry began to infect the village population. When we eventually could decipher the authorities' and the media's message, we unwillingly worked out that we lived in the wrong place in our country...Out in the field, closest to us this propaganda was spread by the labour market authorities, who also had the requisite means to pressure people. Their 'information' got absorbed to such a degree that the villager who chose to stay on risked being marked as backward, if he insisted on staying on in this out of the way spot and not catch hold of a sure chance in the big town!

People were encouraged by state authorities to move to towns and were given moving grants, *flyttbidrag*, to set up homes in urban centres. As the wave of industrialisation subsided, "there were no matching moving home grants," said

Gerd, an elderly woman, who had returned to the village with her husband when work in the cities had dried up.

### *Becoming a Problem: The city as the measure*

The depopulation of many peripheral areas became a policy concern in the 1960s, especially as it coincided with the making of the welfare state. In policy and in research, migration flows between various parts of the country gained attention in the Swedish discussion of regional balance (*cf.* Borgegård et al, 1999). The emigration of young women as compared to men from the countryside became a part of the discussion in the 1980s and the cause of alarm - as painted by the media and in some political debates. The discussion on depopulation has, however, been qualified by research that has showed a localised increase in population beginning in the 1970s that has been called the “unplanned green wave” (Westlund 2002). Research from the 1990s points to the fact that the trend is not only negative, especially in rural areas close to the big cities (Amcoff 1997). On the whole, however, population dynamics are characterised by flows from the *glesbygd* to the metropolitan areas. Political measures that sought to solve the *glesbygd*sproblem became part of the building of the welfare state with its ideals of solidarity and equality. “To work against the dramatic depopulation and lack of employment in the forest counties (*skogslän*), the parliament decided in 1965 for an active regional policy” (white paper of 1997/98:62 cited in Lundqvist 1997).

Frånberg writes that the concept *glesbygd* and the problems one associates with it are a relatively modern invention that was formulated during the fast urbanising process of the decade of 1950-60. She points out that low population density was not always regarded as a problem. On the contrary, high population density in the countryside was earlier thought to hinder development. However, several evaluations have since then shown differences between the urban centres and the *glesbygd* in terms of, first and foremost, quantifiable variables like employment rate, taxable incomes, school education, and access to public service (1994:5). The benchmark for these variables was the urban milieu to which these places were compared (Forsberg 1996; Johansson, Persson and Wiberg 1989). A comparative study of the Nordic welfare states carried out in the early 1970s showed that Sweden had 23 per cent of its population in the countryside as opposed to 40 per cent in the other Nordic countries. This, according to Erik Allardt, meant that in decisions made for the entire society, the countryside was represented as a fraction in the average. Thus small groups became marginalised or pushed outside of the planning and the decision-making framework; policy was decided on grounds other than their own (1975). According to Forsberg, in such a process, policies are formed such that the *landsbygd* (rural areas) and the *glesbygd* (the sparsely populated areas) are taken to be uniform other while the policies of towns and smaller towns (*tätorter*) are adapted to their particular size and character (Forsberg 1994).

The image of the *glesbygd* for policy makers and the media became that of areas marked by deficits in contrast to the cities (*cf.* Bjerén 1989; Frånberg 1994; Hansen 1999). “In the modern project, the city is associated with development and

creativity while the countryside or *glesbygd* is seen as backward and insular” (Rönblom 2002:34). “In the urban perspective that dominates in the media, among policy makers and in conversations between people, the *glesbygd* is characterised by all kinds of deficits, especially those that make up the big city” (Bjerén 1989:11). Images of women in the *glesbygd* are doubly laden. “If there is any reference to the women they are can be seen as the *glesbygds* Anna...associations go to the jam-making unemployed woman in her upper middle ages, whose existential problems would be solved if some suitable, feminine industry would be established in the *glesbygd*” (*Ibid.*:11). Rönblom argues also that in some academic research, the picture of the *glesbygd* as patriarchal and backward is reinforced further when the *glesbygd* is represented by male dominated activities such as commercial forestry, hunting, fishing (2002).

The ambitious goal of the state was to achieve equal welfare (material) for everyone in the country wherever they lived. In 1966, the government set up a special group to work with questions of the *glesbygd*. An *utjämningspolitik* (equalisation policy/transfer policy) was formulated that aimed to support regions such as the *glesbygd* where the prerequisites for ‘development’ and ‘growth’ were held to be weak. This necessitated a flow of resources to agriculture and to enterprise and to building of collective utilities in these areas. According to some researchers, these solutions to the problems identified by the State did not make a significant difference or lead to improvement in the ‘*glesbygd* problem’. Referring to the state subsidies provided to the *glesbygd*, Frånberg writes that once having decided what was good for the rural areas, the State then provided the means to make the benefits come true. In doing so, the important interdependence between people that formed the basis for the informal economy was weakened (1994:7). The negative effects of earlier projects, of clearing forest land and forest exploitation affected the *glesbygd* to a much greater extent than for example the efforts to establish hydro-power units, peat-cutting and exploitation of minerals, which can be assumed to have only local effects (Frånberg, 1994:6, Johanisson, 1989).

In 1977 an official delegation, the *glesbygdsdelegation*, was established for sparsely populated areas. It adopted a ‘development based’ approach that aimed to build on the resources that these areas had and the 1980s were characterised by support for ‘development’ and small scale enterprise (Frånberg, 1994:8 from Ds 1984). However, at the same time as these efforts were undertaken, the pressure to align natural resource management (*areella näringar*) and public services to the market was increased. The major part of the productive and future-oriented investments in the *glesbygd* was concentrated, *de facto*, on the central towns. This was so despite the *glesbygd* policy’s expressed concern with small scale enterprise and use of local resources in the peripheral areas (Johanisson, Persson and Wiberger 1989 193:9).<sup>45</sup> In the words of Bengt Johanisson, Lars Olof Persson and Ulf

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<sup>45</sup> Having said this the authors go on to highlight the *glesbygds*’ urban features and say that policy needs to build on this thoroughly urbanized society (*genomurbaniserad samhälle*) and that the point of departure needs to be the urban features of the *glesbygd* where potential for development lies.

Wiberg, once the compensation concept had been launched, the *glesbygds*problem as we know it today began to get cemented. Many of these regions, especially the northern counties became identified as *stödregioner* (regions that needed support) through targeted regional policy. According to them, one could call this “the institutionalised *glesbygd*” in reference to the organized care which contributed to – for better and for worse –containing the dynamism of these regions (1989). The welfare state reached deep into peoples’ lives.

Welfare policies tied the villages to the central power through a number of different areas: law-making, education, infrastructure, the political system etc. Many functions and activities disappeared from the villages when the welfare state took on the responsibility for people’s welfare. In this process direct relations were established between individual households and the national society’s various organs and transferring systems, barnbidrag (child allowance), health insurance (sjukförsäkring), unemployment support, housing allowance (bostadsbidrag) etc. came to be the pillars of the welfare society (Hansen 2000:138).

Hansen provides an illuminating example in his study of the state’s housing policy. At the same time as providing resources the housing policy played a disciplining role in establishing a discourse on the right sort of housing. The price one had to pay for access to such resources was marginalisation. The right to describe what the rural problem was and what measures were needed, was taken care of by the representatives of the state. The housing policy thus contributed to a new, centrally identified discourse on the rural areas.

In the opinion of some authors such measures led to the cultural disarming of the countryside (Allardt 1975; Frånberg 1994). Hansen writes about this phenomenon as the “unintended consequences” that surfaced due to the efforts to improve the welfare of the people. These were the effects on people’s thinking that were not related to State objectives but came about because of them. The result, he believes, contributed more than ever before to place local communities in the framework of the ‘larger society’ (1999:41). Using Fraser’s terms, this is a case of having fuelled misrecognition in the course of trying to remedy distribution by stigmatizing the recipients and casting them as deviants and scroungers (2003:64). While seeking to better the conditions of living in the rural areas, the underlying economic and political processes that constructed these areas as marginal were not necessarily addressed. Much has been written about the flow of resources to the forest areas but the outflow of resources from these areas has not been part of the discussion. The forests are still a major basis of the Swedish economy. However, many people in Drevdagen felt that they have paid a heavy price to pay for living in forest areas despite an improvement in their standard of living. The forests from many such areas have been used to build up the national infrastructure with the cities as the point of departure for defining the good life and what is needed to create this. Villagers in Drevdagen claimed that this

separated them from control over their environment and they were restricted from using the forests that otherwise have provided sustenance for their communities.

During the 1970s the environmental movement began to gain ground in Sweden, known colloquially in the 1970s as the 'green wave'. By the decade of the 1990s, the dominant view of the forests in Sweden had become increasingly that of the forests as a resource, either as raw materials that keeps the economy in place or as natural resource and a valuable ecosystem to be taken care of. Discussions have centred on the close to hostile relationships between the environmentalists and the proponents of commercial forestry: between the desire to preserve the forests and that of using them as a resource that has allowed Sweden to build its economy. In the confrontations from the 1970s onwards between environmental aims and those of forest production, local communities have chosen to position themselves variously in different situations. The disputes that erupted also have pitted various state authorities, and state/private companies against each other.

Although there are references to the 'social values' of the forests both in the literature and in policy documents (*e.g.* SUS, 2001:43)(Skr. 2001/02:173), these references are largely restricted to seeing the forests as spaces for recreation and for sport, and for arguing that these needs should be taken into account. These social values are seen to be important especially with respect to forests close to towns (*tätortsnära skogar*) and also where tourist activities take place, that is, where the major part of recreational use of the forests takes place. The following passage taken from an evaluation of forest policy in Sweden (SUS, 2001:229), is one way social values/worth (*värden*) have been dealt with:

The forests where the social values are used is for most people the same as the forests in their neighbourhood that is, the forest that can be reached in a few minutes from their homes, the forests close to towns. It is in this forest that most people base their understanding and attitudes towards forestry (skogsbruket) and investigations reveal that it is in these forest areas that more than half of the visits to the forests occur. That what differentiates the urban forests from the rural forests is partly that they are used more frequently and partly that the public's willingness to influence their management is much bigger. These forests' social worth are therefore important.

This passage highlights what has been said before by various researchers, that urban relations define relations (in this case to the forests) not only in the towns and cities but also in the countryside. The social value of the forests is as places for recreation, not necessarily as a possible basis for the vitality of the communities living with the forests. It seems that the relationship of the people living around the urban forests is taken as symptomatic of peoples' relations to forests in general. Certification standards, such as those of the Forestry Stewardship Council offer another mechanism for taking social considerations into account. A major part of the Swedish forest industry has registered to apply these

standards. They have been extremely important for certain communities - but also not undisputed.

The account that I have sketched above does not imply a direct equation of central power with the cities and of powerlessness with the *glesbygd*. I have so far described general measures taken by the State that affected rural areas such as Drevdagen. The ways in which the people responded can be assumed to be complex and varied. The *glesbygd* as a problem area was and remains a powerful discourse that is elaborated and contested by the people living in these areas in various ways. In his studies, Hansen characterised the position of the people as one of intransigence (*motsträvighet*) towards the centre, that lies somewhere between conformism (*inordning*) and resistance (*motstånd*) (2000). Some of this may be seen in the stories from Drevdagen that I relate in the next chapter. What I am referring to here is the mindset and/or the dominant discourse in which policy was articulated wherein the *glesbygd* was perceived as and became a problem area that needed to be taken care of, either by support or by needing to develop itself. These measures also had gendered consequences, some of which I discuss in the next section.

### *Gendered effects of welfare*

The double-edged relations to the central state were felt keenly by women. A number of women entered the formal labour market and for many this provided economic independence in the larger struggle for gender equality. Increasing urbanisation drew more women into service and other professions, making the distinction between rural and urban in terms of employment activities more diffuse. The largest labour market for women became the public sector. State policies were seen as a primary means to achieve equality for everyone, men and women. This issue is discussed further in chapter ten. The expansion of the public sector professionalized a range of activities such as childcare, some kinds of nursing, care of the elderly, that hitherto had been carried out as unpaid labour in the home, traditionally by women. The disproportionate recruitment of women into public sector services was related to the fact that most of the men were already in the labour market. By the 1990s, Sweden had the highest female employment rate in the western world at 85 percent. The employment rate for men was 90 per cent. Extensive female labour market participation was a precondition for the formation of the welfare model. However, part-time work by women, the fact that women carry out most of the unpaid labour and gender differentials in wages and terms of employment can be seen as an expression of existing relationships of power between the sexes (Forsberg, 1999:81-83). Lena Gomäs calls women's temporary and part-time work, the *permanenta tillfälligheter* or the permanent coincidences (cited in Kåks 2002).

Forsberg's research in 1997 on the distribution of economic power and economic resources between women and men, showed that the most gender segregated labour markets were those in the western forest communities. On an average there were 2.5 women employed in public services compared to every one man. Women had a much lower level of income than compared to the men and

many were employed only as part-time labour, despite the fact that their level of education was the same as that of the men. A large part of what she calls the social infrastructure *i.e.* the services sectors consisted of women workers, and in addition a large part of the social infrastructure was maintained by women through unpaid labour within their family and circle of relatives (1997:43-45). The public sector, she believes, plays an important role in deciding the level of freedom that the women have, and in gender relations. It may be assumed that women would be less inclined to move to places that do not have the services provided in other parts of the country and that restrict their freedom. The stories from Drevdagen present a more complex picture. Despite the absence of public services, the choice that several women made to live in the countryside was motivated by a desire to exercise agency by working with development activities and in the creation of a living countryside. They sought a freedom that they believed they did not have in the cities. In examining how policy responded to attempts for what the villagers called a living countryside, I saw the policies divided among different, overlapping and sometimes surprisingly distant fields.

### **Rural development in Sweden: an uncertain framework?**

The 'rural' is a problematic category in the Swedish context. This is partly because what may be characterised as rural differ in character from one another (in terms of population, resources etc.) but also especially in light of the regional approach and policies that have sought to eradicate differences in the standard of living between different parts of the country. On the one hand, there has been no separate area of policy for the rural areas in Sweden. On the other hand, there have been attempts outside of mainstream policy making that have sought to support particular aspects of rural development, notably, the attempts by various people both in the rural areas and from the centre to sustain community life.

#### *A local perspective*

In the 1970s, a 'local' perspective began to gain ground in policy discussions with regard to the rural areas. From 1981, this meant this meant trying to work actively with the village development groups that had come up in several parts of the country, especially in the north, including the women's networks that I discuss below. The 1980s was also the time of renewed political and theoretical interest in co-operatives as a development and collaborative idea. In 1987-88, the European Council encouraged its member states to initiate a campaign for the countryside. The number of local development activities increased over this period, and converged with other such movements in a campaign called *Hela Sverige ska leva* (All Sweden shall live). They culminated in the first Rural Parliament held in Umeå in April 1989 (see Vail 1996). Since then, local development groups in some places have begun to interact more with municipal and county authorities in area-based development although the relationships have not always been friction-free. The *Glesbygdsmyndigheten* (the authority for the sparsely populated areas) was established in 1991 and it was later formalized as the *Glesbygdssverket*, the Swedish National Rural Development Agency. Many people active in the

campaign got together and formed the Council of People's Movement, the *Folkrörelserådet*, as a national centre to support and stimulate local development work (Herlitz 1998:24). At this time the *Glesbygdsverket* was assigned responsibility for the welfare of the *glesbygd*, in the absence of any national rural development policy, an anomaly pointed out by Erik Westholm and Jan Amcoff in the course of a State-initiated inquiry (2003).

### *Growth and Partnerships*

This contradiction was exacerbated by a turn in the focus of regional policy. After the economic downturn of the early 1990s and entry into the E.U., regional policy shifted from supporting the outlying regions to acceptance of the *tillväxt* (growth) principle where the regions were envisaged as making use of their special qualities for regional development. From a focus on urban-rural relations, the attention shifted to the relations between regions where the development of urban areas gained in importance (*c.f.* Westholm 2003:47). Growth is to be achieved through partnerships among various actors in the regions. Partnership was a term that had become common in policy in other parts of Europe for some years has been actively pursued in Sweden since the decade of the 1990s. Regional growth partnerships were set up in all Swedish regions in 1998 and were given the responsibility for producing the so-called growth agreements (*regionala tillväxtavtal*) for each region. The partnership approach remains an important element in the implementation of European Community policies in planning and development and it encourages the active participation of the community in its own regulation. Westholm believes that "the most important change is a gradual shift from top-down and primarily re-distributive policies to promoting dynamic development strategies based on bottom-up perspectives and endogenous processes" (Westholm, Moseley and Stenlås 1999:13). The approach seeks to combine public sector support with efforts made by the private and voluntary sector, accompanied by a decentralisation of power and responsibility from the state to the local level, to the municipalities.

Ideally, such a position is to be welcomed by local groups, especially by those women who are active in the development of their villages but who have been left outside of policy formation processes. However, researchers have been critical of the gender-neutral framing of the regional policy documents, the consensual approach as well as of the contradictions between the rhetoric and the practice of partnerships. Some have argued that decisions and agreements between a collusion of dominant actors within a region in several instances may now be legitimised by their transformation into a recognized partnership (Hudson and Rönnblom 2003). Westholm also points to what may be an inherent contradiction in partnerships that are "put together by the establishment and therefore organisations that are traditionally strong in the region get a favoured position within them" (1999:21). Research from some regions shows that women have been poorly represented in both the organisational structures and the processes of growth agreements and little space has been devoted to gender equality issues and measures (Hudson and Rönnblom 2003:13). In other words, it is the same old actors as before (Scholten 2003:88). According to Christina Scholten, the duplicity in the argumentation is

clear. In the growth agreements, with some exception, there is little attention to equality between women and men and at the same time, the growth agreements are stated to be an instrument for achieving an equal society (*Ibid.*).

### *Women's networks*

A number of women's networks began to emerge from the 1980s onwards in the rural areas especially in the inland areas of Northern Sweden. They actively participated in development activities in their areas and their work often led to general mobilisation in their areas (Bull 1995). Thus during the rural campaign, *Hela Sverige Ska Leva*, a special network was formed for and by women active in the campaign. They drew attention to the fact that women's situation in the countryside was often made invisible. The group wanted to make visible the work that women did as well as facilitate networking between women in the public authorities and women working locally. They lobbied for women's issues and formed a women's group and in 1992 constituted themselves in a project called *kvinnokraft* (women's force) that was linked organizationally to the *Glesbygdsverket* (Bull 2000:25). *Kvinnokraft* consisted of a network of women working within public authorities and other organizations at the central, regional and local level. Its aim was to bring a gender perspective to regional policy. In the white paper of 1994 the group succeeded in getting through its demand for regional resource centres for women.

The focus of the women's resource centres became entrepreneurship, rather than local development in broad terms, the original focus that had directed the work of *Kvinnokraft* (Interview with Herlitz in Scholten 2003:191). In 1995 a national resource centre (NRC) for women was established at the Swedish Business Development Agency (NUTEK) in Stockholm. It was meant to be responsive to the thoughts, ideas, projects and activities that were taking place in the countryside and convey these to the authorities who worked with regional policy. By placing the NRC at NUTEK, the regional resource centres had to relate to and have their work steered by the thinking on questions of regional growth that characterised the work of NUTEK (*Ibid.*:193). The aim was that the regional resource centres would complement overall policy measures on gender-mainstreaming that had been adopted by the Swedish government on entering the European Union. However, Rönnblom writes that several county governments decided to close down their regional centres, using the argument that mainstreaming was the new strategy to work with *jämställdhet* (equality between men and women) and that special efforts for women were a thing of the past. At the same time, in her opinion, the very term resource centres for women in the countryside maintains the reproduction of the *glesbygds* woman as a problem, who is in need of resources. Moreover, the resource centres and earmarked funding led to a certain institutionalisation of women's organizing in the *glesbygd* – something that may be seen as a recognition but also a co-option. Efforts were directed at women to both stay and come back to the *glesbygd* by financing different types of women's projects (Rönnblom, 2002:78). Women's networks began to be seen as a resource for the rural areas (Bull 1993:5), a perspective not too different from seeing women as efficient workers that I have discussed in the case of India. This

institutionalising of women's organizing had advantages for the women as they could seek grants for projects, but to justify the need for extra resources they had to be defined as more subordinated. What does this say about their potential for resistance? (Rönnblom 2002:83). This is a question that comes up in a somewhat different way in chapter ten.

### **Research 'from below'**

Although studies on development initiatives at the village and community level are few, there has been a renewed attention to groups at the local level that have grown rapidly mainly since 1990. The groups are seen to fill the growing distance between the citizens and the municipalities (Herlitz 2002) in a situation where people are increasingly being expected to take over responsibility for themselves (Månsson 1996; Westholm 1997). Government bodies refer to making use of (*tillvarata*) human resources and local mobilization in the municipalities (Ramsell cited in Berglund, 85). These groups also are seen to express a 'place ideology' (Herlitz 2000), as what brings them together is a sense of belonging to the place (Forsberg 2001; Gunnarsdotter 2003; Lindfors 1997; Ronnby 1997; Vergunst 2003) as they work to create a new social economy (Westlund 2001). Co-operatives have become an appealing way of working together in the countryside and women especially have been active in them (Grut 1995). Nonetheless, Anna-Karin Berglund points out the incompatibilities that these groups face in their relations with existing bureaucratic structures (1998). The role of women's networks and of *eldsjälar*, 'fire souls' in mobilising local communities (Bull, 1993), (Frånberg 1994) has also received attention. However there is less attention to how a place may have different meanings for different people, and to how gender relations play a role in the vision for the future in these places (Arora-Jonsson 2004).

These studies bring a welcome focus on the grassroots. Forsberg argues that the traditional view of the 'rural' as a peripheral area persists and research on the rural areas has mainly been carried out in a top down perspective, from the horizon of the town. However, rather than hegemony of the urban over the peripheral, she sees a struggle for power, albeit between contenders with unequal strength (Forsberg 1996). The centre-periphery dichotomy is reproduced in various ways, in the rural areas itself but also in research. Research faces the dilemma of wanting to highlight the dynamism of rural areas but in doing so also strengthening the view of the local *versus* the centre - of what might heterogeneous groupings, as people work and ally themselves differently with people inside and outside of the local place – in their efforts to bring about change.

Research on forest history on the other hand has in the past concentrated on economic and technological aspects (*e.g.* see review by Björklund 1988). The focus has been on the formal forest economy populated mainly by men, both within and outside of the local communities. More recently, the gendered division of labour in the communities in the past and a discussion of the gendered ownership of agricultural (Sjöberg 2001; Sjöberg 2002) and forest land (Lidestav

2001; Lidestav, Engman and Wästerlund 2000) has been taken up. The importance of the forests as important in creating gendered images and relations has also been the subject of research (Ekman 1983; Johansson 1994) and has been of value in understanding gender relations today. There is however, little research on how men and women living around the forests experience their environment today, the role the forests play in the economic and social lives of the communities and their roles in caring for the forests. Both commercial forestry in Sweden (e.g. Lidestav, Engman and Wästerlund 2000) as well as the visible and public image of the environmental movement internationally has been largely cast as the domain of men (Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter and Wangari 1996:6). Struggles being waged by local people over the forests have remained in the realm of popular literature and journalism (e.g. Ersson 1985; Isaksson 1999). Such literature has been important in bringing many issues to public attention. With some exceptions (e.g. Dahlström 2003; Jensen 2002) there has been little academic research (as yet) on the social or ideological aspects of the present day forests in relation to community struggles and none that touch on gendered concerns.

Not unsurprisingly then, gender relations around local resource management is a field that is absent in Swedish forestry research at present.<sup>46</sup> The forests tend to be looked upon as a 'natural' resource. They are not seen as a place to which are tied hopes and dreams not visible in the trees, especially so when local communities make claims to them as the forests and its management touch their lives in so many different and practical ways.

## Conclusion

The history of forest ownership and management in the area and the increasing thrust towards the formal privatization of ownership has played a part in structuring relationships of gender and power among the people. Similarly, the making of the welfare state in the post World War II period and the regional policy for the rural areas were important for the significant effect have had in structuring the landscape around Drevdagen, urban/rural relationships, and gender relations. Ideas about marginality were constructed in dominant images of these areas as in need of support. In practice, this was countered by local mobilisation among the people in the countryside that increased in the decade of the 1980s. Attempts by these groups have been described as efforts towards rural development *underifrån*, or 'from below'. It was at this time that women's networks in the countryside, by working with issues of rural development, contributed to the attempts at gendering regional policy. During the 1990s growth became the major focus of regional policy and partnerships were established as the means by which development could be brought about.

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<sup>46</sup> There has been research however on women who are private owners of forests and the difficulties they face in a male defined world of forestry (Lidestav 2001; Lidestav, Engman and Wästerlund 2000).

‘Rural development’ as a field of its own in Sweden is a diffuse field. The rural is, as Forsberg (1997a) says, a mosaic rather than an undifferentiated area in contrast to the urban. Rural policy making has been based on an urban, indeed metropolitan perspective. So far I have used the literature to paint a larger context of Swedish policies for the rural areas and the interface with action, locally as well as some of the directions in the literature. This chapter thus offers a background against which the story of Drevdagen, told in the next chapter, can be juxtaposed.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Living in Drevdagen

#### Introduction

This chapter is an introduction to the village setting in Drevdagen. It is based on the stories related by the women and men of Drevdagen that describe how they perceived the history of Drevdagen and their lives in it. The broader history of the forests and the rural areas presented in the previous chapter is related to the specific experiences of the people living in Drevdagen and to the ways in which they experienced the effects of policies aimed at them. There were some narratives that recurred and formed dominant images of a Drevdagen identity, the familiar currents in the larger stream of stories about everyday life. There was a strong sense of being actively marginalised in the making of the modern state, counterpoised by stories of rebelliousness and of defying authority. These narratives are not seamless and are complicated by conflicting images that could depend on differences in age among the tellers, on gendered differences and on how long they had lived in the village. There are also differences in how especially the women of different ages, spoke of their understanding of sex/gender roles and of the forests as the men's domain. The stories reflect the thinking that had an important role in influencing the shape of the events in relation to the forests and to the attempts at development that unfolded in the village.

The struggle for a measure of control over the forests surrounding the village, was given different meanings by the men in the association and some of the other villages that I interviewed, primarily the women. In the second half of the chapter, I write specifically about the forest issue in the village and the history of the work devoted to it. The attention here is on the involvement of my colleagues and myself in village activities. These early events formed the basis for the diverging trajectories taken by our work in the village and our involvement in future village and forest activities. Drevdagen's efforts are situated within the context of the debate between environmentalism and forest production, in which local community members have tried to enter as actors. However, my study with its attention to gender relations within the village and the focus from the women's stories brought up the same questions in a somewhat different way. The frame is pressed upon to make room for questions of rural development that need to find a way to relate to questions of the environment and the forests.

#### Drevdagen

Drevdagen is a village in the north-west corner of the county of Dalarna. The scenic village valley lies nestling in the Swedish mountains on the border with Norway. In the middle of the village is a lake that joins a river further on. The houses are spread over the area on both sides of the lake and relatives tend to have their houses situated close to each other. A nature reserve starts at the northern

edge of the village. This is also the beginning of a walking path that goes through the forests that the inhabitants say links up with the *Kungsleden* (the royal trail), the walking path that leads through the mountains of Norrland. The path also leads to a *fäbod*. Since the forest is a nature reserve there is considerable forest cover there but just outside the village, large bald patches that have been clear-felled can be seen all around. The forests are mainly pine and fir and grow slowly at this high altitude. Much of the landscape in and around the village is covered by overgrown shrubs, an eyesore for many in the village. Women and men sighed as they told me that they no longer had animals to feed on the grass and maintain an open landscape as they did a few decades ago and that the villagers would still like to see.

Since the 1960s there has been considerable depopulation. However in the past decade it had stabilised to about 115 people. The women that I spoke to claimed that ‘while other villages were dying Drevdagen was picking up’. They had made several plans for the village and people were choosing to move into the village. Ann said:

There is a good atmosphere in the village compared to other villages. People are saying that Flötningen is closing down and Drevdagen is starting.

Yvonne who was born in the village had recently moved back with her family. She moved here from her husband’s village where, after their departure, only six people remained. An older man related that there were many families who wanted to move to Drevdagen if they had the opportunity, many of whom were their “own youngsters who wanted to move back to the village.”

Drevdagen seems to defy the statistics that point to continued depopulation of the *glesbygd*. In the years that I was there, there was considerable out migration but at the same time there were others who moved to the village, both returnees but also newcomers, thus keeping the population more or less stable. The majority of the adult population at the time of the study was between the ages of 40 and 50, which meant that the median age was very low for a village in such an area. It was ethnically homogenous and, as I perceived it, with no big differences in wealth among the inhabitants.

### *Making a Living*

Much as in the other villages in this region, small-scale farming and forestry that used to be the mainstay of the people in these areas gradually disappeared as large-scale forestry was encouraged in the country. Men from the village initially found employment with the big forest companies that managed the forests, but with increased rationalisation, such employment opportunities more or less disappeared. At the time of the study in Drevdagen, a few men owned their own companies in carpentry, transport, construction, some women and men worked with tourist activities (usually a family company), and for a while one woman worked with the village shop. Other villagers worked for the county, for the

municipality, for the state, with the church, and in a nearby tourist resort. A couple owned a small 'hotel.' Many of the working women were nurses or in other forms of health care. Some of them were *hemsamarit*, that is, they were the 'home samaritans' who visit people in their homes, especially the elderly, and take care of everyday chores for them. It implied driving long distances in the countryside to reach the people who needed their services. People joked in the interviews that some of the women who were *hemsamariter* were old enough to need care themselves. There were about 15 adults who were unemployed. Both men and women were dependent on temporary and seasonal employment, for instance in a nearby ski resort or further off in the country and even in other parts of Europe. Some women had been able to organize childcare after protracted discussions with the *kommun*<sup>47</sup> and two women in the village were working as child carers. There were also the retired and those on sick leave (*sjukpensionärer*). Many in the older generation were hoping that the plans for an old age home that some of the younger women in the village were working on, would be successful. They did not want to leave the village where they had lived for most of their lives to spend their last days at the *Särna sjukstuga* (translated literally, the Särna sick cottage- an old age home for the infirm). Many of the older women spoke disparagingly of Särna and declared that they would never move there.

### *Community Life*

As people moved out of the countryside in the 1960s, being unable to sustain an adequate infrastructure for a dwindling population the local authorities cut down on infrastructural facilities and Drevdagen was no exception. Several facilities like the village shop, a petrol pump and the postal outlet were closed down in the village. Many of the plans that the villagers had for the village were to revive some of these facilities by their own efforts.

Yvonne: We have to have child care, a shop, local services so that we don't have to travel to Idre for everything. These are the conditions for people to be able to live here.

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<sup>47</sup> There are two types of local government bodies in Sweden. The municipality, the *kommun* is the local unit and the county council, *landsting*, (in some places called a 'region') the regional unit. The national government's regional administrative unit in the county is the *länsstyrelse*. The specially regulated tasks of municipalities, which they are usually required to provide include schools, social services, care for the elderly, care of people with physical or intellectual disabilities, physical planning and building, certain environmental tasks and rescue services. The chief responsibility of Swedish county councils (*landsting*) is medical care. They also operate a number of folk high schools (small, often residential adult schools) and are in charge of some upper secondary school training programmes including those in agriculture and forestry. Furthermore they work on regional growth and development issues (SI, 2001). The *länsstyrelse* of Dalarna was responsible for the nature reserve around Drevdagen.

Such efforts were seen as necessary to counter the marginalisation that many people felt that they were subjected to by the very fact of choosing to live in Drevdagen. Community life was organized through various associations in the village. As was becoming widespread in other parts of Sweden (Herlitz, 2001; Forsberg, 2001), the village too had several associations to deal with different functions, including the village hall association, the school association, the sports association and many more.

Drevdagen's village association was formed in 1995 by a number of villagers. It was meant to be an umbrella for all the other associations and to strengthen the effects that the associations had individually, in order to create opportunities to sustain a vibrant community. An information centre was set up and a newsletter about village activities was started. The head of the village association was Gustav, the school's former principal, one of the people who had led the school strike (that I write about further) and seen the school through its problems. He commanded a great deal of respect in the village especially as most of the younger inhabitants of the village had been taught by him in school at one time or another. He was also the chairman of most of the other associations in the village. In interviews and discussions, the villagers often pointed out that being a small village, it was often the same people who were active in the various associations. This is also the case in other parts of Sweden (*cf.* Forsberg, 2001). Much of the work was done on a voluntary basis, as was the case with most other village activities.

An important part of community life in Drevdagen is the village school. Drevdagen is an attractive village to move to not only because of its surroundings but also because of its school. For families with children wanting to move to the countryside, it offers an opportunity to live in the countryside and educate the children without having to subject them to long drives to school in the neighbouring towns. Apart from increasing the number of inhabitants, families with children are important for keeping the village school running. "The school in Drevdagen is known for its good education," I was told by the principal and he was not the only one in the village to tell me this. There were even some children from the nearby town of Idre whose parents sent them to the school in Drevdagen rather than to the one in their own town. Several parents told me about the extremely good teachers that they had in the school. In an interview, one of the teachers at the school said:

*(Skolan är navet i byn)...*The school is the hub of the village. It is everyone's heart. If I ever need something for the school....something to be fixed....help with an outing....something that needs repairing....all I have to do is to wave my little finger and before I know it, the work is done. One doesn't have to nag.

Village identity was linked strongly to the long struggle for the school that the authorities had wanted to shut down. The school was an important symbol of one collective identity although in conversations with both men and especially women,

it seemed that the memory of the school struggle also cast a long shadow. Memories of the school strike were unifying for the village but they were also a burden. Their identity as the village that confronted government authorities was as much a burden as a resource, especially when negotiating with the *kommun* for various other issues, including childcare. Also troubling to many was that the extensive media coverage during the school strike had led to everyone outside the village, including at my university, had formed some sort of opinion about the identity of Drevdagen. I have found it interesting to see how stories about the school were told and retold and how we as researchers and others outside contributed to defining the 'place' and setting lines around village identities (discussed further in chapter seven). I first look at some of the ways that the villagers chose to identify themselves in the stories told by them.

### **Stories from the village**

Many villagers believed firmly that the place had an innate force. On one of my later visits to Drevdagen (2002), I asked a man who had recently moved to the village what made him move there. He laughed and not without seriousness, said: "Drevdagen has magic in its air. It is the volcanic soil and the forests." This was not the first time that I had heard about Drevdagen's volcanic soil and its special healing properties. In one of the earlier meetings with the women they had also discussed Drevdagen's physical history and the volcanic soil that made it special in many ways. Many women in the circle spoke about their lives as they moved around in living in different towns. There were many from the village who spoke about how there seemed to be forces in Drevdagen drawing them to the place.

The 'place' plays a role in the formation of 'local identity and has an especial meaning for how people constitute themselves as subjects. It is partly an essentialist understanding that the place has an innate force that is a feature of the place and its people (Hansen 2000). Knowing the place and its landscape - and not knowing it - can make a great deal of difference in a person's standing in the village. It is believed that local identity formation may be seen as one way to handle unequal relations within groups in society (e.g. Hansen 2000; Skogen 2003). I would think that it can in fact also be seen as way of keeping in place unequal relations in society by appropriating or taking for granted the rights to define local identity by appealing to a sense of community. It seems to me that identity formation is not only a way to define yourself in relation to others outside but important for the community as villagers act constantly, consciously or unconsciously, to maintain a certain order in the community- in relation to policy, other imagined places, other people. I not look at how some of these constructions emerged in the villagers' narratives.

#### *A narrative of marginalization and conspiracy*

A feeling of being penalized for living in the *glesbygd* was strong among many villagers, especially the older generation. It was related partly to the fact that they lived in the *glesbygd*, but more specifically they believed that it was also because

they lived in Drevdagen. These two narratives, one of marginalisation for living in the wrong part of the country and the other, of a conspiracy against Drevdagen, at times created a sense of affinity with their neighbouring villages against a centralized state while at other times it set them against their neighbours. Märta who was in her 60s had been active in village affairs and had borne the brunt of local politics during their strike for the school. She did not think much of the political system and believed that community relationships had been actively destroyed by state policies:

Voting is a game of wild cards (*ett joker spel*) that makes people think that they can do something...The government does not want the people to do things themselves. It can become a threat. It has become almost dangerous to have anything to do with human relations. Women do not have anything in common anymore. They divide themselves up in families.

The feeling that women did not have anything in common anymore was echoed by several other older women. The ‘disarming’ of the countryside that I have cited before was quite palpable in the interviews with the older women in the village, especially the older women who complained that all their meeting places and contexts had disappeared, for better and for worse. With that had also disappeared a culture that was typically women’s own. The women who were (and still are) vital lynchpins of the informal economy and in maintaining relations in their communities, felt this acutely. The older women, who had earlier been seen as pioneers and hard working women who broke new land, had been redefined as backward in relation to the growing cities and in need of support. At the same time the pressure on them, by themselves and others, to maintain rural relations remained, and even intensified in light of the ‘threat from the centre’ (*c.f.* Little 2002).

Frans was one person who refused to leave the village despite what he said was the “drive (*hets*) that the authorities had to make us leave our homes to work in the factories.” According to him, being treated as imbeciles by the local authorities was payment for that. He and Anita related the following story:

Three years ago a bear came into the yard here...It came and sat down in the children’s sandbox outside. Thankfully, the children were inside...We saw it through the window...When we spoke to the *kommun* about it, they said that they would send an experienced hunter to decide whether it was dangerous or not...then they suggested that one should bell the bear....We may be uneducated but we know much more than them.

The suggestion of sending a hunter to the village may sound innocent but as they saw it was a direct assertion of power. If there is one thing that the people in the village took pride in, it was in ‘knowing their woods and the animals.’ But also, as Frans and Anita continued to relate the story, to tell them that the *kommun*

would send an experienced hunter from the city to take stock of the problem was to Frans (who was an avid hunter) insulting, and an attempt to put him in his place. Frans and Anita spoke about their difficulties in running a tourist home; that the authorities objected to their building even after the plans for the building had been passed. Like many others in Drevdagen, they saw this as an attempt just to make things difficult for them just because they happened to live in Drevdagen.

Paradoxically, with the greater centralisation and the drawing of the countryside closer to the centre, the distance between the *glesbygd* and the centre seemed to increase. Drevdagen lies in Älvdalen *kommun*. It was previously a part of Idre *socken*, which was a much smaller area. The municipal centre then was Idre town, close to the village. After the last municipality reform in 1974, the municipalities in Sweden were amalgamated into larger units. The municipal center for Drevdagen was moved further south to Älvdalen, leading to a greater feeling of alienation among the people now further from the centres of decision-making. A remark I heard often in the village was:

What do they, down there in Älvdalen know about us or want to understand our problems. We are so different from them.

Hansen explains the relationship between the outlying areas and its surrounding world as a net that drew tightly around them. In his words, it was a net into which they were inserted administratively, politically and juridically. This net worked as a continually increasing limitation of the lifeworld's relative independence (He calls it *infogningsnät* that translated literally would be net of subservience). In several cases the *kommun*'s central town became an important node in this net. With the amalgamation of the municipalities, the number of nodes in the net was reduced drastically and the distance between the villages and the central powers increased. The reduction of the number of junctions did not however imply a thinning out of the net, but in fact a concentration via increased bureaucratic control (2000:137).

The people in Drevdagen felt that they had few choices. They elaborated on this 'net' even as they tried to disentangle themselves. An intricate system of applying for grants and subsidies was also put in place but according to Frans, the application system for grants made co-operative action more difficult. As a result of the many small projects carried out by people individually they sometimes sought money for similar projects from funders. This is what had prompted Frans to call the village Bidragen,<sup>48</sup> not Drevdagen.' According to him, a system where villagers as individuals were made to compete for the same limited number of grants played a part in putting the village in a state of dependency and creating discord between the people. Rut, an elderly lady speaking of some people who had chosen not to leave the village, said: "the youngsters have become spoilt by being at home and getting the dole (*få stämpel*)."<sup>48</sup> These remarks expressed not only dissatisfaction but also frustration for people who seemed to have great pride in belonging to this area and living in this place. It was a feeling of perpetuating a

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<sup>48</sup> *Bidrag* means grant(subsidy) in Swedish.

system that they disliked but at the same time not being able to survive outside of it or feeling that they had no possibility of doing so, feelings that played an important part in the negotiations about the forests and that also contributed to disagreements.

This system that was meant to be the same for everyone in the country, was experienced very differently by those who lived in a village as compared to a city. In light of recent scandals in the media about directors of state owned companies who retired with big bonuses, Rut dryly remarked when talking about the pension that was decided for her husband before he died:

One doesn't exactly get a golden handshake if you have worked in the barn all your life...my children (*ungar*) help me economically.

The other elderly women who were part of the discussion agreed. They were also dependent on their children, many of whom were working in the cities and towns of Sweden, to help them live their daily lives.

Many in the village believed that there was a conspiracy at the municipality to make life difficult for the people in the village ever since they refused to accept the decision to close down their school. According to some it was due to the ill-will between them and the social democrats at the *kommun* who were the ruling party in the *kommun* at the time of the school struggle. Everything had to be passed by the authorities: building plans, getting loans sanctioned or building a communal cottage for the village and, according to the villagers, not very much came easily. Jon, a carpenter in the village said:

I tried to build apartments for the young people...It was in 1984-85. The *kommun* said no. They did not want to give me a housing loan although their inspection of the houses and the drawings were fine...There was in the *kommun* a social-democratic opposition to the village...I was also the only one who got to pay the property tax in the *kommun*..

Marie-Louise spoke of how difficult it was for them to find work in the neighbouring towns: "The union said that no-one from here would get a job because of the school struggle." Villagers from Drevdagen have a long history of trade union activism. Many were part of the syndicalists, a radical organisation within the trade union movement (*c.f.* Falk 2002).<sup>49</sup>

According to the villagers, being subject to the decisions of the state went hand in glove with being subjected to the vagaries of Assi Domän, the forest company that owned large parts of the forest in the region up to 1999. Villagers not only in Drevdagen but also in the surrounding areas claim that the state had expropriated

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<sup>49</sup> In Drevdagen they were part of something called the LS, *Lokal Samorganisation*.

their land ownership rights and, increasingly, they were excluded even from using the forest.<sup>50</sup> Jon was critical of the fact that although they were inhabitants in the area:

We have to pay for the moose hunt...It is probably the most expensive here in the whole of Sweden...3000-4000 crowns for the moose, 10, 000 for the land.

It felt incongruous for them since many could remember the times when their families treated the land as theirs and these restrictions did not exist in the same way. This may also be read in a short history of the village that Halvarsson, a village resident wrote in an appendix for a report (Byskog 1998):

...the ownership rights to the *myrslogar* included since old times, timber from the slog area to use for wood for hay-drying racks, the slåtter cottage etc. Being able to exercise this old right was tested (*sattes på prov*) by Sixten Emretsson in Drevdagen....It could only end in one way, and after the legal trial Judge Sandgen stated, “how could you be so dumb as to think that you could win against the state?”

Those I interviewed gave many accounts of extensive logging of hunting grounds; of treasured partridge sites where the villagers had been promised that the company would not log; of the company not caring about the way they went about the clear cuts; of planting *contorta* pine which contravened the rules of the *Naturvårdssverket* (Swedish environmental protection agency).<sup>51</sup> Jon spoke of the time when Assi Domän had 1 ½ per cent untouched forest that they were planning to sell out in pieces, and the villagers thought that perhaps that was one way they could find a way forward, by buying some of the forest land in the area. However, he said: “they refused to sell to the villagers...then they said that they would not sell small units.”

Märta was more explicit about Assi Domän in her interview. According to her:

Assi Domän has made it ugly in the forest....They have taken out timber and so on but denied it on the radio programme. The film shows all of this...We want to get back the right to care for our forests, run them ourselves...No-one has succeeded in tackling Assi Domän yet and they won't be able to do that unless they don't carry on in the crooked ways that they do.

A discussion of marginalisation can lay the ground for political mobilisation (*c.f.* Hansen 1999). This may have been the case in Drevdagen as the next section illustrates. However, it also made them complicit in a discourse of the periphery and centre. While this appears to be unavoidable it also made it difficult for them to take action in a number of cases.

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<sup>50</sup> I have discussed this at some length in chapter 4.

<sup>51</sup> See Ersson (1985) for a detailed account of some of these.

### *A narrative of defiance and of struggle*

The stories of the marginalisation of their village went hand in hand with stories about struggle and a questioning of the powerful. Much of these counter-narratives were focussed around the municipal authorities. Relations with the local authorities at the municipality had not been congenial. The villagers were very aware of themselves as mutinous in their refusal to accept what they perceived as unjust. Drevdagen is known for its long battle with the authorities to keep the school alive in their village.<sup>52</sup> Both men and women told me about the strike with pride mixed with pain when they thought back to those days. It had not been very long since Elsa had married and come to the village when the crisis began. During those years she worked at the school as a volunteer, one of the many who did so in the village:

In 1971, the school was also threatened with closure....Then again in 1983 the school board (*skolstyrelsen*) in Älvdalen decided a week before school start that the school was going to be shut down...We read about it in the newspaper headlines. The county board had promised us that they would give us a teacher's position here. We all felt completely steamrolled... There was an immense coming together (*sammanslutning*) in the village. We refused to send the children to Idre...we taught them ourselves for six years.

There were times when the possibility of holding out indefinitely in this way was questioned in the village:

It was difficult to hold out for so long but we never gave up...though... Several women sat on a hunger strike. It was just before Chernobyl... in 1989 the government allotted money for four years... Now there are more and more children.

The village had friends from outside. Several young university students came to teach at the school. Janne said: "in this long struggle, the mass media was our best friend." Reports about the strike in the media made Drevdagen a household name in Sweden and got them sympathy from further afield. But their struggles also created problems with neighbouring villages, some of whom felt that they got the brunt of the municipal decisions because of Drevdagen's recalcitrance:

Karin: The village struggles...It started with the school. The school was to be in Idre...We got a gang of young people here from Stockholm. They helped during the school strike. This was in 1971. They lived here in different homes, some of them stayed at the school also...there was much fighting then...our school has never been shut...other villages have never been

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<sup>52</sup> A detailed story of the school strike and the political intrigues can be found in Halvarsson(1999) and (Ersson 1985).

able to do that. Here there have always been a lot of young people. Even children who come from Idre come here. There is of course a little jealousy on the part of other villages... a little friction.

There was also pride in the stories of having been able to keep their village alive as compared to other villages and of not giving up where neighbouring villages had bowed to the authorities:

Kerstin: Gördalen has only 37 inhabitants now...They have bowed down to the authorities.

The first *friskola* (independently run school) in Sweden was established in Drevdagen: the villagers ran the school themselves with some financial help from the state. Parents and other villagers worked voluntarily and were responsible for running the school and employing the teachers. Work in the school took up a lot of the parents' time. Not only the parents but even other village members were involved in its running. Some spoke of being tired after having struggled for so long and that they did not have the energy to continue to fight. As one woman said to me: "The only project that has succeeded is the school...people are tired...they want results" or that "People haven't really made a comeback after the six years of the school strike."

There were many other stories about defiance and will, and at the root of them all was the story of a collectivity, a community of people who worked together, a story that was both a strength and a burden. Referring back in history to the days of the forest workers, Kerstin spoke of how they preferred to get an equal amount of money from the forest company at that time rather than bid over each other for the timber they had logged. At one time more recently when the villagers got wind of the fact that Assi Domän was going to log a forest path near the village, several rushed there and took over their machines:

Jon: We threatened to shoot their machines

Not very many people in this area owned big patches of forests. This has contributed to giving them some sort of a collectivity *vis-à-vis* the company. Paul Tage Halberg, for example, writes about how a forest company in a certain part of Norway helped the community, where the people could speak as a group, to build a bridge, in contrast to another place where farmers owned the land in a much more socially stratified community where it was difficult to carry out collective action (2000).

The struggle however was not limited to the forests or the school. Lina spoke of her battle to get clean drinking water for the village:

I have struggled for four years for real drinking water. I called around...the thing was that we had radon in our water...we continued to argue with the authorities. It has been proved that

many have died of stomach and intestine cancer and they have shown the link to water with radon. In Falun, they said, put a valve there. But when we tested the water again, it was still there... We saw in *Vi i Villan*<sup>53</sup> that it shouldn't be more than a 100...here we had 300 *becerel*. Last year we got a radon separator ....Then another time they wanted to put up a sewage treatment installation on our land...drew it in their plans without even asking us...they just wrote a letter to Anders to tell him about it. We didn't want it to smell here. We said no! If you don't put your foot down, then you are done for? (*säger man inte ifrån då är det kört*).

The stories are symbolic of a community spirit and a special Drevdagen identity. And integral to this identity was the spirit as Lina described it, '*säger man inte ifrån, då är det kört*.'

#### *Of 'Swedish jealousy' but also support*

The teacher in the school spoke about how it often proved difficult to get people to cooperate. According to her this was quite common and could be seen as an attack of the Swedish jealousy (known otherwise as *Jantelagen*). People in villages around Drevdagen were not so happy about the school even though they gained the chance to send their children to Drevdagen instead of sending them to Idre. On the other hand there were also stories about how others looked upon them with admiration. Ann spoke of the time she was in a neighbouring town attending a school function:

One of the teachers walked up to me and asked me where I was from. I told her I was from Drevdagen. She turned towards me, looking stern and my heart sank. I thought, now she is going to say something sarcastic about us...(the others sitting around nodded). But she actually smiled and said, Oh, I know Drevdagen, a lot of nice and brave people live there.

Another story that I was told by Karin and retold a year later by someone else, went like this. Karin wanted to get her clothes cleaned at the dry cleaners. When she wrote down her name and address on the bill, the saleswoman became hostile. "She almost derided me for being from Drevdagen and I had never seen her before."

On the same day I went into another shop to buy a jacket and when the saleswoman there found out I was from Drevdagen, she said we were so brave and strong (*duktiga*) for struggling and struggling. She wished that they had the same spirit in their village. Most people know about us... But on the whole, most of them are positive.

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<sup>53</sup> A magazine for house-owners.

Having been in the limelight has made it more important for the people of Drevdagen to affirm their own identity. Many believed that other villages around them sometimes felt that they got the brunt from the authorities because of Drevdagen's obstinacy and refusal to accept what the government decided for them. Then of course they said that there were others who felt they should have done something to save their villages as well which were slowly being decimated. Drevdagen's struggle with the authorities is well known in the area.

In many of their stories they positioned themselves as a small community up against powerful actors like the various arms of the state and forest companies. According to Hansen, belonging to a place means that the 'local' is in itself not made a subject of discussion, but in confrontation with welfare policy one's own place is revealed as a culturally special place where social relations are lifted out from local contexts. In his view, this is the starting point for conceptualising what comprises local peculiarity and marginality (2000:120). In the case of Drevdagen I think Hansen's view holds but only partially. Elaborating on these meanings of marginality especially in meetings with outside researchers and development practitioners also helped to reinforce dominant identities. But there were also dissonant strains as the following discussion illustrates.

### *Conflicting images*

The narratives I have described so far were familiar to all the villagers but their meaning is also complicated by other stories. For some older villagers, in their 60s and 70s, who had been in the forefront of the battles over the school, politicians and bureaucrats were tainted by their professions. In order to work with village issues, it was assumed that the villagers needed to find ways to that did not involve the bureaucracy or the politicians. The younger generation (30-50 years), many of whom had moved back to the village, and especially the newcomers, believed that they needed to collaborate with the authorities and make compromises on village issues. Some of the younger generation deliberately sought co-operation with local authorities. At an inquiry circle meeting, the women, most of them in their 40s, spoke well of a local politician from Idre who was in the municipal council. They felt that he understood their problems and had managed to bring up their questions at the municipal level. The women felt that he was responsive to their concerns because he was from their area and was able to understand their needs.

What development in the village implied, were looked upon differently by different women. Some of these differences were generational. Rut who was from the older generation, said to me, "We have fine young people here...We want to have them here when we are old." Many younger women believed on the other hand that their children needed to go out into the world before they decided to settle down in Drevdagen:

Yvonne: We have to make sure that the children have a good life (*har det bra*)...then they can move away from here...when they are mature, experienced...then they can come back. We should not concentrate on trying to make the youngsters stay

on. That is not what we are striving for. They need to go and get some experience.

Annika: Village development should not go overboard. We don't have to build up a mini-town here. After sixth grade everyone must be able to go to Idre...meet other children

Annika, much like Yvonne, also believed that the future depended on young families moving in to the village and that it was the school that was going to make that possible:

For the future it is important that the school stays...otherwise it would be impossible to get families with children here.

There was also a difference in the ways in how the villagers looked upon the different generations of foresters. From the anecdotes related by some of the older men, the restrictions on their access to and use of the forests accompanied a generational change among the foresters in their area. A report on the forest project had the following quote:

Certain *slog* land could be accessed even after the great distribution of landholdings with ownership rights and the accompanying right to forest products (*skogsanslag*) that was later forgotten. Ownership rights naturally included the right to hunt. A number of inhabitants could claim these rights *vis-à-vis* the district forest officer from the early 60s. That is why the forest owners with his implicit support (*goda minne*) could lease out the land for the moose hunt for a number of years, all the way until the general director at the Swedish Forest Service put an end to such generousities (Byskog 1998).

This quote highlights another recurrent topic. Many of the older generation of foresters working in the area previously had been familiar to the villagers and were sometimes themselves from the area. The fact that they understood the people and local customs made life much easier for the villagers. Their replacement by a new generation that was schooled in forestry but knew little about the area often led to a collision with local hunters and others.

A somewhat different perspective may be read in an official report on forest policy in Sweden. It cites the frosty relations between foresters and the environmentalists at the beginning of the 1980s. According to the report, it was only at the end of the decade that a discussion could be conducted among researchers, nature conservation people and the proponents of commercial forestry. The more open attitude resulted partly from increased knowledge, partly from a generational shift in the forestry sector – those people who had been wedded to the ideas of clear felling began to be replaced by people who during their student years had been confronted with, among other, Carsons' and Ehrenvårds' thinking on the environmental consequences (SUS 2001:30).

Similarly, according to the minister for forestry, the shift in the generation of forest officers allowed a significantly different policy to emerge in 1993, making it possible to place important environmental aims alongside those of commercial forestry for the first time (Messing 2003).

In this perspective, then, it was the batch of new foresters schooled in environmental values who were thought to be more open to environmental concerns in the forests, that opened the door that had been closed by a previous generation whose overriding goal had been to increase commercial production. In neither case were the local people themselves seen as actors. Yet in the story in the report it was the older foresters who, because of their identification with the local area, were seen to be approachable. Several men from Drevdagen themselves had been involved in the environmental struggles of the 1980s. At the same time as this generational shift, there was also a shift in images of masculinity associated with forestry as Brandth and Haugen illustrate for Norway (2000). A generation of foresters comfortable at a desk perhaps distanced them further from the men in the villages, and with older associations of hard work in the forests as a determining characteristic of a certain image of masculinity.

In several places, even in Drevdagen, people have mobilised arguments based on environmental efficacy to stop the logging by Assi Domän. Yet the setting up of the nature reserve while restricting the space available for logging, did not automatically enable local development, or necessitate a change for the better. The debate that is so voluble in countries in the South and that has drawn attention to environmental sustainability when local communities are involved, has until recently not been a part of the Swedish debates. It is open to question if the ambitions of small scale forestry, use for local development, and community care for the forests, in Sweden would have more in common with environmental goals than the current model of production.

Cecilia: Now they are saying that the reindeer have destroyed the *fjäll* (the mountains)...They are even talking about banning snow scooters in Fulufjäll.

The mistrust of ‘they’ – bureaucrats and politicians – was also mitigated by an important generational shift:

Märta: There has been a mentality in the *kommun* that Drevdagen should not exist. Now finally it has begun to give way...

Several older people were doubtful about the projects and activities under way, asking if anything was at all possible in the *glesbygd*. Several younger men and women felt frustrated by this attitude. They felt that many of the older villagers were negative to so many things, including relations to the municipality, that it made it difficult to work on the village’s development. Alva, a young woman who had grown up in the village and stayed on, could understand some of the bitterness of the older generation in its dealing with the authorities and others. “It has always

been such a struggle to live here. They think it is tough to need to struggle like this”

Differences were often also nuanced by gender. In most of the struggles, especially the school struggle, it was typically a man who had dealt with the authorities, although it was the willingness of women to act as staff and support the strike that had been crucial to the continuation of the school. With respect to Drevdagen’s plans for the forests, at the time of my fieldwork, it was again men who spoke for the village. Speaking about the problems that they faced with local politicians, the women said that the men had managed to irritate the municipal authorities:

Meja: Plans for the child care and so on. We have to actually discuss them with the *komun*. It is not that easy then.

In conversations among the women it seemed that a widely shared view was that the men took actions on behalf of the village, and as village representatives, that the women often did not know about or came to hear about only later. Occasionally they expressed irritation for having been co-opted as a part of something they either did not agree with or did not know about, or one that put them in a confrontational position. As one woman put it:

It is actually quite irritating that there is so little information about things done in all our names. The old ones (*de gamla*) dominate. It makes it difficult for the others.

In the first round of interviews in the village, when I spoke to the women about the forests and their involvement with the recent forest initiatives, they often directed attention to past roles. They claimed that traditional sex and gender roles in the past had been well defined and strong in their part of Sweden. Märta, who was older and could still remember the times when she helped her mother with the animals in the forests and with small scale agriculture, said:

Life has always been difficult here. Cattle rearing rescued life here. The women took care of the animals and the men looked after the forest. Now there are only a few small cows left on the other side. There are quite a few people here who want animals. We must be able to get help. Small-scale agriculture has always been important.

In her stories about the women of her mother’s generation, the picture that emerged was that of strong women who were vital to keeping village life alive by their work and who bore the responsibility for children. Women looked after the animals and in the summers lived in the forests. Other women that I spoke to, especially among the younger generation, on the contrary explained women’s exclusion from forest issues in the village by the ‘fact’ that the forests have always been the men’s domain and that women in this part of Sweden had never been

directly involved in the forest. Yet they too spoke of wanting to have animals in the forest, have access to berry picking, mushrooms gathering.

In interviews where the women spoke about their relationships to the forests and the forest issue in the village, it seemed that the time that they spent in the forests or what they did in practice (with exceptions such as the moose hunt) did not necessarily differ very much from that of their male partners or other men in the village. And yet, when I first came to visit the women, more than one said to me: “you probably want to speak to my husband if it is about the forest.” That the forests were identified with the men has more to do with what was valued as work in the forests, combined with the extreme importance that timber production has assumed in modern Sweden. Ownership and management of their own land has been traditionally considered the men’s domain, regardless of whether the women worked in the forests or not (Lidestav 2001; Lidestav, Engman and Wästerlund 2000). The statements by the women in Drevdagen had more to do with power relations in the villages than with the time or effort spent in the forests, as it became clearer to me with time. Although industrial forestry has increasingly lost its actual importance in terms of providing local employment, the image of the male forester and male forest workers still continues to hold its sway in rhetoric and practice. The world of official forest management and administration is dominated by men and associated with heavy work although much of the heavy work and discourses of strength has been replaced by high technology machines and white collar work (Brandth and Haugen 2000). Men, more than women are also linked to the formal economy by virtue of ownership and management rights over private forests. Although the number of women owners and managers has risen significantly it is still a small number in the overall picture, especially in terms of forest management (Lidestav 2001). In the narratives of some of the younger women in Drevdagen, it was the power that this notion of the division of labour between the sexes gave to the men, that they felt they needed to challenge. Some of the younger women explained women’s exclusion from decision-making about the village and the forests as vestiges of past roles, resulting in that women did not come to the meetings. On the other hand, Märta spoke of the image of the strong woman of the past who worked in the forests. In both instances, the forests as the men’s domain are challenged but by conflicting accounts.

In the process of trying to develop local management of the forests by the village, these images were called upon by both men and women and challenged, in particular, by the women. Although none of the people working on the issue of local forest management were forest workers by profession, being male was seen as an advantage. It was considered normal that they would be working on the forest issues and it was thus normal for many women when I interviewed that the forests remained the men’s domain, and normal that as women they did not really find place in these actions - it even though they may have objected to the arrangement. The fact that it was normal did not mean that it was not questioned but it did mean it was not seen as something out of the ordinary and considered slightly absurd to raise such a question. According to Gun Lidestav, traditional forestry is a fairly recent innovation and there is evidence that both men and women were involved previously in a lot of the activities in forestry; it was not

necessarily the work that created its image as a male domain (Lidestav, Engman and Wästerlund 2000). So what keeps these images in place?

### **The forest question for the village**

As I described in chapter four, much of the forest around the village was taken over by the Royal Swedish Forest Service in the 1800s. It was reorganized into the *Domänverket*, the Swedish Forest Service in 1912 to manage the State's agricultural and forest land. Its administrative tasks as a public authority (*myndighetsuppgifter*) were later taken over by other authorities and during the 1960s it became a commercial enterprise. Through a decision in parliament in 1991, *Domänverket* was restructured yet again. It was fused with a private company ASSI AB, and the joint stock company Assi Domän was formed in 1993. The state remained as a part owner with 50 per cent of the shares. Assi Domän took over all the commercially viable forest land in the country that was not protected in any way (Palo 2003).

174,000 ha of forest around Drevdagen thus fell into the hands of Assi Domän. Another part of the forest previously managed by *Domäsverket* became in 1992 a nature reserve reflecting the changes taking place within Swedish forest and environmental policy at the time. The nature reserve was taken over by the *Naturvårdsfonden* (a part of the *Naturvårdssverket*, the Swedish environmental protection agency) and managed by the *länsstyrelse* (the county board). The *Naturvårdssverket* is the central environmental authority responsible for protecting the forest in the nature reserve. The *länsstyrelse* at the time (1998) was managing 180,000 ha of forest and had eight men employed in administration and management.

The setting up of a nature reserve initially was welcomed by the people in the area since it meant that there would be a stop to the logging carried out by Assi Domän. The village association had protested against the logging of the forests by the company which according to the villagers had continued the management practices of the Swedish Forest Service. This had resulted in large areas bare of trees, a landscape that is of relatively long duration because the growing period for trees is extremely long at this altitude and in this rugged terrain (low *bonitet*).<sup>54</sup> Men and women in the village recounted stories of their struggle with the Forest Service, of trying to stop them from cutting the forests, especially in areas that are in close proximity to the nature reserve around the village.

In spring 1997, the villagers came to know that Assi Domän planned to sell the forests around the village. Assi Domän wanted to concentrate its work in core areas and the Drevdagen forests lay outside these (1997). The initial plan was to

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<sup>54</sup> The claim that the company was logging more than what is considered to be sustainable is also made by a former head of the forest board in a consultancy report. He writes that in response to pressure from shareholders the company had taxed the forests in Särna-Idre much more than is sustainable (Nilsson 1998).

sell the forests in small pieces to private buyers. The village association in Drevdagen was galvanized into action. They felt that they had to quickly act to save the forests that were still standing. As one of the men from the village told me: "It started when we got to know that they had planned to log the forests ...all the way to our doorstep...then it became a burning issue." They felt that any purchaser would be bound to further fell the forest in order to subsidize the purchase. The men in the village association contacted local politicians, and eventually came in contact also with researchers in Dalarna, and with Axel from SLU, who supported them in their cause.

Somewhat earlier, in 1996, the village association had approached the county government (the *länsstyrelse*) with a plan detailing how they could use and help to look after the forests that had been made into a nature reserve on the other side of the village. According to the men in the association, the county government merely laughed at them and turned them away when the villagers approached them with their plans. This was the time when the people from SLU became involved in the village.

The forest struggle locally was initially led by Gustav, with active support from Karl, a younger man not originally from the village. Karl, a skilled carpenter, had moved to the village recently with his family, intending to make a life for himself in the village. The plans with the forest project provided one opening for a future in Drevdagen and his interests in computers and filmmaking proved useful to the forest project. During the months that followed discussions were held between municipal politicians and Assi Domän. My colleagues from the university supported the cause of the village by helping them lobby international environmental organizations and government authorities in Stockholm. The central authorities were informed about the importance of paying attention to local and environmental interests. Local and regional protests received media attention (e.g. *Skogen* May 1998). Eventually, the sale of the forest to private buyers was abandoned up and a new proposal was put forward,<sup>55</sup> that the forests should be bought by Sveaskog, a State-owned company.

#### *The involvement of some people from SLU*

As a sector university SLU is responsible for research and education in agriculture and natural resources. It is involved also in support to farmers and local people in the rural areas on these issues. The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) supported the Forest Trees and People Programme (FTPP) office in Northern Europe was based at the University, at the department of rural development studies. The mandate changed somewhat over the years but at about the time of

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<sup>55</sup> In an Assi Domän report, *Projekt ny skog Förprospekt*, Sept. 1997, it is stated: "En försäljning av Skogarna i mindre enheter innebär emellertid att Skogarnas fina arrondering förstörs. Härutöver tar en styckvis försäljning lång tid att genomföra samtidigt som förutsättningarna för att fullfölja det av Assi Domän påbörjade miljö- och naturvårdsarbetet försämras då beståndet bryts upp i mindre enheter."

the fieldwork it was to support networking activities, strengthen institutions in the South, build up a Swedish resource base on questions dealing with community forestry, work on method development, and be responsible for information dissemination. It was their interest and passion in the questions of local management, rather than an official mandate, that prompted FTTP in Sweden to work with Drevdagen. The situation was in many ways so similar to the ones on which they had been working with in the South. Those from FTTP who worked in Drevdagen sometimes worked in the village with university support, sometimes on behalf of the FTTP network, or sometimes in their own capacity as interested individuals, but the villagers made no distinctions in these positions. For them, we were all from SLU whether as the development practitioners from FTTP or researchers. Thus when I refer to ourselves in the rest of the text, I write 'SLU' unless I need to further distinguish who was involved.

With the help of SLU, the men in the village association attended conferences and presented papers on their struggle and in this way came in contact with forest communities in other parts of Sweden as well as with local people struggling with similar issues in other parts of the world. In Spring 1998, Axel, Niklas, Kristen and Diane, all of whom then worked with FTTP at SLU, carried out a Participatory Rural Appraisal<sup>56</sup> together with several men and women in Drevdagen. Together, they charted out what they wanted to do with the forests and the village. One of the points taken up was the need to get in touch with other people within and outside the village, and to plan for a conference attended by people from the municipality and other representatives working with rural development and forestry (1998). Keeping in mind their ideas of partnership in what they saw as a global issue, the SLU group also arranged meetings between people from Drevdagen and people working with local forest management in India and Scotland. Some of these individuals from India and Scotland visited the village in the winter of 1998. With the help of Niklas and Axel from SLU, some of the men in the village and a nearby village started making a video film detailing irregularities in compliance with the sustainable forestry certification criteria (FSC) that the forest company claimed to fulfil.

It was in this context that I began my research in the village. The initial phase of inquiry consisted in speaking to the women and some of the men in Drevdagen about their plans for the village, and about the ongoing efforts for local management of the forests. I was accompanied by Axel on my first visit and that ensured me a warm welcome, among both men and women. He was respected for his work and regarded as a true friend of Drevdagen.

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<sup>56</sup> A participatory exercise popular in the development context where development agents and villagers (or whoever) participate in putting together information, analysing the context, and developing plans. PRAs apply specific methods and processes that typically build on visualisation techniques.

## **The first round of interviews**

The conference with the people from Scotland and India had taken place recently. Although for many in the village it was difficult to see the connections, Meja remarked:

Imagine, it really makes you think and gives strength when you see that the struggle against the state for your forests isn't something only in Drevdagen or Sweden but is actually a global phenomenon ...that one can now try and struggle for our environment together.

At the time of the interviews there were several women who said that there was a positive spirit in the village. The school was working well and the village association had been founded in 1995 to work with the forests but also with what the women called the social agenda – childcare, old age homes, the village shop. The village had invited politicians from the municipality to visit and had talked to them about their plans. The villagers felt that they had some support from them. There were several new projects and ideas that were underway. Some new people had also moved into the village. Several women were interested in spiritual health and had been meeting and talking 'at another level' to find companionship amongst each other and find peace. They were also very appreciative of the aerobics workout sessions started by one of the village women, that had brought several women together. These meeting spaces and times were important for them. All these happenings seemed to form a conducive environment to work with village development.

However, I found that the women seemed to know little of what was going on in the association. Men and women had placed various concerns on the agenda that they had drawn up for the village association in 1995. But problems had surfaced.

### *Apprehension of discord*

Both men and women were somewhat apprehensive of local management, since most did not know what it was supposed to mean. They were also afraid that it could cause ill-feeling in the village. I was there to interview them about the forests and their other activities. However, since I was from SLU, I was asked questions about what local management really meant. Which forests were being talked about? Local management by whom? I was often in the uncomfortable position of telling them the little I knew about the project. Most people did not know what plans the village association had. Everyone had their own idea of what they might mean. People were uncertain of how they could manage the nature reserve themselves or if it was a question of having a right in decision-making, together with the authorities:

Jon: We want to take care of the nature reserve also...have a part in the decision-making...it is too much dreaming to think that we can take care of it all by ourselves...Local

management...Total decision-making by us (*själbestämmande*) isn't good...then it would lead to discord...it needs to be part of the decision-making in the forest that lies closest to the village...a part of the profit can go back to the forests...maybe through some sort of village council.

Some were afraid that the village no longer had the skills necessary for working in the forests. Einar, who worked for the local forestry authorities, felt that by the association wanting to manage the forests themselves, the association seemed to be saying to the authorities that they were not doing their jobs properly. "Do they mean that we are not doing our jobs?" Like Jon he also thought that it could lead to *osämja* (discord) in the village. Annika pointed out: "Everyone is not interested in the same things, those who shout the loudest get the most."

Among some men and women, the apprehension of *osämja* sometimes resulted in a distrust of all collective activities. On the other hand, they recognized that villagers looked out for each other as, for example, in the case of Frans who could not complete building his house within the required time because of illness, and risked losing his loan. The villagers turned out in numbers while he still lay in hospital and helped to complete his house. But he pointed to me that this was an example of collective activity for one person. It was help. But in the case of the forest issue the question was more complex. It involved some men speaking for the others.

At the same time there was a fear that they might be getting out of their depth:

Kerstin: The forest is a thing of the distant future (*ligger i fjärran*)...One knows so little...are we capable? It isn't easy...are we ready to take responsibility...because then one is tied down

The questions kept coming back: in this effort called 'local management', who was going to take over, who was going to make the decisions, and who was going to do the managing?

### *The practices of power*

These fears, I realized arose partly because the villagers knew little of what was happening in the village association. Those closely involved in the association, and those from the university that was dealing with this issue had increasingly lost touch with the rest of the village. As the negotiations and lobbying were carried on outside the village itself, the scene of action moved further and further away from the village. In the village itself, only a handful of men remained involved. All the activities that had occurred since 1997 gave them a new standing to argue for their cause. However there was not much change in forestry practices and village rights to the forests remained the same even after the sale of the forests to Sveaskog. The interests of the group of men most active in the forest struggle drifted away from those of the rest of the village, and became distanced from the issues which the

women in the association had wanted to take up. Most of the villagers, especially the women, no longer attended association meetings. Many women felt that the association was inhibiting: "It feels so overwhelming."

There was a frustration among some others who had been involved in various ways with what I see as the 'projectification' of yet another issue:

Cecilia: I am not at all involved in the new ideas with the forest. I have my shop and my children. The film I don't know anything about. There are so many different projects. We would like to see the village as a unit...even if different people are working with different projects it belongs to the village...like with the tourist activities.

It seemed that the need to ground the activity that was being done for the village, in the village, or in the local community itself, had been overlooked or bypassed in the increasingly complicated process of negotiating with politicians, bureaucrats and forest company officials. The feeling that the village association had become reduced to a small clique of men was exacerbated by the fact that they did not always announce their meetings, and gave out information only sporadically. There was little communication with the rest of the village.

For many, the forest struggle has become just another 'project', led and managed by a few, and that did not have much to do with the others. On the other hand, unlike other projects the forest project purported to speak for them all and for the village: for the local people. Although the association may be said to have espoused a decision-making model based on consensus, and that made it important for everyone to attend the meetings, not many people always attended in practice and not all villagers were part of the association.

#### Protocol

The women who had taken the time, and who had tried to take part in association meetings, said that they experience the formal rules and the procedures of the association's meetings, such as a pre-set agenda, as inhibiting. It left them very little time for them to talk about their work. They claimed that the insistence on a formal protocol, like being able to speak out only when called upon by the chairperson and other such strict procedures, all contributed to a great deal of formality and were time-consuming:

At the meetings the agenda and so on takes a lot of time and at the end when one wants to discuss important questions...the other questions (*övriga frågor*)...then it is time to go home. The association works but it is not visible in the village. Not even half of the village is part of the association. It is the association's board that works here. A small group with six people is active. The others support but are passive...but nobody is negative.

According to this woman the formal agenda took most of the time at the meetings, meaning also that she did not recognize the agenda as hers. Because many women found the protocol inhibiting, they stopped going for the meetings. For other women, practical considerations such as responsibilities at home and the care of children gave them little time to attend the meetings. It is interesting to note that when I spoke to some of the women, they told me that not even half the people in the village were members of the association. In my initial interview with one of the men in the association, he had told me that more than half the village was part of the association. I did not check the figures but found these perceptions significant of how people experienced the village's participation in the association. One or two women were more critical. One of them believed that it was a battle for women to be active.

Old habits persist....women are quiet in big groups. Women don't get much of a chance to talk at the meetings. I know two women who stopped going to the association because they felt that they were always expected to make coffee and bake buns for the meetings. I refuse to do that. The forest has always been the men's domain and many think that it is not really their concern or that they don't understand what is going on. I wanted to find out myself what was going on regarding the forest. Now I know. But it takes so much energy. I have been strong and continued but not everyone can do that. I don't have any small children at home so I can spend time on that.

Another woman felt that women were mostly silent at the meetings, but were still expected to make coffee and help at conferences. According to her, although she herself was the chairperson of one association in the village,

Karin: There is a feeling among the men that women are not good enough or not so knowledgeable when it comes to running the different associations. Yet they expect that the women volunteer and organize the food and coffee for meetings and conferences.

Both she and Kerstin felt that many men did not think that women were capable of running associations. While I was sitting and talking to Kerstin in her kitchen, her husband joined us. He spoke about how the village had always had to rely on their capabilities and resources in the village and that was how they were going to succeed in the future:

We have always done it on our own steam. We must all do our bit...then things will get done.

His wife looked at it from another point of view. According to her, their own steam or force that he spoke of was based on the assumption that the women would volunteer to do much of the organizing and taking on the practical details of the work, even in support of ideas that were not necessarily their own:

Own steam? ...It's the women who are supposed to do it (*Egen kraft?!...det är kvinnor som ska göra det*). Women actually have jobs now...they can't carry on and work for free (*ideellt*) all the time.

She said that although she had tried to work with the men in the association, her efforts had been disregarded. It was only the support from her husband that had kept her going:

The men don't let anyone in. I sit in the municipal council in the *kommun*...but nobody cares about that. As it is now, the village association is a club for mutual admiration... I have said at some point that I am interested in working in the association but nobody has taken it seriously. Men are afraid of strong women...It isn't enough just to invite women to the meetings. More is needed. The men must show interest in letting them in (*släppa in kvinnor*). This is also true for now when one is building up the villages' council (*byrådet*)...I hope that more women would dare to come to the association meetings.

Although Kerstin hoped that more women would come to the meetings, she also speaks here about the contradiction of being at the meeting but not really being let in. The presence of more women might influence proceedings but they were still subjected to the same structures and strictures. Their opinions apparently counted for less and, if they were there, they would be bound to decisions that they did not necessarily believe in. In this situation a number of women found it sometimes strategic to work to get their views across in other ways. One option was to put their issues up through their male partners and relatives who attended the meetings. According to one woman, it was often easier to influence decision-making in the village association in these informal ways rather than by attending at long meetings. She said:

I don't go for the meetings. But I have influenced through Thomas. They have planned to build a small trail around the village. I suggested that they could make a little path where one could ride, take a carriage...not around the whole village but there we can make a path at least till we lay the trail. I talked privately with people. Whenever someone came to visit...in this way everything comes out (*på det viset kommer det fram allting*). It was the same thing with the bridges. I spoke to people that they should be wider so that one could take a carriage and so on instead of building more bridges later. One talks to one's husbands and then they put it forward (*Man pratar med sina män och så få de framföra*). One influences others also at the coffee table.

This was one way that some women put forward their issues but it was not always feasible. And it was not only a question of getting the issues of concern to women put forward, as later developments in the village indicated.

#### Talk and little action

Cecilia had moved back to the village and had restarted the village shop that had been closed for a long time. She saw it as a way of reinvigorating village life in the *glesbygd*. It also had a special emotional attachment as several years ago her father had run the shop. Re-starting the shop had not been an easy task. Her determination and endless negotiations with authorities for loans made it possible for her to keep the shop open for a brief while as a private concern. She had discussed the possibility that the village association eventually take over the shop, and hoped then to be employed by the association to run it. Sitting in her shop I tried talking to her about her involvement in the project for the local management of the forests, but she found it difficult to connect this issue with her own everyday life:

Men have always been dependent on regular meetings. One wants so much but it isn't always that so much happens...Earlier the idea was that the shop would be run by the association. They talk a lot but not very much happens. Then one loses the spark (*gnistan*).

Many women whom I interviewed felt that the men in the village association were involved in planning for the future. The women were often concerned with issues that they felt needed to be sorted out immediately and that needed to be 'acted' upon even if only in part. They claimed that action was better than only "talking about them":

Sometimes it feels that nothing really happens at the meetings. That is why it was good to see the film that the village association has made on the forests. At least it is some sort of action (*handling*).

In a conversation with another couple at their house, the husband spoke about all they were going to do with the forests as he stretched out his arms expansively. His wife interrupted him and turned to me:

Do you understand now why we women are not a part of all this? Men! (*Gubbar*)...it all becomes so pompous (*pampigt*) when they sit and talk...The question is ...how does one tie up the whole together...does one have the capacity here in the village?

## Start where you can

The women said that they preferred to start from where they thought they could make a difference. Some of them had been active in organizing a cattle-grazing association and were active in the sports association. The women who were active in the village chose to work in ways where, they said, they were not constrained by the formal atmosphere of the village association's meetings. They wanted to see more immediate changes in the village and thus had turned to other ways of working. One of their dreams in the village was to revive livestock farming activities. Sara, one of the women who had started the cattle grazing association had moved back from the city and had planned to make Drevdagen her home. She was determined to start a goat farm with her sister but also to work for the village. She said:

We have to get the *fåbod* started to be able to survive. Then they can also function for tourism – camping, as village cottages....This thing with the forests is going to take a long time. To get going with the animals and the *fåbod* is quicker.

In order to realize this dream, Sara and Kajsa took the initiative to form a cattle-grazing association and started a cow co-operative. They managed to get some support from the municipality, and women and men from sixteen families became involved in looking after the cows together. They also began working to set up a goat farm. The other activities that the women were involved in were also of a practical nature. Along with Karin, who was in charge of the sports association, several women and men were active in organizing a ski-slope in the village as a meeting point in winter. The women also worked to arrange social gatherings in the village.

### *Search for new forms*

The meetings of the village association seemed to be a forum of importance for some of the men in the village. There was no comparable forum for women, not formal or established. According to Märta, women were divided up according to the families in the village. Some of the older women in the village thought that it was sad that so much of the older ways of meeting, like knitting together, had disappeared and wished that there were spaces for them to meet more often:

Hillevi: I wish that we met more...earlier we used to knit in the evenings...now it is only t.v. that counts.

Others felt that they needed something together, "something that would bridge differences between us." T.V. was often blamed for a lack of village spirit and for destroying social life in the village. But at the same time a lot of activities seemed to be taking place in the village. Kerstin had been active in starting a group on spirituality for some of the women. When working as a teacher in a nearby town school, she had come up against the school authorities, among others things, for initiating the children to meditate in-between classes. She had also started a

meditation circle in the village for a while, which in a way formed the initial core group of the inquiry process that I describe in the next chapter. Her big project was to start a healing and recreation center in the village where people could come and relax in the peace and quiet of the beautiful mountains and the forests. She had lived in the village previously and had now come back to live in Drevdagen again.

Although the interest in spirituality was considered a little dubious by some others in the village, several women started meeting and taking an interest in getting together to discuss the spiritual. Many said that it provided a space for them as women, *kvinnor emellan*. Others in the village thought this talk of spirituality could be harmful or even dangerous. But it had led to a new sense of togetherness among the participants and they felt strengthened by it. One of the women who had always been interested in these questions thought it was a way to come closer to nature (because of the symbolism of animals, plants and so on), and to realize that people, animals and plants are different parts of the same nature, and can get energy from each other. Here was offered an alternative way of interacting with the forests that one did not find in projects and programmes. She believed that this view on nature helped one to be humble in relation to the nature around you.

Some women spoke of trying to find other forms through which they could work, some sort of village network perhaps, so that they are informed about what was going on as well as able to influence activities and to take up issues that concerned them.

Sara: We could find ways of functioning other than these meetings....Not follow the men's patterns.

These words presage a process in the village that became the focus of my research and that I analyse in the rest of the thesis.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, first, I established the contextual setting of my study in Drevdagen. Women and men in the village related stories of having been actively marginalised by the Swedish state and of conspiring against them for daring to challenge the policies drawn up for them. These and conflicting stories of jealousy and support, of differences among the old and the young, among men and women, and of convergences around different issues laid the ground for how the people constructed their identities in relation to the village. In some ways they may be seen to be elaborating the notion of marginality, although from the perspective and level of the village. Yet they also resisted this, while being conscious of being entangled in the very system that labelled them as marginal. Gender played an important role in structuring these stories, especially in the specific case of the forest issue that I focus on in the second half of the chapter.

I have described the tensions that had arisen with respect to the differing opinions on how to approach village development. This account shows that by examining local management of the forests from perspectives other than those of the few men directly involved, enables the issue to be placed in the larger context, of rural development. Most women felt themselves outside of the discussions within the association and unable to influence them. They wanted to work with problems that they saw as pressing needs in the village and to take action in new ways. I turn to these topics in the coming chapters.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Turn to action: collaborative inquiry in Drevdagen

#### Introduction

In the previous chapter I wrote about several women's dissatisfaction with the functioning of the village associations and their feelings of being marginalised from being able to influence decisions. Some women spoke about wanting to look for other ways to meet and work with issues of interest to them. A collaborative inquiry initiated by me with women in the village provided the framework for the process of working together on these issues. This chapter presents the guiding principles for this process. The narrative begins with my involvement in the village, the setting up of the inquiry, and the context that the inquiry formed for our discussions. The description of the methodology by which I chose to carry out my research is not separate from the description of the process. The two threads have been written together to show how the methodology is in fact intertwined with the events unfolding in the village context and to the theories to which I turned. I describe the inquiry process, which became my window into the collective process undertaken by the women, into their lives as well as village development. The collaborative inquiry with the women was transformed by them to something quite different though the frame of the inquiry remained important. I also write about my part in the process, which was more active in the initial stages and changed throughout the process.

I divide the account of our collaborative inquiry into three phases. The first phase began at SLU, where my initial ideas about local forest management and gender and the idea of participatory research were conceived. This phase included getting to know the village, the people and the issues at stake. The second phase began when we (the women and I, in Drevdagen) as a group acquainted ourselves with collaborative inquiry. The third phase is one that I call the turn to action, wherein the using and widening of the participatory space that the inquiry created became the overriding agenda. Although there is considerable overlap in these phases, especially in the second and third phases and not all aspects were necessarily chronologically sequential, I have divided the process in this way for purposes of clarity and comprehension and I have tried to make the writing as transparent as possible. The chapter ends with a discussion of the methodological implications of the collaborative inquiry.

#### Phase I: Establishing a framework

In a way the research started as an extension of the work with the *Forests Trees and People Programme* that aimed to support Drevdagen's local forest management efforts. I accompanied Axel to the village to see if research would be

useful to them and specifically, to the women in the village. Several factors contributed to it being an opportune moment for participatory research. The Department of Rural Development Studies provided a base which was supportive of participatory research and, in addition to taking courses on action research methodologies I found it provided opportunity to explore the theoretical basis in an ongoing discussion. The association with the FTTP, with its base firmly in practice and a commitment to local peoples, provided an opportunity to work with these ideals in practice. I think that there were few other departments at the time where I could have initiated research of this kind. At the same time, coming from a development context in India, I was also wary of how participatory research appraisals and such methods could be used as any other method simply to extract information (see Participation: The new tyranny, Cooke and Kothari 2001b).

Diane suggested that my research could be an ongoing study of the work that FTTP had started in Sweden: "...help us in clarifying our own role...to test our assumptions about networking activities." The idea was that it would lead to further reflection and discussion that would help us at FTTP in moving forward in support of community forestry. In addition, especially after my first visit, Axel and some of the men in the village said that my involvement could help in trying to get the women involved in the forest project that was meant for the community as a whole and yet from which the women had been so far absent. It was an assumption that was later put to test, as I discuss in chapter seven.

My first contact with the village of Drevdagen was with some of the male members of the village association who were working with the question of forestry. It was at our university in Uppsala in December 1997 and I discussed with one of them, Karl, the possibility of participatory research, especially with the women. At the time, he thought it might be a good idea for me to come to the village and speak to the women since there were no women in the village association who were working on the forest issue. The suggestion that my presence would encourage women in the village to join the village association activities, as well as other development initiatives, was one that remained with the men working with the forests in the village association and in the university. I was, initially, in many ways, complicit in such thinking. A funding application process later, in September 1998, I accompanied Axel to the village to ascertain what the women in Drevdagen thought of the process and of SLU's involvement in it.

### *Initial interviews*

It was a short two-day visit, to get to know the people and some of the issues. I spoke to the men working with the forest project and five women active with various development activities in the village. I had the intrusive feeling that I can often get as a researcher, as I tried to speak to the first woman whom I interviewed about the forests and local management. However receptive the interviewees might be, it was a feeling of the taken for grantedness of the situation, of the assumption that they would be willing to answer my questions about their lives. But it was also about forcing questions on them that they might not be interested

in or might not be interested in discussing with a complete stranger. I followed her around as she tried to coordinate her day at the shop that she was running, dropped her children at day-care and fixed things at home. I was not getting very far on the topic of the forests and the village association. As I watched her go about her chores, I realized how pointless it must seem to her to answer my questions when there were important things to be taken care of. I asked her what she felt was important for her. That was the turning point in our conversation and I think in the many conversations that I had in the village in the next two days. She spoke of the need for a wider perspective on village activities, of how the forests needed to be seen together with the other activities in the village, and the absence of women in the formal village fora. When I said that I thought this was important and should be discussed, she immediately made some calls and as I heard her tell some of the other women whom I then met, "SLU is actually interested in us and our issues." Some of the women dropped by and we arranged to meet for interviews. I spoke to four other women. After coming back to the university, I sent a report of the interviews to them. The essential content has been dealt with in chapter five. The response that I got was that they were interested that we continue to cooperate in some way. In the meantime I also visited the villages in Orissa, India (November 1998 – February 1999) and worked on theory (explanations in relevant literature) to piece together what I had learnt from my experiences from listening to women in the two places.

Sometime later, I heard from Karl that it would be good if I came back and spoke to the others. My report seemed to have brought up troubling issues concerning the village association and had prompted a discussion about these issues among some of the people in the village. He saw a possibility for taking the process forward. I was hesitant to begin further research until I felt that the women had thought through what they might want to do. Earlier, during my previous visit in September 1998, Märta had suggested that I visit other women in their homes to see what they thought about local forest management and village development, as an investigation that they would not have the time to do themselves but that I would be able to do. Later that winter, two women from the village - Sara, whom I had spoken to when I was in the village and Kajsa - were working temporarily at a farm close to Uppsala and they suggested that we meet to discuss collaboration. At a meeting at the farm, Sara suggested,

You could speak to the women and see what ideas and dreams they hide in their cottages. Then we could all meet and do something about that.

I thus returned to the village in May 1999 to speak with the other women in the village.

### *Mapping the homes*

Before I visited the women in their homes, some of the women I had spoken to earlier sat around in Sara's kitchen and drew a map of the village to help me find my way around. They walked through the village in their minds and mapped all

the women and their houses. Armed with this map and with the telephone numbers of all the homes, I started off on my itinerary. I spoke to sixteen other women, comprising most of the women then resident in the village between the ages of 30 and 60 years. Some of the women were older and the eldest was 86 years. I also spoke to some of the men who worked with the village association and with the male partners who joined us when I was interviewing the women in their homes. The interviews were carried out by the snowball method, that is, every woman that I spoke to suggested another one (whose house I then identified on my map). The woman usually called the next woman to introduce me and fix a time for me to meet her. The interviews were unstructured and the women were encouraged to decide themselves what they wanted to speak about. From my point of view, the interviews were meant to get to know the women, tell them about my research interests, understand their context and see if they were interested in participatory research together. It was fascinating to get to know the women and their village as I went around in the spring days while the weather was particularly benevolent. The snow lay thick and deep, while the sun shone with such intensity that some of the interviews with the elder women in the village were conducted while they were sunning themselves outdoors, sometimes in groups of twos or threes.

Soon after these days in the village, I wrote a synthesis of all the interviews and observations. I returned to the village the following month, June 1999, to give the report to the women and speak to them further. This time my visit coincided with a meeting arranged by the forest group (including SLU participants) at which people from several villages in Norrland met to form a network on forest questions. There were only men at the meeting, with the exception of Diane from SLU and another woman who had accompanied her husband from a village in the north. The fact that women did not participate in formal meetings to discuss forest futures did not appear to be an isolated event that nor limited to the village of Drevdagen. There were few men and no women from Drevdagen at this meeting.

When I went to their houses to deliver my report, the women wondered if I knew what the meeting had been about. Some were upset that they had not been informed about it while two other women had been told about it but only to be asked by the committee if they could arrange the lunch and coffee and take care of the dish washing for the meeting. The absence of women was raised by Diane at the meeting. She had accompanied me when I went to distribute my interview report to the women and had spoken to some of the women herself. On the second day of the meeting, Kerstin was persuaded to come to the meeting by her husband. The issue of having a space of their own came up once again among the women, precipitated by the latest omission. Several women told me that they could identify themselves in the text and were excited to see that others had similar thoughts as well to see other issues being raised that they had not thought about themselves but considered important none the less. They were interested in sharing their feelings and experiences with each other. While I was visiting Sara in her home, I was joined by some of the others and they brought up the question of having their own network and of finding other ways of working and discussing issues. We decided to meet in a few weeks time when it was convenient for the women in the village.

*Seeking another space: Dammkojan, The cottage by the lake*

Some of the women invited the others to a meeting on June 28, 1999 when we met as a group of twelve women. The women chose to meet at the little cottage by the lake in the village, to mark their distance from the formality of a meeting room. Since I was eager not to facilitate, the women who had invited the others did so while I spoke about wanting to do research that may be useful to them. The women had named several things that were important to them to work on in the village, as well as the problems they faced. The central topic of conversation, however, was centred on the need for their own network in order to be able to take up things informally and to know that they had each other's support and as one way to compensate for their absences from other decision-making arenas. They aired the idea of a women's network partly to distance themselves from the formality of the village association and as a way to be able to work freely and provide space for one another.

The women in the village had previously been involved in collective action, but claimed, that they were now tired of struggling so hard. They seemed hesitant to involve themselves in village work decided upon by the men in the association. They wanted to make a space where they could take up the issues that interested them. Also, they felt that women in the village were somewhat isolated from each other and the network could become a social place for them all to meet. The discussion then moved to what they felt was needed for village development and what they wanted to do. Some of the ideas that came up, concerned projects like their work to develop an old age home, the village shop, day-care in the village and promotion of tourist activities. Some of the women had prepared for the meeting and had spoken to various authorities at the municipality and the *Hushållningssällskapet*,<sup>57</sup> who had promised to help them and suggested that they contact the *Glesbygdssverket*<sup>58</sup> and other authorities. The women divided themselves up in working groups to work with the questions that most interested them.

Since the idea was to design a process of inquiry together, the first meeting was used to sound out various ideas on the form that this process might take. For instance, the question of working together in smaller groups or one large group was addressed, as well as whether the whole group should meet as often as the smaller groups or should that rather be reserved for special occasions. They considered having one person, an informator, who would be responsible for keeping all the others informed about what was going on in the working groups. The women were clear about the fact that, whatever they did, it was to be for the village and not undertaken as private projects that would benefit just one person or family. They spoke about working through cooperatives although for this they would need someone to become responsible for coordinating the activities. They stressed the importance of community as well as practical matters:

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<sup>57</sup> The rural economy and agricultural societies.

<sup>58</sup> The Swedish National Development Agency.

On one's own it will be too much. Things have to be shared, everyone takes a task. One is a little afraid of too much work, of being responsible for everything. The point is not that one person has to carry it all.

In the initial meetings it was not absolutely clear what the network was for (apart from offering an important meeting place) but they believed they needed a space and that the objectives would slowly become clearer through inter-action. One of the questions that they discussed and which was taken up at a subsequent meeting, was if and how they should try to involve men. Someone mentioned and they all agreed that there were men in the village who were interested in some of the issues that they wanted to work on. Would this not this make them into a parallel group? Opinions differed:

It is important to have groups, women as well as men who work together, even though it is the women's initiative.

On the other hand:

But we will work for the village anyway, with them or without them

But also:

Sometimes it is easier if the men (*gubbar*) are not involved.

Some of these feelings have been discussed in the previous chapter with reference to several women's views that the men liked to hold meetings and talk but that not much got done as a result. The women began to meet in various configurations, in the smaller groups, in chance meetings in the village, as well as in a larger group. In the first few meetings, the women discussed their projects and their ideas, what they wanted to do and how they planned to work on these plans. They sought feedback from the others in the group, but the social aspect of these occasions was felt to be equally important: "To meet and have fun together." We organized various social activities when we met. One time it was an Indian meal, at another making *kol bullar*<sup>59</sup> in the *dammkoja, stum*, the local bread and cloudberry pie etc. Sara wrote about the *dammiga damer*<sup>60</sup> in the village newsletter in September 1999: "I agree with Eije, we can't just meet to work, we need to have fun together also."

I tried to define my role in the first few meetings. The suggestion was that I would help in the process of creating their network (as a complement to the village

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<sup>59</sup> Translated literally this means, charcoal buns, *i.e.* buns that are roasted on a fire so that they became black like charcoal. It was the staple diet of forest workers in the past.

<sup>60</sup> the women who met by the lake or to put it literally, the lakey ladies since *damm* is lake and *damer* is ladies. But *damm* also means dust in Swedish.

association). I would document the network process for the group and for my research purposes and provide inputs and feedback to them as a researcher. The last task was somewhat unclear but it began to acquire meaning as I provided examples of women's networks in other parts of Sweden, of theories (literature) on women's networks and began to establish a dialogue between practice and theory (literature). We discussed some of the research carried out in the Swedish *glesbygd* as well as research from Europe on women in rural communities. This evoked an interesting response from the women as they either identified themselves with aspects of the research or felt that it fell short of describing their own lives. I sent them summaries and minutes from our discussions in the form of a process account after each get-together, as well as my thoughts on the subjects, raised sometimes with questions at the end about the issues that we had discussed. After the first few meetings, I thought it would be interesting to reflect on these issues in a more structured way as part of our meetings together.

## **Phase II: Collaborative Inquiry**

To give more structure to the reflection taking place within the group, I had begun to think about a collaborative inquiry, with its emphasis on action outside the group and reflection within the group, as a way to move forward. I discussed this idea with the women at a meeting in the village in October, 1999. We also discussed a paper that I was writing based on the interviews with them on village development and the forest question. I spoke about how I found it difficult to write a paper about the process when I had wanted to reflect on my interpretations and conclusions with them as co-researchers. We spoke about collaborative inquiry as a formal process and I asked if they might be interested in using the space that we had created to reflect on what they had been doing in their working groups, in the village and in our process together. The women thought it could be interesting and something new, although there were reservations expressed about doing 'research.'

### *Forming a circle*

Not all the women who had been at earlier meetings were present when we discussed this issue in October. I decided to write to all the women whom I had interviewed to see if they were interested in collaborating. In the letter I described collaborative inquiry above all as a space to inquire into questions that we would together decide were important for the women and attempt to link theory (the literature that I had read) to our practice. A get-together to discuss this was also announced in the village newsletter and all the women in the village were invited. I followed this up by calling them individually to discuss what they thought about the invitation and what such a process might offer them. Apart from the women to whom I had already spoken, many were curious but several were unenthusiastic:

I don't really have anything to say, you would probably want to speak to my husband about the forests and such things.

Or:

I'm afraid I don't have the time, the evenings are spent on doing homework with the children, they have to be put to bed...

No, I don't have the energy, I spend whatever is left of it after home and work on working for the school and that is about enough for me.

Others were cautious:

It sounds like fun, are the others also going to come?

To:

I'd very much like to come.

This was a stage in the process that, although small and apparently insignificant, was important nonetheless. It was important for the process and for the women and for me that everyone was contacted individually and that they were able to express themselves, negatively or positively. In an earlier interview, one of the women when referring to village projects had pointed out: "those who shout the most get the most while those who prefer not to do so this way, never get heard." I also took to heart what I understood of Treleaven's advice. It is in the initial phase that participation is generated and shaped by attention to two formative dimensions. One is to create a space for the inquiry by establishing a framework of enabling structures. The second is the development of a context within this space that further generates collaborative processes. Hence the preparatory phase of the inquiry needs to be responsive to collaborative processes and grounded in exploratory dialogue (1994:142). This felt important for me although, as our process unfolded, I came to realize that participation needed to be generated throughout the process and not merely in the formative stage.

### *Creating a Space and Keeping it Open*

The space that we were creating with the inquiry was first and foremost a meeting place for the women in the village. The women aimed to initiate collaborative processes for themselves and the village, building on what they had already started. My intention was then to create a structured space for reflection. Reflection was always taking place among us but in a more scattered way. I was very aware of the desire for informality among the women and with a structured space, I mean laying the groundwork or 'enabling structures' to make possible an informal space where we would feel comfortable and a place we would want to come to. It was Treleaven's way of shaping an inquiry with some women in an Australian university that seemed to fit the lives of the women in Drevdagen.<sup>61</sup> She writes:

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<sup>61</sup> I had been doing extensive reading on various participatory approaches and specifically on examples of co-operative inquiry.

I have found the circular model of sequenced steps – plan, act, observe and reflect, then re-plan (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988) to be an incomplete approximation of action research, taking no account of implicit structures embedded within a situation, nor allowing for other forms of knowing beyond that of the conscious, rational mind. This is to ignore knowledge constructed in many forms: from emotions and the body, in creative expression (story telling, poetry, drawing, music and dance), from synchronicity (coincidence to which meaning is given) and from dreams (Treleaven, 1994:142).

My aim was to design the inquiry with the women according to what felt appropriate for them. ‘The rational cycle of sequenced steps’, first conceptualised in Kolb’s learning theories and practiced in much action research left little space for the process to create its own structures. To lay out a rational structure seemed incongruent with their everyday lives and the changes that kept taking place in village life. Also, in a situation of uncertainty and of not quite knowing where we would come to with the process, this is what I sensed was feasible for our group. It felt akin to Stevens’ understanding of gestalt:

I don’t have a plan which I carry out, step by step. I move step by step and the design takes shape (Stevens, 1970:118 cited in Treleaven, 1998:117).

#### Keeping it informal and unstructured

Such an approach left space for creativity and serendipity. It was the kind of space that the women said that they did not find in the formal associations in the village. The women played an important part in keeping it this way. They spoke of being able to interrupt each other (although we did have some rules about that) and of not waiting a half hour before the previous speaker had finished and the chairperson noticed your hand; of being able to connect to something, or to come upon a new idea and for this to be accepted as a genuine contribution to the discussion. Importantly, they valued being able to laugh and share emotions so meetings were not reduced merely to solemn occasions for discussing plans for the future in the village.

As I had felt instinctively then and realized later, our unstructured structure provided the space for several hitherto excluded women to become part of the group. Not all women could attend all the get-togethers and not all always came and left at exactly the same time. The get-togethers differed from time to time. A different structure emerged each time we met, depending on how many women were there and what was considered important as a result of discussion rather than pre-planned facilitation. The important thing for them, as the women pointed out, was that everyone had to feel welcome. Attendance was not compulsory and we discussed how it was important not to feel guilty if we could not make it to a get-together. As a result of the shifting numbers of women attending, although we did always decide on a date for the next get-together, it was not always certain that the

time and place determined would work for everyone else. It was difficult to know just how many women would come the next time. The meetings were always reported in the village newsletter and the next date announced.<sup>62</sup>

#### Facilitation

In the early phase of the process my explicit role shifted somewhat from that of a fly on the wall, participant observer and documenter to that of facilitator. Although I was keen to share the responsibility for facilitation, the women in the group felt that since I knew most (in theory!) about collaborative inquiry, I should facilitate. I did make it clear that it was as new to me in practice as it was for them. But they felt at this stage, it was more practical to have a facilitator from 'outside the village.' However, after a while I realized that the facilitation usually happened by itself. There were also difficulties in being both facilitator and researcher although on the other hand facilitation was easier to hand over to the others. Those who wanted to take up issues that they wanted to discuss did so and facilitated that part of the get-together. I made many of the practical arrangements at this time. As a facilitator I spent considerable time on the telephone confirming dates for meetings and other practical arrangements. However, this role changed again as we shared responsibility among us. Facilitation of the get-togethers began to depend upon who was there and what we talked about.

#### Themes

The first meeting was spent on negotiating the agenda for the day, which was actually accepted more or less as I presented it.<sup>63</sup> I suggested we begin with telling stories about ourselves and then go on to discussing our reasons for being in the group and arriving at a theme we all felt comfortable with. Not ever having facilitated such a group I did not realize how impractical the agenda was. We never got past the first point. There was not even a slight possibility. But the next time we met we shared our reasons for being there by means of an exercise. Everyone wrote down what they felt was important. These contributions were then discussed together and we identified common themes that ran through all of them. They included:

- *gemenskap* (a feeling of belonging)
- the need to support one another and others in the village,
- working to build up women's self-esteem,
- women's curiosity and social needs,
- to be able to cooperate despite being very different within the group,
- to work with village development and spirituality in their lives and the work they do.

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<sup>62</sup> Action research literature often stresses the importance of public reporting. Our meetings were reported in the village newsletter. Further my process reports and minutes from the meeting were another form of reporting as is my thesis.

<sup>63</sup> It was the negotiating that made it theirs.

### Ground rules/Guidelines

There was a very strong desire to maintain an unstructured space, rules were associated with structure. However, at our second meeting in this phase, on my suggestion, certain ground rules were settled on within the group. One important rule was that of turn taking. We also spoke about the need for everyone to have equal air-time. This particular discussion then led to us looking at power relations within the group. The women spoke about how some of them were more confident about talking and could easily dominate the discussions. Those women agreed that they needed to be aware of this. It was decided that everyone was responsible for seeing to it that everyone participated and felt free to express themselves.<sup>64</sup> We also agreed that every woman would speak only for herself and that we would not start conversations on the side with others while one woman was speaking. Interruptions were not forbidden and actually they often emerged as supports to the speaker's narrative as other women asked questions, drew out each other's stories and interjected with expressions of support or wonder.

### Story telling

At our first meeting in this phase of the process, we had begun with stories from our lives. At first, several women felt it was difficult to talk about themselves: "I don't have anything to tell really" or "I haven't really done anything special." But once we got started, we were caught in a flow and ebb that lasted long into the night. Maria, a woman in her 50s who had lived in the village for the major part of her life, started by saying that the story about her life wouldn't last more than two or three minutes. What with questions about her fascinating hobbies, her life in and outside the village, it was well over an hour before someone laughingly wondered if the three minutes were up. Treleaven had cited Martin Cortazzi, and as I read his book I also recognized that:

Once a narrative is under way it effectively stakes out a space to give the teller an abnormally long turn at talk. A narrative definitely wards off interruptions except to allow listeners to ask for something to be clarified or repeated. Such interruptions do not take the main turn away from the teller. They assist the teller to design the narrative to meet the knowledge and interests of the listeners, and they elicit information, which is required for the intended interpretation (1993:28).

I realized that although the women had been happy to talk about themselves and to relate stories from their lives in the one-to-one interviews, initially it was more difficult for many to do so in a group setting, even though it was a group of women they had known for a long time. It was often the genuine interest of the other women in the group that encouraged every woman to share her stories and acknowledge their relevance. So, although it was Maria's narrative interwoven into it was also a conversation about life in the village, prompted by the others'

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<sup>64</sup> This did not mean that all women took part or were active in the same way or were always present at all the meetings or talked the same amount.

questions and queries, confirmation or narratives of different experiences in similar situations. The conversation touched their lives in the village, their families, spiralled out to other places and came back again. By telling and making sense of our stories we were able to see the 'ordinary' not only as something that just happened but that which we made happen, with others or in spite of others, in many different kinds of relationships. In discussing a previous meeting, Sara mulled over what effect it had had:

It was cosy (*mysigt*) and enjoyable to meet, to hear about each other but also about oneself. I was surprised by myself... wanting to share.

Kajsa agreed:

It is so that one seldom speaks about oneself, you say why should I do that? Who is interested in me?

The women and I related experiences from our lives. Frigga Haug *et al.* write (1999:42) "Experience may be seen as lived practice in the memory of a self-constructed identity. It is structured, by expectations, norms and values, in short by the dominant culture; and yet it still contains an element of resistance, a germ of oppositional cultural activity". In conversations that flowed from one woman to the next, there was an exchange and a dialogue that the women were convinced could lead to new ways of acting and being:

This is good for us and important and good for village development.

The roots of all our discussions or inquiry were deeply bound up with the village and village history. The stories were about their lives, moves from place to place, for several of 'coming back' to Drevdagen, of waiting to work and study till the children grew up, about spirituality and of working together for the village. Thinking back on our stories, one of the women said at a meeting:

Have you noticed how much we talk about the village when we talk about ourselves?

The women told stories of struggle and disappointments but also of hope and success and their dreams for their futures in the village. "*Vi måste få bygden att leva*" (We must get the place to live), Yvonne had said in her interview and this was a thread that was woven in and out of all the stories that we shared. In the inquiry conducted by Treleaven, she writes: "Emotions that accompanied our stories – anger, despair and grief as well as joy and its accompanying laughter or well being were catalysts to new understanding and acting" (1998:127). In our case, to be able to express dreams and emotions, to experience being heard and understood, provided an energy which was in many ways the most important outcome of the group. Our stories did a lot to draw the group together. The women

who were there for those times when we discussed our stories thought it was fascinating to listen to them:

Karin: Although you think that you know one another, you never hear these things. To listen to lives like that was like watching a film.

Even though many of the women lived in the same village, they learnt things about each other that they did not know before and felt that they got to know each other in different ways. The discussions ranged from mothers-in-law to plans for writing the history of the village as a way to involve older people in village plans, learning skills from the older women in the village so that they may not be forgotten, struggling with local authorities, and about their children and families. The women also made several practical plans like organizing social occasions such as an Irish pub evening and the advent fair. They planned what they called a nostalgic film evening under the coordination of one of the older women, where they showed films of the village and talked about its history.

Since the size of the group varied and at some of the later meetings, the numbers grew, it became more difficult to continue to share stories. Although the newcomers related stories about their lives, they themselves did not get to hear the earlier accounts. This created some unevenness in our story telling in the later get-togethers. In retrospect, we should have made more of an effort to come back to our stories to see where we stood in relation to them at present, partly to understand if we related differently to them but also to make it easier for a group with a shifting membership. A mitigating factor was that as new women came into the group, the older members reiterated what they felt was important from previous meetings and discussed with the newcomers (about) what they hoped to get from our time together.

I learned the significance of story as a methodology. It enabled some of the women to overcome initial hesitation and narrate a story on their terms using frames of reference and meaning that they felt comfortable with. Although the stories spanned many places and many aspects, when heard in relation to each other, they formed a coherent context for the women's present lives, as we also discussed the many different ways in which they (we) were connected to the village. In this way the discussions may be viewed as 'a kind of active theorising' (Brunner, 1994:4 cited in Treleaven, 1998:131) or 'thoughtful practice' (Cuomo, 1998). The stories and the discussions around them helped to put many activities in the village in context both for the participants and even more so for me. As some women remarked, apart from having the cathartic function 'to be able to talk about oneself,' it sometimes made us see ourselves in different ways and to explore new ways of acting and being. However, as I pointed out above, we did not use this method consistently throughout the process. I draw on these stories extensively in theorizing our process. I make reference to them as I study how they were not just reflections of particular incidents in their lives but played an active role in their constructions. Haug writes about this as a particular way of processing the social world, its appropriation by individuals and one that needs to

be seen as a field of conflict between dominant cultural values and oppositional attempts to wrest cultural meaning and pleasure from life (1999:41). Not unlike Ken Plummer, my focus here was “...on the interactions which emerge around story telling. Stories can be seen as joint actions” (, 1995:20, emphasis in original). Unlike Plummer however, who looks at the political role of story telling in a larger sociological frame, my study is limited to the interactions that occurred among our group of women and how they changed interactions in the village as a whole.

#### Discussing projects – action situations and collaborative action

The inquiry was also the space for discussing the projects that the women had planned and their work on these. Those of us who contacted and networked with others outside reported on what we had been doing as well, other women’s groups, authorities and so on. Although we had started with the idea that their work with their projects would be central to the inquiry (I saw them as the action research situations which would be examined), this idea became less important. What took over was increasingly the inquiry as a space to organize, that they were actively creating. This became the ‘research question’.

#### Visits outside the village

Some of the women in the group began to take a course at the *folkhögskola* (peoples’ college for adult education) at Mora in an effort to learn how to keep alive old handicrafts such as preparing animal and fish hides, smithing and carding wool. I visited them there and for me it was an opportunity to see in practice some of the things that they had been talking about at the get-togethers. This particular *folkhögskola* worked hard to promote courses for what they called rural development. They tried consciously to engage participants in discussions about the Swedish countryside and about ways to invigorate and support its inhabitants. They saw their efforts contributing to keeping the countryside alive and the skills that people had. It was striking that, with the exception of two men, all the other course participants at that time were women.

Some of the women also visited my university in Uppsala. For them, this was a chance to see where I worked and meet my professor and some colleagues. The highpoint of the visit was the delight with which some of them seized on the rotting apples lying around under the apple trees on the university lawns, gathering them for their cows back home. Although somewhat apprehensive of entering an academic community and meeting the others, they felt more at ease when the professor at our department sat and chatted with them on the lawns outside and they felt that he was someone one could talk to (almost normal!). Research and a university environment was something that was distant from their lives and also disdained. Their disdain is perhaps not all that surprising since, as they pointed out, the research that they often read about in the media complained about the dependency of rural people on state aid and talked about their areas as places that

needed to be phased out since they were mainly a drain on the exchequer.<sup>65</sup> After attending at the *forskarforum* (research forum), a meeting organized for people working on rural development, they related that they were bored by some of the presentations but also happy that they had kept up with the discussions and had found that researchers actually made some sense, sometimes. However, research on the whole remained a somewhat suspect activity. The fact that I referred to them as my co-researchers was the subject of many jokes. As Maria was finishing off a relation of her life history at one of our first meetings, she had paused and had said, "...and then... of course.... I do research in my spare time" and was greeted with bursts of laughter.

#### Photovisioning

The village was important in the women's stories and our conversations. We decided to visualise our discussions as well and undertook what I call a 'photovisioning' exercise.<sup>66</sup> I provided disposable cameras to the group to take photographs of the village that would record and reflect the strengths and problems of the village. We decided that the overall theme would be quite broad, to document what was positive as well as negative about life in the village through the eyes of the women. Each woman took five photographs of what she considered positive about her life and five photographs of what she felt was negative. The process gave each woman the possibility to capture in pictures how she felt about the village, her life, and her visions for the future. The exercise facilitated a great deal of interaction among the women in the month between the times that we met. Intricate schedules, for who would have the camera and when, had to be devised as we had only ten cameras and each camera had to be shared among three women. There was a flurry of activity and a certain amount of confusion. The cameras seemed to take on a life of their own and wandered from hand to hand as even some women (both from the village and outside) who had previously not been part of the forum also became involved in the project and shared the taking of pictures.

One aim of the exercise, as I have mentioned above, was to enable us to reflect with the help of the photographs on some aspects of the village and the women's lives that we had been discussing. Another aim was to promote critical dialogue and discussion and eventually perhaps to involve the other villagers and village associations in the discussions prompted by the photographs. The women spoke about wanting to make a collage from the photographs and to invite the others in the village to discuss how they regarded their pictures of the positive and negative aspects of village life.

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<sup>65</sup> There had been a certain amount of discussion on these topics in the newspapers not so long ago.

<sup>66</sup> Similar methods have been tried in a variety of contexts. Photovoice, developed by Caroline C. Wang and Mary Ann Burrell is a process by which people can identify, represent, and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique. For a detailed description of photovoice, see Wang (2004).

From the point of view of writing the thesis, unfortunately the discussions at our get-together were not very well documented by me. A large number of women came to the meeting and there was a great deal of excitement. On hearing of this exercise, other women in the village and one or two from outside the village, who had not been part of the group previously, also took photographs and attended the get-together. From a facilitation point of view it may be said to have been quite chaotic and from the point of view of a conscientious and information-hungry researcher, something of a disaster. Undocumented meetings and exchanges were taking place everywhere. I should have asked someone else to document the process but no one except myself was keen to do that. We had a large group discussion about the photographs and I wrote down who took what photograph and the broad themes of the discussion. I thought we could discuss these themes at subsequent meetings. However this did not happen, regrettably nor were we able to discuss how this exercise might have helped us to reflect on village life and on our inquiry process. A crisis in the village shortly after this get-together led us to discontinue our meetings. The next time that we met in a large group was much later and many of the photographers were not there. However, the excitement generated by the exercise at the time makes me feel that there was something important in this event for the women in the village, and so I have chosen to write about it nonetheless. The description of the photographs given below is based on my notes taken at the time, journal entries after the event and my analysis of the copies of the photographs (that I was allowed to keep) based on what the women thought was important and why. Selected literature on ethnographic work with photographs (*c.f.* Rosengren 1991), has helped me to examine the focus of the photographs, the style that is chosen, and the atmosphere that is sought to be conveyed and to understand the fragments of the photographers' experiences that have been frozen in the pictures. Unfortunately deeper analysis is beyond the scope of the thesis.

the photographs:

There was a spirited discussion as the women sorted out the photographs clusters reflecting the negatives and positive aspects of their lives. There were some photographs that were considered positive by some and negative by others and there were also some, which were held to be both positive and negative at the same time. The participatory approach allowed multiple meanings to be attached to singular images. The positive and negative aspects of village life were perhaps brought more sharply into focus. At the same time, the process of sorting showed that there were differences in how the different photographers had understood and formed the project. Some had chosen to take up what may be seen as 'personal' themes while others focused on community and joint themes. The sorting process also provided the opportunity for them to talk about why some thought certain images were negative while others believed them to be positive.

The village was present in all photographs, with the exception of a few. I later divided the photographs into general categories relating to: the landscape, activity, spirituality, animals, warmth/growth, people, the school, the personal and those prompted by environmental concerns.

Landscape: The majority of the photographs were of the village landscape showing both positive and negative features. Those labeled as positive photographs included the waterfall, Njupesjär, (the highest in Sweden) not far from the village, pictures of the Drevdagen lake and the landscape around it, and of the *fäbod* in the forest with its narrow creeks and vibrant greenery. The pictures were taken in spring, probably the most spectacular season in Sweden. There were also several landscape pictures of the village dotted with its red cottages and of the lake cottage where we often met.

The landscape was also the subject of several negative pictures, such as large clear cuts. From the discussions it was apparent that the women thought that these were ugly areas that also lowered the value of their land and houses. It also cleared the land of valuable forests which, if the villagers were allowed to, they could use for tourism and other economic activities. There was one picture of a fallen tree in the forest and one on the roadside that had not been taken care of. This, they claimed, was negative because in the past, when the communities were responsible for the forests around them, they left nothing to waste. Everything in nature was taken care of.<sup>67</sup> The fallen tree in the forest would perhaps be seen as positive by nature enthusiasts as reflecting a natural process, however, for the women present there seemed to be unanimity that it was a sign of waste and of work not done. Another picture classified as negative was taken by Sanna, a woman in her late 20's. It showed a pile of firewood waiting to be chopped, work to be done. It was seen as positive by some others since access to fuelwood has been an important part of the villagers' claims. The men that I had interviewed in the village had complained that they needed to warm their houses with oil imported from elsewhere when they had the necessary raw material all around them.

Activity: Other positive pictures of the landscape were characterized by activity. There were a few pictures of the bald and to me not so striking slope above the village, but which the women presented as a positive aspect of village life. With their hard work the villagers had transformed it into a ski slope in the winters and were maintaining it as such. Other activities were centred on their homes: a house being constructed, of people working on various handicrafts outdoors side by side (this was not a picture from the village but presented as a future vision of what the photographer wanted the village to be). Another photograph was that of a half-prepared hide drying in the sun and this, the photographer said, was linked closely to a rural setting, with animals and a (wished for) sense of community, where people worked harmoniously together. There was also a picture of a resting place in the forest and although, there were no people in the picture, it was a picture that communicated activity, a backpack slung over a piece of wood, the sun shining on a cup of coffee and a net. This again was a theme that seemed to recur: being 'close to nature' is what distinguished the people who lived here and made their

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<sup>67</sup> This corresponded to conversations with some men in the village who claimed that earlier ways of logging trees in the forests manually were so much more aesthetic and made use of all available wood unlike the ugly tree stumps left in the clear cuts these days.

place special. This particular photograph was taken by a woman who had recently returned from a large town to live in the village.

The negative pictures showed the absence of activity. Three striking examples showed an uncared-for house and patch by the lake, the empty village shop in the middle of the village and the *bystuga*, the village cottage, where village social activities were organized. The *bystuga* and the shop, however, were given as both positive and negative attributes of the village. They were negative because they were empty for the moment, but positive because the villagers were working to fix the *bystuga* and the shop. There was some discussion about why the *bystuga* was important. It was a meeting place in the village, a place where people could drop by and meet one another (play *ping-pong* etc).<sup>68</sup> These photographs visualized our discussions at earlier get-togethers about the importance of a meeting place. The photograph was also interpreted as negative because the *bystuga* was run down. Cecilia told the others that just before she came to this get-together she had heard that the village association had got permission to rebuild the *bystuga* and they had received a grant from the municipality to renovate it and to be able to get houses from Särna to put up in the village.

The shop was negative because it was lying empty but the village association had taken it over and the women hoped to make it a 'house of dreams'. There was also a picture of un-lived-in houses, some of which were summerhouses, in an area of the village that looked rather desolate in the picture. There was a picture of the football field that looked very empty as it was long since Drevdagen had its own football team. At one time the field was very actively used and also the site of several matches with other villages, some of them lying across the border in Norway. There was also a photograph of the not very well looked after recycling area.

Spirituality: There was a picture of a handicraft made by one of the women, an embroidered cloth wall-hanging depicting a benevolent Christ with a lamb in his arms. On the theme of spirituality there was also one of a shaman headdress and of Indian motifs. The women discussed the importance of spiritualism in their lives.

Animals: There were several pictures of animals. There were a few of horses, which were seen as having the potential to bring in income from tourist activities. There were Siberian huskies that did the same through sledging. Others breathed a vision of a future where goats grazed in the *fäbod* in the forest and, chickens and hens ran free around a sunny yard. There was also one of a cat sunning herself on a patch of grass. The animals in the pictures connoted possibilities of being able to provide a living for the villagers but their presence in the photographs was also a depiction of choices made by the photographers for a way of life, of wanting to live with animals.

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<sup>68</sup> In another county, it is in fact a ping-pong society that is actively involved in rural development in their villages.

*Some photographs from the photovisioning*





Growth: Being spring it was a time of growth and revival. There was a picture of seeds that were going to be planted and a more unfocussed one of a thermometer showing that summer had almost arrived.

People: Among the personal positive pictures were those of homes, of adults and children with their horses, of new comers who had moved to the village and of family members. There was a picture of the oldest inhabitant, an elderly lady who had seen the village through the major part of its history. Pictures with people in them were however, in my opinion surprisingly few.

School: Not surprisingly there were several of the village school building, in many ways the symbol of Drevdagen and their willingness to struggle for things important to them.

Environment/health: Thoughts about the environment were quite strong (although sparsely populated areas such as Drevdagen are often pictured in the media as the ones holding back the environmental movement by their extensive use of cars etc.). There was, for instance, a picture defined as negative of a rusty car, of a car engine that needed to be looked after. One picture that was positive was of a bicycle - that was considered good for health and also environmentally friendly. There was a negative picture of a pack of cigarettes, a hazard difficult to give up and another one of a whole iron bowl full of cigarette butts.

Personal: Some of the photographs clustered under this heading that were marked positive also included fruit and nature food (the photographer was on a diet), a pan pizza representing a frozen luxury for someone who did not want to cook, and a whole row of video cassettes of *Friends*, the American T.V. show. An iconic negative picture showed dirty dishes piled up in the kitchen sink that the photographer had not got around to washing and she spoke about how she hated doing it.

One clear interpretation of the photographs is the importance of activity as giving meaning to everyday life. From our discussions I sensed that activity was seen as a prerequisite of life and in fact the normal way of life.<sup>69</sup> Activity was linked to participation, of working together in the village, something that did not occur any longer as a matter of course but that had to be planned and cajoled. In terms of the inquiry process, the photovisioning also provided us with a concrete physical activity to undertake together at the same time as giving space for individual views. It created a great deal of enthusiasm and drew not only the group but also others into the ambit of the women's forum, a widening of the group that was becoming an important part of the women's agenda.

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<sup>69</sup> In a similar vein Paldanius in his research with unemployed adults writes that activity gave meaning to what was considered worthwhile and successful in normal life. Activity was linked to participation, which was a result of joint activity, in this case the activity was wage labour (2000:145).

Methodologically, the exercise allowed for individual voices to be heard in the about collective and personal spaces in a joint exercise. The photos created spaces for the individual. (though even in the photographs one can see the ties among the photographers – see discussion on subjectivities that I take up later). The photographs allowed space for individual women and their visions yet also enabled everyone to see the points of connection and differences between them. These too were stories, differently told. They enabled us to discuss varying topics and how these were related to each other. The photovisioning provided the women instances for describing what they saw on their own terms and using their own points of reference. It avoided the fitting of data into a predetermined paradigm,<sup>70</sup> and confronted us with how people constructed what mattered to them: from household chores to hazardous habits to community spaces.

#### External Participants

Early in the process, I had suggested to the women in Drevdagen that we invite Gunilla Härnsten, who had worked with research circles in Sweden to come and speak to us about her experiences with such forms of inquiry. Some of the women in the group were hesitant about this and wanted to wait and see how the group developed. In June 2000, Diane (from SLU, whom many of the women knew already) and Gunilla paid us a visit in the village. Gunilla presented some examples of research circles and her experience of working with them. This gave rise to some discussion of what research meant to the women. Another visitor to the group in the first phase was a woman from a nearby village who was coordinating an E.U. project in the area.

These examples were useful for some of the women from the point of view of seeing their own process compared to others, and to rural development efforts undertaken by other women's groups. The women spoke with pride about their village and of how the women in the village had always been active. To be able to experience seeing their work in a wider perspective in relation to what the others was felt to be positive. They tried to explain what they were looking for and of their need for a women's group in the village. Some of the women reacted however against the presence of other researchers and of their discussion of rural development and women. This was specifically so in reaction to a phrase, 'research problem', that was used by Gunilla when she described her research. Ingrid pointed out that what they were concerned with was not 'a problem' but a vision. The women's group was a way of working with this vision. This exchange reflects some of the tribulations of how we use language differently and how

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<sup>70</sup> Although patterns also emerge when looking at the photographs. Although it has been outside the scope of this thesis to think about the images of masculinity and femininity in the photographs it would be interesting to examine them in this light as well. For example in two women's photographs dirty dishes or an unkempt yard indicated a dislike for housework and they spoke of wanting to be in the forest and to be doing other things. In this case I think of Brandth's (1994) discussion of attempts at distancing from housework as a disassociation from traditional notions of femininity, a point that comes up again in this chapter.

language structures our thought. It also highlights some of the many contradictions of doing research and more specifically of participatory research, which I shall discuss in a later section.<sup>71</sup> As research makes meaning of our experiences and orders the world in discrete categories and definitions, it also structures the world. This process is something that I was confronted with all the more forcefully as a result of doing research in this particular way.

### **Phase III: The turn to action: a women's forum**

Once we began to meet within the framework of a collaborative inquiry, we began to sort out the themes that the group wanted to work with. There were several that came up but there was one which resonated among all the women there. Kajsa had written it down on a piece of paper as a topic that needed to be discussed:

Has everyone been invited to this... togetherness? (*Har alla blivit erbjudna denna tillvaro?*)

And as she explained what she meant, she continued:

Has everyone had the opportunity to participate?

As we continued to meet, there began to grow within the group a need for what some began to call a 'women's forum.' They wanted to include as many women as possible. The main aim became to organize a women's forum and from there to work for *gemenskap* in the village so that everyone could feel this sense of affinity, *gemenskapen*, that they needed as a base for a living, talking countryside.

It became important that it was to be a women's forum but everyone had to feel welcome and feel free to come. Referring to the dissatisfaction in the village about the village association, Kajsa pointed out:

Otherwise we fall into the same trap that the village association laid for themselves.

It was exciting to realize that so many women wanted to meet, some were set on working to make the forum a place for everyone and offer encounters that could be enjoyed and enjoying. Some of the women spoke about others from outside the

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<sup>71</sup> One idea of research is to categorize the world in neatly defined problems. The research problem is a significant and important category in research methodology. Academic study is based on acts of classification and of defining concepts and the relationships between them. It is feminism and the post modernism (the linguistic) with its attention to discourse, that has made apparent the need to closely examine how these categories are constructed. Referring to Patricia Williams, Bacchi (1996:13) writes: "categorizing is not a sin; the problem is the lack of desire to examine the categorizations that are made...and the uses these categorizations serve. Furthermore it is important not to see these categorizations as static."

village as having heard of the group and who had been curious and interested. They had come together in a mood of dissatisfaction with the existing village spaces for decision making. But though that had sparked the need to meet the overriding urge became one to find 'points of affinity' among women that would enable them to work and socialize together. Then it was the women's own initiatives and ideas that came forward. They looked and gave value to their own ways of socializing and supporting one another. The main aim was not merely to have a forum to talk about one's own situation but to have a forum where one could meet, *sporra varandra*, encourage one another and 'get the strength to do what one wanted to do.'

When one creates a place to meet, things begin to happen...new ideas emerge.

As the process developed, the participants held it to be important that they were able to talk about things that were important to them, to be able to meet, that the meeting place was open for all women, that everyone was informed of the meetings, that it was a safe space where one could meet and through all of this give life and meaning to community spirit.

Respect for diversity and differences among them was another central concept - to be acknowledged for what you had and to respect those who did not want to be a part of any particular activity. It was important that the group be inclusive and open to all women, even those who did not join the forum and that it did not become an exclusive group of women. They continued actively building up a group identity and a shared context in the midst of ambivalence and differences.

### *Reaching out (of the circle) to the village*

The forum was a small part of a bigger context in which the women tried to give life to visions of the rural countryside (*skapa liv i bygden*). It is difficult to separate the group from the context in which the women were active, the village itself. It is equally difficult to say what was specifically a result of the fact that the women in the village began to meet, and discuss their lives and their ideas. What happened can be interpreted in different ways. Because of their absences from other forums and the conventional ways of working, and because of the fact that they sometimes espoused issues that are considered to be everyday and domestic, the women used the space in the forum to take up these issues. They also discussed how they could work effectively in other settings. Being in the group did not mean that they were merely interested in issues that in some ways were an extension of their domestic activities, like their efforts on behalf of the old age home, or daycare for children. They chose to make a conscious effort to become more involved in the village association and village activities. Several women became active in the village association, where they insisted on the need to keep everyone in the village informed about the associations' activities. The village newsletter became the responsibility of one of the women who took it upon herself to ensure that everyone in the village (and those who subscribed to it from outside)

received the newsletter.<sup>72</sup> As a result of discussions about the lack of the women's participation in village platforms (for instance, at the forest meeting that I described earlier), a woman became the chairperson of the village association with the active support of some of the men in the association. Subsequently a number of other younger women and men joined the association. Some women in the forum felt that when there were more women in the village association they felt it was easier for them to come for the meetings. "It feels easier to go and speak when one knows that Karin and Sara are there," said a new participant in the group at one of our get-togethers at the lake cottage. The women in the association in their turn worked consciously to make space for more women in the forest project and other village activities. They urged women to take the opportunity of going on study trips, attending conferences and meetings outside the village. Some women joined the group working on the forest project. Lena, for example, went from home to home to talk to the villagers about the forest struggle along with Karl in an effort by the village association to reach out to the others in the village about the forest issue.

### *Taking courses*

Some women also took capacity building courses at *kunskapslyfte*<sup>73</sup> in book-keeping and computers especially those who had been talking about starting their own businesses. Others also took courses in local handicrafts in order to preserve traditional skills and start something in the village. Their visit to the Mora *folkhögskola* was in connection with this. They were surprised that none of the men wanted to take any courses, especially when some of the courses seemed just right for them. The women had urged some of the men to try them out:

I sent the brochure to x...I thought...he works with various projects and they have talked in the association about how it is important to be able to do all these things...but he did not take it up (*nappade inte*)...He did not want to take the course

In an interview with a woman who worked with *kunskapslyfte* in the nearby town, she confirmed this picture – 80 per cent of those taking the courses happened to be women. This is a pattern that recurs in the country. There has not been much research on the gendered aspects of this issue.<sup>74</sup>

### *Outside the village*

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<sup>72</sup> The newsletter also became a subject of a minor controversy in the association as some thought that they should charge people for it, especially those who were not a part of the association, while the woman along with another younger man in the association, believed it should be for free. The man wanted to publish it on the net.

<sup>73</sup> An adult education programme.

<sup>74</sup> For one exception see Kent Åsenlöf's (1999), *Varför vill inte Mandred läsa vidare?*

A few women from Drevdagen and nearby villages also attended the ‘rural parliament’<sup>75</sup> in 1999. On her return Lena shared the following comments with us at an inquiry meeting:

One realizes that even small people like us, can raise our voices, we can affect rural development in Sweden.

Sara: It feels that things are happening now (*att det var på gang*), this with the rural areas (*landsbygden*) and the *glesbygd*.

That is what gives you an injection. It strengthens confidence for us women when you see that what you are doing isn’t so crazy.

They did not think much of the speeches made by the politicians at the rural parliament, which they felt were conservative. The injection of hope and energy came from meeting others like themselves as well as those working on similar issues in order to keep the countryside alive. Four women also attended the *forskarforum*<sup>76</sup> where they collected reading material and put it in the house of dreams (a place in the village that the women named - that I describe later) for the others to read.

### **Reflecting on the collaborative inquiry**

The design of the inquiry in Drevdagen was not entirely unfamiliar to the participants because it was reminiscent of the form of the study circle. It was innovative, however, in the sense that it was based not only on discussing existing aspects of the women’s lives but it was also an effort to build upon that knowledge for action in the future (*c.f.* Härnsten 1994). It was an all women’s group and located within a single village,<sup>77</sup> and it was not an isolated unit but related in innumerable ways to the activities in the village. The choice of the village itself was due to an opportunity that presented itself and that I valued. In the village there was an ongoing discussion of the management of the forests, a history of activism, and a spirit that linked up with my questions and my aspirations for doing research of practical use for women and men in the countryside.

Conducting an inquiry in this way did not mean that I disregarded the option to conduct a more conventionally formal study in the realist tradition (*e.g.* surveying other women’s groups, interviewing government authorities on the basis of

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<sup>75</sup> The rural parliaments are convened by a social movement’s campaign, *Hela Sverige ska leva*, All Sweden shall live. It was founded in the late 1980s and is composed of rural voluntary associations, governmental bodies and so on. See chapter five.

<sup>76</sup> A forum where practitioners and researchers working with rural areas could meet.

<sup>77</sup> Katarina Schough’s thesis (2001) bases itself on a similar approach where she took part in a number of research circles with women that were carried out within the framework of an E.U. project at a development and education centre in Värmland.

questionnaires etc.), should the need arise within the collaborative inquiry process. However, such circumstances did not arise within the group. Although the group had begun by looking outwards so as to be able to talk about their projects with the world of bureaucracy outside the village, the attention became focused increasingly on their own relationships and to the village as the primary site of negotiation and tensions. This attention to the village turned the focus of my research to the village as the arena where various interactions involving people from outside, governmental bodies, and negotiation of policy were carried out.

### *Finding the right question...in action*

The questions that the women brought to the inquiry were diffuse and the issues were many as different women took up diverse topics that felt important to them on each occasion. Occasionally (often when I came back from my trips and thought and began to write about the get-together) I felt that I needed to take more of a stance as the 'academic researcher' in the group and bring to the fore one central question that we could analyse together. To draw out and concentrate on one central theme would have meant that we might have gone ahead and analysed one main question but that would also have meant excluding those who were new and who dropped in now and then. Although it might have been tempting from an academic researcher's point of view, this was not what the women wanted to do with the forum. Furthermore, this would not have provided the space for the new women to influence the agenda in any way and also for the women who were already there, it would have become *my* research tool.

The inquiry was different from other participatory methods where the research question or rather the framework of the inquiry is normally known. I had believed as Lars Holmstrand writes: "For all the circle participants...the research circle means a possibility to leave everyday work behind for a moment. It lets you step back and think about the situation. Under favourable conditions, the research circle can be a highly creative environment" (1997, my emphasis). I had started with an understanding of action research that builds on the idea of cycles of reflection and action wherein the inquiry would have provided the space to reflect on a situation outside the group. The frame for the inquiry in Drevdagen however emerged in discursive activities from within it. The women took up their agenda in a process of dialogue and meeting at what Haraway (1991b) calls the 'points of affinity'. As the women (we) related to each other, met, told stories and discussed our lives an assumed inter-subjectively understood and shared context was being jointly created. This was facilitated by shared experiences and a familiarity with the particular and concrete surrounding environment of the village as well as our recurring meetings (Waldenström 2001:166).

The women's efforts to form their own forum and the deliberate widening of the group, was action purposively taken. It became *the situation* and *the research question* that engaged the group. As I understand it now, it was by taking action that it made it clear for the women what they could and could not do. In this sense action and reflection were indivisible. Issues about gender and power relations *vis-à-vis* some of the men in the village were not discussed and were left unspoken in

the larger forum. The women seemed to have other ways of dealing with them. The existence of the group was one way. They also wanted to move on and topics changed from time to time. Under the larger rubric of wanting a women's forum there were many other aspects that they wanted to work with. In the beginning, we had decided that everyone had to have some sort of assignment, or an action research situation as I saw it, that they would bring back to the group to discuss. But as the group developed, what became important was to be part of creating the space. To organize a women's forum in dialogue with each other and understand why many instinctively felt that they needed it became the focus of the group.

Theorising by us in the forum took place through taking action and in practice. De Lauretis writes that, "putting political practice into words is theory" (de Lauretis 1989a:14) and in such a case putting words into practice would be practicing theory. The nature of this theorising is accepted in action research and within much feminism. However as Eduards writes, to claim that women's political practices may be seen as part of theorising is to invite distancing taking by the traditional research society. Feminist interpretations are often abnormal interpretations of the normal and are disregarded as ideological or normative. Normal interpretations that do not differ from the power order are seldom criticised for being abnormal (2002:130). On a marxist treatment of theory and practice, Elizabeth Grosz writes that, theory and practice presented as dialectical partners are in fact judged only by theoretical criteria. To speak of practice is only to be done in terms of what it means to Marxist theory. It remains secondary, undirected (1991:383). For the women's forum, the coming in of new people, new thoughts resulted in a process of iteration and it was part of our theorizing. Previous thinking and practice was constantly questioned by the people who came into the forum and they in turn, spoke about what made them come there. The other group members had a chance to reflect on their thinking and to think through what they really meant as they explained themselves to the women who came in. This had the potential of leading to better theory or more thought through practice.

#### *An outside insider in the forum: my role in the process*

My initial contacts with the village as a researcher interested in discussing rural development and the forests was with the men in the village, as it was in the villages in Nayagarh. This is symptomatic of research that seeks to work with rural development – the contacts remain primarily with the formal male representatives in the villages if special efforts are not made to speak to other people. Although the intention is to work with processes and not study the 'people', an understanding of that process for the researcher depends upon whom one speaks to and how one speaks to them. In writing the thesis from the vantage point of the women's forum rather than the more obvious focus of the formal village institutions, I hope like Dorothy Smith to give value to women as actively constructing, and as interpreting the social processes and social relations which constitute their everyday realities (1987). While appreciating Smith's methodology - that puts the researcher on the same critical plane of understanding with the women - Stanley and Wise pose an important question to her work. They point out that Smith's feminist sociologist proceeds from research with women

'like her', who are located similarly in relation to particular kinds of institutional material practices, and wonder how it would be to do research with women who are unlike (*Ibid.*:36). In a sense I inhabited the same critical plane as the women in the inquiry but was very unlike in most respects: age, ethnicity, education, background, residence, language were among some of these differences. In our separate ways we both related to the 'local forest management and village development'. Although we also had different agendas: as an 'academic researcher' and as 'resident researchers' the inquiry process enabled the creation of an intersubjective space for discussing our experiences. It is in the writing that our differences became once more apparent for me.

As a participant of the inquiry, I looked upon myself as a part of it although starting from another position with different ideas and opinions; and, as I realized later, with different needs and facing different demands as to the forms in which we needed to present our work.<sup>78</sup> The intention was not to iron out the differences between us but to use them to understand our context and ask questions of each other. In analyzing their research methodology, Gill Aitken and Erica Burman write about a particular interview situation where the researcher defers to the definitions assumed by the interviewee, out of a subscription to the feminist research convention that in the context of her social marginalization the participant's reality should hold sway (1999:285). A collaborative inquiry over a period time meant that although I deferred to the participants' definitions on some issues, I was also able to clarify for the others what I thought and was able to discuss this perspective with them. The point was to be able to be questioned by the other participants as we directed the process together. I needed to be clear about what I thought in order not to impose my ideas on them (which may have been easy to do in the beginning since the inquiry framework was my idea), but also to be able to identify and discuss the tensions of difference. At the same time, it must be made clear that it was not only a question of my ideas as opposed to those of the other participants. Different women thought differently on many subjects, some of whose ideas coincided with my own and sometimes they did not.

By designing the framework of the inquiry collaboratively, I tried to situate the research in the context in which it was carried out at the same time as I tried to relate it to 'theory' (to be more precise, to literature). The theoretical points of reference underpinning the inquiry underwent considerable change during the process. The inquiry was not designed explicitly as feminist praxis that necessarily sought to change unequal gender relationships. However by seeking to work as women to change their situations for the better, it did in fact imply that. However, it was not a language of 'change' that the women themselves used but that of wanting to build on certain neglected or under-valued aspects of village life. My agenda at that point was to support their efforts by following and analyzing the process. As far as I was concerned, undertaking research as a collaborative inquiry or research circle was not merely a methodological question. It was a

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<sup>78</sup> Of course I knew that but did not necessarily realize its significance at the time that I designed the research process.

*förhållningssätt*,<sup>79</sup> an active way of being. The research is situated firmly in its context, and quite obviously then, every such inquiry would take shape differently and generate different questions, depending on the issue, the place and the people involved.

When we evaluated my role in the process in 2002, the women believed that it was important that someone from outside the village facilitated the process. I was not implicated in village power politics and nor was I related to anyone. On the need for someone from outside, Kajsa and Ann remarked:

Kajsa: People come together (*sammanstrålar*) in one way or another in the village...but (with someone from outside) it has been possible to see more clearly what is positive and negative in our work or in the village... and so on. You realize what you yourself think is good or bad and why. You have to think a bit more.... You relate it to yourself when you see how others look upon you... (*uppfattar*) understand how we are.

Ann: We saw that what we had here among us was actually very special.

Although the idea of carrying out research together, the inquiry, was my idea, my research was of course only a small part of much larger processes in the village. I had wanted us to decide on the process and the form of the inquiry together and wanted it to be of relevance in the village and to contribute to their efforts. When I had started, I had perhaps an image of what research with a group of women in the countryside would be: a smaller group where we would meet regularly and discuss and reflect over research questions that we had decided to work with. We did that but in a very different way than that I expected.

### *Some drawback and advantages*

Reason and Heron write that a project of cooperative inquiry benefits from a certain degree of legitimacy and official sanction (2001). The collaborative inquiry in Drevdagen had neither. A project of this kind that requires time as well as a great deal of planning is unusual in a Ph.D. project with a single researcher. It is usually carried out within the ambit of a programme or project. In some ways, it is true, that it was within such a context that I entered, that is, within a larger project of acknowledging local forest management in Sweden. However, the research with the women was not encompassed within an institutional setting, that is, it was not a part of a larger formal project or programme. It was 'out in the open' and that had both advantages and disadvantages.

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<sup>79</sup> A research circle is above all a meeting place. Whether you want to do academic research on what takes place (or write about it) is a different thing (Härnsten, personal communication).

In the case of the collaborative inquiry, it afforded the women the freedom to articulate the purpose and the frame of the inquiry in ways that came out of the process. In several respects, this enabled the inclusion of women who were otherwise apprehensive of tying themselves down to something official and over which they may have had (or think they would have had) little influence. In terms of the research it was important in ascertaining the question that really concerned the women and that they wanted to work with. The lack of an institutional framework, however, contributed to the ephemeral nature of the women's forum (which for some was an advantage), and at times its lack of legitimacy *vis-à-vis* other village associations.

The richness and the understanding of the issues that the women talked about could not have been understood only through the individual interviews, however unstructured or structures they may have been. I had interviewed most of the women in the village and spoken to them about what they thought was important for them and the village. The need for a women's forum was not something that they had spoken about in the interviews and one that emerged as part of our get-togethers.

On the other hand, it was through the individual interviews as well as private conversations that I came to understand many nuances and aspects that did not surface in the get-togethers, although they were often there just below the surface. A joint conversation does not always reveal underlying motivations and the personal values guiding action. In order to keep the space for joint reflection open, conflictual issues were pushed to the background. I would have no doubt benefited from carrying out interviews with the women in between the meetings but at the time, to request to do so felt intrusive and against the spirit of the inquiry. However, I often spoke to individual women, both during the get-togethers and outside of these, particularly with the women who were most active in the village and who formed the core group of the collaborative inquiry. Undoubtedly, they influenced my thinking more than the others. I regard these conversations as interactions with individuals rather than as representative of 'the women's' views. By using names for the people presented in the thesis, and by presenting them to the reader as people with histories, I have tried to show the role and importance of the individuals in the larger stories and in those some recur more than others.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I describe how the women constructed a shared context for themselves. The collaborative inquiry was intimately tied with this process. Coming into the village, I linked up with the activities and thoughts already being embarked upon and the research design provided another context in which some of these processes took shape. What started as a desire to meet slowly crystallised into the process of establishing a women's forum.

The women's forum provided the space that enabled us to discuss and take up the questions that the women in the village believed were important for themselves and the village, what they themselves wanted from projects and plans, and how they chose to work with them. For me, it provided an opportunity to go beyond looking at women's absence from local organizations and how they might be able to gain a foothold within them, to understand how they framed their needs and questions and what they themselves wanted. This space enabled space for thoughts and dreams in the stories that the women related during the interaction and moments of reflection, and thereby created something new. During this process, I was struck by the importance that the women in the inquiry gave to the form that the forum was to take - the actions they took to realize it and the rhetoric around it or the ways in which they talked about it. It is to this that I turn to in the next chapter as I examine the language to understand the building up of this joint context.



**PART IV**

**RELATIONAL DYNAMICS AND  
STRATEGIES**



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Organizing as Women: making space for a house of dreams

#### Introduction

I described in chapter six how what had started as a participatory inquiry process was turned into a women's forum. In this chapter, I look at the ways in which the women justified this transformation and constructed the notion of the women's forum despite what I sensed was an ambivalence about it. I look closer at the stories told by the women. Rather than claiming a generality for the accounts, I attempt to explore the conditions and contexts in which the stories were produced about the women's lives, their experiences of living in the countryside and my reading of how they constructed them. I discuss how the women in the village actively constructed the woman's forum, why they felt that the forum was important, what they wanted to do with it and some of the discursive practices with which they established their subject positions. In their stories I show how they drew upon a stock of tradition about their lives as women, as inhabitants of the countryside, as a new generation. Through their stories they connected to wider notions and meanings that existed outside the particular individuals, as they spoke about 'working women', 'motherhood', 'being stubborn', 'moving around', and of 'feminine qualities.'<sup>80</sup> By paying attention to the stories they related and by reading their constructions, I then discuss how they were in fact reproducing and/or challenging the discourse about what it is to be male or female in the countryside? I also interpret the narratives in order to understand the how subjectivities changed in the course of the inquiry.

#### The women's forum

In this section I explore the building of the women's forum as part of the women's ongoing struggle to live and work in Drevdagen and negotiate their various identities as women in the village. The women spoke about the forum in different ways. The focus in this chapter is on the ways in which they justified it and on what they wanted from the process. Different women had different reasons for being part of the group. I give an account of what drew them together but also as I show later what kept them apart.

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<sup>80</sup> Or femininity? Discussions on femininity and masculinity have taken somewhat divergent tracks. Femininity is not discussed as much these days. It appears to be seen as constructed in a binary relation to masculinity (for an interesting exception see Brandth 1994) though this is not always the same for the construction of masculinity (for example see Liliequist 1992).

*Why do we want this?*

Social needs

At our first meeting in the collaborative inquiry, we had spent the evening relating stories about our lives, discussing the ideas and dreams of the individual women. I was told by several women after the meeting: "This was really needed." At the time I was not really quite sure what they meant. Most of the women met in the village everyday. But this particular space appeared to fill a different need.

Sara: It is women's curiosity and social needs ...we don't get a chance to meet so often.

Some younger women (20-30 years) seemed to agree with this. At a later meeting, Anita, a woman in her 30s who had come for the first time, seemed to concur with Sara's view when I asked what prompted her to come to the forum,

I work outside the village during the day... I hardly ever get to meet any of 'us.'

The inquiry was designed as a way to think about their lives while being in the midst of living them, to be able to step out of life's hurrying course and look at the experiences together. However, it also became a social occasion. One of the women who was active in the village and often tried to get people together remarked in surprise at one of the first few meetings (when we were 12 people):

I have never seen so many women turn out like this...it is normally difficult to get women to come for village activities

Sara, who had been active in building up the forum, seemed taken aback at the very last joint meeting, when twenty women attended. She remarked:

There is a need among us that we have not really thought about

This was echoed by Diane and Gunilla who had come for a visit expecting a small group of women involved in a research circle. They were surprised by the "women who kept dropping in." Diane felt:

There is a sense of searching for something in the village (*ett sökande i byn*) that is difficult to pin down (*få grepp om*).

It was evidently important for the women to meet in this way. Drevdagen was a small village and the women met in various other associations, at the school as well as informally. Especially parents with children in the school met regularly at meetings to plan school activities and discuss school affairs. The other associations in the village also held meetings quite regularly. But this was different. Alice remarked:

We hardly ever meet if there isn't a formal meeting in the village....it is difficult outside the framework of the school (*skolans ram*)

Many met informally as friends - but to have a semi-formal place where *all* women *could* meet was new. Joint spaces in the village provided by events such as village festivities, the school and the associations, were predefined. Gerd Lindgren, writing about the women of Hedenäset, says that there were few places that the women could meet, joint activities were most often led by men, or male activities were prioritized (1989). This may have been the case for the women in Drevdagen too, keeping in mind their earlier quotes about not being able to voice themselves in joint activities and spaces (chapter five). But there was also something beyond a sense of exclusion.

The women emphasised that they needed the group to learn from each other. It was the women who had moved to the village recently who seemed the most anxious about this aspect. There was perhaps a feeling that they did not really belong and they had a need to find out everything they could about the village, to understand who was related to whom, and how things were done.

Sara: Can we learn something new? Everyone here are not (*infödingar*) native to this village. One wants to try and understand the village better...the people here...figure out...is that one related to this one? One wants to know, participate...to be one of them...Jan's mother was from Kungsholmen...She was never really accepted here despite having lived here all her life.

Yet everyone felt the need to learn to get to know each other, even the women who had always lived in the village. In the forum they were discovering things about each other and themselves that were new. One of them related a story about how she got to know another woman in the village whom most of them had thought a little strange and previously had had little to do with her.

But she is actually a lot of fun...behind her eccentric behaviour.

To meet on their terms

Some discussions focused on how social life in the village for women was disappearing as their jobs outside and everyday work at home claimed their time.

Cecilia: People dropping in on one another has become less and less ...It is difficult to have control over your time.

The women wanted an informal forum which made it possible for them to meet on their own terms, where they were able to talk about those things they wanted to, the every day small things.

It is not about prestige but about developing together and taking the best from each other. To be open and to create space for one another,

wrote Sara in the newsletter when she reported on the forum to the rest of the village (June, 2000). The informality, an unstructured place was very important as I wrote earlier. It was a revolt against the ways of working of village associational life that did not have a place for them and their concerns. This 'revolt' was symbolized in the language we used and the places where we met. Our get-togethers were never called *möten*, 'meetings' because that was how the village associations referred to their gatherings. Ours were in fact *träffar*, or 'get-togethers' or the '*kvinnoforum*' (implying that they had an existence only when we met), thus keeping a distance from the other formal spaces.

Informality, felt the women, gave space for unexpected ideas. Karin spoke of the time when she, Sara and Kajsa had gone to Stockholm and on their journey back they came upon a wonderful idea for the village:

We were on the way home from Stockholm...when we suddenly caught sight of barrels...it was there that we got the idea for an Irish pub evening. We came home and talked to the others...and then we organized it. We have had two pub evenings since then. This is actually the way that we women get things done...it isn't about prestige. We develop together and bring out the best in each other (*tar det bästa av varandra*).

A wish for an informal place I see as a way where the women could be there on their own terms and where the regular power relations did not prevail. This did not mean that power was absent but it was to some extent negotiable. Because the group chose to be informal and the women attended only when they could, that they did not feel pressured to attend, they arrived and departed at times that suited them, they did not feel tied down by claims of being accountable to or responsible for the existence of 'a group' independent of themselves.

Women are different

Some women spoke of needing the group because they felt they were different from men by nature. The village association, they felt, did not have place for that difference. Not everyone shared this view:

Sara: We women are different in that way, we are also used to being more nurturing.

Kajsa: Women and men speak different languages. It is nice for women to have their own group so we can talk about what we want.

At other times the women saw it as a question of men and women having different responsibilities. They related their differences to the different constraints they faced in taking action – time, access, opportunity. But the same women could use different arguments on other occasions depending on the context and the issue and the issue addressed:

Sara: Women are different from men. We have different needs. But then different women are different. We want to get to know each other better....Socialise despite our differences...be diverse and be able to accept it. We want to learn from each other....learn from the older women...for example how to do make ropes from tree branches (*vidjor*) ... brooms.

Alice: Yes, my mother-in-law was really happy when some of you came and wanted to learn how to make ropes from her. She felt that at last somebody in the village would carry on those skills.

Both arguments were used to justify the existence of the group. Regardless of what justification they used, the women were adamant they needed a separate space to be able to acknowledge the differences between women and men (which they sometimes explained in terms of biology and at other times as social differences) and to be free to work in ways, which felt liberating and useful. Then, of course, they pointed out that there were differences among the women also, that depended not merely upon their background or education or village. For many the important thing was how each individual approached things. They acknowledged that not all women wanted to or had a need to meet.

For support, strength and a secure place

The forum was also a space that the women wanted “to feel safe and to be able to be creative.” It was the space to bring forward their hidden talents. For Maria it enabled her to talk about her work with handicrafts and for Marie about her interest in spirituality. The other women in the group were surprised to hear their stories and wondered why they had not heard them before:

Kajsa: One rarely talks of oneself...it is usually work, the children...Why is that? One thinks, ‘who would be interested in me?’ We don’t have such dangerous secrets... We are not so open...we shouldn’t be afraid to make a fool of oneself (*att göra bort sig*)...

But as Marie pointed out, she did not want to be seen as the village idiot. It was within this group that she had felt secure enough to be able to talk about certain topics, be creative and “where our inhibitions do not have to come in the way.”<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Perhaps, as Lorde (2001:90) writes, “allowing the I to be...in order to be creative.”

She also spoke about being able to talk about relating to the forests and nature differently, of hugging trees to get energy, of exploring a more sensual approach to nature and not being ashamed of that.

Seeking a separate place did not mean that the women separated themselves from village life or that was a preferred way to work. It was a way of reaffirming themselves and community relationships as I discuss further in the section on '*gemenskap*'.

The group as therapeutic

After the first get-together of the collaborative inquiry, Cecilia remarked about the experience:

It was therapeutic to be able to talk about oneself and listen to the others without being embarrassed about it

Alice spoke of why she felt it was important for them to have a women's forum,

As one says, if you want a solution to something then go to a man (*karl*). If you want to talk about something important, then go to a female friend.

It was not the researcher that was the therapist but the interactions in the forum, by providing validation and conferring meaning on the participants' accounts. Conversations and the supportive interjections by the other women made me aware also of the how the women in the group looked out for and took responsibility for one another (for and e.g. see de Lauretis 1989a:26). One particular incident made clear for me some of the ways in which this was done. At one of our meetings, Alice turned the conversation to family relations and spoke about her mother-in-law. I was facilitating that meeting and it was one of those rare occasions when I actually tried to (and succeeded in) steering the conversation back to the subject we had decided upon earlier. We resumed the previous thread of our conversation without anyone remarking upon it. However, the next day, Karin kindly explained to me that Alice needed to talk on this topic. She said that while it was not devastating for Alice that we did not continue, and so nobody had questioned my suggestion. This also made me aware of these nuances in our future conversations, with all the turns the conversations took, how through their narratives and comments and the interjections they made in support of one another, the members of the forum looked out for one another.

Taking responsibility for each other was not limited to the immediate group. Several women felt that they needed to be there for the other women and men in the village as well. They tried to involve other women especially those whom they felt would need a place to talk. The women who later became involved also in the village associations tried to make space for them there too, to involve as many women as possible in trips and other activities. The reason that I present these small incidents is to indicate how the women, through their words and actions,

discursively built up a notion of a special space for themselves that reflected an accountability to one another.

This does not imply that the process did not have its discontinuities and undercurrents that were brought in from the broader village context. There was also a discomfort in not knowing if this was the right way to act, and of meeting like this being different from the usual forms. An increasing congruence of views and amicability over the course of a process does not obscure the prevailing power relationships or other differences among participants. However, for the most part, the women chose not to take up these questions of discomfort, tension and power. I write about this further in the section, 'not oppressed.'

There were of course women who did not join in. There were a few women, related to each other, who usually did not come for any village activities. Many in the group thought it would have been nice if they were part of the group but they often kept to themselves. Kajsa pointed out:

They may want different things. We cannot force them if they have different needs and want to do things differently.

Kerstin, who had been an enthusiastic initiator of the forum, did not come after the first few meetings. She cited health reasons and the fact that her family was busy as they were planning to move out of the village. But from chance remarks, it appeared that she had had a disagreement with another woman in the village and that may have influenced her choice to stop attending.

### *Själjakt*

Spirituality was a theme that often came up in the discussions. It was in fact one of the themes for discussion that was taken up in the beginning when we listed what we wanted to work with in the inquiry. However, the group eventually decided not to discuss it or take up any specific activity related to this theme, although it was had brought together many of the women that formed the core of the women's forum. They had met together initially to meditate and talk about their lives, their relationships and need for spirituality in the midst of the hurry and scurry of working and taking care of their homes. Many of the women who had met in this way had children at home. Karin and Kajsa pointed out that though some of them might be interested in spirituality, it was a theme that could alienate some others.

Karin: There could develop two groups with differing positions (*läger*) ...We must make sure (*måste hålla fast i att*) not to slip into spirituality. We can meet in a women's forum but not when we meet about spirituality...

This decision was prompted partly by wanting to include other women in the village who had other religious beliefs and would object to the more eclectic style that many of the women in the core group had. They wanted all women to feel that they could come to the forum. They thus decided against discussing this theme

further although in their language spiritual metaphors were not uncommon. At the time of the annual hunt when most of the men were away, Kajsa said laughingly:

But we are also on a hunt of sorts, a *själjakt*.

Translated literally, a *själjakt* is a 'soul hunt.'<sup>82</sup> For many who joined the inquiry process, the forum was a breathing space, which felt safe and less inhibited. It was a breathing space where for the moment at least the women did not have to conform to any special procedures. They designed it as they willed and came if they wanted to. It was a breathing space where they were not inhibited or embarrassed to take up questions not permissible in other forms of association.

The third time that the women met (I did not attend, having fallen sick just before), it was in the old shop in the village, which had been lying empty since Cecilia had been forced to close it down because of financial difficulties. They decided to give it a new name instead of calling it the 'old shop'. They told me at the following meeting:

Ellenor: We renamed it the 'house of dreams' ....where we are going to make our dreams come true, both old ones gathering dust and new dreams.

It was also a way to revive a physical place that symbolized the difficulties that the women and men in the village came across when they tried to bring life to the *glesbygd*. By giving a new name to a deserted building (which caused its own problems, as I relate in the next chapter), the women tried to revive a physical place but, as the name 'house of dreams' implies it was also the place for making dreams come true and bringing in their soul and spirit in their work.

Spirituality recurred in the discussions, often in reference to the forests and nature around them (although as I wrote earlier, the women had actively chosen not to take it up as a separate theme of discussion). Spirituality, and the need to talk about it, was linked closely to the women. There were two men who made references to it in my conversations and interviews but they would not admit to it, or be a part of discussions about it in public. Sandra Harding writes: "Women and men do not have the same relation to cultural metaphors, models and narratives precisely because these frequently carry sexual and gender meanings" (1998:99). Here, I argue, it was not merely a question of *having* a relationship to cultural metaphors, models and narratives but also a question about it being permissible for men to be seen to have a relationship to a spiritual narrative at all. For example, for both men and women the theme of spirituality was seen as linking them to the 'new age wave', which they had no wish to be identified with. But while it may be considered odd for the women to talk about spirituality, for the men it could be looked upon as extremely irregular and unmasculine. Interest in questions of

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<sup>82</sup> It also made me think of Schough's (2001:152-153) metaphor of the *andrum* (breathing space) and *andlighetens rum* (spiritual spaces) that she used to explain her interviews with women in Värmland.

spirituality is a trait associated closely with femininity and not only with women: the stigma of the feminine was associated to whoever chose to pursue it, whether a woman or a man.<sup>83</sup>

#### Building on strength

The women mobilised arguments about gender and sexual difference to build upon what they saw as their inherent strengths as women as well as to justify their separate space. They also pointed out how the village needed these qualities to survive, qualities which disappeared when women were not part of village activities:

Sara: Things happen (*det blir någonting*)....Women do things differently....Women can do things better....We handle things better.

Kajsa: We need this to get going (*komma till skott*)....things happen when women take charge of things...but we need each other also for our own projects...for support....backing (*uppbackning*)....as a sounding board for our ideas. We support (*ju*) each other.

The reference to the 'we' in Kajsa's statement had a double meaning. She was referring to the group of women but she was also referring to the village following on from another conversation earlier. Such statements reflected the women's convictions that Drevdagen's chances to (re)create a living village rested very much with the women, at least as much as it did with the men. As they looked upon it, not only were the women outside of the discussions in the association but that it was detrimental for the entire village that women did not come; important issues vital for the village were not always addressed in their common meetings or not considered relevant. And there were not any other forums for them either.

Kerstin: There are many who do not take part ....if women were to engage themselves in village activities in their own ways, other issues would come into the open.

The women spoke about women being dynamic, that things happened when they took up something, and that men (*gubbar*) just got together and talked. They said that it was easier to get going with things if the women had support from one another.

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<sup>83</sup> Nancy Fraser writes: "a major feature of gender injustice is androcentrism: an institutionalized pattern of cultural value that privileges traits associated with masculinity, while devaluing everything coded as 'feminine,' paradigmatically – but not only – women. Pervasively institutionalized, androcentric value patterns structure broad swaths of social interaction" (2003:20-21).

Lena: Women are more nurturing (*vårdande*). Power is important for politicians. They work in devious ways...keep (*undanhåller*) information... It is important to be open...to create the space...

Here politics and power are associated with men. Were the women reproducing binaries?<sup>84</sup> Or were they using difference as strength? The women often justified themselves in ways that may be considered 'essential' in much feminist theory when they based themselves on the fact that men and women were essentially different and bound to act in different ways. Feminist theories have pointed to the hazards or disadvantage of such an approach. Such a stance locks women into a uni-dimensional category determined by their sex. One objection has been to point to the differences among women and among men and look at commonalities that can be found in groups of men and women. Schooled in these debates, I often found myself disagreeing with the women in the group about these differences. I pointed to how we were perhaps not so different from men as people, that there were more differences among us. But as I saw later, that was not the point. Their 'emphasis on the affirmation of women's strength and positive cultural roles and attributes' (de Lauretis 1989a:11) did much to counter the image of the rural, retiring and backward woman which they often found around them and which they sometimes relegated to the past and at other times pointed to the strong women of the past to justify themselves. It was on the basis of their strengths that they found affinity with each other. Like Bidy Martin, "we cannot afford to refuse to take a political stance 'which pins us to our sex' for an abstract theoretical construct" (cited in Bacchi 1996:140). I discuss this later in this chapter when I discuss 'reproducing the discourse.'

...not oppressed

The initial coming together of the women was perhaps sparked by a sense of the discrimination created by the structures of the village association, but it was not a sense of overt discrimination that kept them together. It was by their language as they sought to build on their strengths and support from each other that they formed connections. It was this that gave them a sense of agency.

I noticed their apprehension in being defined as oppressed. They had the potential to be doubly so. They were women and they were rural. These labels were also linked closely to being backward. As some pointed out, what they had was not just a problem - about being women in the *glesbygd* - it was rather a vision that they wanted to build upon. This was reflected in Ingrid's response to

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<sup>84</sup> Binary oppositions have functioned in the social sciences as self-evident principles for categorizing and describing a rich multiplicity of phenomena - sacred/profane, nature/culture, male/female etc. Feminists have pointed out how the relation between these terms is a hierarchical and how these apparently neutral divisions are implicitly sexualised and maintain unequal power relations between the sexes. *E.g.* Grosz (1991).

Gunilla when she felt that the formation of their group was being seen as a response to 'their problem' as rural women:

Ingrid: ...not a problem...We need to start with thinking about together what it is that we want to do... in the village...then, what are the problems in the way....what do we have that we can build upon?

Ingrid's quote reflects an apprehension among many of the women to being defined as oppressed. By resisting being called oppressed they were also denying being slotted into one single conventional category, a passive category, a category that preferred not to attend meetings. They preferred to look at instances of what may be discrimination as old habits that needed to be changed among certain men and also women. Speaking about the gossip in the village about a woman who had been active in relation to a number of development activities, Lena said:

Often when a woman is able to do something, then they say, 'she has been able to do this...the reason she can do all these things is because she has a good husband'.

In other words, women could be as oppressive as men. In discussions that recurred often when we met, the women emphasized the importance of recognizing difference among women in the village and within the forum as well. According to bell hooks in her writing about women's movement in the U.S.:

...the idea of common oppression was a false and corrupt platform disguising and mystifying the true nature of women's varied and complex social reality.....This meant that women had to conceive of themselves as victims in order to feel that feminist movement was relevant to their lives (1991:29-30).

Similarly, I believe that the women chose to build their forum on the notions of women's strength and abilities. It was demoralizing to bond with other women on the basis of a shared victimization, for one because not everyone perceived discrimination in the same way or perceived it as discrimination at all. It was a matter also for self-respect. They bonded on the basis of shared strengths and resources.

This was important for the politics within the group. There were women who came to the forum who were unemployed, there were some older women whose lives were very different from those who were younger and from those who had moved in to the village. They needed to acknowledge the power to meet on the basis of their creativity and capabilities. They needed images that moved beyond that of backward and oppressed rural women, or women as oppressed. Their talking about nurturing was an effort to build upon some of these capabilities and experiences. As Valerie Amos and Pratibha Parmar (2001:23) have written, the women could not throw away their experiences of living and being in a certain way; they wanted those experiences to transform their relationships to each other

and also to the village. In view of the women their previous experiences did not to trap them although as I discuss in chapter seven, these were also used by others to justify the women's exclusion in certain issues. Whether or not this refusal to talk about discrimination might stand in the way of action is a discussion that I shall take up later in the chapter.

I have so far concentrated on giving an account of how the women justified the making of a women's forum. This was closely linked to their plans and dreams for the future and to the actions that they took and it is to these topics that I now.

### *What do we want?*

A problem?

The women did not consider the *glesbygd* as the 'problem', and were sensitive to having been identified as a problem. When Gunilla in her talk on research circles mentioned that people often came together around a joint problem, Ingrid had reacted, perhaps voicing a history of feeling when hearing the word problem. The women believed that it was a struggle to live as they did but it was also a privilege. They were proud of themselves and the village. The problem, they believed, lay with those that decided over them. It was not support they needed but their rights.

Sara had been to the rural parliament and had met many people working on development activities in the Swedish countryside. She was struck by the atmosphere at the parliament where all the different groups wanted to revitalize the countryside:

It struck me then....there were different problems that people worked with in different villages...Villages have found twin areas (*vänort*) and are collaborating around a number of questions...doing good work...trying to find something...and then I think...of the authorities...why not give people the trust (*förtroende*)?

Sara was talking about the feeling that they had little control over their countryside and that the authorities seemed to have little trust in the capabilities of the people living there to respond meaningfully to local needs and opportunities. This was similar to the feelings expressed by the villagers that I cite in chapter five, about being marginalized and of resisting dominant constructions of marginality. There was a sense of frustration in Sara because she felt it was so invigorating to be present at the parliament but at the same time the rhetoric of the politicians (*Hela Sverige ska leva*) did not match their practice. As she put it, 'we are the countryside.' In her opinion the people were part of making the countryside and they wanted to work for it, so why not support and trust them?

### Village development

The women believed that meeting together would lead to their development and that of the village (*Utveckling av oss och byn- det leder fram efterhand*). In the

first few discussions the women spoke about how they planned to work for the village. They were interested in different projects. They hoped to set-up working groups to involve women and men working on similar issues.

Sara: They should be run for the village...not privately...maybe as a co-operative...though there has to be someone who is responsible. The details will come along the way...during the journey...Even if not everyone is active ...it would be valuable to have their opinions.

There was not any single activity that the women wanted to work with but a range of different ones as they came up. While the women planned actions together, there was the assumption that “something good would come out of meeting like this, a shared community spirit, an exchange of ideas and support for one another.” The moral support that they got from such a forum was perhaps the most important aspect.

However, they also believed that meeting each other was important but not enough. They saw action as the outcome of social relations. By creating forms of social arrangement, new actions might emerge. They planned and organized a number of social events in the village to bring about renewed community spirit. Their efforts highlight their belief in the need for concrete, physical activity together to create a sense of community.

#### A meeting place: an open forum

Several women in the discussions and in the earlier interviews had repeated several times, that “not everyone can work with the same things” or that “not everyone was interested in the same things.”

Linda: We are all different. Everyone doesn't have to do the same thing. It is a pity that it is so...when it comes to the *glesbygd*...it is so easily done that a few are outgoing (*framåt*) and take responsibility in many places...but one can't really carry on indefinitely, then one doesn't have the energy to continue (*då orkar man inte riktigt*). At the same time there needs to be someone who takes charge (*ta tag i saker*). The April bonfire for example...this year there was nobody who took it on...

The women talked about it being difficult to carry out activities on your own, especially in the *glesbygd*. Often the burden for organizing activities in the village or village development fell on a few people who then got ‘burnt out.’ To meet in this way as a group and decide on things was much better. It was to provide support for each other in many different activities that the forum was seen as a vital framework. Some women were critical of activities taking place in isolation from one another without the support and knowledge of other villagers. Earlier, talking about the village association's plans, Cecilia had remarked:

I would like to know....how will it really be financially (*hur blir det rent ekonomiskt*) with all these new projects in the association...There is a fear in the village that they would start something and like many times before, nothing much would come out of it. So people disassociate themselves from it right from the start...and wait and watch...

In trying to make all women feel welcome to the forum the women in the forum wanted to open up the discussions. Yet one of the older women (in her 60s) at the very first meeting of the inquiry was a little apprehensive when the younger women began to talk about projects and ideas:

Märta: I would really like to do something for this village but I am too old to work with a project... I can't do that anymore...

Cecilia and several others: Even if you are not active in a project...we still need you to come.

Marie: We need your advice and your strength...we need you to tell us what you think about our ideas...

Märta had worked hard for the village in her youth and had been very active in the struggle for the school. As I have written earlier, some of the younger men and women felt that the older generation were now tired of struggling for the village and bitter about the disregard with which they felt that the villagers were treated by the authorities. So, on the one hand, although the younger women in the forum felt that the older ones were often pessimistic, they felt that it was important nevertheless to learn from their experiences, to have the older generation with them in their work, and to learn skills that were fast disappearing.

Instead of carrying out development activities in isolation from one another, some women spoke of a vision of coordinating them so that they could support each other's functioning. Some women spoke of integrating these sometimes in a single project. A central point could provide the geographic and coordinating focus for several activities:

Lina: An old age home...could create employment. One can have a daycare for children after school hours in the shop building. The elder people in the village (*de äldre*) can go there and have a cup of coffee. Trailers can park outside in the yard. All this can perhaps finance a part-time job there...one can fix a little meal for the elder villagers (*de äldre*) or anyone else who would want to, maybe once a week. The older people would have a chance to meet the children and have fun with them. Otherwise it can be so lonely...earlier we visited each other...now it's only T.V.

Cecilia: Yes, we need a gatheringplace (*en samlingsplats*)...it could be both for the old (*de gamla*) and the young...It is very important.

The mention of the need for a village meeting place came up now and then and had recurred several times in my interviews and conversations with other people in the village.<sup>85</sup> The women also stressed the need for cooperation. This was contrary to those in the village who believed that for things to be done, they needed to be done individually. Thomas for instance believed that co-operatives and co-operation were bound to cause problems:

Collaboration does not work (*samarbete fungerar inte*)...It is one thing to help people in their activities, but to collaborate is quite another thing. There will always be conflicts.

He waved away the suggestion that if there were no co-operative, the villagers would not have been able to have the cows in the village. In his opinion a co-operative would probably fall apart. Sooner or later, someone would come into conflict with someone else. Suggestions like those of Lina he believed were impulsive. The women in the forum thought otherwise. Being impulsive was interpreted differently by them. They saw it as meaning acting on intuition and being active, instead of only discussing and talking.

#### Local management of the forests and/or the self-managing village

The women also spoke about how they needed to link up with the forest project without losing sight of other priorities. They stressed that the chosen activities needed to be viewed in relation to each other rather than in isolation. They felt that the men working with the forest issues had been focusing on only one issue.

Cecilia: For the village to survive, if one succeeds with something it needs to find resonance in the village...not merely as private companies...The larger vision, the self managing village is where day care, (*ungdom*) youth activities, old age homes and so on are all part of a vision for the village.

The men in the association in the village according to her had focused only on the forests to the detriment of everything else. The idea had been to work in the forests locally:

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<sup>85</sup> Other researchers have also discussed the importance of these meeting places in the Swedish countryside. Urry (2000) refers to Oldenburg's 'third places' (1989), places between work and the home where the work of maintaining community and neighbourhood relations goes on. According to Oldenburg these places are often either male or female spaces and in his view, they are important in maintaining heterosexual family relations (and keeping at bay homosexual relations). In the same vein, he regrets the disappearance of male bonding and male territory in America as part of the loss of these third places.

But what are people to do when there is no attention to housing for the young people who want to move here and maybe work with the forest, for day-care for the children, a shop and other services. Especially women can't do anything about their ideas as long as there is no proper day care for the children.

Even within the forest project, according to Kerstin, activity was focused on the economic part. She spoke about the meeting on the forests that she had attended earlier (that I write about in 'mapping the homes'). She had talked about the spiritual and other personal aspects of the forests that she felt were being ignored in the discussion. To her surprise, there was much enthusiasm as the men too began to talk about their experiences in the forest and the meaning such experiences had for them, but which they typically kept separate from their work.

There was a big reaction when I started talking about the forests and told them about my plans for the recreation centre. Then it all came out (*då kom det fram*) A man at the meeting took out some crystals from his pocket to show us. He was actually a shaman and no one in the group knew that....not even the people who had travelled here with him.

In interviews and discussions, there were many people who had different ideas about what they wanted to do in the forests, for tourism, for fuelwood, for hunting, as a recreation centre, as pasture grounds. However, these ideas for the most part were disconnected from the project on the forests. As I saw it, an important concern for the women in the forum was to find ways to link these with each other; and this, they felt could be made possible by nurturing community spirit and invigorating the relationships in the village.

#### *Gemenskap* (Community spirit and relationships)

*Gemenskap* thus became the overriding practical concern of the women. In fact they saw meeting together in the women's forum as one aspect of that. In their discussions I detected two different yet linked ways of talking about *gemenskap* – as needing to work for *gemenskap* in the village but through *gemenskap* among the women. At a meeting when the women in the forum explained to Diane and Gunilla why they met, these statements were used:

To support each other in every project. We develop together....take the best from reach other. Spur on and encourage (*sporra*) each other.

The women's forum was where they met and it was the springboard from where they could work for the village. The women in the village wanted a *gemenskap*, something that they missed sometimes and this need became stronger as they worked on forming a women's forum. Many women worked through various associations or groups in the village or individually to bring about change. But according to them, they needed a forum where they could discuss things that could

not be taken up in other forums such as the village association. They considered the conversations in the forum as vital for village survival and in many ways a precondition to be able to work in the village. The women organized events where people could meet and have fun together, where they spoke about their projects and how they could help one another and the problems they encountered. Their various attempts at integrating projects and the ways they set about working for the village, were also aspects of wanting to work in this way.

Sara: What I would really like to do...to work for *gemenskap*...is to write a history of Drevdagen together...Organize a play around it...get to know each other...act out our inhibitions (*spela ut*)...We don't have anything in common that...to create *gemenskap*...so that everyone could participate...children...the men, the old and the young...everyone. When we know each other well, then we can support each other.

Marie: There is in fact a Drevdagen history that Hans has written. And Hilma and Laila and some others had in fact organized a play many years ago. They would be happy to tell us what they did...

Anita: It would be interesting to write about all the moving in and out of the village (*inflyttning and utflyttning*) and so on.

Sara: But of course there are problems of organization...

Anita: The difference now is that one is a working person (*yrkesarbetare*)

Sara: We are too serious...we need to work with something that is fun...Something together.

There was an animated discussion at this get-together as the women planned how they could organize the theatre and involve people in the village in it. As far as I was concerned, I came to share their view of the village as a whole, of the people who lived there and the relationships between people and the activities that were important for the success of each project that needed to be carried out. Their way of approaching village development symbolized for me a yearning for a different way of approaching or working with village development. They spoke about the importance of an open forum and they worked hard to involve all the women who wanted to. They spoke of community relationships as vital for the village and the importance of being able to have fun together as the basis for working together with village issues.

It may seem a contradiction in terms. Why work for *gemenskap* and community relationships for everybody from an all-women's group, not a mixed group? However, in light of the history of their difficulties in the other forms of meeting

and the informality of the women's forum, it was difficult for women to work in the village on their terms. To be able to work from their forum was important for them to be able to work at all if they were serious about including as many women as possible. I return to this issue in the section on 'collaboration'.

For example, they spoke about the film on the forests that only a few had seen and that the villagers did not feel a part of. They felt that by giving priority to the strategic decision not to show the film in case it reduced the value of the forests for Assi Domän just when it planned to sell the forests, the village had lost out on a activity that they all needed to be involved in. The men in the forest project had chosen not to show the film as they believed that it might reduce the value of the forests on the stock market and thus there would be less chance of them being able to sell the forests to the State-owned company. They also had a fear that it would jeopardize negotiations with politicians and others.

So far I have explained how the process took shape and was formed by the women and myself. In the conversations that I have related so far and in others, I now explore the discourses that were given form and shaped in our conversations.

### **Linking lives to places: gendered subjectivities**

In their stories, the women discussed their lives in the village, their choices and their actions. They spoke about their experiences of living in and outside the village. I analyse the women's stories that were related in the forum as accounts of experiences that tell us something about the world and not only the person (I discuss this in chapter two). In doing so it is possible to see some of the discourses that shaped their (our) subjectivities.

Subjectivity, as I cite Henriques, Hollway, Unwin, Venn and Walkerdine (1984) in chapter two, refers to how we as individuals construct and give meanings to our experiences as we dynamically position ourselves in relation to others and within discourses. Participation in the forum also shaped our subjectivities as we related to one another and to the ideas we shared about women in the rural areas. As I discuss earlier being female or male is experienced differently (*c.f.* Gatens 1991a) and these experiences are a part of becoming a man or woman in the *glesbygd*. Discourses and subjectivities are mutually constitutive and the women's stories provides us with glimpses of how communicative acts such as their narratives depend on previous acts and how people creatively interact in the task of making and inferring meaning (Jaworski and Coupland 1999:4). A reading of the stories provides glimpses of how the women constructed the subjective meaning of themselves as women in Drevdagen, as rural or urban, hard working, shy or outgoing and enterprising, passive or discriminated and how some of the meanings changed over the course of time.

#### *Urban/ rural*

The stories told by the women and shared with the others provided insights to the group about how women who had moved to the area (even if it was several years

ago) experienced themselves in the countryside. Kajsa and Sara spoke of how it was to be seen as the ones who had moved to Drevdagen from the city. They had decided to set up a goat farm together.

Sara: We are going to keep goats. That is why we took the computer course at the Datortek in Idre. The employment agency, municipality offices etc. are all in the same place. It is easy and a good place to get information and contacts. We have been around and looked at pasture grounds. According to the law we must also have meat production (*köttdjur*) if we want to have goats. But we do not need the meat, so the question is how should we plan it (*lägga om det*)...together with the *fäboden*...to get the pasture grazing (*vallarna*) going. Once that gets going....then things will really start happening...

We have been to the *hushållningssällskapet*....called around and have been to goat farms in Älvdalen. There is a French woman in Malung who also had goats and made really good blue cheese. She suggested that we should contact the municipality for help...We can start the *fäboden* in order to survive..Then it could also function for tourism, for camping purposes, village cottages...We were advised by an E.U. project to go and have a look at a goat farm in another village in Älvdalen. An elderly couple ran it...

Kajsa: I called them to see if we could come and visit their farm. It was then that I realized, how wrong my accent was.<sup>86</sup> The man who answered the telephone was not too happy about us coming there. It was my accent and that we were two women who wanted to start a farm on our own that sounded suspicious to him. I finally persuaded him to let us come and see the farm. When we were there, we knocked at the door.... no one answered...then Sara saw a little note stuck on the door. It said, 'you are welcome to come in and take a look at the house and the barns. The doors are open.' They did not even want to meet us. They knew from the telephone conversation that we were two women and what is more we were from the city. We had the wrong accent.

Sara: But then as we were leaving, he came back...First he was really irritated (*ilsken*) ...but then he realized who our

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<sup>86</sup> Having grown up outside the village during a part of her life, she did not speak *Idremålet*, the local dialect. During the initial interviews I was given a book on *Idremålet* by Lina to practice with. However I did not get all that far with it, partly because it was mainly the older women who spoke it or the others did at times when the discussions got extra animated. But most of the women spoke ordinary Swedish and as Lina said regretfully, their culture was being decimated.

grandfather was and then he began to talk and talk ...He himself knew nothing about goats before he started the farm...it all came (*eftersom*) gradually?

Towards the end of the conversation it was with relief that Sara and Kajsa discussed how the man had become a farmer. It strengthened them to see that one did not have to be born as a farmer, although that feeling was strong in the countryside. The fact that he had in fact managed to run a successful farm without having done it before was reassuring for them. In writing about a certain forest community Ingar Kaldal for instance refers to how work on the farm and the forests was not 'taught', it was meant to be just picked up by the children. The respondents reported that it just came to them as inhabitants (2000). The story by Sara and Kajsa was also about doing two things wrong: being two women and starting a goat farm on their own and secondly not sounding as if they were from the area itself. Both Sara and Kajsa often mentioned that they were 'going to be a farmer', a *bonde*, the connotations of which were still very much male, although appeared to be changing. They were perhaps seen as pushy and had actually 'irritated' the farmer before he relented.

On the other hand, Cecilia related another story where speaking with a Stockholm accent had actually been useful. A couple of women in the village had been working to get day care facilities in the village. Yvonne had been trying to negotiate with the municipality but had not got anywhere. Then Cecilia came in and called the man responsible for it. "All I had to do was to speak my Stockholmska and it worked." The others in the group nodded and I looked a bit puzzled. You see, she explained to me:

When a woman from the area (*trakten*) calls them, they think they can put them off somehow, that they don't really expect much. But when someone who has lived in Stockholm, calls then they think, oh..no..she expects child care facilities...we can't put her off so easily...Besides which, they treat the women here with such disregard, which they don't do with city women.

This story also shows another side to the accepted notion within Swedish local development that it is often women who have moved into the area who start things off. It is perhaps not only because these women come with energy and a willingness to change things but also because of the ways in which they are treated by the authorities. As I discussed in an earlier chapter, this attitude on the part of the authorities also echoes an understanding that the women of the area are somehow 'backward' and not necessarily capable of acting as equal partners in development or in dialogue about the running of the village. To relate to the people living in the area, it was good to be able to speak the local dialect, but to work with the authorities, a Stockholm accent often had more effect. In the ordering of power and gender in this little incident, having an urban background gave Cecilia a certain amount of power and leverage *vis-à-vis* the official.

Despite the lack of services that they often spoke about, they also felt that the countryside gave them a freedom that the cities did not have. In part, by wanting to live here they were also challenging modern life in the city and the centres there and those whom they saw as trying to wield power over them. As Sara said once,

We are different when we are here in the countryside and want to do something about it...but it is not only us...our men are different too...from the men in the cities.

This again, as I discussed in chapter four where I raise the issue of marginality, is an example of distinctions being forged in dialogue and not in isolation (*cf.* Tsing, 1993:xi). In this case unequal subject positions were turned into an advantage, of having something that was absent from urban areas, that was rooted in the place but also importantly in the people when they happened to or chose to live in the rural areas.

### *Working women*

Many women in the group spoke of themselves as *yrkeskvinnor*,<sup>87</sup> working women. It emerged in conversations as an important aspect of their lives, especially for those who had moved back from the cities. Their stories revealed mobile lives. Almost all, without exception, had moved around in the country, one of them even abroad, in their search for work and in one or two cases, with their partners. Drevdagen had sometimes been one stop in journeys that continued. It was not unusual to hear of travels and shifts in residence from Göteborg—Stockholm- Särna- Mora-Borlänge-Skåne- Falun-Gottland- Gällivare- Värmland and as far as New York during their working lives outside Drevdagen. But several had opted to settle down in Drevdagen, most of them with their male partners and/or children. I was struck by how much they had moved around. This was especially so as compared to some of their male relatives, who had always been resident in the village, although they also travelled to get seasonal work outside the village, often in Norway.

Their involvement in the workforce gave the women an important identity as independent women. It was an important component of their status and of their being modern. There was a certain pride in that: being modern working women provided a sense of liberation from what they saw as the drudgery of the past.

But as compared to their mothers, the women's work outside also made it difficult for them to work for the village. Kerstin had said earlier, when speaking of the men in the village association, "we can't work for them all the time, we have jobs outside the village now." Similarly, when the group discussed getting the village together for a theatre, they realized the organizational problems they

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<sup>87</sup> I have found this difficult to translate into English. As I understood it, the meaning the women gave to this phrase was to have employment and outside the home and earn a salary, to have a profession.

actually confronted. Comparing themselves to the older women who had organized a play a number of years earlier, one woman remarked,

We are all working people (*yrkesarbetare*) now. We are not in the village in the daytime, it makes it difficult for us compared to them.

An understanding of being different from their mothers, of being working women, contributed to the forming of their subjectivities. In their perception, this was also what made them different from the women in Nayagarh when the topic of my research with the women in Nayagarh came up. I spoke about how the women in Nayagarh had organized themselves and how some of the issues were somewhat similar to Drevdagen. This prompted a discussion on becoming 'modern' in India and what it meant for gender relations and equality. I discuss this further in chapter eight and take it up here only to show some aspects that were part of their definitions of themselves as working women (*yrkeskvinnor*). Their views on *yrkeskvinnor* also stemmed from how they compared themselves to the previous generation. Their subjective positions as modern women was thus built very much in their contrast to the earlier generation as well as to the not so modern women of the third world who were not 'working women' in the same sense. Not so surprisingly this element was absent in the stories of the older women who, like Hillevi and Märta (in their 80s and 60s) spoke of the strong women of the past. Märta spoke about her mother and the work that the women did in the past that had made it possible for everyone to live in the village. She thought with some sadness that it was easy for the younger generation to forget the toil of those women and to take things for granted.

### *Remains of the past*

For the younger women in the group as well as among some of the men that I had interviewed (upto their 50s), it was the traditions or vestiges of the past that made the women hesitant to take part in public village life and for men to accept it as a matter of course. The question of low self-esteem (*dålig själv-känsla*) was taken up in the in the interviews and initially in the forum to explain women's absence from village association meetings and activities. At the second meeting of the forum, there were only seven women compared to twelve who were there for the first. Kajsa said:

We are similar in that we are all women, but we are also different women. Those who want to be on their own should be able to do that. It may be that it is a question of self-esteem...that one doesn't dare. How do you bring it out (self-esteem)...how do you do it?

Especially at the initial get-togethers the women spoke a great deal about women's lack of self-esteem. This changed over the course of the inquiry and I take up a discussion about this towards the end of the chapter. They spoke about the importance of increasing women's self-esteem, but my question at this time

was, who were these shy, fearful women that they all spoke about? Nobody spoke of themselves in that way in the village and the term was always used to describe someone else. In the contexts in which I met them in the village, none appeared to be suffering from low self-esteem. And I had interviewed almost all the women in the village. Yet sometimes, in conversations, the image of the old fashioned, shy and traditional woman came up, as an image they were trying to free themselves from. The counterpart to this image was the rural man. As Jan, a man in his 50s who had lived in the village for most of life, put it to Karl who was a few years younger and who insisted that the women attend the village association's meetings,

There would be hell if the women were at the village meetings  
and food was not on the table when the (*karln*) man got home.

Here it was not merely older men but also rural men that Jan was referring to. Karl had moved to the village from the city and Jan and Sara were trying to explain to him that things were different here. Sara said:

Old habits die hard

Corresponding to the shy, retiring rural woman was the rural man who expected to be served his dinner on time.<sup>88</sup> It was these images that the women in the forum saw themselves as working against. They thought of themselves as challenging old-fashioned ideas of women's place.

### *Motherhood and Work as liberating or a fetter*

Nevertheless the women's responsibility for children and the home was clear, something that is often associated with the (discourse on) the 'traditional woman.' Several pointed out that they were also family women and/or mothers. They said that as women, they always had to choose (or make trade-offs) on living where they wanted to and to work in ways that they would like to:

Kajsa: I have to be available at home. Björn (her husband) works all the time...It is quality of life to be able to do this...to live like this and have the children grow up here... to be close to them during the day.

Yvonne: We moved here when we got children...I don't work outside anymore...it is difficult when you have children...It is difficult with childcare here.

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<sup>88</sup> Unfortunately I do not know how the men in the village would have described themselves or if they would have identified themselves with this description. Although 'such men' were mentioned one more time in reference to a discussion about a woman in the village there were in fact few discussions of men in the family in the forum or otherwise. This was one of the two times. The focus throughout was on the women when it came to explaining their absence from village activities, or on men in their positions as heads of village associations.

Alice: I have three girls...at the moment I clean in Idre...but I would really like to be here and work here...I want to cook...maybe the school kitchen or something..

Ingrid: I wanted to educate myself as study advisor (*syö*) but waited till Olle finished his ninth grade.

Birgitta: People should be able to live on here and have work, especially women....because of the children.

On reading their stories, contradictory images abound. There were tensions in how the women regarded their working lives. They were proud of their careers outside but at the same time they wanted to be in and work in the village and be close to the children. In Sweden the opportunity to work has been regarded as a milestone in women's liberation, but many spoke of not being able to do what they wanted, on their terms. Some of them believed that they were primarily responsible for childcare although dual responsibility is a powerful discourse in the country (*c.f.* Magnusson 2001). A strong notion of mothers as mainly responsible for children in Sweden is juxtaposed with ideas about gender equality, employment and dual responsibility that all mothers have to relate to (*c.f.* Elvin-Nowak and Thomsson 2001). The women in the forum were however insistent on pointing out that motherhood, in comparison to work, was often one of those relationships that was rewarding, where they could be appreciated especially in comparison to their work outside. I did not perceive this as a glorification of motherhood but as the practicalities of their lives and "central to many women's ideas of themselves" for which many of them felt there was "little or no validation in dominant discourses" (O'Connor 1998:131). Many women saw themselves as being trapped in the jobs they had. Some of them worked within health care services that were constantly being reorganized or rationalized. For some, being in the village and working there meant that negotiations over the use of their time was for their own benefit rather than for their employers, that is, they were suggesting that to work in paid jobs was not always rewarding. They spoke about wanting to leave those jobs, ("where we were often used in strange ways during bouts of rationalization of the health sector") and work for the village but were daunted by the uncertainties of being a woman and starting something especially if one were a single mother.

Linda: One doesn't leave a permanent job...In that way you are stuck. You don't dare to do that.

Kerstin: I was at the employment agency to see if I could get some help to start my project here in the village...but then she said to me, 'I could help you if you were unemployed'...but as it was now, I had a job so I did not get any help. It is difficult to give up a job and then one doesn't know how things will turn out.

Yvonne: ...If I didn't have permanent employment...One is a little scared....indecisive (*velig*)....don't know what would become of it.

Their plans and dreams for the future often involved seeing themselves as entrepreneurs with their own small companies, as farmers in their own right, or as working for the village so that they could be in the village in the daytime. Their plans for the future held hopes of being in the village, not having to travel if they did not want to, and to have the freedom to decide how to use their own time. They drew on a repository of meanings that existed outside of themselves as they described their experiences in these terms. However, they did not see their own nurturing and caring roles as mothers or wives as conservative (as they did when they discussed women's past roles). They wanted to build on these visions for freedom, freedom over their own time and bodies and not having to be in a place they did not like. This is specially so because their involvement in the workforce - that in some respects provided them with economic freedom and an identity - also made them prisoners of a system over which they had little or no control. For example mobility or the fact that they could move around was a freedom, but also a curse. Their movement to a new place was often pre-empted by the fact that it was difficult to find employment that gave them the freedom to work with what they wanted to do in the place that they were. They moved often because they had to, not necessarily because they wanted to. Forsberg (1997b) writes that the social infrastructure, with the employment it provides, plays an important role in deciding what level of freedom the women have within the gender order but in this particular case it may also be seen as limiting their options (of where to live and how to live) at the same time as providing them with the freedom to work. Fragments of discourses on motherhood, on work were interwoven in the discussions around these topics as the women struggled to re(articulate) the meanings of experiences which made sense in village life and politics.

#### *Giving meaning to the village or the 'community'*

But more importantly, as the women looked upon it, working in the village was not something they were doing only for themselves. Actively choosing to work with uncertain projects instead of in known or secure jobs was an expression of a commitment to revive village life. They were actions beyond those for themselves only. It was necessary "for the village to be able to survive" (Cecilia, Kerstin, Anita). They linked this commitment to the need for activity in the village that the women felt was so important. Their belief in the need for signs of action taking place was apparent in the photovisioning exercise and in their interviews as well as the course that the inquiry took. Social activities but also the everyday independent functioning of the village (for the villagers itself) was felt to be needed for the village to be a real village and "not" as Elisabeth put it, "just a tourist village." However, working on this agenda was neither easy nor simple.

### *Being stubborn*

The women narrated stories about how they worked hard for their projects to get them going despite all odds. These were stories that most women and men in Drevdagen would recognize, stories about being obstinate and not bowing to authority, as conditions that people believed were needed to be able to still live in Drevdagen (as I relate in chapter five). But within the group, when the women told these stories, they provided something special because of the way in which women's agency was revealed in the stories. Cecilia, for example, had arranged for bank loans and permissions and crossed several economic and bureaucratic hurdles to open the village shop:

At every step, there was something or someone telling me it was impossible....that you can never get the loan sanctioned etc. But finally I did manage to do that....The man at the *kommun* (municipality) told me...you know the only reason that you have managed to achieve this is because of your months of obstinacy.

The others said the same about their activities like the goat farm, the ski lift in the village, the cow cooperative. The shop did not last very long and the goat farm proved difficult to start. But these were problems that willpower alone could not change. It was impossible for small village shops to charge the same prices as grocery stores and some of Cecilia's prices were somewhat higher than those in the nearest town. They were high enough for people to go to the big stores in the nearby town to shop. Social loyalty and village solidarity notwithstanding, the household economy played an important part in these decisions.<sup>89</sup>

Many of the women's efforts meant that they had to relate to a largely masculine world such as the male farmer, the municipal authorities and bankers. The place, rural or urban imparted a certain identity as did their sex, revealing perhaps ideas and norms about what the women from the countryside as opposed to urban woman are supposed to be like. However the rural place also implied that if they did indeed want to get anything done they needed to be stubborn. They spoke of themselves as strong women who were not just passive and who dared to dream. At the same time, there was another side to the matter or, as Karin said in a conversation with me:

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<sup>89</sup> These efforts thus may be seen as small moves upstream in a larger flow in the opposite direction. The odds were stacked up against enterprise in these areas. Against all odds, Cecilia's perseverance had resulted in the shop finally being opened when she returned to the village in the mid 1990s. However, it was impossible for her to compete with the prices that the big stores were able to offer because they bought in bulk. This is often the fate of small companies. The thrust of measures is to promote entrepreneurship runs counter to large-scale enterprise and forces that do not favour rural areas.

One cannot be too strong...it rubs people off the wrong way...the men approach me instead of Sara, if they want something from the association, because they think that Sara has too many of her own views.

Sara, who had become the chairperson of the association, found that there were many small ways of circumventing her authority. But this is a story that I take up in another chapter. I now turn to the feelings of ambivalence about the forum that accompanied the women's organizing.

### *Ambivalence*

The group often felt the need to justify their meeting space. For the most part this was because new women joined in who needed to be introduced to the history of the group but this did not seem to be the only reason. There were recurring discussions about why they wanted a women's forum. The women's reiteration of why they needed a forum conveyed to me a vague sense of discomfort at having a forum at all and thus the need to keep reinforcing why indeed they wanted it. Although there were other groups in the village with only women such as the sewing circle, the forum was seen as offering a different kind of space. The conversation given below between Ellenor, Kajsa and Sara is illustrative of the feeling that surfaced now and then. Ellenor had moved to the village recently with her husband and small children. They had many ideas of what they were going to do and plans for setting up tourist activities. But she hastened to point out:

Ellenor: I cannot do it without my husband.

Kajsa: Of course we do things together, we depend on each other. Besides which, even though I am working on it, it is both our project in a way (på sätt och vis). I need my husband to be able to work with my project.

Sara: It doesn't always have to be like that. I know of a woman in Jämtland who set up a whole farm all by herself. It is possible.

Doubts about the forum among some of the women in the initial meetings perhaps reflected an apprehension at the radicalism of some of the others. There was a sense that being part of the group meant that they were putting the men down, that women were somehow positioned against men, that it challenged the normal. Ellenor had moved with her husband and children to Drevdagen. For her, it was her family that was going to make a life in the village and although she was a part of the group, the group becoming more radical could disturb in an oblique way the harmonious male-female family unit. It could offer a challenge to the *status quo*, which not all women were sure they wanted to do. These doubts often surfaced in statements which stressed how they were not trying to take all the credit or the control, "Of course, we depend on each other."

The group had been questioned by others in the village association. By forming a women's-only group, they were seen as having made themselves out to be different and to have withdrawn from the 'common spaces' that mattered in the village. Yet in practice, many women had become much more active in the association as compared to the past. The women justified the existence of the group by saying that they were different from men and needed their own space. Yet, they also pointed out that there was a lot that they shared with other men that they did not share with the women in the group. In discussions, women pointed to how men and women were dependent on each other, to how it would be impossible for them to carry out their projects on their own, especially with small children whose main responsibility rested with them. For the women, the need for inter-dependency and ingrained notions of the nuclear family and sex and gender roles were perhaps disturbed by conversations about taking control of their lives in the village and for the village.<sup>90</sup> A discussion of the lingering sense of discomfort was never taken up in the group. But in conversations among some women, especially in the initial phase, there was also a slight underlying assumption that forming such a group might be seen to challenge the notion of men and women working together. This was particularly because the forum was being questioned by others outside of its membership.

In the exchange above, Sara was also complicating the narrative. By drawing on other situations and narratives, she was providing alternatives to the repeatable, identifiable ways of talking and describing lives and projects. In this particular instance she was drawing on another, perhaps a 'reverse discourse' (*c.f.* Foucault 1990) to provide other meanings to their experiences. This added to the ambivalent nature of the forum and created tensions that were productive of change.

The ambivalence was evident in the efforts to involve the village men in the early meetings. In fact, at the first two meetings, the question of whether and how they should involve men and the things that might interest them enough to come to

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<sup>90</sup> Over the past 20 years work on gender by rural scientists has drawn attention to the importance of the nuclear family and to the acceptance of stereotypical gender roles within both the rural household and rural economy (Little 2003). Research in Sweden also has indicated similar roles (*e.g.* Frånberg). In some ways the women's forum was destabilising for the family norm. "...the nuclear family as the dominant...model of social and community organization in rural areas" (Little, 2003:401). Several families with children had moved to the village and their move was justified by the fact that it was a healthy environment for their children. Later some young women, originally from the village, had moved back to the village some of them with their partners. Research from Great Britain also suggests that although the dominance of the married co-residential heterosexual couple may be hard to erase, there are indications of changes in patterns of intimacy that are impacting upon the wider organization of sexuality (Roseneil 2000). So while there is one overarching discourse they are also others. A sort of intimacy or friendship between the women at the village level was uncomfortable since it was unusual in this form.

the get-togethers cropped up now and then in the discussions. Britta had suggested at the meeting in September when the women spoke of ways to get the village activated:

Maybe we could organize a get-together in our group on a Saturday and play bingo-lotto<sup>91</sup> together. The men like doing that...we could all do it together...that might get them to come.

However, nothing was done about that. Interestingly, many women pointed out that the men would not be likely to come to a group that the women had organized. I tried to ask why but never really got a satisfactory answer, other than they would not come to a *kärring träff* (a hags meet). This was confirmed by Karl in a conversation in Sara's kitchen: "...if you were to invite the men and have meetings together, the gubbar would not come." As I understand it, they would not come if it was the women's group that organized a meeting on village affairs. On the other hand if it was an *advents marknad* (advent market) or a party, it would be alright.

Their ambivalence challenged assumptions of the 'naturalness' of gathering as women. If it was indeed so natural for them to meet as women, would it have been so difficult and necessary to justify it all the time? Yet it seemed that they had enough in common to join together and seek each other's support. They were aware of the disapproval of some others in the village but also of the strength they got from each other. When we spoke about why the existence of the group felt uncomfortable to some men in the village who had been critical of the get-togethers, or what had begun to be known as the 'women's group', Anita said:

Women are used to men getting together and talking ...but women...it becomes creepy (*läskigt*) when women become strong.

Kajsa agreed:

It becomes dangerous when one talks too much.

Perhaps as Sara's intervention shows in this context, the impetus for change is already in the discursive. It is perhaps therefore that it is the 'talking' that is dangerous. Furthermore, the *kvinnoforum* went against the idea of how village gender relations were supposed to be organized, surfacing a fear of the women 'trying to be too important' even though the women themselves were not questioning their interdependence with the men in the village. In fact they often emphasised the mutual dependence of men and women. They experienced the apprehension not so much in terms of undermining the mutual dependence that had been so important in all their previous struggles for the village, but in terms of

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<sup>91</sup> Bingolotto is a lottery on T.V. and it provides a whole evening entertainment with music etc. During the 1990s it was extremely popular in Sweden and is an institution in many ways.

being perceived as doing so. Or rather that was the form in which the main criticism of the group was formulated. By being in the group they did not see themselves as isolating themselves, 'in a cloister built of their own accord' (Irigaray 1991:210 writes about the need for women to seclude themselves for brief periods) but they were aware that others outside the group, especially the men in the association, felt this way.

### *No single activity*

The discussions in the group did not centre on any one issue and various questions wove in and out of each other. The fact that there were new people many of the times, made it necessary to repeat what the women wanted from the group and the needs that the newcomers had. The efforts of the group also became more action oriented in order to try and create a forum open to all women who wanted to come. There was no 'one' answer to why the women wanted a women's forum. But the fact that they did not have one main clearly defined aim is what perhaps made the *kvinnoforum* uncomfortable (or difficult to pin down) for those outside of it. The women were disturbing the norms of gathering places- being only one sex (or rather only female since many neutral spaces were in effect mainly male). They had no clearly defined activity, though they were convinced that meeting each other and talking was in itself an action that would lead to the benefit of women and the rest of the village. The aim was *gemenskap* and they chose to work with different depending on the situation. This might have been considered diffuse for those outside the forum.

That the women's activities could not be predicted or known in advance also probably contributed to making it somewhat uncomfortable and controversial. These qualities highlighted the fact that the *kvinnoforum* was different from other more conventional forms of meeting. Their argument, that there was a need to have their own group was not new in the sense that there were already groups for women but the reasons for it were perhaps new. It was not to sew or only to plan the Christmas fair. They were meeting because they were 'women' by occupation, by bodies, not for example because they were people who wanted to sew. The men in the village association felt that they had no idea of what the women in the forum were doing (as I go on to show in the next chapter) – the women did not specify what they were doing in ways in which group activity was normally understood or justified.

### *A diffuse identity (discovering the same difference)*

The women chose to organize themselves in their own forum partly because they did not identify with existing structures in the village. Although every get-together demanded a certain amount of organizing, the *kvinnoforum* did not have a formal structure. It took shape and came alive every time that the women met. The form it took on each occasion could be different depending on who was present. Nevertheless, it held an underlying meaning for the women and whenever they met, they reaffirmed its' importance in strengthening them in their work and social life.

The initial hesitation in having a women's only group remained as an undercurrent in the forum even as it grew. But paradoxically it was also its strength because as the group grew and changed<sup>92</sup> and new women came in, it was important to explain and discuss and keep alive the discussion of why a women's group was needed. Opposition caused ambivalence but it also helped in the process of generating a collective identity. For the times that we met in the forum, we met as 'women', or at least that was an identity that was vital and present as much as our identities as villagers of Drevdagen or from SLU or another village. At the get-togethers with the external participants, Cecilia traced the group back to the time when she and a few other women were part of drawing up the village agenda:

We had a women's group when we wrote in the social issues in the plans for the village (*Detta vill vi med Drevdagen*). That was in a way how some of us started working with these issues.

Earlier they had spoken of themselves as individual women who had helped to broaden the agenda in the association. Now they spoke about themselves as being part of a group. Was this an instance of building on an identity as a women's group and was Cecilia 'recovering a past'? She had traced our history back even further to a point when most others were not involved. The women were conscious of building up something new and making a break with the past. This was voiced in statements like "things are different now" and "we want to do things differently." Collective organizing was not a sum of their different experiences but the result of their sense of togetherness or affinity, *själva samhörigheten* (Eduards, 2002). Furthermore, the identity that it did acquire was that of a women's forum.

There are several ways in which the women expressed themselves. I have so far looked at the ways in which the women used language to articulate into being a *kvinnoforum* for the times that they met and in the section before that, I examined the actions that created the space for a *kvinnoforum*. The coming into being of a *kvinnoforum* did not really take us by surprise (when I think about it in retrospect) but neither was it something that had been planned in advance. I now examine the making of the *kvinnoforum* and some discourses that surrounded it.

### *Reproducing the Discourse?*

Were the women a part of reproducing the norms in the village and those that played an important part in shaping gender and power relations? In many ways the language they used while working with village issues reflected this. But how well did these processes conform to the actions they took? What about the discrepancies in their language itself and their sometimes, what may be considered radical questioning of the norms, that existed side by side, with (what may be seen as) attempts at normalizing the situation? By looking at the issues they took up and how they spoke about them - their need for informality, their importance in

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<sup>92</sup> Keeping in mind what I was told at a course on facilitation once, 'everytime one person is absent or a new person comes in, it is a new group.'

organizing social life in the village - I try to analyze these contradictory aspects. I look at the changing subjectivities in their narratives about self-esteem, about needing to include men, about collaboration, about how they spoke of themselves as 'women' and finally, at their efforts to build on solidarity,

#### Informality

The women spoke about the importance of informality. They stressed the importance of open forums and inclusive meetings. When they spoke of needing to work on projects, working groups were an option. But the main idea remained that everyone needed to meet in an informal forum where they were comfortable about expressing themselves, taking up any question that they wanted, and most of all to have a good time together and to strengthen community bonds. The activities of the women in the inquiry group thus leaned towards a preference for the informal and the overtly apolitical, an approach that has been characteristic of women's groups elsewhere (Bock 1999; Bull 1995; Frånberg 1994; Rönnblom 1997). This has a correlate in the fact that the formal institutions have little place for their concerns and in recognition of power relations in such formal spaces that tend to disadvantage women.

By emphasizing informality, were the women conforming to the general understanding of informal women's groups that work to bring about change in their villages - informal groups that may or may not have significant power *vis à vis* the formal structures? Research reveals that policy-makers' interpretations of who are relevant partners is crucial in rural development. Rural women's groups are not considered to be political pressure groups nor to have any specific interests (*c.f.* Bock 1999). By choosing to work and meet informally, the women may be seen to reinforce that notion. On the other hand, by working informally and asking for different ways of working, they were also changing the forms in which meeting places were organized in the village. The informality of their own meeting places enabled them to meet on terms decided by them, to decide if they wanted to come at all and what they wanted to talk about could vary from time to time or they could just choose to socialize. These qualities were a challenge to the ways in which village activity was ordinarily organized.

Despite the advantages of informal groups that are stressed by both activists and researchers,<sup>93</sup> the emphasis on the informal is perhaps surprising in 'theory' when seen in light of the fact that is often only when a system is formalized, that women have been able to enter into public areas since it is the informal networks that

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<sup>93</sup> For example, Jiggins writes that in recent times, several formally constituted women's networks have sprung up in the agricultural research and development scene. With little hierarchical control, a great deal of local autonomy and a flexible leadership they allow women to shift in and out of organisational roles in accordance with family and marital obligations. Through these approaches they are able to address biophysical and socio-economic concerns at the lowest point of human organisation and at the same time influence policy at higher levels (1993:113).

work to keep them outside (Reskin and McBrier 2000). As I show in chapter ten, it is precisely this formality of rules that provided an opening for the women in Nayagarh to put forward their claims.

#### The social

Within the forum, the women chose to take up a myriad of activities, many of these had to do with organizing social occasions for the village. These included not only the 'bigger question' that Karl had spoken about, but also small, everyday activities and those necessary to maintain community relationships. They often spoke of how women were more nurturing, and of how other questions came up when women involved themselves in village affairs and that women often worked with 'social issues'. They contrasted this approach to the dry and boring meetings of the village association where there was more talk and little action. This emphasis on the social was also noticed by the men in the association. Karl told me about the time that the association drew up a development agenda for the village. He spoke about how they had spent several meetings in discussing various issues but not made much progress. It was only when some women joined the association and took over the writing up of the agenda that the social issues were raised and a document was put together to take to the authorities and that things began moving. In these instances the discourse of the feminine epitomized by informality, maintaining social relationships, doing the groundwork, might seem to be cemented in contrast to the formal, the official and the masculine. While it brought to light the work that the women did, this division of work was also problematic. The exclusion of the women in the work for the forests was justified by the men in the association by the women's lack of interest in the forests and their preoccupation with the 'social'.

At the same time it was expected that women would maintain social relations in the village (see Little 2002). In a case study of a workplace Eva Magnusson (1997) writes about office assistants who were expected to create a cheerful atmosphere and by conforming to this expectation, they became complicit in reproducing their own subordination. In Drevdagen, the ideas for social occasions seemed to come mainly from the women even though they carried out their ideas often with the support of the men. But in this case, it could be said that they were also exercising agency. They mobilized the other villagers and got things done. They also made a difference to the physical environment, for example by developing the ski slope. Sometimes it seems it was the discursive which was the more problematic 'action' as the renaming of the village shop as the house of dreams illustrates.

The women sought to retain a shifting boundary between the permissible and the not permissible, both in their relations with the village and within the group itself. Their discussions on spirituality and their decision not to take this up as a theme was evidence of that. They also played a part in upholding the norms that they were challenging. Their subjectivities were thus mutually constitutive of the discourses around them.

### An essentialist discourse?

In certain aspects, the actions taken in the process of forming the forum (described in the previous chapter and the beginning of this one), and the language used in the discussions and conversations (this chapter) offer conflicting accounts of how the group negotiated its identity as a women's group. By taking on the norms that are normally associated with the feminine and with women, they may be seen to be 'inscribing themselves in dominant values' (*c.f.* Haug 1999). However, at the same time they challenged these norms. For instance, they recognized that the village association and the forests were constructed as masculine and it was difficult for them to be a part of these activities, but at the same time, they questioned how the forests were defined and some made a concerted effort to become involved.

The *kvinnoforum* may be seen as reflective of the dominant norms but they often built upon those norms to challenge dominant ways of acting. For example, they stressed that women are active, that they are sociable, that they are nurturing. They used these statements to create space to work in ways that felt comfortable and to justify their choices for acting in new ways. As they spoke about their experiences of living in the village, working outside and travelling, looking for work and managing families, they were building on their experiences and using them constructively (see the section on solidarity).

Spivak in an interview with Grosz (1990) says that we may have to differentiate between the category of political mobilization and an analytical category and that essentialism may not be rhetorically right but it is strategic. Carol Bacchi (1996:11) puts it in another way. According to her, it is the acknowledgement of the political character of categories like 'women' that takes the sting out of accusations about essentialism. She writes that such categories seem essentialist only because those campaigning on their behalf have felt impelled to give these groups definition that make them appear essentialist. They have been impelled to do this because they are positioned as outgroups, inhabiting the borderlands of power and influence. "Hence appeals to 'women' ...are practical and strategic, not ontological. There are no similar debates about the ontological status and content of 'men' because men have seldom been asked to justify their privilege" (*Ibid.*: 11).

Taking the cue from Bacchi, I thus focus my analysis from talking about who 'women' are or are not or what they are like, to the practices which made this question *appear* to be one we needed to answer. The answers to this lay in the context that they (we) found them(our)selves in. I believe that (for the women) the question of women's special qualities was more than a question of it being a strategy and a belief in difference in nature between men and women. It was a question of solidarity and of affirming themselves. It was also, as I discuss in the case of the women in Nayagarh, a 'politics of the possible'. The women's claim to legitimacy depended upon community attitudes (of which they too were a part) that positioned women as different, as unwilling to get involved in associations yet at the same time as there was a strong notion of everyone (men and women) being

the same. I discuss these issues further in chapters eight and ten. The women in the forum took places in a gender order that framed them as different from 'men' but then used their relationships and friendships in the forum, in part, to construct themselves as diverse 'women' with diverse meanings. This women-centeredness was tenuous and context bound but it gave them strength.

In the course of the inquiry, subjectivities were continually changing. There were also disappointments and different realizations for different women. In the next section I take up a few of the themes that are easier to identify to trace how they changed over the course of the inquiry: self-esteem, the *kvinnoforum* and the idea of complementarity.

### *Changing subjectivities: self-esteem, the kvinnoforum and complementarity*

There were discussions in the first few meetings about women's lack of self-esteem and self-confidence. The women discussed how many women were too shy to speak out in public meetings or take up issues 'on their hearts.' Many did not attend any meetings or participate in village public life. It was well known that it was difficult to get women to gather for meetings and get-togethers.

On looking at my notes from the meetings, I saw how the emphasis on self-esteem changed over the course of the inquiry. Plummer (1995:19) writes that stories may be examined for the "ways they are produced, the ways they are read, the work they perform in the wider social order, how they change, and their role in the political process." Working for women's self-esteem was one of the themes that the women defined in the beginning as an issue to work with within the inquiry process. That this was an important area to work on was confirmed by the women's encounters with individuals outside the village. When Sara contacted someone who had worked with women's networks for advice, one of the things that the woman suggested was a training course to increase women's self-confidence. Her suggestion of the course in Sveg was received with little interest in the group. The topic was dropped quite quickly after that meeting. Sam Paldanius writes that the relation between confidence (*själv-förtroende*) and self-esteem (*självkänsla*- what the women often cited) may be understood as that people start out from their actions and the worth those actions are given in order to achieve a feeling of self-esteem. An example is that someone who carries out legitimate and positive actions is rewarded by the existing system of norms and so achieves confidence. When there is confidence in actions, it may be possible to speak of good self-esteem (2000:153). Paradoxically, then, to attend a course on confidence-building would suggest an identity of little worth. Yet what the women were seeking was a re-valuation of the worth they recognized in themselves and in each other.

Although most of the women had lived in the same village and many had done so for years, the stories that the women related about their lives were seen anew. In each other's stories, they recognized incidents in their own lives, which they had attributed to personal shortcomings. To see that others seemed to have similar experiences provided the "possibility of interpreting difficulties, problems and

inadequacies not as the effect of individual, personal failings, but as the result of socially produced structures” (Weedon 1997:81-82 cited in Treleaven, 1998:132). This had political implications. When the group was first formed, women spoke of increasing self-esteem so that women could take part more actively in village life. During the course of the inquiry, this ambition changed direction to focus on wanting a women’s forum for themselves, because entering in to the existing structures did not always change their situation very much (see chapter eight). From looking at women’s individual failings, the many women in the forum sought to find collective solutions that were beyond one individual. Being in the group helped to locate wrongs in social relations rather than in interpersonal psychology.

The very idea of the *kvinnoforum* may itself be seen as the result of a changing subjectivity among the women. From thinking of ways of trying to include men in the group to articulating a need for a *kvinnoforum*, was a change in itself. The initial wish to include men was perhaps an effort to “harmonize potentially competing interests without compromising the energy they generated among each other” (Marks 1998:65). However, in this case, including men did not seem to be an option that was considered feasible (as I pointed out in the section on ambivalence). It became important to stress that women were different and that ‘men and women speak different languages.’ Within language, they tried to build up a space for women, a space which they felt was lacking in village life. It was perhaps the experience of a shared language among them but also the apprehension, within the forum, of a gendered subjectivity, that gave new meaning to certain parts of their (our) lives in the village and beyond. There were ‘diffuse forms of change as we engaged with each other and drew on new ways of thinking and acting’ (Treleaven 1998:120).

In parallel to this was a change in my ideas about *collaboration* for local management. It was clear that both the men in the village association as well as the women in the forum believed in the need to collaborate and work together to achieve their aims. It was assumed by me and by the others from SLU that the women and men thus would complement each other. I learnt from our time together in the inquiry process that complementarity hides within it relationships of power and says nothing about how men and women are supposed to complement each other.

The need for a women’s forum and the discussions about it, as well as the reactions from the village association, made it clear that complementarity and collaboration in local development were value laden terms and norms that needed to be negotiated. Patricia O’Connor writes:

“The very existence of friendship between women sits somewhat uneasily in capitalist patriarchal societies where the ‘reality’ is the pursuit of power and profit in the public area and the existence of a heterosexual family based unit in the private area” (O’Connor 1998:131)

If this were to be the case, seen in a larger societal perspective the women were challenging dominant ways of organizing in both spheres. They spoke of co-operatives and of co-operation for work in the village and yet they wanted a women's forum. Organizing in the way they did, gave them energy, but its nonconformity also made the *kvinnoforum* fragile. I thus turn to look at women's solidarity and the potential disturbance that it contained.

### *Solidarity*

The women focused on what brought them together, which included the need for company and *gemenskap*, wanting to work together for the village and themselves, of their being in a different situation because they were women. They built upon their strength and self-respect for each other. By highlighting what they believed were feminine qualities, they were reclaiming the worth of experiences handed down from history and perhaps taking some parts of their 'life as the starting point' (c.f. Mies 1991:66). They spoke about how 'things are different now', 'we are career women', making discursive interventions in how they regarded themselves and in their language made a conscious break with a (imagined?) past.

Rönblom, who has worked in what seem to be similar empirical contexts of women's groups in the north of Sweden, points out:

Expressions like making themselves and others aware of their unequal situation in society, to build up greater self-esteem among women, to be able to make space for themselves and realize their aims, to work with local questions that have relevance for women point to a more or less clearly formulated analysis of gender relations. (2002:140).

This was perhaps so also for the women in Drevdagen but this is not how they chose to frame it.<sup>94</sup> As I pointed out earlier, the women sought to downplay their general disadvantage or unequal situation and pointed instead to specific instances. In their case, rather than an analysis of gender relations, it was a desire to build upon solidarity among them, a solidarity that guided their drive to have a forum. The women in the *kvinnoforum* did not discuss having an unequal position that disadvantaged them, when they were in the large group. When they did speak about discrimination in interviews, it was often directed at specific men who could exercise agency as they wanted or more general references to how they had a more difficult time in getting money to finance their projects. The problems that some of the women had spoken about in the interviews, that is, male domination in the village associations were not discussed in the larger circle (although this changed towards the end when one of the women brought up this matter in public, after the my inquiry with the *kvinnoforum* had ended). It must be remembered that this was a group of women in a village where many of the inhabitants were related to each

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<sup>94</sup> Is this a writing of their experience in academic terms- imparting a certain feminist legitimacy? On the other hand the groups Rönblom studied were semi-formal groups that had been active for a long time.

other or had lived together for many years; taking up such questions in public was far from easy.

As I see it the strength of the group came from its being open – by the fact that most women in the village had passed by it at least once. It was not a clique. This contributed to it becoming a challenge for those outside of it. What gave the *kvinnoforum* its strength was that it was inclusive and yet it was ambiguous. It was open enough for women to define their own reasons for being there and to work in the way they chose to (or rather they chose not to) be defined. They built up an identity on the basis of strength and self-respect and not as I write earlier on oppression. By expansion and inclusion, they recognized and bridged differences among themselves. Their appeal lay in fact in that they did not adopt what might be seen as a radical stance as a group in terms of challenging unequal relations. The group included women who wanted to preserve their way of life in the village as well as those who did not necessarily want to challenge gender relations but wanted to protect the place and its norms. It may sound contradictory but these women's presence did give the forum its' strength. In this way the differences among the women, in opinions and ways of action, were accommodated as the forum provided a space for them. It made the forum more tolerant to difference and keen to include everyone. The women in the group did not claim to speak on behalf of the other women in the village nor indeed of the group. However, there was at least one occasion as I show in chapter seven where critique of some of the men in the association by one woman in public was seen as being possible because of her belonging to the forum. Many women in the forum would have perhaps themselves balked at taking such a stand. Women's activism within the group was heterogeneous and complex, both individual and collective.

#### Interrupting the normal

But most of all, by stressing the need to have their own space, the group was productive of new configurations of social relations rather than reproductive of the behaviours that instill dominant values in us (Lather 1991:96). (Of course not all actions were seamless or non-contradictory) It was the action and not the reflection on action that made an 'intervention in dominant practice' (Haug 1999). We did not reflect on the consequences of having a group to the extent we could have, but the very act of forming the *kvinnoforum* was the 'interrupting' although nothing was said overtly.

Maguire (2001:64) writes: "Feminist grounded action-research affords participants the power and space to decide for or against action, for or against breaking silence." In this case, the choice to break the silence was not really ours. It was simply because the women met and talked that a certain amount of confusion was caused among some people and was experienced as disturbing. It challenged a social order in the village. I see their get-togethers and organizing, however spontaneous and unforeseen they might have been, as actions that they chose to take consciously. A large part of the conversations in the group revolved around trying to organize social events in the village, discussing daily life and thinking about how to involve men and women in village activities. But the fact

that they met and discussed these issues and that they needed their own forum to do so was in itself disturbing. Their doing of *gemenskap*, of ‘support’ was at the same time a ‘doing of gender’. The group came more into the public eye in the village perhaps because I was there as a researcher and because what was said was put on paper. In village public life, they thus came to acquire interests and values as women, contrary to ‘the tendency among women not to think of themselves as women in the public arena or as having values and interests other than those deriving from their connections with men’ (O’Connor 1998:121). The silence was already broken! As the women, especially those most active in the *kvinnoforum*, worked to create a space for the women in the village and extend the participatory space, they may be seen to be exercising power generatively (*cf.* Cooper, 1995).

## Conclusion

In the first half of this chapter I describe how the women constructed a shared context for themselves which found expression in the form of a women’s forum. The collaborative inquiry was intimately tied with this process. Coming into the village, I linked up with the activities and thoughts already in train and the research design provided another context in which some of these processes took shape.

In the latter half I trace how the women explain their subject positions and how in their stories they are linked to discourses outside of them, to which they give form but also in turn change. They expanded the space of the forum further when we discussed what they wanted to do in the village for a living countryside and a self-managing village. Their sharing of personal experiences, for instance, conferred on those a social significance and power missing in the humdrum of everyday life. An understanding of subjectivities took shape for me as I made sense of our discussions about them as individual women (urban/rural, working women, mothers...) but also their need for a *kvinnoforum* and a collective space. The women’s subjectivities were shaped by their notions of rurality, nature, local gender relations but were not seamless or non-contradictory. Their discussions revealed the complexities and apparent inconsistencies within the experiences of women’s organizing. Towards the end of the chapter, I have looked at how their subjectivities changed over time as they related differently to the same experiences in new ways. I have also discussed how by reproducing a certain discourse on ‘women’, they were in fact interrupting it. The aim in this chapter has been to present women as gendered subjects rather than objects of local development or as a missing category in development work. The discussion of their subjectivities thus lays the ground for the next chapter that takes up a discussion of local development and how organizing by the women came to be at odds with how development was meant to be organized.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### **Unsettling the Orders: the dynamics of rural development and local forest management**

#### **Introduction**

When gender is not specifically mentioned, processes and events are considered gender neutral. This is true of rural development and local resource management that in its terminology of the 'local' conceals gendered differences of power. In previous chapters I explained why and how the women in Nayagarh and Drevdagen chose to get together and act. I also pointed to some reactions to their organizing in their villages. Their organizing took different forms and the issues that they took up were different although there are also similarities. In this chapter I examine the women's organizing in Drevdagen and Nayagarh in relation to local and rural development. I look at the processes of gender and power at work in the two contexts as I examine the two cases side by side and analyse what local management might imply for overall rural development. The focus here is on the everyday, the small incidents that are trivialized as village politics but which play a part in the outcomes in village development and forest management. They present a picture in which neither local development nor forest management is uncontested, and struggles over meanings included not only the women's groups and the formal associations but also development practitioners.

I begin by drawing attention to how the men in the formal forums in the village and outside development practitioners acted in response to the organizing by the women and in Drevdagen also to my research with the women. The women's organizing was perceived as disruptive, and the ways in which it was resisted reveal the norms according to which local development and resource management was meant to be carried out in the village. The village association in Drevdagen and the BOJBP or the *Mahasangha* in Nayagarh had visions of a different countryside which they were active in constructing. In the vision lay greater rights and responsibilities with the people and the community. The exclusion of women from organizations for local forest management and village development was acknowledged and regretted and by some their inclusion was desired. I look beyond the obvious absence, or exclusion or discrimination against the women in formal forums, to the processes by which they were kept outside or chose to stay outside them. In light of the women's organizing the purpose is to understand what the inclusion of women in organizations implies for rural development and questions of equality.

#### **The gender of local development**

Norms for how development is to be carried out were upheld by relationships of gender and power both within the village and also by outside outside. Women's

organizing in Drevdagen and discussions about the women's federation in Nayagarh occasioned various reactions in the villages and especially resistance from the village and forest organizations. By taking action in what appeared to be an unconventional way, the women had interrupted the normal in 'local development'. These norms, taken so much for granted otherwise, became clear when the men in the village association had to defend them and thus forced into the discussion the otherwise ever present and yet unseen gendered processes of local development. I now turn to look more closely at illustrative reactions from the men in the village and the forest groups and the arguments that they deployed to justify their support or resistance.

### *Threatening the harmony*

The women believed that they were working for development. Instead they were seen as threatening the harmony in the village. In Drevdagen, the villagers were not indifferent to the women's forum.<sup>95</sup> The reactions varied from an attitude of understanding, to benevolent expressions about the *dam träff* (the ladies' meet), to jokes about the *häxmöten* (witch meetings), to irritation and annoyance expressed by the members of the village association who perceived women's organizing as a threat to the harmonious working of village life.

The women's critique of the village association and of its' sole attention to the forests that surfaced in the first round of interviews that I conducted, was not perceived as a threat in itself.<sup>96</sup> But it was considered a threat when that critique became the basis of their self-organizing activities (cf. Eduards 1997: 165). The women's forum in Drevdagen discussed everyday life and how to work with various activities in the village. As compared to Nayagarh, for instance, where some of the groups took up what may be seen as specifically 'women's issues' (violence, women's rights, representation in village bodies), the women in Drevdagen did not do so. Their activities could include planning a pub evening or a theatre in the village. They spoke about working on relationships inside the village so that the village together could work effectively with the authorities and agencies outside. Every get-together in the group was reported in the village newsletter.

But the fact that there was no single aim that the women worked towards other than wanting to establish a women's forum, became a challenge. Not having a definable activity perhaps made it difficult for others outside the forum to know what the women did when they met. The get-togethers were reported in the village newsletter but the feeling of not knowing was apparent and caused discomfort. This was apparent in the interviews that I conducted with Gustav and Tage who had been active in the village association at the time of the collaborative inquiry

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<sup>95</sup> It struck me that in most cases and on most issues, the people were not indifferent (or cannot be?) in a small village like this.

<sup>96</sup> On the other hand, my writing about it was perceived as a problem by some of my colleagues.

with the women. It was almost two years since the inquiry had ended. They were somewhat reticent to talk about the process:

Gustav: There was no insight...Because we had no insight into it... we thought that it would have effect in the general village association (*ge genomslag i allmänna byföreningen*). There was curiosity. We got some women in the village project. The group lay a bit on the side (*vid sedan om*). There was no insight.

Tage: We got to hear that we only had the forest on our brains.

By keeping themselves open to the activities that they chose to work with, the women made the forum unpredictable. For those outside the forum, it was difficult to pin them down. Thus without necessarily meaning to challenge the village association, that is in effect what they did do. Gustav's reference to the village association as the 'general' may be regarded as an effort to show that the association was open to all and was meant for everyone. By meeting outside of it the women were seen to be thwarting this common space. Women organizing in the village became political although every effort was made both by the women's group and the men in the association (for different reasons) to make it appear apolitical. Ideas about equality and the proper way to go about working for the village through 'village' associations with their constitutions and protocol were disturbed by the women choosing to meet in a women's forum and discuss every day life in the village.

A chance meeting in the village between Karl, Sara, Jan and myself, resulted in a discussion of the resistance to the women's group within the village association and of their understanding of the group as discordant in relation to the village association and 'village development.' I quote excerpts from the conversation in the following sections to show how they positioned themselves in relation to each other. The sense of the opposition expressed and the arguments capture the uncertainties, the disagreements and the conciliatory attempts between the speakers and also reflect the different positions adopted by the men in the village. The fact that they were having this conversation indicated that both Sara and Karl, who were the main speakers, were looking for solutions. Critique of the women by others was normally veiled and more difficult to respond to, as I try and show in the following pages. Sara and Jan started the conversation by asking Karl about what was happening in the village association. They spoke about the time when several villagers, both men and women, had got together and founded the village association and had begun planning for work in the village and the forests. But, according to them, after the initial meetings with the people from SLU, there was a sudden silence and the rest of the villagers had no idea of what was going on. Sara explained the existence of the women's group because of women's exclusion from association activities and decision-making.

Sara: In the beginning the women were a part of the activities... but then there was a shift (*en vändning*)...

Jan: There was a lot of hope at that time. It felt that Drevdagen had come far...but then it became very...quiet.

Karl: ....maybe...but...I don't believe in a women's group.

Jan: But if the women were at the village meetings, there would be hell if dinner was not ready at home.

Karl: Earlier it was always ... (his wife) who was at the meetings and I was at home.

Sara: It is difficult to get the women involved and interested (*fånga upp*). They are so busy with housework when they are not working outside.

There are several issues being worked on here in this exchange, some of which become clearer only when the conversation continued, but I take up some here. First, it shows how individual men positioned themselves differently as regards the women's forum. As I discuss later in chapter ten, these differences also were reflected in the women's organizing. In this particular exchange, while Karl expressed his displeasure at the existence of the women's group, Jan and Sara begin by pointing to the impracticality of expecting women to attend village meetings and being at home at the same time. Jan pointed to the costs arising when the men as opposed to women, attended the meetings, what Agarwal calls the 'transaction costs' of attending meetings (2003). As she points out gender inequality dwells not only outside the household but also centrally within it although as Karl shows there are variations within this. But the inequality in the power to shape the agenda is reflected also in the formal settings:

Sara: Maybe it is just that it's the issue...for example forest logging that they are not interested in....the women in the village.

Jan: Yes, that too.

Karl: It's good with women's meetings and so on but it's a terrible solution (*vansinnig lösning*) to the fact that the village association is not working for them. It is not the absolute solution. You are doing the same thing that the village association and the forest project was doing.....

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Sara: Karl, you are unusual. It is easier to create projects when there are only women.

Karl: That is a lousy excuse (*taskig ursäkt*).<sup>97</sup> To be able to develop the village, we must be able to collaborate.

Sara: Our network for me is contacts, to find out how the other villages are working and so on... And for women to dare to go out and collaborate.

Karl: I don't think a women's network is the solution. It's good to have networks, contacts...

Sara: But this could be a good way to work....dividing up the women and men...they may be interested in different things.

Karl believed in openness and of working together and he admitted that the association and the forest project were not doing that. Yet he wanted the women to follow that ideal. He believed that the women were doing the same thing as the association. The difference was, however, that in the *kvinnoforum* the women were speaking for themselves, often as individuals, and not professing to do so for the entire village. According to him, by placing themselves outside of the village association, they were placing themselves in opposition to the village associations. Sara pointed to how this might be a way to activate the village association and prompt women to join it. Here again, Sara hastened to justify the forum as the women in the forum felt the need to justify it to each other initially (see chapter seven). In this instance, Sara did not challenge Karl's belief in needing to work together but unlike Karl she did not see the existence of the forum as being conflictual. She even justified it by saying how this was a good way to involve the women in village affairs (*fånga upp kvinnorna*). Karl's reaction to the group was not based on the issues that the women took up but on the existence of the group itself. Both wanted men and women to collaborate but Karl did not want that to happen from within a women's group.

Karl also shifts between various positions in the conversation. On the one hand he believed that 'it is good with women's networks,' but at the same time not because women are dissatisfied with the village association and not in this particular case. This was a recurring aspect that I point to again, of how gender is believed to be important, but not in one's own case. Earlier he had told me about a successful women's network in Äppelbo that was doing a lot of good work for their area. These may seem as contradictory positions but they are also reflective of the different discourses in society that find form as fragments in such conversations. The importance of gender equality, the gendered neutrality of societal institutions, as well as the increasing rhetoric of women's networks and networking in working for development, find place in the same conversation.

In Nayagarh, the forest federations' relationships to the *mahila samitis* were expressed differently. The groups in Nayagarh were formed as part of the programme and their success was, in many ways, reflective of the success of the

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<sup>97</sup> For having a women's group.

movement. There was, however, dissatisfaction among individual men who wondered if it was worth spending the money and effort on women's groups. But the programme itself was not open for discussion. It was not the formation of the women's groups itself but the instances where the women took over the agenda and pushed it beyond that envisaged by the programme, that discomfort with the groups began to become apparent. Also "their talk of their own federation" was considered unnecessary and foolish. When I asked one of the *Mahasangha* functionaries about the federation the women wanted to form, he put it eloquently:

We do not have so much contact with the women. Once the Mahasangha is stronger we can support the women in what they want to do. Without guidelines or ideas there is no point in women gathering. They need the *Mahasangha's* /BOJBP's support.<sup>98</sup>

It is significant that he says that 'we do not have much contact with the women.' In their own groups the women took on another identity. They became women and not only mothers, sisters and wives and other men's relatives that the men knew in everyday life at home and in the villages. 'We' in the *Mahasangha* was also a collective identity that was different. To an extent (or in its own way) this was also the case in Sweden. The men knew these women well, but when in the forum they took on a different identity as well. The forum for the women was a place where they could express their individual subjectivities. But they were also a group. I believe that the women sought to resolve this dilemma (of a collective and individual subjectivity) by not calling themselves a group but keeping it as a forum, a meeting place. It was working together on concrete issues in the village that united them in different instances. However, they were regarded as a unity from the outside. The same women who were relatives and friends at home and in other village spaces were suddenly a part of a forum as well. They were referred to as the women's 'group,' making them into a category, which I believe they were resisting by the flexible nature of their organizing. Referring to the Swedish women's movement, Christina Florin, Lena Sommestad and Ulla Wikander write that sisterhood was an utopia for the movement and perhaps a projection that came into being because, from outside, women were treated and perceived as a group (1999:7).<sup>99</sup> The women who met in the *kvinnoforum* were perceived as a group and the challenge the outsiders felt was from a group. Therefore at times, depending on the context that I write about, I too refer to them as a group although it was not a group in a permanent or stable sense. It was in fact a forum that took shape every time the women met. That it was so ephemeral made it more suspect.

Both in Sweden and in India, the need for a women's group or federation was questioned by men in the forest committees, albeit for different reasons. In Sweden, it was questioned whether there was a need for a women's group when

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<sup>98</sup> I cite this in chapter four where I discuss it from a somewhat different angle, i.e. in the context of women's groups in development.

<sup>99</sup> Bacchi takes up this discussion and provides a sophisticated analysis that I cite later in the thesis.

there were other village associations. In India, a women's federation was considered unnecessary as men felt the men's organizations were capable (and better) at taking decisions for women as well.<sup>100</sup> In each case, women's efforts to reshape spaces reveal the presence of asymmetrical gendered orders. Yvonne Hirdman (1990) argues that it is when women step into men's territories, (in these two cases exemplified by attempting to define community projects and as in Nayagarh to have a say in decisions over the budgets), that the gender power order becomes apparent. It is this transgression of boundaries that reveals the power relationship between men and women. However, although in both cases the women spoke of their nurturing roles in the village, which may be seen as 'traditional' they were opposed all the same. It was not only a question of where they were stepping but also one of how they were doing it. The imbalance caused by this transgression prompted several men in the organizations to attempt to restore the order.

### *Maintaining an order*

The order was not static and did not just exist but was kept in place by dynamic processes and deliberate efforts. Just as gender relations were being challenged by the women's activism, there were also constant negotiations to maintain the *status quo*. In this section, I write about some of the ways by which this occurred.

#### Veiled(ing) confrontation

Although the women's forum evoked opposition among the men working with forest issues, for the most part, the resistance was veiled and indirect. Karl's opposition to the idea of the women's group was seen as positive since Karl chose to talk to and not only about the women. Karl made it clear that he did not believe in a women's group. On the other hand, his willingness to discuss this gave hope (at the time) for some kind of understanding of each other's positions. As some women said, 'It was good to have Karl in the association, whatever he may think ...one can at least talk to him.' It was better than apparent indifference and silent disapproval.

Similarly at SLU, there were some who believed that I had questioned their own actions in the village. They believed that my writing could jeopardize the forest project. However, they chose not to speak to me but to Karl who happened to be working with them in Uppsala at the time. It was when I insisted on speaking to them about the hidden tensions that we became able to talk about their apprehensions and their critique of my work. One reason for this, I believe, was the apprehension of being regarded as contravening 'gender' (discussed further in the section on outsiders). Veiled confrontation might seem like a contradiction in terms but there was a sense of conflict or tension about the organizing around the

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<sup>100</sup> Building on the work of several authors in a South Asian context, Agarwal (2000:302) writes about how male perceptions of women's appropriate roles, both in the village and among government officials, often is at variance with women's real abilities and serves as a constraint to the inclusion of women in community forestry groups and in my view, to limit women's action.

inquiry in the village that was veiled because the underlying reasons were not discussed. (*e.g.* in general it was considered good to have networks, but not in this case or at the university, there were discussions about “what research was for?” or “the point of this kind of research that divides people”). Unlike Karl, to talk about their dissatisfaction was also to admit the challenge posed by the women, to recognize the women and the group and the critique that the research presented. It was to recognize a position. But by choosing not to do so, there was an effort not to acknowledge that any gender question existed or that it did not count (or not in this case). One way the effort took shape was by trying to depoliticise the groups.

#### Depoliticising the groups

In much the same way, the challenge that the forum was seen to offer to the village association was met by attempts to depoliticize the group by making them out to be ‘different’. The men in the association initially sought to maintain order in the associational life of the village by choosing to regard the women’s forum (at least initially) as a group that had been formed for the purpose of interesting women in the regular associations. It was not regarded as comparable as an entity in itself to the other associations or organizations in the village. This is not all that dissimilar from Nayagarh where the women’s groups were seen as the space where women discussed women’s work, saved money and carried out income-generation activities and ‘got training.’

As a result of the initial critique by the women and others in the village, the association in Drevdagen sought to include more people in the forest project and one woman joined the forest group. During the course of their work, the association wanted to write a letter to the authorities about the forest issue. Although it was important that the letter got written the men in the association also felt that writing such an open letter might jeopardize their position in further dialogue with the various authorities. The chairperson then suggested that perhaps Kerstin, who had recently joined the forest group could write it. Better still, since she was a part of the women’s group, she could write it on behalf of the women in the village. This aroused the indignation of the women in the forum as they related the incident at the next meeting:

They have been very bad at talking to the village although they talk for the village. Kerstin is in the committee now but it is a struggle. They decided that she should write a letter to everyone about the forest<sup>101</sup>... But then it was hu and ha... And then they said...but maybe you can send it out from the women’s group....maybe...then it wouldn’t be so dangerous...

The women felt affronted by this. The assumption behind it seemed to be that the association was working for the main cause, for which the women’s group could make itself useful. Whether it would jeopardize the women’s chances for dialogue with authorities for their projects, or if the women even wanted to write

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<sup>101</sup> This included the authorities.

such a letter was not considered. It was not exactly how the women's group had envisaged themselves as partners in village development. The women's forum as a collectivity for itself was not respected and was sought to be de-politicised as far as work in the village was concerned. "The obverse of the refusal to image women as political actors is the bestowal on them of a social role" (Tharu and Niranjana 2001:520). By taking on the authorship of the letter, the women were expected to make a point for the village (or more precisely for the men in the forest project) and at the same time to rescue the men in the association from the embarrassment of making the statements that the letter contained. Women both in Nayagarh and Drevdagen were 'mobilised' to work for the activities of the associations and committees. But it did not mean that they were automatically a part of the decision-making.

Similarly, there was an assumption that just because there was a women's forum, all the women would necessarily act as one. There was a disagreement between some women who had joined the village association about a trip they were to make outside the village. The men scoffed at the women who had organized themselves together and yet could never get along (*hålla sams*). The assumption was that the presence of what they saw as a women's group meant that all women thought alike. Although the women in the forum resisted being seen as trying to represent all women, differences between them were seen as a sign of their weakness. The village association that was working with the forest project was marked by conflicts between the men. However, it was assumed that for the women to have differences of opinion was because women could not get along. The fact that the men disagreed on various issues was based on a difference of opinion on how the work was to be done. As one of the men said in an interview with another researcher when talking about disagreements in the village association about local management: "we don't really have the same vision about what it would lead to" (*vi har inte riktigt samma vision om vad det ska leda till*).

The resentment to the naming of an empty building, the 'house of dreams' by the women offers another example of how the forum was seen as political and how efforts were made to depoliticize it. Towards the end of the conversation that I cite in the beginning of this section, Karl said:

The name...house of dreams...how could you just name the place like that...

Sara: It was at the women's meet...we spoke about organizing a film evening, a coffee day, bingo for everyone in the village...the nurturing part...nurturing relationships in the village...(Det behövs också att ta fram) It also needs to be brought out. That is what we feel needs to be done...

Karl: The name...none of the men were part of it...

Sara: Because all the men were away for the moose hunt...and that was the theme we were working with...talking about our

dreams for the future and the village...and then we thought, let us christen this place where we are meeting

Karl: But you are painting the same picture as the men (*ni målar samma tavla*)

Sara: What does it matter what we women want to call it?...maybe all this is threatening for the men..

Karl: I am going to talk more locally about the forests...I don't have the energy to work outwards.

On the one hand, to be provoked by 'this small thing' as he himself admitted, revealed perhaps the perceived threat a women's group posed to the existing gender and power relations – the women had appropriated the right to define a specific place in the village. On the other hand, those who resented this also tried to show how the forum did not really matter by ignoring the name. Gender and power relations were sought to be maintained by denying the women the right to name a building in the village without going through the right channels, without the legitimacy that came from within an established system. At the same time, this resistance was illustrative of the threat that they felt that the women's forum represented. It was noteworthy how people in the village, both men and women when talking about the same place referred to it either as the 'old shop' or some of them as the 'house of dreams.' And this in part, explains the veiled shape that the resistance to the group and to the research took place.

#### A resort to tradition

Tradition was often seen as something that could come in the way of working together for local development, or it was blamed for the fact that women were treated differently from men. But it was also tradition that excused men from being individually responsible for an exercise of power that discriminated against others.

Karl: Nobody has said that the women cannot be part of the forest project or the village association (*att de inte kan vara med*)

Sara: But look at what happened to Kerstin when she tried to be a part of the forest group...the letter...There was resistance from the men all the time..

Karl: That is tradition. It isn't contempt (*förakt*) for women. And Walter...isn't all men.

Sara: But how many women and men dare to do that...to question established authority?

Karl: It is easier for us who come from outside.

Sara: Walter is not used to working democratically...Kerstin is already run over (*överkörd*)

Karl explained Walter's omissions and disregard for Kerstin within the association as tradition or culture that made some men behave in certain ways; that they did not mean purposively to marginalise women (although they did so nevertheless). References to tradition are double edged. While they may excuse an older man from behaving in a certain way, how is one to separate individual agency and tradition/culture. A resort to culture or tradition is often used to justify gender inequalities when biology is no longer a justification (*cf.* Kabeer, 1999:7). Walter did not mean to be insulting. He may be seen as enacting certain 'traditional' values but what is not expressed is his exercise of power. These were everyday practices expressed as tradition. "Conflicts are mistakenly characterized as between isolated individuals, when they are actually between richly enmeshed sets of interests and meanings" (Cuomo 1998:102). Karl may not have subscribed to them but by accepting them as tradition, he was in fact 'reinventing tradition' and reinforcing the maintenance of unequal relations. "Power is thus difficult to locate as it runs through notions and practices, can be enacted by individuals who may even be opposed to it, and is localized through its expression in everyday practices ...Individuals adopt discursive and embodied articulations of power that become readily accepted as cultural norms. In this way, power and inequalities become normative and thus often remain unchallenged" (Kothari 2002:144-145).

#### Opposing individual women by making them abnormal

One way that resistance expressed itself to the group in the village was by focussing on individual women. They were seen to be aggressive and not like other women. This can be seen in Nayagarh as well. Both in Nayagarh and in Drevdagen, it was not all women but those most active and vocal who were seen to be assuming too much importance. In Drevdagen, one man in the village association expressed it like this in an interview when he summed up his feeling about the inquiry:

Some of the women took too much place on the stage with what they wanted to do. It led so easily to too many words and talk (*det blev så lätt mycket ord och prat*) that was more or less unrealistic. We experienced that from some parts of the women who were active....Some persons got too much space because of that. That coloured it<sup>102</sup> too much...

As he saw it, the inquiry had created the space for some women who would not have that space otherwise or would have been restrained from being so vocal within the existing framework. Karin was one of the women who had also joined the association along with other women. According to her, some of the men in the association often called her instead of the chairwoman because they claimed that

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<sup>102</sup> The group.

the chairwoman had too many opinions and they did not know how to relate to her.

They felt that she was too strong, not like other women.

In BOJBP, it was the coordinator of the women's group who began to be seen as being aggressive and became a source of irritation. During my stay there, there were some meetings of the BOJBP. She often brought up women's issues at those meetings and at one of them refused to form a group of only women as suggested by the chairperson once the plenary was divided up into smaller groups. She felt that the women and the issues that the women wanted to take up then tended to get marginalized to just the working group of women and did not enter the main debate. An older man at the office complained to me that she did not always listen to them, or that she was trying to be too 'professional' and was not doing her work in a volunteer spirit.

She was seen to be trying to take over control. "A consistent argument of the men who control all the power centres of the world is that the oppressed who rebel want to exercise power" (Mies 1991:62). But it was a power that was unacceptable. The power that the men exercised, on the other hand, was regarded as of a different kind.

#### Shifting the arena

The men's exercise of power became apparent when a woman became the chairperson of the village association in Drevdagen. Some of the men who had previously led the association consciously tried to keep some women, especially the chairperson, out of the decision-making in the village. They organized meetings without her knowledge, invited other villagers and did not inform her, although as chairperson she should have been part of these interactions. Thus, although women came into the decision-making body, the arena for decision-making was shifted elsewhere.

The right to talk for the village came not simply from the arena or the office which is formally seen to have the trust of the people. That some of the men had the option to exercise agency not available to the woman who became the chairperson (despite her office) was not a random event. "While not all men choose to exploit this advantage - to exercise power - an individual's abstention does not make the advantage disappear. Neither men nor women can simply 'opt out' of gender's organizing framework,<sup>103</sup> although both can find ways of disrupting it" (Cooper, 1995:10).

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<sup>103</sup> Referring to Eisenstein (1988), Cooper writes about gender as an organizing principle interacting with other organizing principles, for example ethnicity, class that "although will be condensed differently according to the form or site in question, they are not recreated from scratch at each instance" (Cooper 1995:25).

It was the men in the association who had complained about the women not taking an interest in village meetings. But once some women did involve themselves and were active in trying to involve other women, the decision-making was shifted elsewhere. By organizing themselves the women in Drevdagen resisted being made into 'the problem, the recalcitrant category' (Bacchi 1996), a category that was passive and whose non-participation was irresponsible. Once they did involve themselves, those women were resisted all the more. The contradiction may be seen to reflect dominant relations of power (or "hegemonies") that are themselves "nothing but elastic alliances, involving dispersed and contradictory strategies for self-maintenance and reproduction" (Berlant and Warner 2000:317).

#### Not only women and not necessarily gender

It was important for the men in the forest project to show that the divisions lay not only along gender. The criticism made of the village association was positioned as personal politics in village conflicts. By trying to make the criticism a case of personal issues or coincidences the focus shifts from looking at the normative order to personal relationships or a series of coincidences.<sup>104</sup> I was told by Karl that there were actually men who were also opposed to the association's disregard for openness and that this was not a man-woman issue. This was an important reminder and, as Axel pointed out, there were also other cross-cutting categories such as age, length of stay in the village. Gender was not the only way in which power relations were organized in the village and not the only basis for exclusion. At the same time, gender was one axis and could not be disregarded. It was with the women's organizing as 'women' that this axis became evident. According to Eduards, by taking action separately and collectively, women challenge men's privilege of setting boundaries for gender/sex. That women take action together implies, therefore, not only that they reconstruct the category 'women' but that they also name men. Men are forced to position themselves as men and in relation to the construction of masculinity (2002:149). It thus becomes a reversal – from what men do and women are, to what women do and men are (*Ibid.*:150). Men were defined as having a sex, the onus of which normally lies on women.

The efforts made in maintaining the order – the veiled confrontation, the depoliticisation of the women's work, shifting the arena of decision-making and questioning gender - though small on their own, were instances which questioned the existence of the women's forum, although the women had made no claims to being an established group. They sought to have a forum where women could meet. The gender and power order in the village was thus not one that was maintained automatically but effort was invested in maintaining continuity just as there were attempts to bring about change. "Change is taken to be a mark of

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<sup>104</sup> In terms of party politics, Eduards writes, "One can easily conclude that men dominate politics, at the same time as the message that is conveyed is that they are there not because they are men. They stand for a combination of self-evident presence and total absence. Thus the question: men, do they exist?" (2002:106).

activity or endeavour, whereas continuity is not. Yet change and continuity depend on each other to demonstrate their effect” (Pringle 1997:81).

What might this imply for working with rural/local development? What were the assumptions about rural development that were meant to organize the work in the village and how were these maintained? By looking at the women’s organizing and trying to understand why it was resisted, it was possible to understand the ways in which gender and power relations constituted what was understood as local development and how these development initiatives, in turn, ordered gender and power relations.

### **Some organizing principles of rural development**

The opposition to the women’s forum made visible certain taken-for-granted principles of how to go about working with local development and the forests. By this I do not mean that these principles express how local development necessarily took place but that these were the norms that were meant to be followed and by which action was meant to be organized (or, in the words of Foucault, the discourses that were used to support power relations). As I show in the previous sections, processes were dynamic and continuously changing as there was a constant process of maintaining and changing gender and power relations. The point is to explore, “what were the most immediate, the most local relationships of power at work? How did they make possible these kinds of discourses<sup>105</sup> and how were these discourses used to support power relations?” (Foucault 1990:97). Expressed differently in the two case study sites and in less or more degree were assumptions about the way women are, about issues of interest for men and women, what work is important, the forums that are acceptable and effective, the correct space from where development can take place, the expectations of whom should be part of them, and that women and men were meant to collaborate on these projects within these arenas for the benefit of their community. These principles of rural development and management were further reinforced by development practitioners from outside. In the following section I examine them in detail.

#### *Women as passive or uninterested*

The reasons for women’s non-involvement in ‘neutral’ organizations and institutions are often explained by the fact that women are either too shy, too passive or not enterprising enough. In Drevdagen invitations were sometimes extended to big village meetings - which the women often refused.<sup>106</sup> The women in the village were encouraged to be more proactive. This notion of passive women is prevalent both in Sweden and in India, prevalent within development, in policies and in their implementation, despite extensive research on the presence of women’s networks and entrepreneurs in Sweden and the many rural women’s movements in India. In Drevdagen, individual women were seen as being strong

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<sup>105</sup> In this case, on gender and development.

<sup>106</sup> Reasons ranged from the irrelevance of questions addressed, the alien and intimidating forum, to the spokesmen being over committed (see chapter five).

and able. As Axel mentioned to me once when we spoke about the inquiry and my aim to have the women guide its course, “Yes you can’t run over them” meaning that they were particularly strong women. However, as a group, women can be regarded as passive. When I had first interviewed people in Drevdagen, both men and some women had explained the absence of women from the association by women’s passivity, lack of interest or lack of self-confidence. For example, one of the women who had returned to the village from a city and who was active in the village at that time had said:

Women here in the village are not so conscious of what is going on in the Drevdagen village association....Not very many women are active. Most of them are passive. They have lived here for a long time. Maybe it is a lack of self-confidence?

This understanding was also prevalent in the wider arena of rural development especially about women who had chosen to stay in the village and not travel outside, although very few women below sixty fit into that category in Drevdagen.<sup>107</sup> Towards the beginning of the inquiry, Sara had turned to the women’s resource centre for advice when forming their group. The advisor there suggested a course directed at increasing women’s their self-confidence. Sara herself saw no need for this but she related the conversation to the women who came to the next get-together. As I related in chapter six, no-one said anything about it and the discussion was dropped. I think some of the women were insulted by the insinuation that they would need such a course. Courses such as these are no doubt constructive attempts to help women overcome some of the problems. However, I also see them as efforts to accommodate women within the structures as they exist. Like all norms it was not only men that worked to keep them in place and not only women who disrupted them. There were also women who believed that women (other women) were passive and scared.

In my interviews with some of the BOJBP male members, several spoke of ‘educating the women’, ‘making them conscious’ and ‘empowered.’<sup>108</sup> Statements like ‘lack of women’s awareness on sanitation and childcare’, or ‘the decrease of interest by women in developing the community’, ‘ignorance of women’s rights’ recurred in BOJBP reports. Educating the women or giving them courses to enable them to enter into extant structures was thus a thread that ran through, in different ways, both in Sweden and in India. In development, analysis of women’s assumed deficits has prompted support for such interventions as tailoring classes, income generation schemes or support for individual women entrepreneurs. This has been critiqued and addressed in theory (for *e.g.* extensively in the GAD debate and also in Sweden) but not necessarily in practice in rural areas. Proposing a transformative “deconstruction” Fraser advocates an approach that would redress status subordination by deconstructing the symbolic oppositions that underlie

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<sup>107</sup> Many of the older women had also lived and worked in other places.

<sup>108</sup> Cleaver writes about depoliticising empowerment by making it individual. I take that up in the next chapter.

currently institutionalized patterns of cultural value. As she writes: “Far from simply raising the self-esteem of the misrecognized, it would destabilize existing status differentiations and change everyone’s status self-identity” (2003:75). It was the forming of the women’s group that brought questions of identity to the fore for both men and women. Men were identified as a group. It also became possible to ask, which women are passive? Who are these women in the village? And with reference to what are they passive? A corollary to ‘women as passive’ was then that women are different or interested in different issues than men.

*Women are interested in different issues?*

(A question not only of ‘what’ but ‘who’)

Many women in Drevdagen indeed felt that they had no interest in being there for the association’s meetings, as the issues addressed did not concern them. It was generally assumed in Nayagarh and Drevdagen that the women identified with some kind of questions in the village and the men with others. And although it was also true that many women wanted to take up issues that differed from those of forest management, it was not only a question of different issues taken up by men and women. This division of questions although valid for some was not a watertight boundary between the men and women involved in village activities.

Not attending association meetings was also a question of not having the space to take up issues other than those already on the agenda. It was not only a question of ‘what’ issues were being taken up but ‘who’ had the space to take them up. In some cases in face of the women’s critique, neglected issues like, for example, housing that some women had been arguing for, were now brought onto the agenda. But when some of these questions were taken on board, they were not always accompanied by the women who had been speaking for them. The question this raises is not only that of what was being said but of who said it. As Sara remarked about some association meetings:

If I happened to make a suggestion at the meeting in the association nobody said anything. About 15 minutes later, when Leo said the same thing, it was discussed with great enthusiasm.

This can be compared to Yvonne, whom I cited in chapter five, who claimed that she managed to get her ideas through in the association without ever going there but by getting her husband to take them up at the meetings.<sup>109</sup> In these cases, it was not the issues that mattered but the social position of the speaker.

Some women asserted that they were interested in other issues than the men. This may be seen as a strategy to maintain ‘difference’ at the level of the ‘issues’ without raising difference in terms of power and gender, in an attempt to open a

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<sup>109</sup> This can be compared at another level with BOJBP—needing to go through the men.

dialogue with the village association. This aspect recurs in the conversation between Sara and Karl that I cited earlier, where Sara said that the women needed their own forum because they were interested in different issues. In the long run, however, it also made it easier for the association to talk about the issues and not the asymmetries of gender and power that were often the crux of the matter (explained further in ‘the right forum’).

In Nayagarh the question of issues was sought to be solved by having a woman’s programme and women’s groups. Being a more gender-differentiated society there was more explicit talk about women’s work and men’s work. The women’s groups were meant to take up women’s issues. However, the groups that were most active took up a range of issues that seemed important to them just then. They were not specifically those that were considered women’s work, as the example of the road or the forest protection by the women in Hariharpur shows. The *mahila samitis* in some of the villages were playing an increasingly active role. As the women in Hariharpur pointed out to me: “what the men can’t do, the women have done.” On the one hand, as I write in chapter six, women derived their strength from their ‘gendered responsibilities’ (cf. Brú-Bistuer, 1996), but, on the other hand, these could also be used to justify unequal relations.

#### *A hierarchy of work*

By consistently trying to make work different and incomparable, the men working with the forest project continually recreated a hierarchy between the women and themselves where the women and their issues were subordinated. References to the ‘important issues’, the ‘larger question’, as compared to those taken up by the women, recurred often. One of the men in Drevdagen said after a meeting on the forests,<sup>110</sup> when speaking about the women’s criticism of the village association:

The forest is a men’s thing...it is okay to sit at the kitchen table and complain and air opinions but one must show commitment ...one must be prepared to work like we do...it is actually we who take on way too much...

Seema: But what about the cow-cooperative and the sports association...?

Yes, yes but I mean this, the bigger work

This was not all that different from the view expressed by the man from the *Mahasangha* in Nayagarh who believed that once the *Mahasangha* was stronger, it then could support the women in what they wanted to do. In other words, once the important work was done, the smaller questions could be dealt with. The men in the association and the *Mahasangha* had assumed and acknowledged the privilege of defining what was more or less important. This may be seen as a judgment made on the basis of the assumption that what men say and do in public

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<sup>110</sup> I write about this meeting in chapter six.

life is normal and right – and that they had the right to define what public village life looked like (*cf.* Eduards 2002). In this way, men were seen as the ones active and taking initiatives, while the women were 'passive', an opinion shared also by some of the women in Drevdagen.

In Nayagarh, in conversations and interviews the women articulated their identity as strong women who found their strength together in the groups and by working to bring about change in their villages. Although I had begun by asking them about their involvement in the movement for community forestry and in their forest committees, they turned the discussion to the work that they had been doing within their own groups. According to many women, they were carrying out important activities in the villages and these were never discussed in the larger forest forums. Women in some villages spoke of taking care of the village and the forests (*e.g.* planting fruit trees in the forest if they chanced upon the seeds when they were in the forests), which they did not have a chance to take up as part of the forest discussions. They had few opportunities to bring up their issues, but when it was possible they did so (*e.g.* as at the meeting at Katrajhari, Box 1).

That much of this work was looked upon as women's work and thus 'different' or not as important as the larger issues was clear for many men. I was constantly reminded of this. One such occasion was when I was in Chaddiapalli talking to the women in the *mahila samitis*. We had video-filmed our discussions and the women wanted to play the video back to see what they had said. The villagers finally located a small black and white television set that belonged to a young man in the village. He was a migrant worker in Andhra Pradesh and had been able to buy the television on one of his working trips. At that moment he was back in the village and he agreed to let us use his television. However, as about thirty women and some men crowded into his little hut, which was probably about 2 by 3 meters, he was perhaps not entirely pleased with the situation.

He was also confused by what I was doing there. Finally he came up to me: "Why exactly are you wasting your time on them? What would they know of anything important?" he asked rhetorically, waving at the women sitting around and all talking at the same time as they waited expectantly to see themselves on television. I was also a woman but, in our hierarchy, this was mitigated by class, the fact that I came from a university and had access to modern equipment like a film camera. And here I was talking to the women about what they wanted to do. The villages in Nayagarh were famous for their attempts to develop and manage community forestry and especially so among people working professionally with development activities. It was not uncommon for researchers and development workers to come and speak to the men about their movement. But for someone to speak to the women about their chores in the village was perhaps considered dull and not serious enough.

The reaction of the young man in Nayagarh, was in fact similar to some of the reactions that I encountered in Drevdagen (although in a very different setting and among people in a different gender/race/power relation to me). Now and then when I met some men in the village, they greeted me and said: "oh, so you are

here for the ladies' meet" (*dam träff*). Or as an older man in the village often asked me with a smile: "So what are you going to do when you grow up?" Like the man in Nayagarh perhaps he was referring to a time when I had finished with wasting my time on the women and got real employment and stopped studying. This had its counterpart at the university. I was the token 'gender' person. By working on gender, I felt forced to clarify or make a case (probably more than others) for why this was also an issue of local management, of community forestry and rural development and not merely a story about a group of women getting together to work and socialize.

### *The right forum*

It was considered self-evident that the BOJBP and the *Mahasangha* or the village committees were the right forums to deal with village questions. The BOJBP's reservations concerning a women's federation were based on the understanding of women's inability to deal with bigger issues because of social restrictions and because of 'the way women are'. In light of that they believed that the BOJBP or the *Mahasangha* was the right forum for the women as well. The women's groups were seen mainly as a tool to organize the women so that they could join the forest committees. Nevertheless, the fact that the women were beginning to organize themselves also made them interesting allies. The groups thus became a bone of contention between the BOJBP and the *Mahasangha* and further limited the space for women to take action themselves, as I discussed in chapter three.

Women both from the *kvinnoforum* and the *mahila samitis* were eventually expected to integrate themselves into the 'village' association or the *Mahasangha*/BOJBP. The understanding was that there existed already the structures into which 'women' needed to be brought. The support for women in Nayagarh to organize themselves in groups was mainly to help them come into the committees and federation for forest management. In some ways the associations in Drevdagen reflected a similar reaction concerning the importance of the right forums though expressed this view very differently. Since the norms of working with local development and management were based on the terms set by some of the men, they were in many ways thereby assuming responsibility to know what was best for the men and women in the village (despite what the women in the forum claimed). It was this assumption that was veiled behind the rhetoric of neutrality. As Karl as well as the other men stated several times in conversations, the association in Drevdagen, although dominated by some men at that time, was actually genderless and meant for both men and women. "Nobody has stopped the women from joining the association."

From this perspective the legitimacy of the 'neutral' and the right forums was so taken for granted that the formation of the women's group was experienced as puzzling and then actually threatening. A few months after our last get-together, I accompanied a class of masters students along with other faculty members from our department to Drevdagen for a study trip. Gustav and Karl spoke to the students about the school strike and the forest project and Sara was asked to say

something about the women's group. She chose to speak about the difficulties for women in working with rural development.

Men dominate associations. One doesn't get so much information either...Traditionally women were not involved in it but now there are women who want to be part of it. But we are excluded...it makes it difficult.

But Gustav brought this decision back to the women choosing to stay out of the village association.

The women have been outside the forest project...or to put it correctly local management. But local management includes everything...not just the forests...they have misunderstood it. Women...they draw back (*de ryggar tillbaka*). When Seema began to talk to the women, in my foolishness, I thought ...that now the women and men could work together. But it did not happen.

He shifted the question from that of women being part of defining rural development to women needing to join an association whose terms were already set. The burden of claiming to have different terms, for not being like men and for not wanting to join hands was placed on the women. The women wanting to work with local development from elsewhere was not considered an option by the men in the association as Karl's conversation with Sara illustrates. There were established ways of working for the village through the association and the correct way was to join them. Furthermore they were willing to take up the women's questions, but the women had misunderstood them.

When I first came to the village in Drevdagen and wanted to work with the women, I was told by the some men in the association that now perhaps the women will want to join the association; that they may get interested and stop being passive. The women's forum subsequently was seen as reneging on the idea of men and women working together for the village. The resistance revealed the taken-for-granted assumptions of how local development and management was to be reached. It was not through women organizing themselves in their own group. The forum was destabilising for the relationships on which gender and power relations in the village were premised. The association in Drevdagen that professed to work for the democratisation of forest management resisted the efforts of the women by trying to re-establish accepted relationships.

There is also an interesting discursive shift in Gustav's expression from the forest project to 'local management.' It reflects how the question had changed as a result of the women's views that the forests could not be seen in isolation. It might be seen as a cooption of the women's arguments or as neutralising their claims, but also alternatively as an opening of the space for defining the forests and management.

*Who joins whom?*

In the conversation between Sara and Karl cited above, Sara spoke about the importance of a women's group for themselves but importantly for village *gemenskap*, of arranging events together for the whole village. Karl insisted that the women needed to join the village. Besides, he pointed out:

But if the women are to meet together, the men (*gubbarna*) are not going to come to that.

But in response to Karl's statement that the men would not come to the women's meetings, Jan retorted by saying that the women might feel the same way, that they may feel that the association was irrelevant for them, that the women were being expected to do something that the men did not expect of themselves:

And then the women are going to say....I'm not going to get into this (*det här lägger jag inte mig i*)....and its back to the stove (*och det är tillbaka till spisen*).... if you continue to discuss only those things that you want to and in the ways you do.

In this particular case it was a question of issues and also of maintaining hierarchies. Karl made it clear that being part of a group run by women was not something on which the men in the village could be expected to spend their time. It was expected that the women would collaborate with the men but also that it was 'natural' that symmetrical behaviour could not be expected of men. The same demands could not be put on men. Which self-respecting man would join a women's group?<sup>111</sup> Here too it was the discursive neutrality that set the norm. The women were expected to join an association that was not called a men's association although it was in effect that.<sup>112</sup> Karl complained that the women were not being inclusive by forming a women's group. At the same time the men did not want to be included in what they saw as a women's forum. Moreover, by meeting in the forum all the women were expected to be in agreement with each other, as I point out in an earlier section. The asymmetry in what was expected of women as compared to men in the village became clear in that collaboration did not include the men joining the women, but meant that the women joined the men.

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<sup>111</sup> Not that exceptions do not exist. One exception was Sumoni Jhuria's tribal women's group in Orissa that I interviewed in 1993 (Arora-Jonsson 1995) and where the young men in the village said, partly in jest but also with seriousness that they would be happy to join the group if the women let them, since it was the women's group that was dynamic in the village.

<sup>112</sup> Maud Eduards (2002:154) cites Mary Spongberg (1997:26) and writes that despite the role that men play in politics, it is important to erase all allusions to them as sexed or gendered beings. Men's privileges should not be visible. One of the fundamental contradictions is thus 'that while the body politic may be male, in order for it to function, all vestiges of its maleness must be rendered invisible. The body politic must be both masculine and sexless at the same time.'

There was nothing in-between. It was the idea of a women's group that was offensive. It disturbed the normal order of relationships.

### *Collaboration*

As I have pointed out in the previous sections, there was an assumption among the men in the association and also in Nayagarh that the purpose of the women's groups was that eventually they would be brought into given structures. This notion of complementarity was strong in Drevdagen even among those of us working at SLU, as I will show further. Many interventions in rural areas that are aimed to benefit women take place in a situation where there is unease at disturbing the given order, an order that is presumed to be gender neutral and meant to serve everyone's interests.

In a conversation with me Karl acknowledged the role that the women played in actually getting the association going, a view that may seem quite close to that of many of the women. He said this in response to Sara's outburst at the meeting with the students. He attempted to show that men and women do in fact work well together. Didn't the women write up the agenda that the men had been talking about for so long? That was the normal way of working. He seemed to imply that by separating themselves the women were disconnecting themselves from power that was theirs to take. And herein lay the difference in understanding of the situation. Was it theirs to take? This understanding fails to take into account lived experiences that tied the women and men in the village in relationships of power.

Women's self-organizing in both places challenged the norms of how activities were meant to be managed and organized. The notion of complementarity was disturbed. Although the women chose to discuss everyday village activities, which the women in the village organized anyway, they were held to be doing it in the 'wrong' ways. The women's companionship or togetherness in the *kvinnoforum* in Drevdagen was seen to be directed against the men and especially against those in the association. For example, despite remonstrations to the contrary from Sara, in their conversation Karl was assuming that by having a women's network or forum, the women did not want to collaborate. He felt this way despite the fact that a woman had become the chairperson of the village association and that several women had joined other village projects. In principle or theoretically at least, women were not excluded from village associations. The men believed that if the women really wanted to collaborate, they would enter given structures. It was good to have women's networks but they needed to work out of existing organizations or preferably "organize themselves with the men" (Rönblom, 2002:158). But the question was, on whose terms? Were the terms negotiated? Did tradition not come in the way? It seemed as if collaboration was meant to take place in one direction only.

The women's development programme in Nayagarh on the other hand was meant to empower the women in the villages by eventually bringing them into the *Mahasangha* as individuals. In conversations some of the *Mahasangha* staff spoke warmly of including the women. They wanted to make sure that the husbands did

not just come and sign their female relatives' names on the attendance sheets or pay their membership fee for them. One of the men suggested that the women should instead sign with their thumb impression to guarantee that they had been there in person. But how this was to be done, or whether that is the way the women wanted to work, were not central to the discussion. Neither was it considered the women's concern to decide how the funds were spent.

One aim of the women's programme, as some men in the BOJBP and the *Mahasangha* saw it, was to be able to 'integrate' women into the *Mahasangha* and thereby make it more gender sensitive. As far as Oxfam was concerned the objective was similar. The Oxfam officer put it in this way:

My other objective was... again... supporting women's good organization and then to culminate it with the *Mahasangha*. I mean integrate real gender strategies into the *Mahasangha*. Because... *Mahasangha* independently ...I was not sure *Mahasangha* was in a position to take up two things at a time. One is organizing *Mahasangha* in itself ...self sustaining membership, structure...all those issues. And Nayagarh is not a very gender sensitive pocket for that matter.

The micro credit groups that were meant to form the basis of women's organizing actually did succeed in several villages. However, the fact that the women chose not only to be integrated in other committees but also to form their own federation, was again seen as circumventing the norms of development and of the organization of gender relations in the villages and of what they were expected to do. The groups were meant to strengthen women's position in order to come into the structures that mattered. Such strategies are important but they are not the only ones, and in some cases they may be limiting. The question that is often put in relation to women's groups is whether women's organizing gives them a voice in other forums. This is perhaps not a nuanced way of asking the question. Neither in Nayagarh nor in Drevdagen, could the women's organizing be ignored and it did not go unquestioned. Posing the question above does not take into account the active but not always overt resistance by the actors in the structures which they are supposed to join. The women's ability to raise their voice depends very much on the resistance to their organizing and the social context in which they organize.

Collaboration is important from the point of view of the position that many women find themselves. For example, Purushottam in the case of women's groups in Maharashtra in India has argued that flexible forms of organizing for women, for example, in networks is important to suit the situations in which they find themselves.<sup>113</sup> At the same time transfer of resources from the State is necessary and requires the formal accounting of funds; most resource transfers are contingent on the organization being legally registered. This explains the

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<sup>113</sup> I have discussed earlier how research also in Sweden looked at the important role that informal networking plays among the women in the countryside in Sweden.

concurrent need for women's informal groups to collaborate with formal organizations that can perform these functions (1998). But the question that the case in Nayagarh presents is what happens when channels close down for them if women's links to the formal structure are broken? Does this mean that women's groups have no direct recourse other than going through intermediaries?

A central problem for development practitioners has been to see that those not privileged are included in various initiatives. This was so both in Drevdagen and Nayagarh. Including women in the associations was one solution proposed in Drevdagen. Axel at SLU and Karl in the association spoke of the need to involve women as a question of democracy and also one of legitimacy. How could one speak of a local movement when many men and women remained outside of it? But the spokesmen, and the spaces to take up questions of local management, were already defined. The research with the women in Drevdagen was considered dangerous since it had opened the possibility of giving voice to differences (or causing divisions) that could jeopardize the larger question. The problem was that the women's organizing was a piece of the jigsaw that did not fit in.

I too had a role to play in this 'collaboration' which I was seen to have jeopardized by writing about the conflicts in the village. I now analyse the role played by outside development practitioners and myself as a researcher in defining the field and constructing what rural development, empowerment, or local management meant in the two places.

### **The other side of development: the outsiders**

During the course of my research, being mindful of the processes in the village made me cognizant of the need for an analysis of my own role as well as that of the other researchers and development practitioners involved in both places. I analyze our roles not only as a case of reflexivity but because the meaning of development or local management/community forestry is very much a definition that arises among all the actors involved in the process.

#### *Village politics in Drevdagen*

At one of the early get-togethers of the women's forum in Drevdagen, I arrived late in the evening in the village, having been delayed on the way. The women had started already and were in the midst of planning events in the village, including a film evening. Märta had a collection of several films taken over the years by her family in Drevdagen and the other women planned to complement this with films and photographs assembled from the others in the village. It was to be a called a nostalgic film evening. This exchange of ideas was interspersed with anecdotes about the village and stories about various attempts at working for the village over the years. The conversation turned to the plans for the forests and the villagers' lack of information on the project:

Britta: In the beginning we discussed the forest together but then things changed ...it became a man's club.

Sara: Axel and Niklas probably don't understand that they don't inform us or care about telling us anything.

This was not the first time that I had heard this statement from the women. In the quotation above, Axel and Niklas were the men from SLU and the 'they' were the men in the village association. It felt uncomfortable hearing this view expressed in the light of my own conversation with Niklas a few days earlier. He had said:

My role is to help people negotiate with more powerful people...I don't like village politics...I work with real questions. Not these issues.

The background to this conversation with Niklas was a draft of a paper that I had written on the basis of my initial interviews in the village. I had cited the women who were critical of the forest project because of this lack of information and because of the women's absence from discussions that were carried out in the name of the village. I had also written about the activities that many women were working on, which were of a more immediate nature and which had direct consequences for the village. This paper caused a great deal of discussion within the FTTP group at SLU. Some of them believed that by writing in this way I was endangering the process of community forestry or local management. They felt that by writing this I could cause potential divisions between the men and women in the village and make it difficult for them to work together. Besides this, they felt that the paper could be used by local politicians and others for their own purposes. The politicians could use it against the village association to thwart the association's leadership in the forest struggle:

Niklas: You bring out the problems but not the collaboration. Who is it helping? What is the real problem? They are going to start felling next month. What is the point of talking about these things?

But as I show earlier, the collaboration that was desired was based on the terms defined by the men. The reason that I have chosen to take up the story on the university side of the process is because it had a role to play in how my research as well as relationships in the village evolved following this episode (and ideas about community forestry and the positioning of women). The heated reaction to my paper from some men and a woman at the SLU was not necessarily the cause, but it did contribute to the strained atmosphere between the women's group and the village association as the men at SLU discussed my paper and the perspectives it had brought to light with men in the village association. The position of the university reinforced the notion for the men in the village that the critiques offered by the women were personal matters and not necessarily something that needed to be brought into the working of 'the real issue'.

I understood Axel and Niklas' apprehensions about engaging in 'village politics' but at the same time I was struck by the fact that, though seemingly unconsciously, that is what they were doing. In 2000 a researcher from SLU interviewed the people in the association on their work for local management, as part of an evaluation of SLU's support to the forest project (see chapter two). In response to a question about whether there was a clear division of roles between SLU and the village regarding the forest project, one of the interviewees answered:

Maybe it would have been needed in the sense that they should have been more neutral towards the others in the rest of the association, because now there has been a lot of "let's ask ... (him)...." I feel sometimes that they call and talk with me instead of the chairperson, which has both advantages and disadvantages. Sometimes it is better to be formal, at the same time as the informality is important for commitment (*engagemanget*).

Axel and Niklas spoke to the men in the village whom they believed were interested in the issues that they themselves were interested in, rather than to someone in the association who might not be. At the same time they took some of the men to be the representative of the village, gave them their support and by doing so engaged directly in village politics. By supporting the men in the formal structures, they were actually strengthening the *status quo* in the village in terms of gender relations. Their relations with the men in the village association also affected the relationships among the men in the village. Despite being a newcomer to the village, Karl was active in the association and especially in the forests, a role that had been difficult for most women to achieve. However, his position was nonetheless seen as that of an outsider and his importance in the forest project that arose partly from his relations to the outsiders was also challenged in the long run.

### *Dividing the village*

According to Niklas, by writing about what the SLU group felt was a few women's criticism of the village association and by speaking of the activities initiated by the women as women's projects, I could divide the men and women in the village. I was sceptical that an academic report would have this effect given the complex webs of gender relations in the village. However, perhaps by highlighting the differences that the women spoke about, my research may be reinforcing the differences. Making visible these relationships may not always be so desirable for the women concerned. As Cecile Jackson writes: "Silences speak and invisibility can be excellent camouflage." Niklas' argument was that bringing the differences into public discussion could jeopardize the forest issue. My concern was that perhaps I had jeopardized the women's chances to work with the issue in other ways?<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> At the same time, Axel and Niklas had also placed the women's chances in jeopardy by strengthening the position of the men in the association.

Shortly after my conversation with Niklas, I met Karl in the village who in the meantime had discussed this issue with my colleagues from SLU. At that point, he was not perturbed by the paper. In my opinion this was partly because from the beginning I had been sending reports from the interviews and meetings to the village, which he said he had read (the argument in the paper was not new and was in fact an English translation of the reports I had sent earlier), and probably also because he did not give such importance to an academic paper. However, in the months to come he became one of the vocal protesters of the idea of a women's group.

The view that the research would divide the men and women in the village came up once again in another interview conducted during the SLU evaluation:

One thing that I experienced personally was when Seema worked with the women's bit (*kvinnobiten*) here. A report was to be written and it was written in English but it was never translated. When I read it I was upset (*tog illa vid mig*) by the division that had been made, women's projects and men's projects. For example, the ski slope was labelled as a women's project, yes... it was the women's idea but it wasn't the women who cut the trees. I think it is fatal in a small village like this to begin to talk about women's projects and men's projects because it creates yet another division (*man delar byn en gång till*). The result was that people said, yes, yes they can have their women's project, instead of seeing the positive side to it. To call it specifically a women's project creates bad blood (*väcker mycket onda tankar*), damn feminist society. No-one talks of pub evenings as men's projects. To create such a situation in a little village is unsustainable. I think one destroyed more than what one got out of it, unconsciously.

Interviewer: Do you know how the women reacted to this?

They weren't as offended, they felt that – yes, yes but in the forest project as we know (*ju*) there are only you men who are part of it. But I have talked mostly to my friends, the men in the village and they were damn offended, them too, but said, "it is as usual."

Although Niklas and Karl felt that my study could divide the men and women in the village, they also underlined that men were also involved in the activities spearheaded by the women. It was clear that there were deep interdependencies between the men and women in the village without which living in the rural areas would be difficult. The fact that these relationships could also be conflictual was probably highlighted by of my research but even more so by the reactions to it of my colleagues. Their own part in village power relations became clearer to see as a result. Axel and Niklas, on the other hand, needed to see themselves as and believed that they were neutral outsiders working for 'the people' and for the

cause of local forest management, not only in Drevdagen but in the whole Swedish countryside. The relationships that I wrote about among the villagers were not new to the women and men in the village although they may not have conceptualised them in this particular way. My reports or papers became a source of discussion not when the people in the village had read them but when my colleagues at the university did so. As far as the paper was concerned, when I presented it to the women, several thought it was quite mild compared to what they thought and had said. It was our collective choice to continue with an inquiry and mine to continue with my research, which also meant that it would be written about and the discussions in the forum would eventually become public.

### *Collaboration revisited*

As I quoted Gustav as saying earlier, there was an assumption that by my working together with the women, they would be enabled to collaborate with the association and the forest project.<sup>115</sup> Axel said to me when we discussed another paper that I had written on the process, after the inquiry had concluded and I had started to write,

I would have needed help to make the forest project more open...to find ways to make it more participatory...

I appreciated the interdependencies between men and women and did believe that the women and men needed to work together and to acknowledge each other. I had begun my research with an idea of complementarity, in the sense that I believed that highlighting the problems that the women had might also enable a dialogue that would work towards overall development together, thus inscribing myself, as Haug would say, in dominant values. But during the researching process, by having the women rather than normative ideas of collaboration guide the process, I suppose I was also questioning the idea of complementarity and collaboration itself, or at least the terms on which these were supposed to be carried out. And in their view I was making our work irrelevant for the men or rather I was taking our activities out of their familiar field.

I was perhaps creating conflicts where on the surface there were none. Karl had said that nobody stopped women from joining the association. In a similar vein Niklas told me:

Nobody is complaining, so why are you bringing up all these conflicts.

Perhaps nobody was complaining publicly (as far as SLU knew) until I began to ask questions about local management and village development.<sup>116</sup> The questions

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<sup>115</sup> See for example Pini (2003) for a description of a similar situation in her research.

<sup>116</sup> Magnusson (2001:11) cites Marla Steinberg (1996) who writes about fairness accounting by default, that is, if nobody is complaining, then that is taken as a sign

had not been open for discussion. People may have been complaining but that was also accepted. "Power is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself" (Foucault 1990:86). The presence of a researcher from SLU asking questions thus created a space for people to be able to voice their feelings, thoughts and opinions. Local management became a topic that could be discussed. In light of this, the women's wish for a forum may be understood as a place 'to talk about issues that one cannot do elsewhere.'

The critique that I presented was taken personally rather than as a challenge to open up the topic for discussion in its particular context. Perhaps this was because the topic, 'local management of the forests' was already seen as given and considered accepted by the people working with the forest project both in the village and at the university. Questioning the given was taken instead as an instance of some disgruntled women who wanted to be included (*you must have just spoken to Märta*) and of a researcher intent upon imposing ideas about gender from the South on a Swedish context (*Gender is important...but it is not like that here. This is different*). There was also an unease that arose in the face of a critique that may be seen to derive from the discourse on gender and equality (for better and for worse), which has its own strange effects, as I discuss below.

#### *'Gender' trouble*

My telephone conversation with Niklas and the conversation that I had with Axel a week later, made me think more about my involvement in the process. Axel felt that my references to the activities spearheaded by the women and to the men in the village association gave the impression that all men had the potential to dominate. I seemed to group together all men in one category. He did not feel that way, believed in gender equality and considered himself a feminist. But at the same time he felt that it was not his task to interfere in how the villagers ran the association or the struggle for the forests from the village. In other words, he saw the SLU group as attempting to carry out a gender-neutral participatory approach that was non-intrusive. As Niklas pointed out, they had actually carried out a Participatory Rural Appraisal in the village in which both men and women had been involved (see chapter five). And rightly so, in conversations with many women who had been part of the PRA, they related that they had been happy with their involvement in the exercise and had looked forward to working with the issues that the PRA raised. But as Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari point out: "Although PRA seeks to reveal the realities of everyday life, paradoxically its public nature means that the more participatory it is, the more the power structure of the local community will be masked" (2001a:12). Because of the PRA, for a while everyone felt able to participate as men and women in their own right. What many women and men believed was a shift in power enabled by the outsiders was perhaps a one-time event. Instead the PRA may be seen to have contributed to building up relationships between the outsiders and some of the men in the village, that further confirmed the village men's authority.

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that the situation is fair. In Steinberg's study of Canadian couples, it was striking to see that it was only the men who used this argument and not the women.

It is true that by speaking about the ‘men in the association’, I was in one sense, ‘brushing all the men with one comb’ as Axel said. And he was right, as Karl himself pointed out in a discussion with me about my draft paper that it was not only the women who were dissatisfied with the association but in fact other men in the village were also concerned about the village association. The men in the forest project for their part had pointed out that the cause of dissatisfaction was not just a question of gender (see ‘not just gender’). Neither did all the men in the association see eye to eye on the running of the association. It is indeed important to recognize that the ‘men in the association’ were not all alike and that they mostly did not deliberately exclude women. Yet they all had the potential to do so by the very fact of their unquestioning assumptions about what was normal. Not because of the persons they were but because they commanded that space for agency (in varying degrees) in the association at that time which the women did not. They guarded and reinforced the norms for work on the forests and for development work in general by accepting and acting out these norms. These norms became visible when the women exercised agency by organizing themselves. Even the space that the men had in the association did not become wholly available to the woman who became the chairperson of the association. It was not the arena that conferred that space to the men but their persons (their embodied selves). Thus, even involving women in such a case could mean including some women into associations and projects where the structures were already defined and the norms for gender relations already set.<sup>117</sup>

There is a large amount of feminist literature theorising differences among women. Quite obviously differences among men are just as important in their shifting social/gender identities (*e.g.* Connell 2003). A parallel question then is how one can speak about ‘men’ and still acknowledge differences among them. As I saw it, it was the agency that it was possible for them to exercise because they were ‘men’ in this particular rural community that made them different from the women. Of course there were some women who also came into the association but precisely because they were ‘women.’ That men had access because their sex/gender was unquestioned. But for the women it was their sex/gender identity that was important. It may seem as a positive effect of the women’s organizing that some of the men in the association felt that there needed to be a woman as chairperson. This need was felt also after the first woman stepped down because she was being outmanoeuvred by some men. So, as I see it, the next woman who became the chairperson did so partly because of her sex, *i.e.* because she was a woman. But she was also very young and had moved back to the village (her

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<sup>117</sup> One should not write men but some men and not just women because it is some women – a problem that is both empirical and within feminist theory. The need to write men and to write women was because of what ‘men’ or ‘women’ could and could not do, just because they were ‘men’ and ‘women’. This is not to say that there were not other enabling and inhibiting social dimensions for these ‘men’ and ‘women’ but their sex and gender identities were an important part of them. Bacchi tries to resolve it by looking at how ‘men’ and ‘women’ are represented and thus in inverted commas, as categories.

childhood home) not long before she took that position. Did the visibility for 'women' (as a category) increase or decrease?<sup>118</sup>

Everything that Niklas and Axel did was of course liable to be questioned. Whether they acknowledged it or not, their work did result in inclusions for some and exclusions for others. I understood that it was considered to be in the best interests of the work, the cause, not to stir it up at all, not to interfere, preferably not to acknowledge that there might be 'problems.' Talking about gender and power would mean admitting that these relationships existed in this particular context and that one had to deal with them. In fact I was told by Niklas:

This is not like the third world...this is different. Gender is not the same thing here.

Gender relations are indeed not the same here as in other places as is further highlighted by the following section on Nayagarh. Fraser writes: "status hierarchy is illegitimate in modern society. The most basic principle of legitimacy in this society is liberal equality, as expressed both in market ideals, such as equal exchange, the career open to talents, and meritocratic competition, and in democratic ideals such as equal citizenship and status equality. Status hierarchy violates all these ideals. Far from being socially legitimate, it contravenes fundamental norms of market and democratic legitimacy" (2003:56).

This view was important in the context of Drevdagen in Sweden. The notion of gender could not be questioned because equality was the right thing. Furthermore the question of 'marginalisation' put the practitioners/activists in a difficult position, because we at the department saw ourselves as working with the people in the *glesbygd*, in what is the periphery, the margins of Swedish society. This meant a strong notion of struggling from below and at the same time, it perhaps conferred on us, those working with these issues, the position of being the "saviours of marginality" (Spivak 1990:226). Niklas and Axel were operating within this discourse in our work with community forestry and supporting 'local people'. When I began to speak about discrimination within this setting of the local, I took over that mantle. It could not be questioned so easily. I had virtue on my side. Women and men are supposed to be equal and everyone agrees on that. By pointing out that it may not be so I was probably expecting remedial action. They did not question me directly about my writing despite being upset about it but instead chose to discuss the issues raised with Karl. It was also potentially dangerous to acknowledge my 'gender' position? This inertia to deal with questions of gender may be likened to what has been termed 'white inertia' in feminist analysis in face of the problematic of race (*c.f.* Lewis and Mills 2003:7). This was a sort of male inertia, a fear of getting it wrong in relation to gender; it was considered more prudent simply to try and ignore it. Or rather a Gender

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<sup>118</sup> I see in this a correlation to the a group of social democrats who left the party in one municipality because they claimed that the leadership tried to replace them with younger women who were not as experienced and might not question party practices in the same way and yet fulfil the need for women to be appointed to official positions.

critique could not be challenged because it had the potential to reveal one's own privilege (and bias). Gender may be a 'development problem' and yet it is extremely personal at the same time. Implicit in Axel and Niklas' behaviour was a frustration that by admitting that the world is gendered and unequal, did that mean that they should not do anything? (I take this up in 'the practitioner's dilemma').

As an earlier quote illustrates, some women believed firmly that the men from SLU did not recognize how little the process was participatory. This view surfaced whenever the issue cropped up. It reveals the contradictory nature of development work and activism, even when beginning from the bottom-up. Axel said that they had expected the village men to involve the rest of the village, to open up the space to make the forest process more participatory. They spoke about it as the responsibility of the men in the village working with the forests.

However, by being upset about my research and discussing it with the men in the village, Axel and Niklas made the position of the women's group and their activities in the village more difficult. They felt that acknowledging differences or unequal relations in the village could jeopardize the impact that the village association might achieve *vis-à-vis* external entities like the state or the forest company. These were problems that were relegated to the realm of village politics. In doing so they diminished the importance of the critique from the women about the village association and the forest project for the men in the village. Gender relations between the men and the women within the village were thus as much the result of the village men's relations to the outsiders as they were of my relationship to the *kvinnoforum*. The vision of men and women working together in harmony with the forests came in the way of recognizing power relations that favoured some and excluded others in the village. I now turn to look at Nayagarh and discuss how some of the relationships between development practitioners and researchers and the villagers were articulated there on the question of 'gender'.

### *Outsiders in Nayagarh*

For this purpose I scrutinize a draft report on Oxfam's work in Orissa in which the BOJBP is dealt with extensively. The reason that I take up this particular report is because it was based on fieldwork conducted at approximately the same time as when I was there. It is a fairly comprehensive account of the activities of the BOJBP and of the *Mahasangha* and reflective of an important way of thinking about gender in development. The chapter on women in the report starts by looking at the structural inequalities in Orissa. This is emphasised in the beginning by the following story:

“For instance, Orissa is the only state in the country which disallows a woman from boarding a bus, if she be the first passenger when it starts in the morning. She would have to wait for a male to board the bus first, irrespective of the age of the male. Even a small child would do. If there are no males around, she simply cannot get on” (Mitra 1997:94).

The authors continue:

The above is just an instance of the silent, quiet suppression of women that takes place. It is a day-to-day phenomenon. What it points to is how extremely difficult it is to bring about gender equity in a social system where such inequities and attitudes are so deeply entrenched (*Ibid*).

The report is aimed at development agents (Oxfam to be more specific) and hence discusses their role in this change. The authors look at the structural problems faced by women and not necessarily at their agency. They did not, as I did, see the women's efforts to organize on their own as gathering self-assurance to act. The patriarchal nature of the society is emphasised and this lens is then used to examine the BOJBP. And true enough one does see the gender discrimination in the movement and in society, entrenched in day-to-day phenomena as the authors describe. The other side of the picture, that is, to see what the women are doing from day to day in order to work around this discrimination and how such work may be supported, is not given equal attention.<sup>119</sup> The women's non-attendance at *Mahasangha* meetings is attributed to the rivalry between the BOJBP and the *Mahasangha*. They write that the women's groups were being told by the coordinator not to attend the meetings of the forest federation. The reason could well have been this or, on the other hand, it could have been explained differently, as one woman put it to me: "they can't force us to come to their meetings." There is almost no mention of the work that the women's groups had been doing. In another book, a scholarly and meticulously researched history of the movement, acts of agency by women are hailed but are seen as one-time events. The reader is cautioned not to read too much into the fact that some of the women's groups had organized themselves although the authors do write that such acts do reflect the potential and an emerging trend of women's involvement in development activities in the area (Human and Pattanaik 2000:108).

Comparing my report with the draft report on Oxfam's work with community forestry, I was struck by how research could see these things so differently. I do not propose to have the right view but when I went looking for ways that women exercise agency, I found plenty of examples. I was struck by the optimism and the vision of the women and their confidence of having actually brought about changes in the forests and the community that, as I was reminded by more than one group in Nayagarh, 'the men had not been able to.' For the other researchers,

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<sup>119</sup> The authors do mention however, that they spoke mainly to the coordinator of the women's programme and some field organizers and it was difficult for them as two males to come in contact with the women. Yet they make rather far-reaching assumptions about the women's programme. It was not considered the women's programme but rather the BOJBP's since it was started by the BOJBP. In the words of Jackson, "It is a serious objection that in our attempts to recover women as subjects in social change we can, perversely, deny them subjectivity by representing them as passive recipients rather than active instigators of social change." (Jackson 316).

the women's efforts were seen as sporadic and informal and not necessarily as part of a long-term strategy. The dominant and recognizable norm of how to organize and bring about change did not really fit in with women's organizing. Their organizing did not take the shape in which 'development' could be recognized. The fact that the women were beginning to question how the programme was planned and how the money was being spent 'on them' without them having a say, was not taken up. What I saw was the women exercising some agency but the underlying assumption, expressed both in the report and in the book that I cite above is that the aim was for women to be integrated into the *Mahasangha*. This assumption was based on a well-founded apprehension that with the establishment of the women's groups, the women could be segregated and thus disregarded (I discuss this to some extent in the following section). The women themselves offered no one answer to this. The solutions they proposed were diverse just as much as the women were diverse. Some wanted their own federation in order to be able to influence the *Mahasangha*, others believed that it was important to be a part of the *Mahasangha*, while others still felt that the *Mahasangha* was not their concern. The women's attempts to form their own federation, or wanting to do so, is not mentioned in either of the two texts. Measures for gender equity and social justice are highlighted, but they are done so in a frame that is already set.

As far as my role in Nayagarh is concerned, there was little space for feedback from the people with whom I interacted since the research was carried out more conventionally. But there are some effects that I think can be pointed out. For one, I think by taking up the question of the *mahila samiti* I contributed to highlighting the issue of gender as did the report that I cite earlier although both did so in very different ways. However, my visit to Nayagarh also made me think that I may have played a part in heightening the contradictions between the BOJBP and the coordinator of the women's group. Towards the end of my stay, she had become quite critical of those "who always tried to decide over the women's groups" - the BOJBP and Oxfam and even the *Mahasangha* who wanted the women as "statues". Sensing that she had been vocal about this criticism to me, I was also told by some of the men in the BOJBP that they thought she was trying to be too professional and losing her volunteer spirit. Furthermore, when I sent them my fieldwork report after I returned to the university, I received a reply from the coordinator about an error in the report. I had written:

One thing that struck me during my stay in Kesharpur was that although the BOJBP was instrumental in helping to set up *mahila samiti* in several villages they seemed to have no *mahila samiti* in their own village. When I asked the BOJBP about this they laid the blame squarely on inefficient field organizers. They even blamed the present women's coordinator of treating all this as a job and not having a volunteer spirit. When I spoke to some of the others, the reasons did not seem so simple or look so clear. The coordinator said that there was a girl in the village who worked for an NGO in Bhubaneswar who had incited the women against the BOJBP and said that

the other NGO will support them. This broke up the group. One of the wives of the BOJBP men started another *samiti*. The *harijan* women had a *samiti* of their own but it got dissolved as they could not pay back the 'savings' money (Arora-Jonsson 1999b:14).

I was probably wrong in stating that there was no group in the village; what I meant was that there was no active women's group in the village, in the sense that there was no evidence of the women having used the group for their purposes beyond that of saving money. I had gone on to speculate if that was because of the strong presence of the male-dominated associations in the village. A letter from the coordinator of the women's groups, written in Hindi said that there was indeed a *mahila samiti* in the village. I had perhaps put her in an awkward situation and in some way contributed to the strained relations with the BOJBP. She had eventually resigned before the programme ended as she felt that she and the other staff members of the women's programme were being deliberately harassed by the BOJBP leadership (Interview cited in chapter three). Their complaints led to the closing down by Oxfam of the BOJBP's women's programme (see chapter 3 and next section). According to the Oxfam officer whom I interviewed later, the BOJBP also blamed the *Mahasangha* staffer who was helping me to organize my trips to the villages, for trying to create trouble by taking me to the Harjan sahi (the Dalit hamlet) where the women and men had complained (on video) about harassment by the other castes in Kesharpur. I was also struck by the fact that they said nothing about another part of my report where I had mistakenly assumed that the *Mahasangha* had moved their office because of disputes with the BOJBP, as another researcher had recorded. The *Mahasangha* in fact had moved out before the problems had started. It seems to me that this omission could have been an oversight but also that it was important for the BOJBP to present themselves as in control of the women's programme rather than to correct my understanding of the history of their disputes with the *Mahasangha*.

Thus even a comparatively short visit by an outside, apparently 'neutral' researcher contributed in many small ways to the gender and power relations in the Nayagarh context. Outsiders also contributed to constructing identities in different discursive contexts. In Drevdagen, for example, the school was always brought up by the older men in the association when they acted as representatives of the village. The people from SLU, who aimed to help them in their local resource management activities needed to hear these accounts of independent work by the villagers and of a history of collective action around the school that would make future collective action feasible. In fact the school strike was so much bound up as the identity of Drevdagen that several people who read my papers at the university wondered why I did not give much more information about the school. After all, it was through the portrayal of the school strike in the media that the outside world knew about Drevdagen. The reason that I had not given it prime space was because it was not taken up as a central issue by the women when I was there 'to speak to the women about their work'. Many on the contrary spoke of the burden of that identity in their daily interactions with the rest of the world around them. The context in which they spoke to me, apart from being villagers in

Drevdagen, was as 'women' in Drevdagen. This identity could conflict with the one presented to outsiders as a villager of Drevdagen. In the context of practitioners and researchers working on rural or local development, it was the 'stock of social capital' that was generated during the school strike that the village was seen to possess, that was important. The aim here is not to present different identities that are produced in different discursive contexts, but to show how we as researchers and development workers are complicit in their articulations.

### *Defining local management*

The issue here was how we all chose to define local management and ownership of the project for local management. The group from SLU had an agenda. They wanted to help people in their efforts to create local management of the forests. They were faced by forces aligned strongly against such efforts. As they saw it, broader discussion of participation and gender equity had the potential to disturb the already fragile nature of their efforts and to feed the resistance that they faced from the authorities and forest companies. An emphasis on gender relations challenged those efforts and their ownership of the ideal of working for the people. It had the potential of bringing up the question of whether it was 'local management of natural resources' that the whole village really wanted. On my part, it was also a question of stepping into someone else's territory whose boundaries were already defined. As Kristen in the FTTP/SLU group said to me: "We did not know that researchers were going to be involved in our project....Why don't you focus on looking at women's networks."

What I was doing was women's matters (with the women), what they were doing was working with the community (with the men). I was indulging in village politics and they were working with local management. Even if this were so, can these territories be separate? Once again it was a question of the bigger question as opposed to the smaller one. What I learnt from this experience was a lesson perhaps not so much applicable to development out there but for 'here', at the university: about how complicated a simple vision can be, the vested interests in the topics and areas already defined and in the theories already written. And about us, development practitioners and researchers who with the best of intentions try and shape development.

In India, my entry point for looking at the *mahila samiti* was initially through the BOJBP's women's development programme and there the role of the outside agencies was more obvious. The *mahila samiti* and the inability of Oxfam (with its commitment to gender equity) to support them despite wanting to do so, is another case where women's groups or questions could not be classed as self-evident in the definition of community forestry.

### The practitioner's dilemma

Speaking about the structural problems of gender, the Oxfam review cited earlier states:

The difficulty is compounded for agencies like Oxfam which has to work through the existing organizations like the CBO and NGOs,<sup>120</sup> meaning that beyond a point, it cannot really change the ways of the functioning or the thinking on a particular issue of the organization concerned. At best it can stop giving funds to it (Mitra 1997:94).

This was in fact what did take place and Oxfam preferred to close down the programme because of the disputes between the female staff and the male BOJBP staff (that I write about in chapter three). Thus, on the one hand, inequality is recognized and stressed and on the other, given Oxfam's mandate to work through CBOs/NGOs, these are recognized as the representative organizations of the community, albeit inequitable and chauvinistic. This problem recurs also in Drevdagen. Does it mean that the outsiders stop working with in such contexts or with such organizations? Or does it mean that gender inequality is recognized and that, there is greater reflexivity on the part of development workers to see how they might in fact be strengthening inequitable relationships (and strengthening unequal power relationships).

Even within Oxfam and in the report that pointed to the discrimination of women and the 'patriarchal nature of society', there was an acceptance of a framework that was given. The solution sought was to make existing structures equitable. This approach has its limitations. Agarwal (2001:1642) advocates 'bargaining' as a way to enhance women's participation and believes that women's bargaining power with the community would be enhanced if women had support from external agents such as NGOs and the State. But how this might be done in practice then becomes a crucial issue. In both the cases presented in this thesis the outside practitioners felt unable to use this possibility, although Oxfam did open the space for exploring this option to an extent, by insisting on a women's programme, but in both cases the outsiders' support to or involvement in the community was mediated by the 'formal' organizations. It was not considered possible to support the women independently. The way in which they tried to do so was by stressing the importance of including women.

The other people from SLU were practitioners and activists and wanted to support local forest management in Drevdagen. Kristen told me that my draft paper had prompted a discussion on research among them, on what it was for and the point it served. What was the point as Niklas said to me, of talking about these things when the forest company was going to start felling the following month and clear cut another area around the village. However recognition of domination did not mean that practitioners and activists should stop working but that they were aware of how they were working, of whose interests they were actually supporting and their own positions in the matrices of power. By treating these issues as irrelevant to the larger and important question or as merely personal (village politics) for this particular debate, power relations in motion block the building of non-normative ways of thinking about the issue. This does not mean that all norms

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<sup>120</sup> Community based organization and Non-governmental organization

are bad or that I am advocating a 'norm-less' existence. In a sense, norms are discursive practices and to study them is to investigate how they also may make room for domination, by looking at what may be said and what may not be said on a particular topic. The rhetoric of local management thus set the rules for radical political practice in such a way as to delegitimize the claims of the women.

Also, by turning the spotlight back on ourselves and our roles in the process the question of what research is for and also who is normally researched were brought into discussion. After having read this chapter as it has been presented so far, I discussed it with Axel who felt that being written about made him feel uneasy and he felt like an object of the research:

If an analysis of SLU's role has to be done, then I think absolutely that the gaze must be lifted so that the real SLU is taken into the analysis. Niklas and I were two odd figures within SLU and that is why without any real interests if one was to generalise. You and your supervisors represent the real and the traditional research world and you form a very interesting and important field of investigation for how research relates to village politics and the world that you research.

....The villagers can not distinguish between you, me, Niklas or your supervisors. We are all SLU. ...All your work has in the same way as mine had an effect on village dynamics and to do an analysis of SLU and SLU's role in the village, that mainly deals with two odd figures (Niklas and myself) feels wrong and uninteresting. The researcher as usual ends up outside of the analysis.

I wrote back to Axel,

As we discussed the other day, it does say something about that I who was actually employed by SLU all through was mainly 'Seema who has been spending time with the women' while you were 'Axel from SLU' (even though you were not formally employed by SLU all of the time). ...I was a younger, doctoral student, from India, and for the villagers far from one would imagine a representative for SLU to be and I did not use that position in the same way as you did. Actually, I can't say never. The main reason that I was able to do research was because I was from SLU.

As he pointed out, my research affected rural development and local management just as much as his work did in the village. Quite obviously, my involvement with the women affected the position of the *kvinnoforum* in the village and in particular of the women who were most active in it. Doing

'research' together with me affected their relations to others in the village. This is a point to which I return in the final chapter.

## Conclusion

This chapter examines how gender is constructed in the initiatives taken by the men and women in Drevdagen and Nayagarh. These included both the forest issues as well as the discussions about the women's groups within the communities. By choosing to organize, the women highlighted gendered differences in working on rural development. The differences lay not so much in the visions of local management and development but in how such visions were to be defined and carried out. For many women, opting not to join village organizations did not mean that they were not interested in forestry or village development. Rather, by looking at their everyday experiences in relation to the associations, it is possible to understand the actual choices available to them within these organizations. The inclusion of women in these organizations did not automatically mean challenging inequalities in existing norms and gender relations. On the contrary, by looking at the processes unfolding in the villages one may see that when the women did articulate a way of working with these issues, the organizations trying to bring about democratic change in the villages, hastened to take action to maintain the gendered *status quo*... (for the cause of local management).

One ideal picture of gender harmony was that men and women in both places would collaborate with each other for the good of the 'community.' How this was to be done differed in the two places but there was no doubt as to what were the right forms and structures for collaboration. It was through existing 'community' organizations that shaped relations on an assumption of gendered (male) subjectivities. The increasing bureaucratization of village development work and formal organizations meant that the women were required to accommodate themselves to existing norms and structures rather than that the structures would be changed to accommodate the women's subjective positions, needs and ideas. This concept of collaboration was reinforced by development workers from outside, often while they were trying to promote democracy and greater equality within decision-making. The disregard for everyday life in favour of working with formal forums, especially in small communities precludes an understanding of the agency exercised in everyday village life by those not included in the formal forums and of the dynamic power relations that shape the form of projects and programmes. In trying to understand informal and flexible forms in which the women chose to organize, an appreciation of the constraints in which the women act begins to emerge.

The interactions between development agents from outside and the villagers were particular and formed in their own contexts. However there were recurring questions. They demonstrated a meeting of people with different backgrounds, needs and partly overlapping interests and contradictions during the processes: expectations by SLU that the village association would take care of differences in

power while not recognizing how their own relationships impacted on village relations, the discourse of local management *versus* empirical inconveniences like gender relations and the inabilities of addressing them directly, especially in Nayagarh, the abstract and the concrete, the theory and the practicalities. Given these contradictions and complexities that characterize each context, what may be said about local resource management and development in the two places and what lessons may be drawn from that? In the next chapter, I try and make sense of some of the complexities of development and management in Drevdagen and Nayagarh and relate them to literature on collective action for resource management and development.



**PART V**  
**ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS**



## CHAPTER NINE

# Making sense of local management as rural development

### Introduction

In this chapter I try and make sense of local management as rural development and analyse what openings it may provide for the women and men in the countryside in light of the two case studies. Increasingly, women and men in Drevdagen as well as in Naygarh are being expected to take over responsibility for their own development and welfare. Self-help groups in India, citizen responsibility in Sweden are the leitmotiv of present day policies. The existence of the local development groups in Sweden and what are known as community based-organizations in the Indian context is significant for the rural areas of both countries. Instances of communities protecting forests in India have been recorded from the 1970s. Large areas of forests are at present being managed locally by communities living around the forests. The case of the forest protection movement in Nayagarh is one such example. Many such forest action groups are actively managing forests to which they have no legal rights. This is not quite the case in Sweden although the wish to have some measure of control over natural resources in the vicinity of where they live has been the concern of some village action groups as in Drevdagen. Researchers have positioned local development groups as filling the space between citizens and the municipal authorities and have drawn attention to the need to work with new forms of local democracy (Herlitz, 2002). Yet local management of natural resources has not been emphasized in the practice of or in the literature on rural and local development. As the instances of wanting to work with natural resources are increasing, what legitimacy do the groups have to deal with such issues and what is our frame for studying their efforts?

In the context of 'development' in the South, such groups and organizations have been the focus of considerable study. This focus on organizations of collective action is highly attractive to theorists, development policy makers and practitioners as they help to render legible 'community' and codify the translation of individual into collective endeavour. The visible often formal manifestations of association are attributed normative value (Cleaver, 2002: 39). In practice, despite the acknowledgement of their sometimes skewed composition, these organizations are taken as representative of the community by development agents and practitioners and also research (Guijt and Shah 1998). This has consequences on the gender and power relations in the particular contexts. I believe these organizations play an important role in disturbing the centralization of power as imagined by the bureaucratic systems and they are important for a 'local' development. I believe it is important at the same time to rigorously analyse the efforts by all those involved in shaping these organizations as much as it is

essential to affirm their importance. The affirmation of the local may also reinforce the discourse on the centre-periphery that may continue to maintain relations of domination.

Thus, in this chapter, I examine how the organizations for forest management in the case studies responded to outside demands in their organizing and how gender was negotiated in local development initiatives, not merely in the interactions within and among specific men and women, but in the meanings they give to their work in the village. The chapter ends by re-examining how policies for the Swedish countryside corresponded to village activity in Drevdagen.

### **Local groups and the power over development**

There is a tendency in development literature (dealing mainly with the countries in the South) to recognize the importance of the social and the 'informal' but nevertheless to concentrate on the analysis of the 'formal' (Cleaver 1998b:350). I realized quite soon after my initial field studies in Nayagarh that what was informal and not apparent in the formal organisations or associations and regular routines could often be ad hoc and subject to a particular context at a specific time. But at the same time it was intricately bound up with the so-called 'formal.' In projects and programmes in development driven from outside it may be possible to delineate the 'formal.' The informal, on the other hand, are those processes which may not find place in the formal organisations but determine how negotiations are done. In local efforts towards rural development or resource management, these differences slide into one another. Community efforts in themselves are often based on informal networking and on more or less formalised social relationships. Some relations become formalised in their contact with the outside world and individuals who form these relations tend to be taken as the voices of the community. In the context of Drevdagen and Nayagarh, it is this meaning of the formal that I espouse. In Drevdagen for instance, I have often referred to the village association as the formal or public arena, yet the success or failure of various projects was quite obviously not decided only there. It was not always easy to understand why activities and projects were taking the shape they did. One particular instance highlights this aspect. Drevdagen had received money to work with the forests and Axel had sent them a suggestion on how to proceed with local management that was based on discussions from a meeting in the association. Formally everything seemed feasible to work with the issue. However, there was no response from anyone in the village and no action from the association.

There was perhaps a conflict between the need to go ahead with the issue and on the other hand to negotiate relationships in the village. According to the women in the forum, it was these relationships that would make it possible to pursue issues that needed to be negotiated with those outside the village. Power over development lies not only with those who have authority within formal institutions (see for *e.g.* Cleaver 1998b; Cleaver 2002; Zwartveen 1998). In Drevdagen, the meanings of local management were produced both within the association, in the women's group and no doubt in many other settings. By paying attention to how

the women's group conceptualised community relations, I turn to look at how 'local management of forests,' a potential force for greater democracy in resource management, became a limiting discourse.

### **Local forest management: a limiting discourse?**

It became apparent from the interviews and during the course of the inquiry in Drevdagen that the village association was not considering forest management in the perspective of village life. The question was not one of what or what was not being discussed in the association, but also one of *how* it was being done. There were some aspects that came in the way.

#### *Mirroring bureaucratic structures*

The people working with the forest project in Drevdagen, from the university and the village, proposed new ways to work with resource management. Their ideas about local management in Drevdagen differed from the prevailing system of forest management and the organization of development in Sweden; at the same time it also acquired many characteristics (at the level of organization and method) of the system that it hoped to change. Their understanding differed in the belief that local explanations are superior to more general ones (although local management in general was considered good), that people are capable of managing their own environments and that dynamism for local development comes from the people in the communities concerned.

At the same time, they shared some of the values of the prevailing system. These included the wish for planned organization, the importance of policy and planning, the need for an organized leader, a belief in the structural division of the centre and periphery, the primacy of economic returns and a concept of universal subjectivity (or a universal concept of the human that was masculine). In other words, the theories differed but the methods and form became similar. There were dimensions of life and development that could not be talked about within this framework of rules that determined which statements were accepted as meaningful and true and what could and could not be said (*c.f.* Foucault 1990:12) – what was excluded in this case was the spiritual, emotional, the everyday and the non-economic. Based on this framework, the key issues or the bigger questions were defined. The women who chose not to insert themselves in this framework were seen as passive (*with low self-esteem*) and many of those who criticised it were seen as complainers (*it is as usual*) and some of those who tried to involve themselves or chose to organize outside of this framework were seen as aggressive or power hungry (*took too much place on the stage and not so organized*).

The village association along with Axel and Niklas were no doubt constrained by the demands from outside to conform to bureaucracies divided in sectors.<sup>121</sup> All

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<sup>121</sup> Despite increasing attempts and rhetoric for overall planning across sectors - *övergripande verksamhet*.

the different ways of living with the forest that the women often talked about was quite obviously not reflected in the daily routines of official forestry. For the people from SLU, the forests were their focus. They did not consider the rest of the village and its activities as a matter of concern for the issue that they sought to address, although they did believe that they needed to be for the men in the association. Their negotiating partners were government bodies and company authorities. This created and reinforced the distance of the association from the village. For many men and women in the village, who wanted to bring management to the local level, the forest project and the association began to mirror the bureaucratic norms that they sought to replace. The meetings about the forests (those that were in fact announced), were considered tedious, the social aspects and other village connections were excluded and the discussion became grounded in an increasingly complicated reference to the practices of the forest sector, especially when the association considered forming a company to enable the village to work with the forests.

In the case of the BOJBP in Nayagarh, there was a similar move towards bureaucratisation and several people complained of the NGOisation of the BOJBP. The movement had at one time centred on the activism by men, women and children from several castes. The inclusion of the everyday, the spiritual and the interlinking of development needs, was what proved to be the BOJBP's success in its early days. Although explicit references to gender or women did not figure in the reports until 1988 when outside funding became an important factor in their work, these issues were taken up as they walked from village to village.<sup>122</sup> Often it was the wives of these men who organized the women's *padayatras* and discussed women's situations as part and parcel of the environmental struggle. This happened, as I understand, not a result of any concerted effort on the part of the BOJBP but as a consequence of several women getting together and discussing their role in the cause of their communities. However, with the increasing formalisation of practices and routines, there began to be discontent with the organization. Over the years, the leaders were the same men and the membership that at one time had continued to grow phenomenally, became static. The BOJBP registered as an NGO, partly to be able to get support from foreign funders like Oxfam for various programmes, one of which was the women's development programme (though the initiative came from Oxfam). Eventually the number of young men in the organisation dropped and the organisation began to be identified with the handful of older men in the executive committee. The women's argument for taking up multiple issues that they saw as being interlinked was not only an attempt to have a wider perspective on the forests and to link them to everyday life. It was also a question of power relations, and of the definition of what constituted community forestry. It was a question of the meaning of *community* forestry.

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<sup>122</sup> As discussed in interviews with BOJBP functionaries and some women in 1993. I do not know if the interviewees said to me as a retrospective creation of their history but, for example, Hazari wrote about total development and women's uplift already in 1987.

The bureaucratisation of the village association in Drevdagen and of the BOJBP closed the space for the emergence and valuation of the different meanings that people ascribed to development, community and local management. Dominant ideas of those able to exercise power were taken as the community view by the outside development agents - who were also tied to the village in relationships of power. The differences at stake were perhaps not over the issue itself, that is, local management of forests, but the power relations involved – whose opinion (and definitions) were considered to be relevant. For the women, it was voiced as dissatisfaction in being represented by a structure that did not respect their stake nor give them voice about the issue. Not attending formal village meetings was one way to evade being bound by rules that did not favour them. Were they exercising agency?<sup>123</sup> Hence, how activities are linked to each other and the need to have a holistic approach are also a question of power. The women's discussions on *gemenskap* that I discuss in the next section, apart from making the village a pleasant home and fostering engagement and inclusion of the villagers was a way to show how power rested (latently) with the women and men themselves.

### *The centre-periphery divide*

The rhetoric of local management in the ways in which it was conceptualised tended to reproduce the centre-periphery discourse that I discuss in chapter 5. In some respects local management was a category that was valued as allowing local people to demand their rights from a centralized state. This fitted in well with some of the stories in the village about resisting central power. However, the discussion also got caught in a polarisation that made the centre and the periphery two unities, separated from one another. The social context from which the question arose thus began to be treated as an undifferentiated 'local.'

The hardening of this divide created what some of the men in the village association believed were unnecessary tensions in village – municipality relations. But it also put the women in a double bind. In several meetings the women spoke of how the older men had irritated (*retat upp*) the municipality, making it difficult for the women to work with bureaucrats at the municipality on other projects. Even with regard to the local management of forests, Karin felt that by working past the municipality, as the village association was doing, the forest project would make it difficult for the village in the long run. According to her: "local management should be discussed locally – with the *kommun*."

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<sup>123</sup> Cleaver (2002:52) writes: "...in drawing on ideas about the 'proper' role of women to justify their non-participation were they exercising agency or simply acquiescing to their structural gendered subordination, or both? Doubts among individuals about the merits of being included in development projects from the point of view of preserving individual freedom are common, suggesting a sophisticated analysis among people of the structural instruments of their subordination and a blindness among development agencies to this" (Long 1992; Scott 1985).

This is not to deny the importance of questioning centralized power but it can also make it difficult to talk about tensions that would come in the way of the larger struggle of the periphery and the centre. In each case this divide has to be made historically specific. Drevdagen's struggle with the authorities in the past, and their work with the forests was both supported and resisted by those in position to wield power. By focussing attention mainly on the centre-periphery divide, it is difficult to see the circulation of ideas, the agents of change in different places and how this discourse may limit further discussion. Due to the radical potential of the idea of 'local management', the people in the forest project did not have to defend or explain their position although nobody really knew what local management might imply for the village although there were repeated requests from the villagers to clarify what it meant in terms of concrete activities. Any questioning of *local* management had the potential to be considered conservative in light of the strong narratives of marginalisation and rebelliousness in the village. At the same time for the centre to exercise power there needs to be a category defined as the periphery or as Spivak notes, particular binary oppositions are the condition of possibility for centralization (1987). The discourse of local management may be seen to be complicit in this dichotomy although the aim was to make the 'local' a stronger category. Gender differences were something that could be seen as standing in the way of the changes for greater autonomy for the 'local.'

#### *Distancing of the issue from the place*

By arguing for an involvement by local communities in the management of the forests, the association in the village and the group from the university were hoping for a more equitable distribution of power and responsibility in management that would benefit the community. The question was framed as one of transferring increased rights and responsibilities from the State to the villagers. But the forms working with the issue began to take was within structures and practices, unfamiliar to the ways in which many men and women in the village experienced the forests. The issue became situated in a discourse of local forest management rather than one that responded directly to the experience of women and men in the village. The village wanted to create a living countryside; SLU wanted to support them in this by working with local management. Among other things they wanted to open up a space in policy for local initiatives in relation to resource management. Although the villagers were concerned with problems that affected their particular village, they were at the same time enthused by the thought of initiating change in the Swedish countryside. As one person interviewed during the SLU evaluation said:

I think SLU wants to see the pilot project on management above all, while we in the village want to see concrete things – a living *fäbod*, camping spot, you know, the practical things. What ... means will surely take ten years. That which is most important must happen sooner, although everything is interlinked (*Det som ligger närmast oss måste ske snabbare, fast allt går ändå hand i hand*). If you talk to the people in the

village, then you can get asked: if we do get local management, who is going to be responsible? Who will do it? Those questions are hard to answer, because I don't know either.

The person continued:

At the same time one doesn't want to let go of the management question because it is so exciting. It concerns the whole of the Swedish countryside, that is why it is important to work with it.

Here is expressed a tension that is not unusual when working purposively for social change. The question that arose from the village had the potential of bringing a change in policy. But in order for that to happen, the village needed to respond to factors outside of the village. Was local management then losing touch with the women, men and the place where it had briefly found a home? The quote above suggests that it was not the village that owned the question, although it was also exciting to work with it. The more the village association was drawn into the world of official politics, the university and questions of formal management, the more it meant differentiating their work with the forests from the place itself from which the questions arose.<sup>124</sup> Regulations are necessary for regulating social life and also 'function as conflict resolution mechanisms' (Habermas cited in Berglund, 186). But how can they be implemented without undermining social and community relations? And, moreover, in redressing gender inequalities?

Although limiting, the idea of local management was nonetheless diffuse enough as yet for men and power to fill it with alternative meanings. In the following sections I look in more detail at the meanings that the women gave to local management of the forests and village development in their discussions.

## Opening up a space

The discourse of local forest management became a limiting discourse especially for the women's groups in both places. The groups raised issues that called into question the definition of forests, the villages and community institutions and tried to open up the space for articulating community life differently. Conceptualisation of the self-managing village in Drevdagen and of what I term as the social forest and of *gemenskap* were discursive shifts: from what was perceived as the distant management of the forest and of the village association, from the emphasis on forests as an economic resource and as a provider of employment and from its bureaucratic structures.

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<sup>124</sup> Berglund cites a similar example of a development group that the more it was recognized as a (legitimate) legal entity by the municipal authorities and the more it proceeded to work with them, the more sectoral they became. Referring to Habermas, she writes that the lifeworlds were rationalised. In another example Rönnblom (1997) describes women's groups that were forced to organize themselves hierarchically to satisfy criteria to apply for support. They did so 'on paper' while at the same time continuing to work in informal ways.

The women's forum became a place to talk about or articulate the constructions of the forests and the village, which did not find place in the many village associations. The aim in the association was increased economic activity in the village and to provide employment. The women who came together to form the *kvinnoforum*, believed that other points of departure were also needed. They were in effect negotiating the frame in which the discourse on the forests was situated.

### *The self-managing village*

The women in Drevdagen argued for a more holistic approach to forest management by linking it to everyday village life.<sup>125</sup> They believed that linking these activities with each other was vital for the community. In interviews and group meetings, they spoke about the need to take up all issues along with the attempts to manage the forests locally. The running of the village shop, day care, old-age homes, animals were, according to them issues, which called for immediate attention. Many women that I interviewed felt that they needed to link these issues in a way that was cognizant of how they affected the lives of other people and projects in the village. In order to be able to work with the forests, they needed more young people in the villages, for which they needed to make sure that there was housing for them, a school for their children and childcare so that moving to the countryside would not have to mean that activities, especially for the women would become limited. Central to their efforts was the community in its relations to the forests and not the resource. In this sense, the local management of forests needed to be seen in a wider frame, which may also be encompassed by the rubric of rural livelihoods, or rural development. The women in the inquiry wanted to work to link up people, and stimulate information flows. One of the women active in the *kvinnoforum* defined her vision of local management:

We cannot merely speak of managing the forests. The whole village needs to take part to realize the larger vision (*den stora tanken*), the self-managing village.

In other words, a locally managed forest would be incongruous without a self-managed village where the villagers felt involved. In the same way, village activities could not be viewed without the forests, the material, physical environment that was a vital presence in village lives. The women spoke of the importance of different people doing things differently, in the forests and in the village, keeping each other informed and helping out when needed. Drevdagen is a village in Sweden known to the outside world for its solidarity in village issues. However, many women believed that there was little communication between the association, the spokespersons for the forests and the rest of the village. As they saw it, community forestry needed to be embedded in community life and all those rural development efforts that may seem unrelated at first sight.

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<sup>125</sup> Researchers in Sweden (Bull, 1995; Frånberg, 1996) and in India (Purushottaman, 1998) have stressed the holistic approach taken by women in their groups in the rural areas. What I also try to see in my cases is the circumstances that often prompt women to take such a stance.

Similarly in Nayagarh, the women's groups spoke of the importance of being able to discuss the activities that they were carrying out in the forest federation meetings and to be able to discuss their work in relation to the decisions about the forests.<sup>126</sup> They, as in Drevdagen disturbed the hierarchy of work, (the big and the small questions) even in the more gender differentiated activities (at least formally) in Nayagarh. They derived their activism from their 'gendered responsibilities' (c.f. Brú-Bistuer 1996:119) in their villages but also went on to challenge these. As the history of the *Bruksha O' Jeevar Bandhu Parishad* had shown in the past, it was the cohesive village decision making and the reaching out to all the villagers, both women and men, that enabled them take up the cause (although even there, the women were not formally involved). In both places, local management could not be separated from cohesive decision-making in the villages. To be able to manage the forests and work in the villages, the whole community needed to feel accountable for the forests and to be able to relate to them. And for that the terms and the agenda of the institutions for management needed to be negotiable and different ways of relating to the forests needed to be recognized.

### *The Social Forest*

There were many people who had moved to the Drevdagen for a special kind of life. The women in the inquiry who had done so, spoke about being able to be close to nature and to be able to bring up their children far from urban environments, which they felt were unhealthy. Many of those who had moved back had roots and relatives in the village. Others had moved in search of or to take up work opportunities in tourism. But whatever the reason, in most cases, it was often combined with a yearning to live in a special way, to be 'close to nature.' I was told by Cecilia:

Several families with children have moved back to the village because of the environment, the nature, the good environment for the children....and to be part of a *gemenskap*.

To be part of a community was important. As Linda, a single mother who was originally from the village said:

There is security in smaller villages...you know everyone...if anything were to go wrong.

Several researchers theorising the rural (e.g. Forsberg 1994; Myrdal 2001; Stenbacka 2001) as well as policy documents (e.g. *Skr.* 2001/02:173) discuss a change in the ways of understanding the Swedish countryside. They show for

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<sup>126</sup> It was also a practical issue. For example, Sarin, Singh, Sundar and Bhogal, (2003), writing about another part of Orissa, describe how women who patrolled the forests also used their time to collect various forest products, i.e. do other chores. For the men, in several cases it was found that when they took up protection responsibilities they looked upon these as separate tasks.

example that migration within the country has been prompted by other values beyond only the economic. The countryside is less a site of production and more answerable to needs that have to do with nature and a way of living. That way of life in Drevdagen is intrinsically linked to the forests – socially (and emotionally and spiritually) and economically (in incomes from tourism etc.) and politically (since the power to make decisions about the forests were important for community relationships). At one of our *kvinnoforum*'s get-togethers, some women felt that the men in the association looked at the forests with an 'economic gaze.' They spoke of many other ways of relating to the forests which found no place in the routines and practices of the project's work with the forests. One woman spoke of the need for her to get away to the forests and just be there for a day or two - not to hunt, not to fish but "to be there." Another spoke of how hugging trees and living in and spending time in the forests gave her the energy to continue with life down in the village. The forests were a sanctuary, a source of livelihoods, mushrooms and berries, for tourist activities and for socialising and for many other things. The women defined the forests as a social place among many others. Louise Fortmann and Calvin Nhira invoking Romm write about the social forest in terms of how people related to any woody biomass besides timber within the ambit of the forest (1992). I would like to expand the definition in a different way, as the women in the two case studies lived it, a 'social forest,' as an integral part of every day community life.

The women's wish to make space for these perspectives even within the straitjacket of 'projects' was not, as I see it a wish to romanticize the place, but to draw attention to the relational nature of the forests and the relationships to it among the men and women in the village. Economic benefits from the work with the forests were important but the ties to the forests were not only economic. The everyday social, spiritual, emotional and political dimensions of the forests were also important for them and could not be captured in economic terms. The nesting of the forests in other concerns was central to how the people chose to live their lives and one important reason for living there. The meanings that the women gave to village life and to development and to the forests ordered their social life and relationships. By organizing themselves in their own group, they tried to make a place for the expression of these dimensions as well as making space for themselves.

A definition of 'local management' and plans made by a small number of people (many of them from outside the village including government bodies) and likely to provide employment to some men, was limiting for other women and men who found it difficult to relate to something that was intended for the benefit of the village. "...both individual and collective action are likely to be shaped by both economically "rational" incentives *and* socially embedded motivations" (Cleaver 1998:358). Feeling isolated from the way in which the issue was handled precluded healthy relationships within the village and led to the estrangement of the villagers from the association.

The women in the inquiry process in Drevdagen spoke about how, in contrast to life in the cities, you did not just leave work and enter a different world – here it was the school, the community, home, your co-villagers were always there: there

was a certain ‘flatness’ (c.f. Nordin 2003) to their social space. That is why single-issue lives are probably more difficult here than in other places.

### *Gemenskap/community spirit*

The women in the *kvinnoforum* in Drevdagen believed that in this small village and fairly remote part of the country what was needed to keep the village alive was their *gemenskap*. They spent a lot of time talking about what they were going to do about stimulating *gemenskap*.

Sara: One must protect (*värna*) our *gemenskap*...In a way it is easier to do things here, it is easier to get people together, one is more anonymous in the towns.

She told us about the time that she had met someone from Örebro at the rural parliament (*landsbygdsriksdagen*):

He said that he was jealous of us who lived in the countryside and of this *gemenskap*.

Networks and local engagement is something that people often tend to equate with the rural areas, which are seen to compensate for the lack of service facilities in these places (e.g. Westholm, 2003:92). The women’s process in Drevdagen showed that these networks or sociality needed to be continuously and consciously created.<sup>127</sup> The many social events that they organized in the village and their other attempts to work within the village and encourage exchange among the villagers (the ski lift, pub evenings, Christmas markets, the cow cooperative, the Drevdagen stall at the Idre fair) may be seen as efforts to cultivate relations as the basis for cooperation. In fact even meeting within the inquiry group and forming the *kvinnoforum*, was in a sense an effort to foster this search for meaning and for community when most other practicalities of daily life discouraged one from living in such a place.<sup>128</sup> The need for activity was repeatedly emphasised in the interviews with the women and made amply clear in their photographs from the photovisioning exercise. “Identification with community is largely a function of social participation” (Cuba and Hummon 1993 cited in Vergunst 2003). At the same time, it was felt important to be recognized as different individuals. The women believed that it was important to start within the village to be able to work outside. Local management, although still diffuse and hazy for many at that time

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<sup>127</sup> For example in her thesis on people who had chosen to move to the countryside Susanne Stenbacka (2001:123) cites a woman who had moved to the countryside, who was disappointed that the natural contacts that one assumed existed in the countryside were not so natural as she expected.

<sup>128</sup> In their analysis of the role of communities in natural resource management, Baland and Platteau (1996:141) draw on lesson from experimental psychology to state essentially what the women in Drevdagen seem to be saying: that cooperation increases with communication and that decisions on co-operation are based not on reason but on emotion.

meant being able to make their dreams come true. It meant power to the people - both the women and the men. Since the women spoke about the community being the point of departure, constantly renewing relationships was fundamental.<sup>129</sup>

Working 'professionally' with the forests took people's activism and especially that of the women who did not feel involved in the project activities, further away from their lived experience. Taking account of people's experiences and of relations to the forests and the village opens up the space for working not merely with structures and agencies, but from people's subjectivities. A perspective that looks upon the forests as an economic resource commodifies the forests and obscures the social relations among the villagers and between the villagers and the forests that generated the value of the forests for them.

The women's forum's insistence on *gemenskap* as a building block for village activities and their insistence on open, informal forums within their own organizing was in reaction to what they felt was lacking in the common/joint forums in the village. It was perhaps also an effort to bring up issues together which were otherwise hierarchically organized in terms of importance and closely connected with certain groups in the village. For them, the question was not only one of moving decision-making from one place to another (from the centre to the periphery), but also for different ways of working. The attempts at local management implied a redistributive shift to the community. However for the women in the inquiry it was important to make decisions from lived realities. "...status differentiation is as important as redistribution" and questions of gender concerned questions of both redistribution and recognition (*cf* Fraser, 2003:45).<sup>130</sup> This differentiation became all the more apparent by the women's organizing and the resistance to it. The events in these places makes it important to shift/widen the development debate from the need to include women in existing organizations to also taking seriously their organizing as a valid and equal partner in development and crucially to understand the tensions and the contradictions between them.

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<sup>129</sup> This conceptualisation is akin to some of the vast literature on social capital. But I believe that the term *gemenskap* has a fluidity: the women used it somewhat differently in different contexts. It had a moral and ethical dimension to it wherein people were seen as individual subjects, in relation to each other, and as a collectivity where they related to each other while keeping in mind their own and others' needs and interests.

<sup>130</sup> For *e.g.* see Sarin, Singh, Sundar and Bhogal (18): For many poor women, community forest management only meant a shift in the *danda* (stick) from the hands of the forest guard to the local youth.

## Struggles over meanings

Feminists in South Asia have importantly argued for women's involvement in institutions for resource management and development. They claim that, in ignoring gender concerns, community forestry groups are in fact violating many of the conditions deemed by several scholars as necessary for building enduring institutions for managing common property resources (Agarwal 2001:1637). However, presence in formal arenas, even in a 'critical mass' (Agarwal, 1997), may be inadequate by itself without the explicit recognition of unequal gender and power relations within communities (Guijt and Shah 1998; Sarin 1998). For example, as the case in Drevdagen demonstrated, the question was not only one of "who should speak, but who will listen" (*cf.* Spivak, 1990:59). Presence alone did not guarantee that the women would be taken seriously or that they could take 'critical action' (Dahlerup, 1988). In several cases, the women both in Nayagarh and Drevdagen preferred not to waste their time on meetings and chose to try and influence decisions through their male relatives, a useful but not foolproof strategy and one that does not redress problems of 'status differentiation' (*cf.* Fraser, 2003). Besides that, neither women's nor men's interests are static implying a more dynamic analysis is necessary of how meaning is created in relationships. It is often assumed that inclusion of women is necessary to ensure efficiency and democracy, but there is less analysis of the dynamics of decision-making in the formal organizations and of how positions are negotiated and roles enforced outside the formalized structures (Cleaver 1998a:296) or even in deliberations in the meetings where consensus is sought to be reached (*cf.* Kohn, 2000).

Importantly, as the two cases indicate, attempts to include women within the formal organizations did not only mean that there was an effort to broaden the democratic base. These efforts may also be seen as a means to maintain the *status quo*. This ambiguity is linked to the question of whether the motivations to involve women in formal arenas makes a difference to how development takes place? Is involvement a democratising process or a symbolic act that gives legitimacy to the struggle? If it indeed is meant to be democratic, why are the forms of engagement so limited and designed in advance? Both in Nayagarh and Drevdagen, the men wanted the women to join them, as a support and a resource and even for reasons of equality, but they were less inclined to address the gender and power relations that gave rise to differences in the first place. Making a place for women did not mean that there was a willingness to change the structures or procedures for decision-making. At stake in both the places was not necessarily the issue itself, that is, wanting to manage the forests locally, but questions of whose visions of rural development the activities represented, on whose terms were they conducted, and who defined what was the community and the local.

The representation of village development activities and forest management can be seen as a 'struggle over meanings' (Peters 1984) and not just over the resource. It was easy for the forest project to discard ideas about open forums and *gemenskap* or a social forest as unrealistic in the 'real' work of the forest management. But this rejection also means paring the forests of its meanings and

emotions and of the ways in which it relates to other activities in the village – all the sense-making that ties people to the collective effort and to each other.

In Drevdagen and in Nayagarh, there was a tendency especially from the outside development practitioners to separate the women's groups and natural resource management into two different activities with different needs and roles that did not have much to do with each other. This could be seen, for example, in the suggestion that I should focus on women's networking and that the forest project did not have anything to do with it. Questions of interconnection and power were transformed into questions of discrete and separate categories instead of recognizing the importance of power in organizing the community. I argue that differences are intertwined and hierarchically organized. Disregard of the connections does not bring any insight into how people are excluded or choose to opt out of the formal spaces, and who by doing so affect the working of the formal groups and associations. I have shown in this thesis that formal structures and committees were only a small part of the complex web of networks that interacted to give form to development envisioned in Drevdagen and Nayagarh. A richer understanding of collective action is possible when analysed in its social and relational context and the local management of forests (or any other resource) in its connection with other activities. Local forest management is difficult to effect without tangible connections to overall local development and the social relations that constitute these activities.

The women's organizing was local development. Through their management of the village and their work to 'develop' the village, they were asserting that "environmental relations are social relations" (Jackson 1998:315). But what the women were doing was not considered local management. According to Eduards, not finding place for their claims and demands in a democracy based on apparently gender neutral ideas of legitimacy and merit, women in Sweden are choosing more to organize themselves outside of the formal democratic sphere (2002). She sees this as a space for women's political action outside of what is normally taken as politics. Writing about women's shelters in Sweden, she states that the "organizing poses the greatest challenge because it creates a concrete, women defined space for political action." (1997:165). A similar understanding has been propounded by Rönnblom (2002), who studies women's groups in the sparsely populated areas in their relations to the political establishment. Both see women's organizing as the space where women 'live and do politics in new places' in relation to the established democratic order.

There has so far been little discussion of the gender and politics of organizing at the level of the community in Sweden. To put it in the words of Foucault, the state can only operate on the basis of other, already existing power relations (*c.f.* Foucault 1990). The two case studies show that the alternative spaces created by women find their opposition not only to the formal democratic political order but in the politics of everyday village life and in relation to discussions informing local development and management. Yet the encounter is not simple: in their organizing in the villages women's groups were in some instances supported by

the political system that increased their influence *vis-à-vis* their communities and sometimes by the men in their communities in opposition to the political system.

### **Having, Loving and Being: policy and village activity in Drevdagen**

In the policies of both countries there has been a slow shift where participation of local people (to different degrees and in different forms) has been on the agenda in the larger context of political decentralisation. The claim-making of the villagers in Nayagarh and Drevdagen is thus based in part on needing to present themselves as 'the local community' just as the government authorities and development practitioners need 'local communities' to take over some responsibilities. Many groups for village development have emerged in the Swedish countryside to fill the "democratic deficit" (Herlitz 1999) at the local level. Many are working with rural development, in a myriad of ways and some are grappling with questions of resource management. What space do policies provide for mechanisms for dealing with the practicalities of each situation?

At present, rural development as a policy area does not have an independent existence in Sweden. Rural development initiatives may be seen to be divided up among initiatives taken within agricultural policy, regional policy, various European Union financed initiatives and projects being carried out in the countryside that are scattered under various authorities. Some efforts for the rural areas have been taken under the regional policy while others have been part of the European Union programmes and agricultural policy. The rural dimension has been toned down in the new regional policy but there are still several measures that focus on what may be called the rural areas - *glesbygder*, *landsbygder* (rural areas closer to bigger towns and not so sparsely populated), and the archipelago - within different policy areas (Westholm, 2003:25).

The formation of the *Glesbygdssverket* and the *Folkrörelserådet* was seen as making space for questions that did not fit into regional policies, though one could question the influence that these bodies have been able to exercise. Their formation was a result of a realization that the rural areas needed to be treated differently in policy (Lundqvist 1997). However, regional policy is based geographically on the *Lokala Arbetsmarknadsregioner*, the local labour market regions constructed around the *tätorter* (small towns) and the towns. As a result there has not been place for the rural area as a separate category (Westholm, 2003). Furthermore, the local labour markets can look very different for men and women.

Westholm (2003) suggests that while Swedish regional policy is toning down and partly rejecting the rural as a category, a new rural policy is growing via the agricultural policy. This may provide the opportunity for more nuanced policy outcomes that do not hide but in fact take advantage of the rural areas' specific development prerequisites. In his proposition to the government, he suggests the reorganization of the ministry of agriculture and the *Glesbygdsgsverket* into a

ministry of rural development and agriculture. He agrees that there is a strong and increased dependency between towns and the countryside and that one cannot speak of a separate rural economy, but he argues that specific characteristics of rural areas make it useful to treat them as a separate category, namely: physical qualities, sparsely populated structures, small scale businesses and volunteer work in local development. He suggests a new policy area, *landsbygspolitik*, a policy for rural areas.

It is the physical qualities such as the forests and the waters that some of the local development groups in the country have seen as a key to sustaining the countryside. My research in Drevdagen shows how issues of local mobilisation and local development are linked to the people's ability to exercise power over their environment. How would a rural policy aimed at the welfare and development of the rural areas relate to the policies on the environment?

Forest policy that for some time had one overriding goal of timber production has since 1993 accommodated environmental goals, but in the polarisation between environmental and forest production aims, the social aspects concerning local community livelihoods have not been taken into account.<sup>131</sup> The efforts of communities and individuals in the countryside to relate to the forests in different ways are not discussed. Environmental consideration is often assumed to encourage social considerations. The role of local communities is not mentioned in the policy framework nor the fact that the community is not a generic category with differences of power and gender. This was also evident in the speech made at SLU by the Minister of Forests. She spoke of the two major actors within forest policy – the forest industry and the state (Messing 2003). In this formulation, the presence of other actors is not mentioned or acknowledged.

Nature conservation policy, on the other hand, has made overtures to people in rural areas. The White Paper on environmental policy (*Skv.* 2001/02:173:5-6) states that there is a need to develop a dialogue with citizens and to develop forms of working for nature conservation. It states that the need and demand for participation in different processes is increasing in general in society and that this is also true for nature conservation. Thus, it stresses, nature conservation needs to develop ways of working which respond to the needs of local participation and to the need to anchor policies in local situations. The White Paper links the environment to sustainable development and argues the case for cross-sectoral collaboration in order to meet new development needs. It explicitly states that it is important that gender equality is taken into consideration and that women and men, the 'new Swedes' and 'the handicapped' are given the opportunity to take part on equal terms in these processes. It considers this important in the view of the fact that women and men can have partly different views on nature – and the cultural environment and how we should preserve, use and develop the

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<sup>131</sup> More recently the minister for environment and the minister for forests and infrastructure stressed at a conference the need for these areas to work in tandem and with regional policies, to support development initiatives such as nature tourism in order to contribute to the local economy (Messing 2004).

environment. The formulation is interesting in light of the case in Drevdagen. What was it that made working for the forests different for the women and men?

Views and needs are not neutral or benign. They rely on economic and political relations which produce it (Pringle 1997). In Drevdagen for instance, the women constructed their subject positions in their organizing. These positions were not a given just because they were women. In Nayagarh the struggle united several women's groups but not all groups were so active. In the cases both of Nayagarh and Drevdagen, it was their experience of being 'women' that brought them together (or women of the village) but this did not come merely from their social location of being women. Through their organizing and their discussions they positioned themselves as a women's group, a political position that was brought into play for brief periods and in response to particular situations, reflecting questions of power rather than a question of having a different view, based on their sex. The Swedish White Paper on nature conservation policy speaks about different views on nature and not difference in power relations and resources that was often the crux of the problems in each particular site. It also refers to new, innovative working forms for management and for the need of a well-developed dialogue in order to create mutual understanding between different interests and actors so as to lay the ground for trusting (*förtroendefullt*) collaboration and a feeling of shared responsibility to reach given goals. It states further that women and men should be given the possibility to participate on equal terms in these dialogues' and that it is desirable that people with foreign origin should be given the possibility to engage themselves (*engagera sig*) (Skr. 2001/02:173:32-33). As the policy states, the point is to find a common language and a common platform (*det gäller att hitta ett gemensamt språk och en gemensam plattform*).

We see that the discursive practices in Drevdagen find an echo here. There is a need for collaboration, for including those who fall out of the framework - the new Swedes, the handicapped. It is considered important to find a common language. Going back to several women's firm conviction in Drevdagen that men and women speak different languages, it thus becomes an interesting question of what language lays the framework, and on whose terms the collaboration shall take place? As Marcel Stoetzler and Nira Yuval-Davis note, conflicting interests and competing claims to truth are not always reconcilable, but at least the notion of dialogue shifts the discussion on to a terrain where standpoints can be argued about, rather than treated as givens (2002). In this way sexual identity need not be taken as a guarantor of the worth of knowledge. However putting these ideas into practice raises other issues:

Unfortunately creating a common language for communication poses many challenges. Establishing the conditions for non-coercive discourse is not an easy task...Even if a common language could be agreed upon, however, its meaning to different groups might still vary...It seems likely to us that for most issues concerning forest management among numerous and very diverse interest groups, the rational debate of the meaning of specific terms would never reach a final

conclusion. The common language of accommodation is probably a temporary fiction rather than an enduring fact in these cases. It is a way to explore differences among interest groups and understand them better, but does not eliminate problems associated with communication (Wollenberg, Anderson and Edmunds 2001:209).

Also, Margaret Kohn points out: "...language competence is not shared equally. Any consensus which brackets rather than engages this fact is likely to reproduce existing social and political inequalities. By appealing to the standards of rationality and reason, discursive democracy masks an irrational core at the heart of its project" (2000:417). Kohn argues that what is needed is another definition of politics, rooted in contestation, struggle and resistance. She believes that a purely discursive vision of politics has a tendency to reproduce the *status quo*. Empirical evidence indicates that political struggles that take place on the basis of deliberation are heavily weighted in favour of the elites (*Ibid.*). What is needed, she argues, is structural or institutional changes in the basis of power, and may even require strategically separate spaces - what Fraser calls 'subaltern counter-publics'. (I take up this discussion of what this may have meant in terms of the women's groups in the next chapter). For example Box 1 in chapter 3 is an illustration of such an argument. When the women were able to speak it is a moot question whether or not they were really heard, as the experiences of the women in Drevdagen showed. They were theoretically free to attend meetings and free to speak out but this did not mean that they could necessarily influence what happened at the meetings through speaking. Nevertheless, for the women of Abhimanpur, being at the Katrajhari meeting and being able to speak out was felt to be important. It gave legitimacy to their cause and in this case their legitimacy to speak out was facilitated by the formality of the meeting form and the space that they were able to make for themselves within it.

The White Paper on environmental policy speaks of cross-sectoral collaboration to meet new development needs and the need to link the environment to sustainable development. It stresses the strong links between regional policy and environment and nature that has developed within the E.U. but also nationally (Skr. 2001/02:173:6). Theoretically, cross-sectoral collaboration might provide the space to envision a forest that is not only resource based but also social. However while rural policy is being debated (and is the subject of current inquiries) regional policies are based on the local labour market regions guided by the growth agreements for each region. Their basis may be seen as based on economic considerations as compared to the aim of a lot of community activity (see Herlitz 1998). The market is an important component of the notion of growth; it is supposed to make possible the aims of welfare society and lead to sustainable development (*c.f.* Prop. 2001). Decentralization is meant to take place within this framework. Decentralization implies a shift of responsibility downwards in a hierarchy and/or the spreading of responsibility geographically. However, according to some researchers, decentralization is also used by economists to describe a transfer of decisions from the state to the market, and even to describe the case where the economic sphere becomes the dominant sphere for decision-

making (Andersson cited in Berglund 1998:80). It is against this background that “gender equality, often meaning the inclusion of women, has in Swedish regional policy been presented as a way of solving regional problems” (Hudson and Rönnblom 2003:16).

### *‘Rural’ equalities*

The Swedish State’s overarching policy on gender equality stipulates that it is to be taken in account in all walks of life. However, according to research, there is little consideration of issues of equality between men and women in the growth agreements and in discussion of the forms in which partnership is to be achieved (Scholten 2003). The cornerstone of Swedish equality measures has been women’s incorporation in the market and their economic independence: these are seen as leading towards liberty and equality (Hobson 2000). As is probably quite clear by now, an urban or rural context have a bearing on how gender relations are negotiated. Especially in the rural areas, the public sector had been the main employer of women, but with the retrenchment of the welfare state this opportunity is disappearing. Other measures to ensure equality between men and women in the countryside have taken the form of supporting women’s entrepreneurship (see chapter three). The attempts by the women in Drevdagen to strengthen community cohesion, their concern for childcare, old age homes and community spirit, lie outside the concern of the market and are not regarded as political measures or as important as the ‘larger questions.’ In an interview with Hanna (a woman in the village who was not a part of the women’s group) she said:

I would like to work in the school ...It is better to work with other’s children...But for a while the conservatives (*moderaterna*) saw to it that one got a subsidy (*vårdbidrag*) if you were at home and looked after your children...that the work we do...being at home was not undervalued upon but rewarded (*inte nervärderades - belönades*)...but one must work for one’s economy.

Seema: Yes...on the one hand it could raise the status of care taking but support like that, don’t you think it could also have the effect that it is mainly women who would end up being at home and get locked into that role?

Hanna’s answer to my question shows some of the contradictions between policy or theory and practice:

Hanna: Is it better to be at home and look after your children or work in a low paid and uncertain employment in the nearby town?

She did not see the family as a site of oppression. It was where she had space for agency as compared to the other alternatives available. The existing division of

work, more so than in the cities (because of the structures of the formal market) and the different stakes that men and women had, were not taken into account in dominant notions of how equality is to be achieved. Hanna's wanting to be at home and to get paid for what so far has been unpaid labour in the home, has the potential of trapping her in a caring role that is not given the same importance as employment outside the home. On the other hand, it also gave her greater freedom over her time and the work compared to that she would have when working in the nearby town. Compared to women and men in cities, she had to travel long distances to work and nor was she assured of care for her children as an employed woman in the city might be. The women in Drevdagen spoke of being able to live close to nature, to be part of a community, to be able to decide (to some extent) what work to do, to be close to the children during the day by not having to separate working life from life at home, as valuable freedoms which they did not have in other places. Yet these were freedoms that they had not always achieved. These positions were not without problems as many women did recognize in their conversations about the home-bound women of the past and from femininities that they distanced themselves (see chapter seven). As Rosemary Pringle says: "There is a need to respond more flexibly at the level of what women are actually concerned about, to recognize their more varied political subjectivities and to open up a wide variety of possible interventions" (1997:76).

There thus seems to be a contradiction between policy and Drevdagen praxis. Increasing commercialisation within society has accompanied the rhetoric of growth in development discourse. The changes taking place are creating mounting pressures on women and men in local communities as they negotiate between trying to make their activities profitable, and at the same time maintaining social relations important for the survival of their communities. Women are caught up in this contradiction in particular ways. Support for women's entrepreneurship is what Fraser would call a redistributive redress. But gender is also a status differentiation. Gender inequality thus bears the injustices of recognition and is not merely a 'superstructural' phenomenon (2003:20-21). Furthermore social relations and trust, seen as fundamental for village development by the women's forum are not assigned that same kind of priority and privilege as economic growth and development (redistribution?) despite the fact that local management and participation was promoted as necessary to attain social equality and democracy. "Social relations...are seen ultimately to serve the ends of economic development. Such perceptions allow little place for psychological motivations, for the needs of individuals for recognition, respect or purpose, which may be independent of other material benefits" (Cleaver 2002:48). The informal and voluntary nature of many women's organizing and their lack of clear economic and political objectives makes them appear as valid partners in rural development (Bock 1999). The inability of state organs and external funders to meet women or others not organized in a particular way (through formal male-dominated channels) was obvious in both the cases, especially in the case of Nayagarh.

According to Allardt, welfare in Sweden has been defined by policy largely in relation to the 'objective' material conditions of their lives. Allardt, who was part of a study of Nordic welfare states in the 1970s felt the need to expand on this

concept of welfare. He argued that in addition to the importance of *Having*, i.e. the standard of living, there was a need to take into account *Loving* (*gemenskapsrelationer* - community relationships), and *Being* defined as, the opposite of alienation, of being a person in one's own right (or in the terms of the women in Drevdagen also to organize and be recognized). There was a need to study not only the objective but also the subjective welfare in the form of experiences of happiness and feelings of dissatisfaction (1975:7).

Policy has tried to respond to needs in terms of having or standard of living, but the issues identified by the women in Drevdagen as loving (*gemenskapsrelationer*) and being (of being able to be who they are, of being able to act) do not find place either in village politics or national policy so easily. Policy has so far provided little space to negotiate the meanings of development, the forests and management in each context, partly because public participation in these issues has not been on the agenda. Development encompasses different processes taking shape in its different contexts. It also means that it is taking place in a gendered terrain and power/rights to the people or even local means little if it does take into account gendered differences in each context; especially in the context of resource management - since much of what is at the centre of the debates has been long been identified with a masculine ideal- the male forester, the male fisherman, the male hunter. Otherwise, one may be tempted to ask if local management is an ideology whose time has come for men but not for women?

## CHAPTER TEN

### **‘Women are like boats’: discourse, policy and collective action**

#### **Introduction**

During my visit to the village of Hariharpur in Nayagarh, the women in the *mahila samiti* complained that the men from their village were always going out on visits and training. The women rarely had such opportunities. Kailash, a man from the *Mahasangha* who had accompanied me to Hariharpur asked them:

Would any of you agree to go to these meetings alone?

No, not alone but together.... in a group, said several women.

In a conversation one day later, Kailash held this to be one of the many reasons for women’s inferior status or lack of independence.

Women are like boats...they always like to go out together...when they will be able to go out alone, become educated and do things on their own, they will be independent....empowered....It will come.

Kailash was referring to the catamarans that went out to fish in the coastal waters of Orissa.<sup>132</sup> These small boats, sometimes no more than a plank, were often at the mercy of the vagaries of the sea. It was the company of the other boats that provided security in case of a mishap. The women in the *mahila samitis* whom we had spoken to, chose to ‘go out to sea’ together. Organizing in women’s groups, as Kailash pointed out, did not automatically or necessarily lead to personal change in the gender and power relations in their household or personal lives. Then again, in Nayagarh, it was their togetherness, which had proved to be their strength rather than a sign of their weakness. The women in the *mahila samitis* (like the men or more so than the men) derived their strength in numbers and from the moral support provided by other women. Yet Kailash spoke about an individual independence that they did not have. It was a problem with women or a women’s problem. But empowerment ‘would come’.... in the larger project of ‘modernizing society’ and greater progress.

A foil to Nayagarh is Drevdagen. The women were independent and autonomous in the sense that Kailash spoke about being empowered. They were able to act as individuals and had strong rights as citizens and as women. But

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<sup>132</sup> The coast was comparatively far from the plateau of Nayagarh. Many of the women might not have seen the coast and that again illustrated that women did not go out and that the men did.

organizing within a women's group seemed all the more difficult. The resistance to the existence of the women's forum was expressed strongly by some men in the village association in Drevdagen, despite the fact that the women were not as vocal in taking up questions of power as compared to the women in Nayagarh. Given that in absolute terms the women in Drevdagen were far better off in relation to health care, wealth, availability of food, choice to work and to marry and in geographical mobility, that is in all those factors that are often used to explain women's lack of influence, how is one to analyse what appears to be similar difficulties for the women to organize in Drevdagen as in Nayagarh? The narrowing of space for women's agency in Drevdagen and the resistance to women's efforts in both cases is in part explained by how the groups were positioned within prevailing ideas of development and equality in their countries and how these discourses expressed themselves in the politics of the personal and the collective.

The arguments for and against the women's groups in Nayagarh and Drevdagen reflected discursive practices in their particular societies about gender equality and more importantly about accepted ways of practising equality. It may be tempting to associate individual autonomy with the West as compared to a more collective Indian context. However, I think we need to be careful in drawing such a conclusion (and look beyond). It is important for me to be able to understand collective action (and empowerment), not as reified in culture as Western/Swedish or Indian. Exploring the process and the rhetoric around the women's organizing in Nayagarh and Drevdagen presents interesting insights about the context of women's agency and empowerment as well as about the wider contexts in which they acted.

In order to study these processes side by side, I freeze the frames around them, *i.e.* I lift them out of their cultural context and study the underlying mechanisms of their organizing.<sup>133</sup> And yet by analysing the space they had for organizing themselves, that is, by comparing and contrasting the group processes, I look at them in their specific contexts *at that time*.<sup>134</sup> It is a snapshot of their relations to each other and to others in the village and beyond. A note of caution must be struck here. The context did not wholly determine women's organizing but rather the shape it took and the discursive constraints and opportunities that came their way, which they too were a part of upholding or challenging. In chapter eight, I wrote about the principles of rural development and gender that recurred in both places. Here I attempt to look at what made the organizing different.

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<sup>133</sup> By culture I mean systems of meanings and practices by which men and women make sense of their lives and the world around them.

<sup>134</sup> not in relation to how it was before or after though as I go on to show later, *time* is an important element in arguments for gender in/equality- in statements such as it is better now/statistics are getting worse etc. The indices of status for example contributed to a whole new angle to the debate on gender in India. The very concept of development is about time, a process towards something, a process going somewhere.

I start with a brief overview of how gender has been conceptualised by researchers as represented in policy and lay discourses in both countries. I look for possible explanations to understand the words and actions and for alternative explanations (other than coincidence, passive women, some strong men, traditional men) for patterns that are latent but not always easy to identify. The women's ability to act was determined to some extent by the power to name their difference in terms that distinguished them from the men as a group. They did this in various ways. I examine what space they had to do this in the two contexts by studying how the opposition to their organizing was expressed, by looking at the actions that the women chose to take, the public and the not so public and the language that they used to justify their coming together. In light of the discussion I then look at what constitutes empowerment for the women in the two places and some connections that emerge in doing so. The chapter ends with an analysis of how the women in their relationship with the formal organizations, the forest movement and the association in their villages, were both empowered but also marginalised.

### **The practices of equality: *jämställdhet* for individuals and empowerment for others**

Here I give an overview of how researchers have conceptualized dominant discourses on gender, equality and empowerment in Sweden and India. I do this in order to understand the wider frame for the women's activism and study how beliefs about on gender or equality were given meaning and formed in the practices of the women and men in Drevdagen and Nayagarh.

#### *Equality/Jämställdhet in Sweden*

Male dominance and the different treatment of women and men have become illegitimate in Sweden as a basic social principle. This can be seen in state policies and the wider discourses in society. The issue of gender or the organization of relationships of power has been approached as a question of equality between men and women and the avowed neutrality of the state, the market and social institutions through which equality is to be achieved (Eduards 1995; Gustafsson 1997; Magnusson 2001; Rönnblom 2002). Sex/gender equality in the late modern Scandinavian context make the position of a dominant male and subordinate female illegitimate (Søndergaard 2002:194). Discourses of the 'new fatherhood' and gender equality are culturally dominant today, regardless of actual practice (Magnusson 2001:3).

State policies have been important in framing discourses of gender and equality in Sweden. Policies set up guidelines for political rule and have been shown to have important implications for the ways in which political subjects think about themselves and about their relationships with others (*c.f.* Bacchi and Beasley

2002:331).<sup>135</sup> “Contemporary mainstream researchers, decision-makers and journalists often describe the transformation of Sweden following the introduction of general suffrage as having created a society which is both more egalitarian and more women-friendly than most others. Public policies aim at making it possible to achieve gender neutrality, defined as equal opportunities for women and men in the labour market, the family and political life” (Gustafsson 1997:42). Independent women’s groups, especially in the 1970s, were instrumental in shaping what in the Scandinavian context has been dubbed as ‘state feminism’ (c.f. Dahlerup 1987). In common perception, the state is seen as the main source of economic and moral support for gender equality through its welfare policies. The public sector is the largest labour market for women. Academics have shown that the infrastructure provided by the state has an important role in forming what they call the *könskontrakt*<sup>136</sup> (Forsberg 1997b).

Discrimination is practised in everyday life, but less overtly. Florin, for example, writes that the most usual practice is that women must always give ‘right of way’ for others and for ‘more important’ issues – the market, the state finances, religion - that are seen to come in conflict with gender equality (2004). My point here is not to speak of the discrepancy between the ideal and practice of gender equality but to show how, by making discrimination illegitimate, these discourses may also be used to create barriers to what one may or may not do.

One strand of feminist argument is that the emphasis on equality or equal worth, has shifted the attention from the real problem, that of the discrimination against women (Friberg 1989). The word for gender equality, *jämställdhet* that gained currency in the 1990s is considered problematic by several researchers. Rönnblom writes that a basic reason that the term may be seen as problematic, for example in official documents or in “the so-called equality plans”, is because a word symbolising a vision is used to name what happens to be a problem (2002:213). The term is infused with positive connotations, where the focus may be seen to be on the goals and the visions, without naming the group that is disadvantaged (Eduards 1995). This ‘consensus term’ (Tollin 2000) is used to discuss and explain (power) relations between women and men and is linked to democracy and justice. Since it symbolises a vision, there is a great deal of tolerance in how the term is interpreted in practice. To speak of injustice in society by linking power and gender becomes difficult when the official word available is a description of a political ideal and one that emphasizes harmonious interdependence. Thus a space is created within existing frameworks and norms where the rhetoric of equality obfuscates a reality where man is the norm (Rönnblom 2002:21; Tollin 2000).

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<sup>135</sup> There are of course differences in the implications and effects of policy. In India, for example, policies do not have the same effects in implementation as in Sweden. But then it differs from policy to policy in each country as well as the specific context for which it is meant.

<sup>136</sup> The term *könskontrakt* was first used in the Swedish context by Hirdman who built on Carole Pateman’s theory of sexual contract.

Political scientists have argued that the Swedish political order is an expression of a gendered power order and yet there is an assumption that decision-making is a gender-neutral activity (e.g. Dahlerup 1987; Eduards 1997; Gustafsson 1997). This gender-neutral image of the political in society is believed to legitimize the continued subordination of women (Gustafsson 1997:27). According to Eduards:

The problem that also is one of politics (*politiskt*)...There is a public discourse in Sweden about the welfare state's and equality policies' successes that has clear nationalistic undertones: we top the equality charts (*jämställdhetsligan*). These ideas are espoused both by politicians and researchers. The question is in what measure feminist social scientists and historians are allowed to point to the stability (*stabila drag*) and fissures in the development" (2002:122).

Analysing this notion of equality from a somewhat different angle, post-colonialist feminist writers in Sweden<sup>137</sup> illustrate how *jämställdhet* has been used as a marker in relation to immigrant populations to distinguish "us" from "them" and has been established as a basic part of the Swedish self-image, in relation to the rest of the world as well as to the immigrant populations" (Molina and Reyes 2002:306). In the view of Diana Mulinari and Anders Neergard Sweden has for long been characterised by a form of welfare state nationalism that is based on a 'we-pride' against a world outside that is chaotic, filled with conflict and irrational. They write that the image of the generous and tolerant Swedish identity has been weakened in the past 20 years in the context of the shrinking welfare state and through events like the Palme murder, the Göteborg fire and nazi murders that have acquired symbolic significance (2004:210). Against this background, they claim *jämställdhet* or gender equality between men and women as the only "successful cultural product" (de los Reyes, Molina and Mulinari 2002) that can be used as an ethnic marker against those who are created as "the other." I bring up this discussion here not because I show this to be the case in my work but because some aspects of this self-image were recreated in the discussions presented in this thesis. This image is exemplified in the quote from the white paper on gender equality (Skr. 1999/2000:24:6):

We in Sweden have come long way in an international comparison, in fact the furthest in the world. We are glad to share our experiences, we are glad to export our Swedish model for equality between men and women. But our first place should not lead us to believe that we are done. A lot is still left to do in many areas (cited by Rönnblom 2005).

*Jämställdhet* as a policy focuses on individual women and men, (Eduards 2002; Tollin 2000); the space it creates for equal individual endeavour is through institutions that are considered to be gender neutral. At the same time there is a

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<sup>137</sup> McEachrane and Faye (2001) discuss in their book, *Sverige and de andra* why post colonialism is a relevant concept in Sweden.

strong belief that Sweden has achieved a state of being equal or is 'on the way to' total equality (Florin and Bergqvist 2004:6) and in my view, a faith in the formal structures to achieve this.

### *Gender and empowerment in India*

The women's encounter with a discourse on 'gender' in Nayagarh came in the shape of programmes and agendas set for them by a combination of government policies, international aid agencies and NGOs. But 'gender' in the Indian context has also become an 'issue': a crisis, problem, scandal. Declining demographic indices and discrimination in all walks of life have led to a situation in which gender now figures as an 'issue' as well as a category of analysis (Sundar Rajan 1999:2-3). Government policies have served to identify women as a special group in much developmental activity. Not infrequently, this has been done in an attempt to win over women voters. Theoretically, legislation and policies for women provide spaces for negotiating rights and privileges according to a constitution in which equality is guaranteed for all men and women. Reservation for women's seats on municipal corporations and councils (*panchayats, zilla parishads*) were guaranteed by the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution.<sup>138</sup> In general, however, researchers show that adopting a 'pro-women' stance is largely limited to rhetoric, policy documents or enactment of a piece of legislation. The legislations have in-built loopholes, the policy documents remain inoperative and unoperationalized (Lingam 2002:316).

From viewing women as recipients and beneficiaries, the 6th Five Year Plan (1980-85) recognized women's roles as partners and as contributors to development. Development language has now taken a further turn, from a former attention on exploited workers, women are now viewed as efficient workers and economic subjects in the new legitimacy accorded to the market (Harriss-White 1999; John 1999:112). Nevertheless, policies and programmes for women still treat women as needy and the image of victimhood or incapacity persists. The help provided to women is often a particular kind of help (family planning programmes etc.) although there have also been unexpected exceptions. Women's empowerment programmes were introduced by the central state from the Sixth Plan onwards, with an emphasis on 'awareness raising' and 'mobilisation.' In several places this led to contradictory situations as women organized themselves against oppressive state organs. "This leads to a peculiar situation of the state sponsoring women's struggles against itself. This is like waking a sleeping giant" (Lingam 2002:317), demonstrated by the unrest and resulting unionization among women in several such programmes.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> A bill to reserve 33 per cent of the seats for women has in the past met with a lot of opposition. Whether the reservation is a solution to empower women or mere tokenism is being debated widely. The congress led coalition that assumed office after the May 2004 elections has included it in its Common Minimum Programme for the country but the debate continues.

<sup>139</sup> The support for empowerment programmes in India on the other hand may be understood if the state is viewed as a focus of power but also "as a set of arenas; a

The state is not the only major actor in the context of development. International donor agencies, NGOs, both national and international are important in shaping policies and development activities. Discussion of women's marginalisation from centres of power is widely discussed within development work, not least due to the large amount of development literature that has pointed in this direction and helped to create a space for 'women's issues'.<sup>140</sup> One outgrowth of the expansion of international feminist networks has been the possibility of feminist influence on where and how various forms of development aid are channelled. Gender sensitising programmes for building capacity to address gender issues among government officials and NGOs and 'empowerment training' are not uncommon (Ferree and Subramaniam 1999). Aid agencies in the North often demand a gender perspective or gender component to their programmes in the South. Although the validity and the effects vary, they often succeed in treating women as a special category (for better and for worse).<sup>141</sup> Empowerment through self-help groups or support for women's groups has often been interpreted in a simplistic manner and bureaucratized. On the whole there is an assumption of inequality and of an obvious male dominance that characterises much of the discussion on gender. Formal structures are evident for the absence of women and are not necessarily seen to be representing women as a group.

#### Mainstreaming

Mainstreaming, which has been adopted in both contexts, can be seen to work differently. "Gender mainstreaming was a way of marking the distance from a focus on women as a problem group – or from men's malevolence towards women, for that matter" (Mieke Verloo cited in Ds 2001). Mainstreaming implies taking into account the inherent gendering of the system but sometimes, in the process, women as a group have tended to disappear. Although, even in the development context, mainstreaming has led to the 'men at risk' debate (Baden and Goetz 1998), and been seen to erase the question of gender (Parpart, Connelly and Barriteau 2000), separate women's groups are still the important way that much of this work is being carried out. A similar argument has been made in the Swedish context. In a study of mainstreaming practices in a county of northern Sweden, the Katharina Tollin writes that, for those meant to mainstream gender equality there is little to indicate what mainstreaming might really mean in practice. In the quest to emphasize equality and equal opportunities, disadvantages

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by-product of political struggles whose coherence is as much established in discourse as in shifting and temporary connections" (Pringle and Watson 1990:229). Interestingly, in the government formed after the 2004 elections in India, Meira Kumar, the lone woman in the cabinet is the Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment. In a Cabinet in which all other portfolios are held by men, the lone woman is meant to take care of social justice and empowerment.

<sup>140</sup> At the same time priorities set in the international arena initiate seemingly contradictory processes in motion. Empowerment programmes for women, structural adjustment programmes for the economy and population control policies are all introduced in conjunction.

<sup>141</sup> See chapter three for the changing debate on development, women, gender and culture.

faced by women because of the system's male bias have been overlooked and power is pushed into the background. Mainstreaming may even be seen as an excuse to cut down on special efforts for women (2000).

I now examine how the threads of these arguments presented above turn up in the stories of the two places and contribute to a discussion of what empowerment might mean.

### **The power to name the difference**

The ways in which the women chose to express themselves about their involvement in the groups gives some interesting insights, not necessarily for a reflection of reality about the success or failure of their groups but for an understanding of the space they had to organize. I look at larger discourses of equality, neutrality, victimhood were given form by the women and the men in the two study sites and the ways in which the women took them in different directions and exercised power by making a space for themselves.

#### *A presumed identity*

Ideals about equality and the gender neutrality of common spaces were present in Drevdagen in several ways, in the women's own doubts about organizing separately and in the opposition expressed to it. In Drevdagen, it became apparent that the women saw themselves as autonomous but they also talked about male dominance in the countryside. They saw such dominance ingrained in much of the *föreningsliv* (associational life of Swedish villages) that was dominated by older men. However, none of the women thought of themselves as being personally disadvantaged, simply by being a woman. On the personal and individual level (*som individer*), they saw themselves as equals with men. In spite of this (or perhaps because of this), when it came to forming the women's group, there was a certain amount of tension especially in the initial stages (see chapter six). An identity as a member of a women's group was uncomfortable, at least in the beginning, as there already existed other 'neutral' committees in the village where formally both men and women could be involved.

These ideas on equality were exercised as self-restraint by the women on themselves (not to be seen as hysterical complainers if they felt that they were being excluded or discriminated), as an expression of self-respect for one's ability and individuality and they also explain in part the resistance that the women's forum encountered. The women themselves spoke of being strong women. Having to acknowledge discrimination was also in part to make a victim of oneself. It undermined their sense of agency to be seen as victims and thus speaking of discrimination at some level was felt to entail a diminishing of yourself (although this may sound unreasonable). As I show in chapter six, in justifying their group, the women chose consciously to build on their strengths rather than emphasize disadvantage. They considered themselves equal with the men. This did not mean that they did not see disadvantage but it often expressed itself differently for

different women and it was important to emphasize their differences. There was thus a tension, on the one hand, in acknowledging power relations while, on the other hand acknowledging discrimination could imply loss of self worth and power in a system in which everyone was supposed to be equal. Tensions such as these made it difficult at times to articulate a common identity (or rather the identity needed to be reaffirmed each time),<sup>142</sup> or to make its activities and discussions more stable and continuous as they were in Nayagarh. Their need for informality that I discuss further in this chapter, stemmed partly from this. It put together women who were different and wanted to do things differently.

In Nayagarh, on the other hand, the women's identity as a 'women's group' was not in question. There were different justifications offered for why a women's group was needed: differences due to timings, roles and power to speak. The women were demanding to be part of committees that made decisions about the forests and the villages and demanding a share of the money that came in the name of village development. The women claimed that it was in the *mahila samitis* that many of them saw themselves as making a difference to the village. They were actually doing something purposively. They were doing more than just going about their daily activities, which they do at the individual or family level and which are often governed by tradition and custom (regulated by the men and for the younger women also by older women). In the groups they were communicating and acting together in order to achieve something. In Chaddiapalli, the women challenged the ways in which the funds were being spent and the decisions that were being made by the BOJBP. In Hariharpur, the women wanted to be a part of the *Mahasangha* and were confused about the limitation of sending only two women representatives to the village forest committee comprising in total of five members. They felt that they had acted as a group and that it was as a group that they got their strength. To continue to have an effect, they needed to be in or speak from within their *mahila samiti together*.

Some of the groups also pointed out that acting together did not mean that individual activities (or issues affecting individual women) were not their focus of concern within the group. But when it came to taking action, they did so for something that concerned most of them or when individual women needed the support of the others. They seemed to have more of a sense of identity and could in the group call upon a collectivity. Doing something purposively here meant that they needed some degree of organizing. It was this identity as a women's collective that proved to be their strength and not their weakness. Although they were involved in projects designed by others (government and international aid

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<sup>142</sup> *A propos* needing to constantly justify the group, Frye expresses it strongly: "All women's groups, meetings... it is seen as a device whose use needs much elaborate justification. I think this is because conscious and deliberate exclusion of men by women, from anything, is blatant insubordination, and generates in women fear of punishment and reprisal (fear which is often well-justified). Our timidity and desire to avoid confrontations generally keep us from doing very much in the way of all-women groups and meetings. But when we do we invariably run into the male champion who challenges our right to do it" (Frye 1983:103).

agencies, NGOs), in several places, the village women began to take over the agenda of the groups. As one of the women's groups coordinators said: "What is the point of saving money and making mixtures<sup>143</sup> when everything else stays the same." The various women's groups from different villages met occasionally to discuss coming together in a larger federation. They encountered opposition from some other villagers, but they continued to meet in large numbers and enjoyed a sense of identity. The forest federation aimed to integrate the women through the *mahila samitis*, into the forest federation (not without opposition from many men). But when I spoke to the women, many insisted on having their own federation as well: "We can't keep waiting for them to decide when they feel that our issues are important to take on."

### *The opposition*

Resistance to the groups in Drevdagen and Nayagarh expressed itself in different ways. In Nayagarh, there was an acceptance that the women needed their own groups although some of the men that I interviewed dismissed the idea of the women forming their own federation on the grounds of their incapacity to do so, especially "without guidelines"<sup>144</sup> from the men. Here, the concern of the contending male-dominated community organizations was to have access to and control over the women's groups. In Drevdagen, in contrast, resistance to the women's forum was justified on the grounds that there was no need for such a women's group as there were other associations in the village for both men and women. As I quoted one of the men before: "It is a crazy solution to the fact that the village association is not working for the women." The strong reaction from the men might seem strange in the light of the fact that what the women spoke about was to arrange village festivities and other such activities. They did not take up the question of male dominance publicly until much later.

Initial critique of the village association was sought to be defused by making it out to be a problem of some individual women. Women who did not attend village meetings were considered passive or lacking in self-esteem or generally disgruntled and the men who dominated the meetings were seen as a matter of one or two strong individuals. Power relations, such that the association was dominated by men and maintained actively by them (as becomes apparent in chapter eight) were sought to be individualised by pointing to the many passive women and due to the presence of a few strong men. For example, Karl, countering the suggestion that the women needed their own space because they found no place for themselves in the village association, pointed out that he often stayed at home with the children while his wife attended meetings (see chapter eight).

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<sup>143</sup> Snacks.

<sup>144</sup> He used the term 'guidelines' in English. I believe this use of language reflects a professionalisation of their network; in a sense, a formalisation and modernisation that came with contact with the outside world and that many women were not seen as having.

What may be seen as a common element in all these assertions is the fact that only individuals and personal relationships are the reference points – the issue is reduced to a private relationship, so that seeing men and women as a group is made more difficult. By talking about personal relations in which the heterosexual couple relationship is the scene, the gendered relationship is individualised and its political force (*sprängkraft*) neutralised (Tollin 2000:29). Florin writes that although individual relationships may appear equal, on reversing the perspective and looking at them in a societal perspective the structures of discrimination become obvious (2004). However, research has also shown how unequal relations can be seen to be reproduced in new forms in the home and between individuals (Magnusson 2001; Søndergaard 2002) and that the love relationship may be the very prototype of unequal relations between men and women (Holmberg 1991). By making discrimination a private question and an individual one, it is acknowledged but it is placed somewhere else where it cannot be reached. The men's privilege was hidden (at least in the beginning though as I show in chapter eight it became apparent when they felt themselves challenged). A response to this challenge was to stress the role and importance of the formal institutions. At the same time, the rhetoric on equality also posed a potential threat. Karl's response to the interviewer (see chapter eight) when he complained about 'the damn feminist society' he lived in, perhaps reflects a threat that the men in Nayagarh did not feel to the same degree?

On the other hand, the dominant rhetoric of women as illiterate and victimised was shared by several male activists that I interviewed in Nayagarh. There was an understanding that women are oppressed by the present system in society. In the literature produced by the forest movement and in my interviews (for example with Joginath Sahu and Narayan Hazari), they referred to the discrimination and the inferior status of women. This problem was also discussed at village meetings, especially at youth meetings (probably often without many women involved) as can be seen in the minutes from BOJBP's meetings with youth clubs. This understanding formed the basis of the work done by NGOs and development workers. In the report by Mitra and Pattanaik for example that I cite in chapter seven, the patriarchal nature of society was a strong theme on the chapter on women. Whether women on the whole considered themselves implicit in this system, I do not know. In the *mahila samitis*, however, there was often a mixture of this awareness, of everyday practice and rhetoric that made clear to them tangibly and evidently their limits and behaviour as 'women.' Yet this was combined with a sense of their own agency, echoed in statements like "what the men can't do, we have done."

The 'surprise factor' (Smith and Smith 1983 (1981):114) or what O'Reilly has dubbed the 'click' experience<sup>145</sup> (cited in Mansbridge 1999) of experiencing their

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<sup>145</sup> I would say click experience not necessarily in experiencing a whole structure of experiences but alternative explanations for everyday small things that feel uncomfortable and for which ordinary acceptable explanations do not feel right. For example, I spoke of the veiled opposition in chapter seven. What is disempowering then is not being able to question, or rather not being able to

subordination as a result of an order larger than their particular relationships, was not new for the women in Nayagarh. The women did not have much direct influence over the committees as individual women or over state agencies. They had less to lose and much to gain by speaking from within a women's group. The women's groups in Nayagarh linked their disadvantage in the villages to wider orders. As Mamta Tiwari, one of the field organizers for the women's programme expressed it in a report:

The government has reserved 33 per cent of seats for women. It may rise to 50 per cent in future. But this reservation will not solve our problem unless we represent our problems effectively. Women should not only conduct environmental work, they should protect themselves, build up awareness in society. The purpose of the *mahila* programme should not be only confined in the discussions, meetings, rather it should be translated into action" (Progress Report of Women's Group Formation. Initiative of BOJBP, translated from the original in Oriya).

Women in Drevdagen were in fact treated as a group when it came to trying to involve them in the village associations, but when they named themselves as a group, all the rhetoric revolved around trying to prove the opposite. To take an example, as I show in chapter eight, I was told several times that the problem of the village association was not one of gender but one of exclusion in general. Thus men as a group were also denied. As Edwards writes, to be a man is to be the norm and by that to have certain privileges.<sup>146</sup> The most important privilege is that your gender is denied and men are seen as individuals. Seeing 'women' as a category is problematic, both in theory and in the practices of everyday life; but at the same time, not seeing women as a sex/gender that faces different terms when it comes to decision-making and power, is also problematic. Recognizing differences can be

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express or being uncertain about whether you have anything to question despite apprehensions about certain experiences. So, although I cite O'Reilly, for the women in Drevdagen I believe it was to see that others have similar experiences and that maybe alternative explanations are much more satisfying and revealing. This feeling may be seen to be reflected in Tollin's survey where in an answer to the question if they felt that there was a problem with equality at their workplace, 38.3 per cent of the men said that there was no problem, while just below 50 per cent of the women said there was no problem. But what is remarkable, writes Tollin, is that almost half of the women marked the alternative 'unsure.' To be able to voice different interpretations was important in the groups in the case study sites. Interpretation reveals the possibilities for action and spurs personal transformations (de Lauretis 1986), while the construction of identity and the possibilities for agency are made possible through political interpretation (Alcoff, 1994).

<sup>146</sup> Though I believe it is often certain men. Not all male immigrants would qualify for example. However this qualification does not diminish her argument since gender remains an important crosscutting axis.

'naturalising' (subsuming them in a category of victims) but also a step towards recognizing the different terms available to them (and not just needs).

*Being publicly different... being publicly 'women'*

Research on women's organizing in rural areas, both in India (e.g. Purushottaman 1998) and Sweden (Bull 1995; Frånberg 1994; Herlitz 1996) and elsewhere (Bock 1999) have pointed to how women often choose to work in informal ways because of their position outside the centres of power. In the case of Drevdagen, the women found it necessary to work informally since they had little prospect of being able to influence the discussions in the formal structures and the issues they took up were often considered subordinate to more important questions. It was important for them that they had an informal space in the village to meet and to discuss issues that they felt unable to take up elsewhere. I have discussed this at length in chapter six. In Nayagarh, on the other hand, it was the formality of the group that made its existence acceptable and possible within the village.

When I speak of the formal and informal, I distinguish them in the sense that the groups in Nayagarh were part of a programme, that the *mahila samitis* (not all) were registered at the district and followed certain formal rules and regulations. They had a president, a secretary, treasurer, they were meant to keep a documentation of their activities, and carried out economic activity together. But what made them formal was that they presented themselves as a women's group to the rest of the village (and were accepted as such by the village), in contrast to the women in Drevdagen who mainly spoke of meeting together. The *mahila samitis* also provided a space sanctioned by the BOJBP and the village. They had a legitimacy that the women would not have had otherwise. They 'drew the women together outside their households into a public space sanctioned by the community and the state. In acquiring even limited visibility as a formal group, the women had non-domestic reasons to meet, to establish linkages and perhaps to build nascent ideas of solidarity' (see Krishna 2004a:33 for this formulation of self-help groups as a legacy of the community development era).

The formality of the *mahila samitis* gave them the opportunity to become a stable entity within the village (for a while) and also to link up with other groups. That different women's groups differed within Nayagarh itself was obvious in the varying extent to which the groups had been active and in the questions that they chose to work with. This formality in Nayagarh resulted in some cases in greater bargaining power for women *vis-à-vis* other social groups such as the landlords, violent husbands or in-laws.

In Drevdagen, existing power relations were sought to be maintained by asserting the gender neutrality of common spaces. This was reflected in the view that "nobody has stopped the women from attending the village associations" which were considered to be for all villagers, whether male or female. For the women it was difficult to challenge a system that was suffused with notions of equality and welfare for everyone and existed under constant threat from the 'centre,' where there was self-imposed guilt in going against the order. Speaking

of discrimination or gender made you someone who always looked for problems (It is as usual-*det är som vanligt*-see chapter eight). It was against village harmony. This was reflected in the women's ambivalence about speaking (or limitations in being able to speak) from within or as an all women's group. It was not as if disadvantages for women were not recognized at all. But as the quote above makes evident (that nobody stopped the women), the problem was individualised. It was made into the problem of individual women and not one of an order of gender and power. In this conception, there were other 'normal' ways of dealing with such problems, through proper channels. Formal equality, however, precluded an analysis of substantive inequality. This was also one reason for the need for informality. Thus while in Nayagarh it was through the formal nature of the group that the women were able to wield greater bargaining power *vis-à-vis* other groups – landlords, violent husbands; in Drevdagen it was the group's informal nature, of not really having 'a group' at all nor being a women's 'project', that was important. It enabled them to be more inclusive and open up to different women and to take up a range of issues.

Nayagarh was more gender segregated than Drevdagen. This gender segregation was taken for granted by both men and women.<sup>147</sup> The women in Nayagarh often said, 'the men do their work and the women do theirs,' although in practice the women could also be seen doing men's work, like patrolling the forests. The importance of sex/gender differences, social and bodily, were enmeshed in why they needed to organize differently. However, this difference was not often recognized as a difference of interests and power rather it was positioned as a natural/social role difference that make it reasonable to support men working with issues of forestry while family planning, tailoring classes and micro-credit were reserved for women.<sup>148</sup> Even in these women's programmes, it was not the women who decided what they were going to work on – the selection came from outside and despite the importance of savings and credit groups (SCGs), it was a choice not of their own accord but choices made by outside research or development agents and depended on what was fashionable in development aid just then. Gender segregation and its recognition did not mean that a gender approach with power at its centre was adopted. However being seen as a group also made it harder to avoid an analysis of difference – one that was 'natural' or social or actually based on relationships of power.

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<sup>147</sup> The implied neutrality in Sweden or 'the making of woman into man' (Gatens 1991a:154) would be much more difficult here in Nayagarh with its strict ideas of men's and women's work and roles.

<sup>148</sup> There has been considerable critique of programmes such as family planning by feminists in India who point to how development programmes keep women within their roles as mothers and wives. In family planning programmes for example, "no attempt is made to reinforce or envisage more egalitarian relationships or place responsibility on the man. In the world of the family welfare programme, a man who is not a male chauvinist is a contradiction in terms" (Tharu and Niranjana 2001:510).

...in action

Compared to Nayagarh, where the women sometimes made what, in a Swedish context would appear to be dramatic moves like fasting and foot-marches to reach their goals, the tendency in Drevdagen was for women to go through the proper channels.<sup>149</sup> Formally they were not barred from formal arenas as women were in Nayagarh. Formal or public arenas have a properness to them that is hard to question, whether they are state institutions or village associations. Ideally, the aim is to try and influence the formal institutions by working from within and certainly not by inflicting pain on oneself. Radical action at the time of the fieldwork was usually identified with fanatic environmental activists or the vegans.

In the village of Chaddiapalli, some of the changes that the women had been able to effect came about after their confrontation with state authorities. For example, they were able to get a hand pump for their village after they *gheraoed* (surrounded) the BDO (Block development officer) and refused to budge until their demand was looked into. They were openly challenging the bureaucracy and through collective action politicising their actions and exercising power. The story of the road (see chapter three) when several women lay on the road on a hot summer day and stopped people from passing, was another such incident. The space for politics in Drevdagen did not include space for such action by the women. Perhaps similar actions by women would just be seen as embarrassing (like the fasting in the school) and would have different effects. In Nayagarh, by protesting in this way, the women were demolishing the myth of being victims and beneficiaries as they demanded what they considered was rightfully theirs. They communicated their message in a bodily way, exhibiting bodies that are otherwise meant to be confined to the home. By taking part in the action, they affirmed their own identity (see Kapstad 2000 for how environmental activists create an identity for themselves). Although these actions initially were started by the *mahila samitis*, other women also joined in, making their identity as women in the process important for the moment. Perhaps it is, as Bauman (1995:73) writes: what characterises action is the absence of doubt, guilt and anxiety. In action you can be a victim without shame because, as I see it, they were eroding their victimhood in that way.

Similar action in Sweden would not be seen in the same way as women already were meant to be equal, definitely not victims, even though they were considered to be passive some of the time. The importance of the women's bodies in Nayagarh and the way in which the women made use of them, is significant. In Drevdagen, in an assumed neutrality of male and female, the implications of the body are sought to be denied. Here, it was something far less dramatic, merely meeting as women that became controversial. The collective brought to light unequal gender relations in Sweden in a way that was already obvious in India.

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<sup>149</sup> However, during the school strike in Drevdagen some women sat on a hunger strike in order to reach decision makers. In an interview, one of the men claimed that it was a foolish act by the women and that it was a relief when media attention on the women was distracted by the Chernobyl accident.

Perhaps that also explains why it appeared more threatening. Difference was given a political meaning.

...in rhetoric

There was thus a noticeable difference in the rhetoric used by the *mahila samitis* in Nayagarh and Drevdagen. There was a certain self-restraint in the language in the women's forum in Drevdagen. Although their reason for organizing was because they needed this space as women, in their discussions on why they needed to meet, they stressed the fact that it was for the village and its development. They did not necessarily speak as a women's group, unlike the women in Nayagarh. When they presented themselves to outsiders for instance (see chapter six), it was to point out that the *kvinnoforum* was for a living countryside and for everyone. As I pointed out in chapter six this gives rise to what may appear as a contradiction: of working for village *gemenskap* from a women's group and not from 'community' organizations. Their sense of discrimination as women in the village associations was not challenged overtly by them.<sup>150</sup> In Nayagarh, though the women's activities were concerned with the village, they described themselves as a women's group and also took up issues that were explicitly gender related. They asked to be included in the forests committees as women. Both in Nayagarh and Drevdagen the women worked with multiple issues and emphasized their interrelatedness in the villages.

Clearly the women of Drevdagen and Nayagarh were not only working for women but for an equitable society for both women and men (see also Bhasin and Khan 2004; Cuomo 1998 for such examples). But issues of power were highlighted more often in Nayagarh. As one of the field organisers wrote in a report, there is no point talking about the forests when women do not have power themselves. This is not unlike the activist in another struggle who said: "Our first environment is our bodies" (cited in Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter and Wangari 1996:9). Compared to Drevdagen, the women in Nayagarh took up questions that may be seen to be more challenging of gender relations and were related specifically to discrimination against women in the villages. This does not imply that power was not an issue in Drevdagen but rather that the space for taking it up was smaller. But the women were resisted all the same, not for what they said but what their collectiveness suggested.<sup>151</sup>

Thus to organize as women in Drevdagen felt illegitimate not only because of a rhetoric of collaboration and gender harmony within the village that hid unequal

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<sup>150</sup> Except at the meeting that took place after the end of the inquiry where Sara took up the problems of male domination in the associations (chapter eight).

<sup>151</sup> The concept of practical interests as opposed to strategic interests has been advanced by Molyneux (1985) and built upon by other researchers. Practical interests and needs are those related to women's current activities and strategic interests as those which relate to the unequal distribution of power. Though a useful metaphor to understand some aspects of discrimination, I do not use it here, for one because I believe the separation is difficult and perhaps not very useful in these cases.

power relations, as I illustrated in chapter eight but also in the wider orders of meanings in policy and institutions: a forbidden action as Eduards (2002) calls it. An important contextual difference between Nayagarh and Drevdagen is perhaps that in India there is a distinct perception and acknowledgement of difference whereas in Sweden that difference is sought to be minimized for reasons of equality. It is not so much a difference in *perception* of difference but in the *response* to it (Gatens 1991b:192 speaks of this in terms of feminism and philosophy).

*Other men are jealous but our men are good vs.our men are backward*

These discourses were also reflected in the images that the women had about the men. For example, when I asked the women in the village of Talapatna what made them successful as a group, one of the reasons they cited was:

Our men are good. The men in other villages get jealous when their women get more advanced<sup>152</sup> and try and stop them from acting together.

This was contradictory to the views of some women in the forum in Drevdagen, especially those who had worked and lived in towns. They often spoke of how ‘old habits die hard,’ implying a backward looking view on gender relations among many men in the rural areas. They compared them to the men from SLU, men from the city, from a university, who, they believed did not know about the discrimination in the village and would not behave in this manner and would do something about it.<sup>153</sup> This could be seen in chapter seven where I write about how times had changed now when everyone was in fact equal but unequal relations keep recurring, not as the present, but as remains of the past. Karl, too, explained this as tradition (chapter eight).

Although perhaps not quite indulging in ‘gender wars’ as Allison Goebel writes about a case in Zimbabwe (2002), the married women in Nayagarh were much more outspoken about expressing conflictual relations with the men in their households or their villages.<sup>154</sup> In Drevdagen, on the other hand, personal relationships to male partners were rarely the subject matter of group discussions.

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<sup>152</sup> It is interesting that the women who were otherwise speaking in Oriya used the word ‘advanced’ in English, showing how language and action was linked to and responsive to discursive elements from outside their immediate surroundings.

<sup>153</sup> But as I show in chapter eight, they did not only know but were part of making them irrelevant.

<sup>154</sup> For example, while I was speaking to some women at their home in Kesharpur which was also the home of the one of the BOJBP leaders, they complained of their problems as being women. Earlier in the day I had spoken to their father-in-law about the importance of women in the movement and their awareness etc. I asked them why they didn’t take that up with him. Her older brother-in-law and the oldest son in the family who was there laughed and said: “I hardly dare to say anything like that to him in his presence, it isn’t likely that she could do that.”

When they were, they may be said to be characterized as closer to the 'love-contract' (Magnusson 2001) where relations were negotiated through 'love,' making the relationship personal and unique.<sup>155</sup> This is not to say that there are no wars in the Swedish households or love in the Indian but more that these images are descriptive of the legitimate ways of talking about male-female relations or especially marital relationships, as they may have been seen by the women and the societies in which they lived.

Once again I believe that these assumptions reflect the larger discourses in societies. Feelings of injustice are always shaped by public discourses (Honneth 2003:250). Orissa was considered male dominated and individual men who were different were seen as aberrations and progressive. In Sweden, on the other hand, men in rural areas who exercised power over others were seen as relics from the past. I believe, however, that this power is not a phenomenon of the past but rooted very much in the present and that references to the past to explain unequal relations make acceptable inequalities that are embedded in and have their own history and complexity in existing relations of power. In Drevdagen, unlike in Orissa, men were not used to being identified as oppressors. Since women were overtly treated as a group in Nayagarh, it was implied that even men were a group. But in Drevdagen, it was by organizing themselves that the women identified 'men' as a group and thus caused even greater consternation among them.

The women's programme and the assumptions that it was based on thus provided a space, which the women in Nayagarh used to take forward their own agenda. This space gave the women in Nayagarh a certain amount of legitimacy to organize as 'women'; at least in the beginning. It made it easier for the groups to take up issues of discrimination. This combined with elements of the discourse on gender and development, like empowerment, provided a space for them and justified their actions from the point of view of the NGOs involved in supporting the community forestry groups. Gender, (or rather a gender and power order) thus became an issue in Nayagarh overtly in a way that it was not in Drevdagen. Both in Drevdagen and Nayagarh, the women claimed that they needed a separate space because they were 'women.' This was accepted by both the women's groups and the men in Nayagarh but not the village association in Drevdagen. The women in Drevdagen did not have the easier recourse to the arguments of difference and/or discrimination. The ideas about the gender neutrality of existing institutions, there for everybody, reinforced the accepted ways of reaching equality. This created the space for a "domination which is more subtle, and may be more stable and powerful than earlier forms. In response to conflict and resistance men have been able to consolidate, or at least defend, their power, and regroup as a fraternity, specifically through discourses which deny the relevance of gender" (Pringle and

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<sup>155</sup> Mies writes about the realization of a woman from the Phillipines, after working in Amsterdam, what a fetter romantic love was for European women. 'Asiatic and African women are psychically much less dependent upon 'love' than we' (1991:76). This statement needs qualification, depending on where you are in Asia and Africa and in what context but I believe that it does reflect a certain dependency occasioned by love.

Watson 1990:231). Similarly, Fraser writes that: “Even as fixed status (gender) hierarchy is presumed illegitimate, that presumption can serve to mask newer forms of status subordination... Ironically, moreover, modern norms of liberal equality can serve to mask new forms of status subordination” (2003:103).

### *Differences (in response) between the men*

Differences in the men’s responses were thus as important as the differences among the women and for the relations of the groups to the villages although there was a normative order that was also being negotiated. Differences among the men had a role in shaping women’s activism. Strategies undertaken by women in order to attain their aims are thus important. It is necessary to theorise not only the separate social interests that women’s groups may have but also the deep interdependencies between men and women which are vital for understanding gender relations.

In Drevdagen, many of the projects spearheaded by the women could be carried out because of the support of men and women in the village. Both in Drevdagen and in Nayagarh there were men who believed that the women needed their own groups (e.g. Jan, the *Mahasangha* staff member). In the view of the women in Drevdagen there was a generational difference in this respect among the men in the village. It was considered easier to speak to the younger men working with village activities. It was through these younger men, often relatives that the women often tried to influence association meetings. It was the opposition expressed by some of these younger (and ‘good’, to use the terminology of the women in Nayagarh) men that contributed to the ambivalence among the women. On the other hand, in the long run their opposition may have contributed to a sharpening of the sense of discrimination by bringing up the contradictions in the assumption in Sweden that gender equality goes via a generational shift and what Hirdman calls the passive strategy for bringing about gender equality (Holmberg 1991:48).

The men in the BOJBP leadership and among the members, mainly the older generation, spoke of the need to make the women aware, to impart training. The younger generation (though far from all) spoke about needing to try and involve women in the *Mahasangha* both for reasons of efficiency and equity. One of the men in the *Mahasangha* staff that I spoke to, for example held the latter view, reflecting also his university education and contact with the NGO workers. The Oxfam officer for example was also of this view. Different men had different ways of responding to the women’s groups. It was not necessarily so that ‘different men can be placed in different categories (see Hagberg, Nyberg and Sundin 1995:140 for different men’s responses in working with a gender equality programme) in their relation to the women’s organizing but as I show in chapter eight, the men’s response as to the need for the women for their own group depended on the particular situation and the men’s involvement in that situation. For example, in Drevdagen, it was generally supposed to be good to have women’s networks and important to work with the question of ‘gender’, yet ‘gender’ was considered dangerous in this case. Women’s activism in Nayagarh was sometimes aided by

the men ('our men are good') and at other times, it was a response to violence by men. In their activism too, they were supported differently by their male relatives and other men. When I attended a meeting or met forest committee members at the forestry offices, several eagerly invited me to come and see how well the *mahila samitis* in their villages were working. This does not mean that they necessarily believed in them for the same reasons as the women did, but it does show support for the women's organizing. As the coordinator for the women's programme said to me:

As it is now, some men are supportive in some places while in others they do not want the women to get together or go for training camps or get-togethers. They feel that the women just go there to eat and get smart and then destroy the household. They are afraid that the women won't listen to the men after having organized. *Mahila samitis* can be strong if they are supported by the men.

In Nayagarh, on the one hand, by regarding the women as incapable, the men's attitudes limited the women. On the other hand, the experience of discrimination due to poverty gave both men and women in Nayagarh a structural analysis of certain inequalities and the need for collective action to combat some of these problems. The men and women here were, "by and large, spared the kind of individualism that attributes every inequality to personal failures on the part of the less rewarded" (Mansbridge 1999:300). Understanding discrimination of caste and class perhaps helps one understand the fact of sex discrimination, and understanding the need for an independent community forestry movement might help to understand the need for women's groups. That may be one reason why (apart from the fact that it was a programme that was part of their movement) that several men active in the community forestry movement tended to support the women's groups although they had their own views on how they were to function in relation to themselves (Jane Mansbridge uses a similar argument to distinguish support for the women's movement among white and black men and women in the U.S.). This was especially so in the *harijan sahi* of Kesharpur where the men who joined us while we interviewed the women (whose savings and credit programme had dissolved due to lack of savings), were vocal about the problems suffered by the women in their community. The women active in the other *mahila samitis* did not position themselves against individual men but against what they considered 'male behaviour', especially in cases of violence and dowry, because their men or some men could be good. In their view, development was indeed 'incomplete without gender'. But as I understand them, development was a transformation not only of the women to becoming independent or empowered but of the jealous men to good.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> I am afraid that because of the difficulties of translation and my own limitations in understanding Oriya and the translations by interpreters, these words used by the women were translated as good and bad. I was unable to discuss any nuances with them and hence I use the words as I understood them.

Violence against women in Sweden is seen as the perpetuation of male power over women. Eduards writes that in women's collective action related to the body, violence and power is particularly challenging for democracy because it is men who are particularly singled out as responsible, and this in turn because they are men. "The gender power order is revealed in its nakedness" (1997:25). However, in India, this connection is far from simple. In the perception of the women in Nayagarh, the role of the mothers-in-law (and other female relatives) was instrumental in instigating, abetting and sometimes taking part in violence against a daughter-in-law. This distinction emanates from the largely communitarian and extended family complex of relations (*c.f.* Chaudhari 2004:xxiv) especially for younger married women. The women's organizing in Nayagarh was directed as much against inhuman mothers-in-law as, for instance, against husbands and fathers-in-law.

The development agents who worked with the men in the communities in these two cases also happened to be mostly men. In the case of the *mahila samitis*, although wanting to support the women, they felt unable to relate to them directly, instead of through the village organizations (see chapter three). But for a brief while, the women had support in their organizing through programmes introduced from the outside. This was considered important since the men in the *Mahasangha* would find it difficult to take on the wrath of the men in Nayagarh who could be expected to oppose change in this direction. Outside intervention did not cause the change but, based on an understanding of gender inequalities, it provided a little extra space for the women which some of them used to negotiate power relations.

Men from outside the villages thus played an important role in both places. Development projects and especially participatory approaches have been criticised for reinforcing unequal relationships by prioritising those most vocal (Cooke and Kothari 2001a; Krishna 2004a) or as taking certain male members as 'the community' (Guijt and Shah 1998). This has also been true of Drevdagen and in Nayagarh. Nevertheless, as compared to the case in Drevdagen, in Nayagarh it has been more permissible to challenge the unequal relationships as perceived by the development practitioners. Firstly, it is because they are more obvious, but importantly, also because it is more permissible to do so in a 'third world' rural society where inequality is a premise to begin with. Intervention in 'gender' from outside has more legitimacy. In Nayagarh it was gender or male dominance that became an issue but in Drevdagen it was equality and participation. The idea of development is to bring equality, democracy and encourage development in a particular direction. This becomes more apparent in the idea of empowerment and the notion of development that I discuss further.

## Empowerment

To go back to the quote in the introduction of this chapter, what was it that constituted independence and empowerment for the women of Nayagarh and Drevdagen? When was it personal and when was it collective? <sup>157</sup>

### *The personal and the collective*

Placing the processes of the two groups in relation to each other directs attention to how the personal and collective take shape in ways that are different. According to Kabeer, (building on Amartya Sen's capabilities approach), one facet of empowerment is the ability of being able to choose. In this sense empowerment may be seen as a somewhat normative idea (Kabeer 2001).<sup>158</sup> The women of Drevdagen, for example, were able to choose (more or less) where they lived, whom to marry, how many children to have, choices that were not available for many women in Nayagarh. In that sense the women of Drevdagen were already empowered (perhaps what Kabeer calls the immediate level). But their space for agency was circumscribed by the dominant (a particular) discourse on equality and modernisation. I have been talking about the limiting aspects of the discourse but there are of course positive aspects for individual women who can claim advantages and equality within the system. Collective organizing may perhaps be seen to harm individual women who might be able to find a place for themselves. But taking action on their own terms was what constituted empowerment for the women at the collective and village level.

In Nayagarh, on the other hand, women's agency was not always recognized because there was already this notion of individual empowerment through modernisation that did not match the idea of the women wanting to organize in groups. True enough, the women's activism in Nayagarh did not always lead to a better life for them. On a personal level, once home from meetings, they were still expected to cover their heads and not to speak in the presence of older males in the household. These were the same women who had fought for their cause with local male money-lenders and official authorities. Their confidence in themselves and their success, in certain instances, did lead to changes in household gender relations, but there was not necessarily a direct cause and effect. In the Oxfam report that I cite earlier, the authors narrate the story of the president of one of the women's group who was beaten by her husband for taking up the cause of a

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<sup>157</sup> Interestingly in the context of the Swedish academic or policy debate, empowerment is not a concept used in terms of gender relations or in discussions of equality for women in Sweden (with some exceptions). A search for this in the research literature shows that the concept has been used (with some exceptions) primarily in research with handicapped people, in the context of immigrant women, in some cases in *byggforskning* (building research) mainly in the case of immigrant settlements and in business management literature.

<sup>158</sup> She also goes on to show that empowerment cannot be conceptualised simply in terms of choice but must incorporate an assessment of the values embedded in a wider social context.

woman in the village who had been thrown out by her husband. The authors used her case to show that the women groups or the programme was ineffective in changing the structures of gender domination in the home. They espoused idea of empowerment based on the individual. The authors of the Oxfam report did not look at what the women were saying or were doing in everyday life, such as solving disputes, dealing with violent husbands and nasty mothers-in-law and working with problems related to dowry. The women's strategy was a 'politics of the possible' (Sangari 1993) as they together worked to change their everyday.<sup>159</sup>

The attention to the individual achievements is a humanist conception of empowerment that leaves unchanged structural conditions and places failure on the individual (Treleaven 1998:53). Cleaver puts it more succinctly in the development context: "As 'empowerment' has become a buzzword in development, an essential objective of projects, its radical, challenging and transformatory edge has been lost. The concept of action has become individualized, empowerment depoliticized" (Cleaver 2002:37). 'Third world feminists', among others, have criticised the focus on 'singular women's consciousness.' Chandra Talpade Mohanty writes that the strategy is to speak from within a collective. Referring to Sommer (1988:110), she identifies the 'plural' or 'collective' self of Latin American women's testimonials as "the possibility to get beyond the gap between public and private spheres and beyond the often helpless solitude that has plagued Western women even more than men since the rise of capitalism." In her view Alarcon, Ford-Smith, Anzaldúa, and Sommer together pose a serious challenge to liberal humanist notions of subjectivity and agency in their conceptualization of agency that is multiple and often contradictory but always anchored in the history of specific struggles (2003:82).

In an ideal world there would be more direct correlation between the personal and collective agency that leads to empowerment. However, discrimination takes many different forms though it may be systematic and in the words of Elizabeth Spelman, "we need to be at least as generous in imagining what women's liberation will be like ..." (2001:87) in the multiple spaces in which women may choose to act individually but also collectively.

### *Creating alternative spaces*

Women, both in Nayagarh and Drevdagen, shared several common spaces. In Nayagarh, it was the village wells and ponds, fields, fairs and in Drevdagen the women met in school meetings, organized village festivities and spent time together even before they formed the groups and spaces that I write about. In Drevdagen many some of these activities were not limited to women but occasions such as organizing village parties, being engaged in school activities, sewing bees, taking courses, were in effect spaces occupied mainly by women. It was often

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<sup>159</sup> It was not unlike the attitude of the famous anti-arrack movement in Andhra Pradesh described by Tharu and Niranjana (2001). One of the leaders when asked if she would go and take up initiatives in other villages replied, "Are the women of the other villages dead? Why should *we* go there to fight against *sara*?"

these prior networks that they built upon in forming the groups. However, those spaces also had the potential of reinforcing subordinate relationships where power relations between men and women and between women may be reproduced. The micro-credit group in Manapur, for example, that an older man from the BOJBP had helped to build up, was built on prior networks and also deferred to existing social relations in the village.

In the groups that were active in Nayagarh, the coordinator of the programme and the field workers were part of creating a space within the official programme that responded to what the women thought was important. Many of the activities that they carried out were what they did otherwise as well. It was the creation of the space that enabled them to come together and develop their collectivity and go on to take on other activities. In Drevdagen it was the lack of any one clearly defined activity that also made the space different and specifically the women's. The women's intentions in the groups were not very different from what they may have wanted to do otherwise. It was instead the structure of the political space that they created that made it different.

In these cases, they were different in the sense that they were inclusive in new ways. Although the *mahila samitis* were formed more or less along lines of caste, in the actions that they took, for example in the case of the road, women from different castes joined together. Women's groups from different villages who had not taken part of in these incidents also referred to them as instances of women's activism. The idea of forming a federation was disturbing in part because it would have cut across lines of caste and other social boundaries like age that ordered relations in Nayagarh. Similarly, the fact that all kinds of women met together in Drevdagen also made the forum a different space. As I cited a woman in chapter six, meeting in the *kvinnoforum* enabled women to also meet women they had considered 'eccentric' and who were of different ages, not only 'people just like us' and this gave the forum a different quality. This did not mean that women in both places erased differences among them but rather that they met over them. It was the creation of alternative spaces<sup>160</sup> that had the potential of changing existing relationships between the women and their relationships to their villages.

### *Politicising that difference*

The previous section began with a discussion on the power to name the difference. In a sense the very naming of difference became political. Much like the women in Sweden, the women in India had to tread a delicate line between the permissible and the non-permissible, making use of different strategies and opportunities at different times to fulfil their aims. The successful groups in Orissa, for example, always went to great lengths to show that their work had been successful thanks to the co-operation of the men. Kabeer refers to such situations as private forms of empowerment, which retain intact the public image, and honour but nevertheless increase the women's backstage influence (Kabeer 2001:35). The ambivalence of

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<sup>160</sup> Not unlike what Fraser (1993) calls 'subaltern counter-public' in the public sphere of politics.

the women in Drevdagen to openly challenge the system may be understood as that of 'tempered radicals' (Meyerson and Scully 1995) working from the margins of the system. They may be called 'radicals' because they challenge the *status quo*, (*in this case through their organizing as women*), as people who do not fit in perfectly, but at the same time who seek moderation.

Empowerment may be seen as a process that brings about social change (*e.g.* Kabeer 2001:28). But what does this say about transitory processes that are collective and where change may be difficult to measure? The group in Drevdagen did not continue. Can we speak of the women in Drevdagen being empowered (temporarily?), being able to mobilise resources, having a sense of agency and achieving some things (*cf.* Kabeer), the achievements in this case being a sense of identity and a base from which to act, believing in themselves, having the energy and the feeling of being able to act. For some women (and for me), what they felt about gender and power relations, became better articulated. It also became legitimate to talk about them – that in itself was empowering. The naming of the gender problem as a power problem is a change in itself (*cf.* Eduards, 2002:129). The women were constructing one identity but as de Laetis (1986:8-9) points out, consciousness is never fixed, never attained once and for all, because discursive boundaries change with historical conditions. The identity as women of the village that emerged for them was not a goal but a point of departure. By organizing separately, the women were challenging formal equality and the power that it provided, (a power that Karl implied was theirs to take). Meeting together led in some ways to identifying their difference and for several, the basis of their differences lay in power relations with men. Organizing was the collective action. "Women's collective actions have a value in themselves, as a liberating identity-shaping, *empowering process*, a confirmation and a strengthening of the self... Through collective action, regardless of measurable outcomes, women cease to be political objects and become agents" (Eduards 1992:96).

The women in Drevdagen and Nayagarh were being proactive. The women's initial protests about the village association did not arouse much reaction within the village, as I pointed out earlier in chapter eight. But it was when the women organized themselves, when they were proactive that tensions began to arise. They were transforming their demands, wishes and dreams into self-organized activity (*cf.* Eduards 1997:21). This was empowering. "Empowerment differs from protest because it is proactive" (Pieterse 2003:116). In the context of feminism, empowerment is often taken as the 'power to' of capabilities rather than the 'power over' of domination. The women of Drevdagen were exercising power generatively by choosing to form a *kvinnoforum*. They thereby transformed not only themselves but also the identities of the men since by forming the group they had defined the men in the village association as 'men' and not as individuals. Similarly, by wanting to work from within their own groups and form their own federation, the women in Nayagarh were assuming power by 'simultaneously controlling access and defining' (Frye 1983:107).

In both places, by bestowing on women a social role: that of working for the village, arranging village events and saving money for the household, there was a

refusal to image women as political actors. Echoing Lata Mani, one could say that in both places women were “neither subjects nor the objects” of these discourses, but the “site” on which the debates were conducted (1989). Both in Nayagarh and in Drevdagen, there was an effort to make the women independent or equal while their efforts were resisted or were not recognized even by those who wanted to work towards equitable relations. The women in Nayagarh were demanding assistance and support while everyone else was talking about making them independent or about changing structures - Kailash in the Mahasangha when he spoke about them becoming independent, the Oxfam report when they wrote about needing to change structures and all the other reports and conversations about women’s uplift. A large part of this was to be achieved by means of training. The coordinators of the women’s groups spoke about needing women who would help to coordinate the groups and help them keep in touch with each other. They wanted a small amount of funds to meet and discuss issues of importance to themselves. They wanted assistance in getting together. But that proved to be difficult to support.

In Drevdagen, the women by organizing themselves highlighted differences both among themselves but importantly differences in terms with men. The effort however was focussed on making the women ‘equal’ and the same, largely to be achieved by inclusion. There was a disregard for differences among the women and an assumption that some women would be capable of representing all the others’ needs. On the whole, the difference between the men in the committees and the associations and women in the *mahila samitis* and *kvinnoforum*, was that the women by organizing were disturbing the existing order. The men, those who did see a problem (that women were not part of formal organizations), wanted to make the organizations better or more equal, but first by restoring the order that was. It was by their political action together that the women made a difference in their lives and those of the others.

### **A faith in progress**

As the writing draws to a close I seem to have come to see the “just barely possible connections” (that I write about in chapter one) between the cases, not necessarily those that link the people or even the issues but the thinking (or discourses) that guides actions in the world, both North and South. I have discovered how these are not confined to specific places, and how these have their own hierarchies in ordering the world. The actions in the two contexts take shape in specific ways but thinking about progress, modernity, development links peoples in the South and in the North, even where they are not obviously connected.

Empowerment in the context of Nayagarh was linked closely to the idea of development. And although development has been debated at length with its many dimensions, economic development has been a dominant aspect. Income generation programmes and micro- credit schemes such as the ones started in Nayagarh are important in this respect. They are meant to lead to some form of

empowerment for the women.<sup>161</sup> Yet, without linking them to other kinds of activities they do little to change unequal gender power relations (Endeley 2001) and while important are not always sufficient.<sup>162</sup> Reaching equality through the market has also been a cornerstone of gender equality measures in Sweden (Hobson 2000). But as I discuss in the section on 'policy and village activity' in chapter eight, the importance given to the economic can also be limiting for women in the rural areas.

In Nayagarh one idea of development was that it was leading somewhere. As I cite Kailash at the beginning of the chapter, development and empowerment were something 'that would come.' Implicit in the idea of development is also the notion that it is meant to lead to a modern, equitable society. The referent for the meaning of development and progress is the west. Being modern and developed meant that women would behave in a certain way: be independent, dare to go out alone. Development as a linear progression recurs as a theme in many texts. To take an example, I cite below an excerpt from an article that, not unlike my study, takes its point of departure in two villages (regarded as marginal and local places), one in India and the other in Sweden. The authors argue for the need to take a local view on modernization and development instead of the top-down approaches that are often at odds with local development. There is, however, an idea of modernization as a linear progression. They write:

The Södra Finnskoga area became involved in the modernization process in the mid 20th century, yet some say that modernization has not penetrated fully into the local communities. As for Chamaon, this village seems to be in its early stages of modernization, and its destiny has yet to be seen. From another, more particular and local, point of view, the Swedish example appears to be at the tail end of modernization, on the point of being abandoned. Chamaon is just entering its early modernization phase, where crucial gains and losses are about to be decided (Andersson, Lejonhud and Lundberg 1999:251).

Modernization is seen as a progression that everyone goes through. I believe it is normal to use such arguments when comparing two countries that are so obviously 'developed' and 'underdeveloped' and so differently placed in power hierarchies. However, it is this hierarchy that needs to be taken account of as well and our implicit acceptance of these definitions of developments. Development needs to be analysed in its specific history.

Implicit in the meaning of development is the role of aid, trade and international organizations. How gender is conceptualised is also a result of broader interactions

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<sup>161</sup> See background discussion in chapter two.

<sup>162</sup> Though Kabeer (2001:52) for example, reviews considerable research that shows that access to independent resources allowed many women to walk out of unsatisfactory marriages.

and ‘carry the impress of forces that make a global society’ (Connell 2002:90). One may see the effects of this perhaps more clearly in Orissa, where the women and men related to the ‘global order’ in tangible ways as NGOs, donors and other outsiders were part of trying to change their lives. This relation is more diffuse in the case of Drevdagen. However, the presence of the men and women in the South is palpable in Drevdagen, as for example, when they defined themselves in relation to my discussions about the women in Orissa. Borrowing an analogy from Haraway, the connections may be seen as a bush branching out in different directions. One could concentrate on one little part in one little place. “*But the rest of the bush is implicitly present*, providing a resonant echo chamber for any particular tracing through the bush of ‘woman’s experience’ (1991a:113, my emphasis).<sup>163</sup> The rest of the bush (so to speak) was present in Nayagarh and perhaps less explicitly in Drevdagen. I look more closely at one example.

At a meeting with the women in Drevdagen to discuss what I was planning to write in my thesis, much after we had stopped meeting at a group, I found a changed group. Some of the women who had been very active had moved out of the village and some women, new to the village, also came for the meeting. Margot was new in the village and had moved there recently from Stockholm. I spoke about my thoughts on the organizing of the women’s forum and of the *mahila samitis* in Nayagarh.

Margot: I have heard that in India women have become stronger...have developed quite a lot, ever since India has become modern (*i och med att Indien har blivit modernt*). Perhaps that is why they have been able to do these things together.

Earlier, during an interview when I had spoken to Cecilia about the women’s group in Nayagarh, she was somewhat offended by the association. “But we are different,” she told me. “We are working women.” Margot’s and Cecilia’s reactions were not uncommon in Sweden but nor in India. “...third world woman has functioned as the oppressed backward other in relation to which a certain image of a liberated educated female western Self has been constituted” (Baz 2002:143). In Sweden the image of the immigrant women as traditional, passive and victimized has been contrasted with the image of the Swedish women as modern, active and equal (Brune 2002).<sup>164</sup> Eduards (2002:124) writes that the Swedish debate on equality is characterised by an understanding that it is better in

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<sup>163</sup> Haraway uses the metaphor for sketching some of the multiple ways that anti-colonial and feminist discourses speak to each other and to enable conceptualising women’s experience as an intentional construction within multiple and often inharmonious agendas.

<sup>164</sup> Feminist approaches to development have been seriously critiqued by Mohanty (2003) among others for ignoring uneven divisions between first and third world constructions of class and race in their portrayal of the images of the victimised women and oppressive men in academic texts.

Sweden than in other countries, meaning that subordination of women is less obvious here. And it probably is, she writes and goes on to say:

The space for agency is bigger for women in Sweden than for women in Sudan or Bangladesh. But that there are probably big differences within Sweden or within Bangladesh.

However, looking at the two case studies I think it would be difficult to make the assertion that the space for agency in general is greater in Sweden as compared to India? But as she qualifies it in her next sentence, there are probably differences within these countries. The question that however remains is what kind of agency and for what? What is that the women are organizing for? And as she writes further herself, how do we 'measure' increased political agency?

The image of the 'liberated, educated female western self' (Baaz, 2002:143) is also a part of the development discourse in India. There is an assumption that women's empowerment results in a modern, independent woman. At the same time there are norms in each societal context that decree how women dress, the spaces they may inhabit and what they may or may not do. The dissonance among these norms may make for a situation that is all the more constrictive but, at other times, this also may provide openings. Relating to the West is not limited to images but is also basic to ideas about gender and women's movements. Myra Marx Ferree (1999:18) writes: "Allowing local women the space to develop their own forms of feminism is a challenge that the international women's movement has not always met in practice." Allowing for a space within a movement implies that there must be a given order in which a place has to be made. This relation is also present in the literature on gender and feminism emanating in the North and South. The categories of 'women of colour' or 'third world women' highlight important questions within the vast body of literature on feminisms. I want to link this to my previous assertion of there being a discourse on gender and feminism (the bush) to relate to. As Maitrayee Chaudhari (2004:xiv-xv) writes:

...while, for western feminists whether or not to engage with non-western feminism is an option they may choose to exercise, no such clear choice is available to non-western feminists or anti-feminists. For us our very entry into modernity has been mediated through colonialism, as was the entire package of ideas and institutions such as nationalism or democracy, free market or socialism, Marxism or feminism. Any question of feminism therefore, had to confront the question of western feminism as well.

Thus relating to the debate on feminism from the west is unavoidable.<sup>165</sup> It is not a question of western feminist theories making space for others but that Western feminism also exists in relations of power over them. In many ways the roots of

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<sup>165</sup> Despite the 'womanism' propounded in some African writing. See Haraway (1991a) and McFadden (2000) for a discussion on this.

feminism lie in modernist ideas of emancipation and justice and power/knowledge relations that it criticises (Brandth 2002). The debates, however, are not monolithic. Dominant feminist thinking has been challenged on the basis of race, class and its' implicit assumptions of heterosexuality, both from within and outside the western countries (primarily North America and Europe). It has also been challenged for its middle class assumptions and more recently for its urban bias (see chapter four).

Taking account of these traditions does not invalidate the use of feminist thinking. It locates its use and insists on its partiality and accountability (Haraway 1991a:111). It directs attention instead to how uses and meanings are connected across specific places and the ways in which hierarchies are formed between them. So, in a very abstract or obtuse way while in one context, agents of modernization and progress opened up a space for women in the 'developing' world, that space was closed off in the 'developed' world.

### **Both empowered and marginalised**

The two cases illustrate that although women were excluded from formal arenas and their space to exercise power was limited, what is rational for women is not the same in all social and geographical contexts. Nor was there any obvious line of development in practice although shades of a strong normative notion about development and equality or empowerment could be detected in both places.

For the women's group in Drevdagen and Nayagarh, in their relations with formal sphere of the village associations and forest organisations, they were both empowered and marginalized. The notion of equality did provide individual women with a relative power in village politics in Drevdagen. Some women initially took up questions of interest to them in the village association and a woman was made its' chair-person with the support of some of the men. Women's inclusion in meetings and conferences gave them confidence and they often discovered that they were not alone in the issues they wanted to take up.

The women in Nayagarh were able to come together in a network as a result of contact with the BOJBP. The programme also provided them with the legitimacy to meet and carry out activities in the village, which may have been difficult otherwise. It was their access to the forest federation that enabled many women's groups in the Nayagarh to organise themselves in the first place and through the donor funded programme, to link up with other women's groups. In a sense, the committees and organizations were 'new' organizations in Nayagarh and had the potential of reworking or creating more equal relationships. As I show in chapter three women felt less restrained by social norms to talk and express themselves at meetings that were organized in villages other than their own and which were not dominated by men from their own families and villages.

The forest project in Drevdagen and the movement in Nayagarh laid the grounds in some way for the women's collective organizing – by their rhetoric about rights

and democracy. The events in Drevdagen showed that the rhetoric included people in a struggle that was already defined (which was seen to benefit everyone equally). But the rhetoric of self-management also opened up a space whose content was filled by the women and others in various ways. Referring to de Lauretis (1986) Sommerson Carr writes that empowerment is premised not only on individuals' assessment and possibilities for change but also on the ontological possibilities for social transformation. As women join together the range of knowledge necessarily expands as they share their experiences, feelings and ways of naming (2003:16). In these particular cases there was a perception of ontological possibilities as a result of sharing between the women but this was also enabled to a certain extent by a wider discourse of possibilities for all people, men and women.

In Nayagarh, the language of power to the people was accompanied by talking about women's disadvantages. The framework of the women's programme was an important support for the women. It was important that the support came from the same people that were also supporting the community forestry movement, both in the villages and from Oxfam. Although the financing for the programme was important, it was quite limited. What it did provide, however, was legitimacy in the shape of a programme. Thus, here more so than in Drevdagen, there was a framework for a brief while that the women could lean on, even though, the BOJBP later sought to limit their action.

But although these instances provided openings, there were limits. In Drevdagen, a change in the leadership of the village association and the involvement of more women did not automatically imply a change in routines and procedures or in who decided on village affairs. The women chose to focus their work within the village partly because, their 'integrated' solutions did not appeal to more sectoral styles of working, both outside but also within the village. Their resolve to start by building upon community spirit rather than directing their energies towards actors outside village has gendered connotations. Women as individuals found a place sometimes but women as a group had more difficulties expressing themselves *vis-à-vis* formal arenas. In Nayagarh, the women were also challenged, especially the more independent they became. They, too, became controversial when they started taking up questions outside of the limits of the programme, although the questions might also be seen as related to 'women's development objectives. Their desire to have a women's federation was considered unnecessary and became threatening when they proceeded to throw off their 'victimhood.'

Ironically, it was the rhetoric of modernisation and equality that made organizing as a women's group difficult for the women in Drevdagen. The power of discourse on equality and the entrepreneurial road to development were pervasive, infiltrating everyday language and meanings. It made it harder for the women's group to challenge certain structures, because they were already couched in neutral or equal terms. At the same time they had more freedom than in Nayagarh, in exploring a different *form* of organizing. By eventually placing

themselves outside of the dominant orders women were making clear its biases but also were seen to be actively challenging these.

Sweden has a strong ethos of collective action – but through organized political structures. This is being challenged more and more as women are organizing everywhere (Eduards 2002). At the same time discourse is constituted continuously by people's actions. The women in Drevdagen in this sense may be victims of ideas but they were also changing and challenging them.

Feminists have worked to show the underlying assumptions of Swedish politics and its inherent male bias. In India this can be seen more tangibly and is thus sometimes easier to pin down. The women's programme in BOJBP was initiated by the community forestry network and international donors as a way to involve more women in the organisations. The absence of women in the public life of village organizations was an accepted fact. The legitimacy of a 'woman's group' gave the women a space to act within. It provided the context for building up an all women's group. At least initially, this was an advantage although it tended to standardise the forms of organisation considered legitimate and authentic. The fact that there was a programme aimed specifically at women (however tame it may have been - initially it was a tailoring programme, gave the women a certain legitimacy to organize and helped build up an identity as a women's group and to challenge inequality. This together with the women's 'programme' defined for them (not always by them, and sometimes contested by the women themselves) a space that seems more elusive in the rhetoric and practice in Sweden.

In Nayagarh and in Drevdagen, in their contact with the formal organizations, women were both empowered and marginalized. The rhetoric of democracy and equality allowed them a space for their own claims within village politics. In many ways it was their contact with the formal associations that often provided the spurt for them to start off on their own. However the limits to their actions also became clear in their relations to these organizations. But an action has no end and in ways that rippled through, the women had rocked the boats.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### Concluding reflections

Those seeking to work with theories on rural development and local resource management face a difficult task if they aim to understand women's empowerment in relation to rural development and local management. A considerable literature has pointed out that local communities cannot be conceived as a whole. Research from different fields has shown that rural contexts are crosscut with plural values and fractured identities. Theorists are faced with a situation where claims no longer converge on a singular form of institutional change; and the solutions to the problems of inequality do not only lie in finding ways of including all men and women in the new institutions. Critical, activist scholarship wanting to work with women towards positive change in rural areas may meet a situation where 'rural development' and 'local management' itself are in doubt. Claims for 'local development' and 'gender equality' put forward by different groups can have diametrically different meanings and are in need of deconstruction in an increasingly global world where accepted ideas about development and progress are put to test in everyday practice.

Such conditions framed my research. They challenge the assumptions underlying the three constraining discourses that I refer to in the introductory chapter: that the local management of forests is mainly about the forests and the institutions for its management; that the correct way to go about scientific inquiry is to have the right questions, and that an egalitarian discourse and greater individual equality and freedom gives 'women' greater space for (collective) agency than a context where inequality is an obvious condition of life. However, fragments of these constraints existed concurrently in everyday practice as well as in theories about natural resource management, rural development, and gender. My research on these issues does not claim representativeness, but it highlights important issues: first, it shows how gendered discourses are produced, maintained and unsettled in dynamic relationships in specific contexts as well as in general ways. Second, the research presents a methodology that offers a way to identify and analyse these processes in action, and to interrupt discriminatory practices; and third, it offers a way to study the effects of discourses about equality and development on women's space for agency by analysing two different contexts in relation to each other. In the thesis I have discussed these different threads. In the following pages, I examine the three questions that I first posed in chapter one and have addressed in the thesis, summarise some conclusions and reflect on key learnings from the process.

(i)

The women's organizing unsettled dominant constructions of rural development and resource management. Their organizing foregrounded struggles over meanings and the contestations over what constituted rural development and local resource management and brought to attention how dominant meanings are sought

to be established. The studies in India and in Sweden shed light on how 'women' are excluded but sought to be included in village organizations at one and the same time; and reveal that a desire to include women in development and resource management does not necessarily imply a willingness to address unequal gender relations. The women in the two field sites envisaged their organizing as a source of strength in their work on village welfare. However, the village organizations experienced women's organizing as a threat to what they considered were harmonious relations needed to work with what they identified as the important village questions.

For the women in India, freedom over the forests was inseparable from freedom over themselves; conversely, a lack of freedom in either domain implied a recognition of unequal power relations *vis-à-vis* the men. Similarly, women in Sweden believed it was important that differences in the possibilities of influencing village decision-making were taken into account in work on village development. This was far removed from the ways of working that demanded consensus regardless of the terms in which the issues were defined. Outside interventions fed into these tensions and played a crucial part in giving meaning to dominant constructions of 'local' management and thus to gender relations in the villages. Central to constituting the processes of local development and management in the villages in the two countries were dynamic processes shaping recurring relationships of gender and power, relationships that some sought to maintain- just as much as women's organizing disrupted them.

Neither in India nor in Sweden did the women organize themselves solely around resource issues. But in many ways the issues were implicit as the women in the communities showed: it was impossible to sift out the natural resource issues, and separate one from the others. The women, especially in Sweden, believed that forest issues were unlikely to be resolved without tangible change in the village itself. The women's point of departure in both places was the community and not necessarily a specific project or activity, making clear that questions of local forest management needed to be dealt with in their social contexts. To revive the countryside, the women in Sweden believed that they needed to see activity in the village itself. In order to work effectively with outside actors, they believed that relationships in the village needed to be nurtured.

In research and development practice that seeks to work with local management of natural resources, this thesis suggests, that the forests need to be understood as a 'social forest', in the manifold ways in which women and men related to the forests – for example, economically, socially, spiritually. Attempts at local management of resources need to be conceptualised in relation to other activities undertaken in the villages that give meaning to local management. Power over development lies with all the men and women in their struggles, their dreams, and in the varied meanings they give to the work they do. The question is not only one of 'what' is to be done but also one of 'how' development and local management are meant to be carried out and the form in which these activities are organized. The women desired to be able to participate through a variety of different forms - in concert with each other, from within their own spaces but also as individuals

from within formal institutions. These different ways of working, however, did not fit with the existing organization of power relations, nor in the emerging new institutions for local forest management, that all too soon began to mirror the bureaucratic norms that they sought to replace. It is thus difficult to speak about local management of resources without simultaneously addressing questions of local development and questions of power.

In the context of devolution and ‘growth’ wherein people in the countryside are expected to take on greater responsibility for their surroundings, rural development and local resource management assume greater importance. Rather than studying local management as a category that is given, I have examined how it was constituted in the two study sites and show how gender is central to this project, especially in the assumptions about how work with local management is meant to be organized and how it is divided. Studying rural development and local management as processes in motion provides ways to foreground the organizations of social relations – relations that are constant and recurring, but also subject to change. The study of processes in motion is central to understanding the struggles taking place. Future work in this area needs to be better informed by theories that take account of the social relations of gender and power at work in village arenas among the villagers and with development practitioners, researchers and other actors from outside.

(ii)

The collaborative inquiry with the women in Drevdagen provided a methodology that allowed me to go beyond looking at women’s customary absence from local organizations and how women might be able to gain a foothold within them, to understanding how the women framed their needs and issues and how they envisaged working in relation to village organizations. It was an attempt to open up the space to carry out research together. With this comment I turn to the second question: what might opening up of the space for undertaking an inquiry together imply for research on village development and natural resource management? The response to this question comprises three parts: ‘finding the right question’, letting the categories emerge from the process, and the social relations of the research act.

#### Finding the right question

Several authors have pointed to the gendered valuing of theoretical knowledge over practitioner knowledge in the academy (Treleaven 1998:119). Even on an empirical level, there is a similar differentiation wherein the more practical, everyday needs in the villages, both in India and Sweden, were poised against the future benefits of working with the forests. Through my involvement in the collaborative inquiry in Sweden I was able to understand how the women in the village offered a potential challenge to the framing of village issues but also to the thinking about what the *important and the right questions* were, both in the village and the university. On looking back at my material from India, I saw the question of the big and important versus the small questions recurring there as well. However, it was being part of similar process in a different context that helped me to see this more clearly.

The women in Sweden met in several different ways in the village and the *kvinnoforum* was one of them. The collaborative inquiry provided insights into the dynamics of village life and rural development that otherwise would have been difficult to understand. It directed attention to the importance of the everyday in the question of local management and the forests. The collaborative inquiry shifted the research focus by bringing to light the struggles over meanings of the categories that were being taken for granted in the village and the university: local forest management and rural development. Getting to the 'right question' engaged us in a journey that we undertook together.

Letting the categories emerge from the process

By leaving the framework of the research open for negotiation, the language and the categories that were relevant to the women in that context, at that time, defined the research. The making of the women's forum, the importance of *gemenskap*, an analysis of 'collaboration', the forests, 'women' and 'men' were all aspects that became important to examine. However, the process of inquiry was more complicated than I had imagined as I also came to find aspects that were difficult to conceptualise. By letting the women guide the direction of my research in their village, for a brief while, I was included in a dynamic and exciting process that was full of vigour and that made it all the more difficult to put down on paper. I realized as others before me, "the gulf between what is possible to be communicated in making public one's in-process efforts to do research more democratically and the finitude of what is actually spoken or written" (Lather 1991:98). As I was mulling over how I could explain the discussions and what was spoken, Diane who had visited us at one get-together pointed out with insight, "It was not what was said but what was felt, the energy that was important in that process." Stanley comments: "That much human behaviour and emotion cannot be described, let alone understood in unexplicated categorical terms is largely ignored or rather resolved by treating people's experiences as faulty versions of the theoretician's categories" (1990:24). By trying to describe the process of building the women's forum and paying attention to the everyday I have tried to highlight some of the dynamic processes, the emotions and the spirit that are integral to what development is about but normally do not find place in its conceptualisations.

Categories are made in language but language is problematic. Action research proponents stress the need for public reporting. But analysis for an academic thesis is not the same as reporting on activities. There are tensions between academic and lay discourses. And here again is the instability of language and the ways in which it structures our thought (see Kohn 2000). What may be said in academic terms, for example, the categories that one uses as tools of analysis, do not have the same implications in lay discourse. Women or men may be categories in academic analysis but they are also real live people and I have presented them as such in the text. Their personhood cannot and should not be erased in taking their practice as text but this commitment can also be problematic as I discuss further. In chapter two, I point out that I freeze the frames of analysis in order to look at relationships, practices and processes to understand how they solidify meanings

(*c.f.* Connell 1995), rather than to see them as attached to specific persons for all time. This enabled me to understand examples of people's actions and their language as a re-enacting or challenging of a wider context. The question of who speaks and with what authority is not only tied to the person but also reflects the authority of the structures that individuals draw on and carry with them.

A text that aims to speak to both academics and to practitioners must be easily intelligible to people outside academia and at the same time, according to Parekh, who writes about politics and academic documents, "retain the power to challenge their common sense and get them to see familiar things in a radically new way" (2005). This is no easy task especially as analysis may question not only categories but also all that is reasonable and obvious. Despite the close connections between development and research, this is seldom discussed and is, I believe, an area that I believe that we need to continue to think about.

#### The social relations of the research act

All methods have a political moment that at a fundamental level expresses a relationship between people (Gitlin *et al.*, 1988 cited in Lather 1991:91). The inquiry with the women in Sweden was one way of making the research relationship visible, for us to be able to question it, and for my position to be questioned in turn. However, the question of my accountability is far more complicated. The question with which I was confronted was: accountable to whom? Was it only to the women in the villages or also to the others that I write about? There is also the question of my being accountable to myself – that I write what I believe is important. But what if that has not been (or cannot be?) negotiated in advance? I write not only about what was said and done within the inquiry but I also look at how the inquiry and my research affected, and was affected by, others. The field of relationships that I felt I needed to take into account was thus much wider. This brings up ethical issues. For instance, I had not decided with my colleagues that I would write about and critically analyse their work. These issues emerged during the course of the research.

My colleagues did not consider themselves as representing any specific university interests. However, it is not their interests that concern the analysis but the authority that I, as researcher and they as practitioners from the University, called upon to justify the work we were doing. I criticize some of the men and women from the University for reproducing the *status quo* that favoured men and disadvantaged women and in doing so reproduced the notion of the forests as a masculine domain. But as a researcher I had drawn on the same institution to justify stepping into people's lives in the name of research. It was a privilege that was accepted in the village without much questioning. My research is in many ways unconventional. I took the legitimacy accorded to me as a researcher to choose how to carry it out. There is perhaps the issue of me using or, some may feel, of misusing my position. Here I think of Spivak, who says:

If you are from within, your position constituted from within  
the academy...that is what gives you your power...(in this

particular context) ...you have to negotiate to see what positive role you can play from within its constraints ...for breaking it open....you must intervene even as you inhabit those structures'...one tries to change something that one is obliged to inhabit, since one is not working from the outside. In order to keep one's effectiveness, one must also preserve those structures- not cut them down completely. And that as far as I understand is negotiation (in Gunew 1990:72).

The desire to do participatory research and the mutual confidence that it creates drew me into a circle of trust that made me aware of the need to be cautious. A participatory process might be manipulated for the researcher's benefit. When I turned to writing I also realized the need to establish a distance to be able to look at our process critically. As I write in chapter two, by turning to discourse, the object of my inquiry became the language, not the people and in doing so I tried to keep their integrity. The understanding I gained on particular issues - that were not easily seen or named in the everyday and yet patterns that I found on examining the language used and the actions taken - could not simply be discarded. It was important for me to try and explain something that I felt was important even though this had not been negotiated. It would ring false for research that seeks to challenge dominant understanding and to explore practices that give rise to inequalities as well as disregard of our efforts in the village to bring about change.

I found that I had to assume the role of the person with the power to define (Acker, Barry and Esseveld 1991:142). Dorothy Smith writes: 'how does one create a sociology for women and not about women?' I began my research believing that the answer lay in that it was to be 'with the women'. But then, I believe that my position as an outsider provided me not only with privileges but also with a different kind of responsibility from theirs as we looked to work in different ways with similar problems. It was at times useful for the women that I as a researcher interpreted events and told them how I looked upon things. As Kajsa put it, it was useful for them "to be able to see how others look upon us." What I do know less about is if and in what way the writing will be read and what effects it may have. I had started by wanting to do research that mattered to local men and women. Participatory action research provided the space to ground it in the social context and alerted me to the need to question the theories and assumptions that tend to be taken for granted in development and academic worlds.

In the end, as Robert Chambers would say, I am left holding the stick (a symbol for having knowledge and the right to speak), but I argue that it is a different stick than the one with which I started. I had begun with participatory research to bridge what I saw as the distance between the university and the field. I learned that the question was not merely one of bridging a distance. The research showed how forms of working are normalized and social relations of gender and power are reproduced across structural distances. This is the third question that I take up in the thesis as I study how discourses about empowerment and development shape the space that the women have for exercising agency.

(iii)

As I finish writing the thesis, Wangari Maathai (Deputy Minister of Environment in Kenya) has been awarded the Nobel peace prize and the issue of women's rights in environmental issues is once again on the agenda. In an article written by Maathai and Lena Sommestad, the Swedish Minister of Environment - both active in the network of female environmental ministers - they refer to the decision taken by UNEP on the 25th of February 2005 that states the importance of the relationship between gender equality and the environment. They write that women's interests must be taken into account to a greater extent when environmental policies are formulated. They position equality between men and women as a crucial development question – necessary for an effective and sustainable development, especially in poorer countries (2005).

The relation of third world women to the environment on which they depend for their own and their community's survival is evident. 'Development' and a certain standard of welfare make this question appear to be less urgent for women and men in relation to environmental policy in a richer country like Sweden. What are the implications of my research with the women in the two villagers in understanding how discourses on gender and the environment shape women's space for action? Research in Sweden, as I have discussed earlier, has pointed out how women living and working with the forests become invisible in discussions about work and the forests. The inquiry conducted together with the women provided one glimpse into how this comes about, and showed how questions of gender and power in environmental management are as relevant in this context as in developing countries. Understanding this opens an opportunity for interruption in an order and in a space that appears to have become narrower under the umbrella of development, welfare, and growth.

Meeting in the women's forum in the village in Sweden or in the women's groups in India was neither natural nor self-evident. It was a space that the women in both study sites had consciously constructed. The making of this joint space was not only the result of their social location. Women's subject positions were varied and complex. Social boundaries between them were not always erased as they sought to organize together but they were often acknowledged as the women found ways to relate to each other, over them. The experience of collectiveness proved to be their strength rather than a sign of their weakness as individuals. This fear of being seen as weak and incapable as a result of their organizing as 'women' hovered over the women in different ways in both case study sites. However, the creation of the alternative spaces by them interrupted dominant discourses. The collaborative inquiry and its analysis enabled me to identify the gendered processes that constrained but also assigned value to women's actions in rural development and natural resource management.

The fact that the women in the case in India were more vocal about their discrimination does not imply that power and discrimination were not issues in Sweden. Rather, the space for taking up issues of discrimination and questions of power in Sweden was smaller. Paradoxically, the rhetoric of gender equality that is pervasive in Sweden served to mask forms of subordination and made it difficult

to question the 'neutrality' of given structures. Outside intervention in gender issues was acceptable in the Indian development context but looked upon as interference in what were considered to be personal relations in the case in Sweden. Finally, gender and environmental relations were conceptualised in ways that were specific to each context, but they also carried the impress of outside forces. Strong normative assumptions about development and gender equality or empowerment resonated with each other in both places. A complex movement of ideas at the global level, about what it meant to be developed, rural or urban, empowered and independent, found expression in the everyday practice of 'development'.

By using the two cases to pose questions to each other it has been possible to analyse the gendered consequences of how these discourses take form in specific contexts. By posing these questions, assumptions about how development and local management are to be achieved were illuminated, as well as how ways of working based on these assumptions might also contribute to domination. This comparison (or diffraction) helped me to call into question prevailing metaphors and categorical divides and to bear in mind the relationships of power that organize the world. It has been possible to 'locate' each case in its context and yet carry out a dialogue between the two across what might be regarded as the development divide.

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## Sammanfattning på svenska: avslutande resonemang

De som arbetar med teorier om landsbygdsutveckling och lokal resursförvaltning får en besvärlig uppgift om det är kvinnors handlingsutrymme om lokal förvaltning och landsbygdsutveckling de försöker förstå. En omfattande litteratur hävdar att lokala bygder inte kan uppfattas som helheter. Forskning från en rad områden har visat att landsbygder präglas av en mängd värderingar och splittrade identiteter. Teoretiker står inför den situationen att lösningar inte längre går att forma fram i en enda form av institutionell förändring, och att ojämlikhetens problem inte enbart ligger i att hitta sätt att öppna upp de nya institutionerna för alla män och kvinnor. Kritisk, aktivistpräglad forskning som vill arbeta med kvinnor för förbättringar på landsbygden, kan ställas inför situationen att "landsbygdsutveckling" och "lokalförvaltning" inte är självklara begrepp. I en alltmer globaliserad värld, där vedertagna idéer om utveckling och framsteg utmanas av den vardagliga praktiken, kan anspråk från skilda grupper på om vad man menar med "landsbygdsutveckling" och "jämlighet mellan könen" få helt olika innebörder och behöver således dekonstrueras.

Dessa förhållanden utgjorde ramen för min forskning. De utmanar föreställningarna som utgör grundvalen för de tre begränsande diskurser jag diskuterar i inledningskapitlet: att lokal skogsförvaltning huvudsakligen handlar om skogen och institutioner för förvaltning av denna, att det korrekta sättet att bedriva en vetenskaplig undersökning är att själv ha de rätta frågorna, och att en diskurs präglad av jämställdhetsideal tillsammans med större individuell jämlikhet och frihet ger "kvinnor" bättre utrymme för (kollektivt) handlande, än vad som är fallet i sammanhang där ojämlikhet är ett odiskutabelt livsvillkor. Fragment av dessa begränsningar återfanns dock i såväl vardagens praktik som i teorier om naturresursförvaltning, landsbygdsutveckling och genus. Min forskning kring dessa frågeställningar gör inte anspråk på att vara representativ, men den belyser tre nya frågor. För det första visar den hur genuskodade diskurser skapas, upprätthålls och omvandlas i dynamiska relationer på såväl kontextspecifika som generella sätt. För det andra framläggs i forskningen en metodologi som gör det möjligt att dels identifiera och analysera dessa processer i handling, dels avbryta diskriminerande praktiker. För det tredje, genom att analysera två olika kontexter i förhållande till varandra erbjuder avhandlingen sätt att studera hur jämställdhets- och utvecklingsdiskurser påverkar kvinnors handlingsutrymme. I avhandlingen studerar jag dessa olika frågor. Här diskuterar jag de tre frågorna, sammanfattar några slutsatser och reflekterar över de lärdomar som forskningsprocessen inneburit för mig.

(i)

Kvinnornas organisering störde de dominerande konstruktionerna av vad landsbygdsutveckling och resursförvaltning innebar. Deras organisering tydliggjorde motstridiga betydelserna om vad som utgör landsbygdsutveckling och lokal resursförvaltning, samt tydliggjorde hur olika aktörer försöker etablera

dominerande betydelser. Studierna i Indien och i Sverige visar hur kvinnor uteslöts från byaorganisationer samtidigt som det finns försök att inkludera kvinnorna i dessa. Vidare framkom att en önskan att inkludera kvinnor i utvecklingsarbete och resursförvaltning inte nödvändigtvis medför en vilja att arbeta för en förändring av ojämlika villkor. Kvinnorna på de båda orterna i studien såg sin organisering som en kraftkälla i arbetet för byns bästa. Byns organisationer upplevde dock att kvinnornas organisering störde de, som man ansåg vara, harmoniska relationer som behövdes i arbetet med, vad man menade vara, viktiga frågor för byn.

För kvinnorna i Indien var handlingsfrihet vad gäller skogen omöjlig att skilja från frihet över sig själva, och omvänt innebar brist på frihet i någondera domänen ett tecken på ojämlika maktrelationer visavi männen. På liknande sätt ansåg kvinnorna i Sverige att det var viktigt att i utvecklingsarbetet ta hänsyn till skillnader i inflytande över byns beslutsfattande. Detta synsätt skiljer sig radikalt från arbetsmetoder som kräver samförstånd och konsensus, oavsett utifrån vems villkor och hur ramarna för arbetet formulerats. Studierna visar hur utifrån kommande åtgärder bidrog till dessa spänningar och spelade en viktig roll när det gällde att ge innebörd åt dominerande konstruktioner av "lokalförvaltning", och därigenom genusrelationerna i byarna. De dynamiska processer som formade existerande genus- och maktrelationer var av central betydelse i utformningen av de lokala utvecklings- och förvaltningsprocesserna i byarna. I samma mån som kvinnornas organisering utmanade genus- och maktrelationer ville somliga bevara dessa.

Vare sig i Indien eller i Sverige organiserade sig kvinnorna runt naturresursfrågor i sig. Men som kvinnorna i byarna visade låg dessa frågor outtalade i mycket. Det är omöjligt att sortera ut frågor om naturresurser och skilja dem från övriga frågor. I synnerhet de svenska kvinnorna menade att skogsfrågorna knappast kunde lösas utan genomgripande förändringar i själva byn. På båda platserna var närsamhället och särskilt i Sverige var gemenskapen kvinnornas utgångspunkt och inte något speciellt projekt eller aktivitet. Detta visar att frågor runt lokal skogsförvaltning måste lösas i sitt sociala sammanhang. Kvinnorna i Sverige ansåg att det behövdes aktiviteter i själva byn för att vitalisera landsbygden. Om man skall kunna bedriva ett effektivt samarbete med utomstående aktörer måste relationerna inom byn uppmärksammas och stärkas, menade de.

Denna avhandling hävdar att man i forskning och utvecklingspraktik som strävar efter samarbete och lokalförvaltning av naturresurser, måste betrakta skogen som en "social skog", och ta hänsyn till de mångahanda sätt som kvinnor och män förhåller sig till skogen på, till exempel ekonomiskt, socialt och andligt. Försök till lokal resursförvaltning bör förstås i sitt sociala sammanhang och i relation till andra verksamheter i bygden vilka ger betydelse åt lokalförvaltning. Makt över utveckling finns hos alla män som kvinnor i deras strävanden, deras drömmar och de olika betydelser de ger arbetet de utför. Frågorna om hur utveckling och lokalförvaltning skall bedrivas och i vilka former dessa aktiviteter skall organiseras är lika viktiga som frågorna om vad som måste göras. Kvinnorna

ville ha möjlighet till flera olika former av deltagande – tillsammans med varandra, utifrån deras egna grupper, men också som individer utifrån formella institutioner. Dessa annorlunda arbetssätt passade emellertid inte med vare sig de existerande maktrelationerna, eller med de framväxande, nya institutioner för lokal skogsförvaltning, vilka återskapade de byråkratiska normer de ursprungligen försökt ersätta. Det är således svårt att tala om lokal resursförvaltning utan att samtidigt ta upp frågor om lokal utveckling och makt.

I en "tillväxts-" och decentraliseringskontext, där landsbygdsbefolkningen förväntas ta större ansvar för sin omgivning, får landsbygdsutveckling och lokal resursförvaltning en större betydelse. Istället för att betrakta lokalförvaltning som en på förhand given kategori, studerade jag hur denna konstituerades i de båda undersökningsområdena och jag visar på den centrala betydelse genus har för detta projekt, i synnerhet när det gäller föreställningar om hur arbetet med lokalförvaltning skall organiseras och hur det skall fördelas. Om man studerar landsbygdsutveckling och lokalförvaltning som pågående processer får man möjlighet att lyfta fram organiseringen av sociala relationer – relationer som är stabila och återkommande, men också föränderliga. Det är nödvändigt att studera processer i vardaglig praktik för att förstå de kamperna som förs. Framtida arbeten inom området måste utgå ifrån teorier som behandlar de sociala genus- och maktrelationerna som finns inom bykretsen dels mellan bybor själva, dels till utvecklingsarbetare, forskare och andra utifrån kommande aktörer.

(ii)

Studien med kvinnorna i Sverige utfördes som en form av deltagarorienterad forskning där diskussionsteman och forskningsfrågan skulle bestämmas tillsammans. Detta förhållningssätt inspirerades av 'collaborative inquiry' (Treleaven 1994; Reason 1994) och forskningscirkel (Härnsten 1994) ledde fram till en metodologi som gjorde det möjligt för mig att nå längre än att konstatera kvinnors sedvanliga frånvaro från lokala organisationer och att diskutera olika sätt för kvinnor att ta sig in i dem. Istället möjliggjorde metoden en förståelse av hur kvinnor själva formulerade sina behov och angelägenheter samt hur de såg på detta att arbeta med byns organisationer. Metoden utformades som ett försök att öppna upp ett utrymme för att bedriva gemensam forskning. Med detta påpekande går jag över till den andra frågan: om man öppnar upp för att genomföra en gemensam undersökning, vad innebär det för forskning om byutveckling och naturresurserförvaltning? Svaret på denna fråga består av tre led: att hitta den rätta frågan, att låta kategorierna framträda ur processen, samt forskningsarbetets sociala relationer.

#### Hitta den rätta frågan

Ett flertal författare har uppmärksammat den akademiska världens genuskodade preferens för teoretisk kunskap före praktikerns kunskap (Treleaven 1998). Även på ett empiriskt plan förekom liknande uppdelningar, varigenom de mer praktiska, vardagliga behoven i både den indiska och den svenska byn vägdes mot de framtida fördelarna med att arbeta med skogen. Tack vare min inblandning i den gemensamma undersökningen i Sverige kunde jag förstå hur kvinnorna i byn erbjöd en potentiell utmaning mot rådande tolkningar av byns behov. Detta gjorde

det också lättare för mig att analysera vilka som ansågs vara de viktiga och rätta frågorna, både i byn och på universitetet. När jag återvände till mitt material från Indien, såg jag att frågan om vad som ansågs som de stora och viktiga frågor eller små och mindre angelägna frågor återkom även där. Jag fick emellertid hjälp att se detta tydligare genom att jag hade deltagit i processen i Sverige.

Kvinnorna i den svenska byn kom samman på flera olika sätt och deras organisering i ett kvinnoforum under forskningens gång var ett av dem. Den gemensamma undersökningen med dem gav mig insikt i dynamiken både i byns liv och i landsbygdsutvecklingen, en insikt som annars skulle ha varit svår att nå. Den belyste vardagslivets betydelse för frågan om lokalförvaltning och skogarna. Den gemensamma undersökningen ändrade forskningens inriktning genom att den avslöjade meningsskiljaktigheter om innebörden i de kategorier som annars togs för givna i byn och på universitetet om vad gäller lokal skogsförvaltning och landsbygdsutveckling. Sökandet efter den ”rätta frågan” blev en resa vi gav oss ut på tillsammans.

Att låta kategorierna framträda ur processen

Genom att forskningens tolkningsram lämnades öppen för förhandlingar fick språket och kategorierna som var viktiga för kvinnorna i det aktuella sammanhanget, just då bestämma forskningen. Aspekter som kvinnoforums bildande, gemenskapens betydelse och företeelser som ”samarbete”, ”skogen”, ”kvinnor” och ”män” blev viktiga att studera och analysera. Jag stötte emellertid på aspekter som var svåra att begripliggöra och undersökningsprocessen visade sig vara mer komplicerad än jag föreställt mig. Genom att jag lät kvinnorna bestämma inriktningen på min forskning om deras by, kom jag att ingå i en dynamisk, spännande och kraftfull process, vilket gjorde det ännu svårare att skriva om skeendet. Som andra före mig upplevde jag ”klyftan mellan vad som är möjligt att förmedla när man offentligt presenterar sina inomprocessuella försök att bedriva forskning på ett mer demokratiskt sätt, och hur begränsat det som faktiskt sägs eller skrivs blir” (Lather 1991:98). När jag grubblade över hur jag skulle förklara diskussionerna och vad som hade sagts, påpekade en kollega, som besökte en av våra träffar, insiktsfullt: ”Det är inte vad som blev sagt, utan känslan, energin som var det viktiga i den processen.” Stanley hävdar: ”Det faktum att mycket av mänskligt beteende och mänskliga känslor inte kan beskrivas, än mindre förstås med *(unexplicated)*...kategoriska beteckningar, förbises ofta eller snarare kringgås genom att man behandlar människors erfarenheter som bristfälliga versioner av teoretikernas kategorier” (1990:24). Genom att försöka beskriva kvinnoforums uppbyggnadsprocess och genom att ta hänsyn till vardagen, har jag försökt lyfta fram några av de dynamiska processer, de känslor och den anda som är oupplösligt förenade med den lokala utveckling handlar om, men som vanligen inte får plats i utvecklingsteorierna.

Kategorier skapas i språket, men språket är problematiskt. Aktionsforskningens förespråkare framhåller behovet av offentliga rapporter. Men analyser i en akademisk avhandling är inte samma sak som aktivitetsrapporter. Det finns spänningar mellan akademisk och icke-akademisk diskurs. Och återigen ställs vi inför språkets instabilitet och hur det strukturerar våra tankar (se Kohn 2000). Det

som uttrycks i akademiska termer, exempelvis kategorierna som tjänar som verktyg i analysen, har inte samma innebörd i lekmannadiskurser. Kvinnor eller män må vara kategorier i akademiska analyser, men de är också verkliga, levande människor och jag har beskrivit dem som det i texten. Deras mänsklighet varken kan eller bör utplånas när deras praktik uppfattas som text, men detta åtagande blir problematiskt. I kapitel två poängterar jag t.ex. att jag fryst analysens ramar för att kunna studera relationer, praktiker och processer och förstå hur de konsoliderar betydelser (jfr Connell 1995), istället för att betrakta dem som knutna till särskilda personer för all framtid. Detta gjorde det möjligt för mig att förstå exempel på människors handlingar och språk som bekräftande eller ifrågasättande av en större kontext. Frågan om vem som talar och med vilken auktoritet är inte bara knuten till personen utan belyser också auktoriteten hos de strukturer som individer stöder sig på och för med sig.

En skriven text som riktar sig både till akademiker och till praktiker måste vara lättbegriplig även för människor utanför den akademiska världen, men enligt Parekh, som skriver om politik och akademiska dokument, måste den samtidigt "ha kraft nog att utmana deras sunda förnuft och få dem att se välbekanta ting på ett helt nytt sätt" (2005). Det är ingen lätt uppgift, i synnerhet som analyser ofta inte bara ifrågasätter kategorier, utan även allt som förefaller rimligt och självklart. Trots att det finns ett nära samband mellan utveckling och forskning diskuteras denna fråga sällan, och jag menar att detta är ett område vi måste fortsätta uppmärksamma.

#### Forskningsarbetets sociala relationer

Alla metoder har ett politiskt moment som på ett djupare plan uttrycker en relation mellan människor (Gitlin m.fl., 1988 citerad i Lather 1991:91). Undersökningen med kvinnorna i Sverige var ett sätt att synliggöra forskningsrelationen, så att vi kunde ifrågasätta den och låta min position bli ifrågasatt i sin tur. Frågan om min ansvarighet är dock mer komplicerad än så. Frågan jag ställdes inför var: ansvarig gentemot vem? Var det bara gentemot kvinnorna i byarna eller också gentemot alla de övriga jag skriver om? Frågan gäller också min egen ansvarighet gentemot mig själv – att jag skriver om det jag anser vara viktigt. Men allt man skriver kan inte förhandlas fram. Jag skriver inte bara om vad som sades och gjordes inom kvinnoforumet, utan jag tar även upp frågan om hur forumet och min forskning påverkade, och påverkades av, andra. Jag insåg således att jag var tvungen att ta hänsyn till ett mycket större relationsfält. Detta gav upphov till etiska frågor. Till exempel hade jag och mina kollegor inte fattat något beslut om att jag skulle ta upp och kritiskt analysera deras arbeten. Dessa frågor kom upp under själva forskningsarbetet.

Mina kolleger upplevde inte att de representerade några speciella universitetsintressen. Det är emellertid inte deras intressen som är föremål för analysen, utan den auktoritet som jag som forskare och de som praktiker från universitetet hänvisade till för att legitimera det vi gjorde. Jag kritiserar några av männen och kvinnorna från universitetet för att de upprepade status quo vilket gynnar män och missgynnar kvinnor, och genom detta återskapade bilden av skogen som en maskulin domän. Men som forskare hade jag hänvisat till samma

institutioner för att rättfärdiga att jag, i namn av forskning, klev in i människors liv. Det var ett privilegium som accepterades i byn utan några egentliga diskussioner. Min forskning är på många sätt okonventionell. Jag använde legitimiteten jag hade som forskare till att välja hur jag ville genomföra den. Säkert kan man diskutera hur jag brukade, eller som några kanske upplever det missbrukade, min position. Jag tänker här på Spivak som hävdar:

Om du kommer inifrån, om din position skapats inom universitetsvärlden [...] ger det dig din makt [...] (i detta speciella sammanhang) [...] du måste förhandla för att se vilken positiv roll du kan spela utifrån dess begränsningar [...] för att öppna upp den [...] måste du ingripa samtidigt som du befinner dig inom dessa strukturer [...] man försöker förändra något som man är tvungen att befinna sig i, eftersom man inte arbetar utifrån. För att kunna förbli effektiv, måste man också bevara dessa strukturer – inte riva ner dem fullständigt. Och det är, så vitt jag vet, att förhandla (intervju i Gunew, 1900).

Min önskan att bedriva deltagarorienterad forskning och det ömsesidiga förtroende som det skapade inneslöt mig i en cirkel av tillit som gjorde medveten om behovet av försiktighet. En deltagande process kan manipuleras för forskarens skull. När jag påbörjade skrivandet insåg jag också att jag behövde distansera mig för att kunna studera vår process kritiskt. Genom att använda diskursbegreppet blev, som jag skriver i kapitel två, forskningsobjektet språket, inte människorna och på det sättet försökte jag bevara deras integritet. Den insikt jag fick om företeelser som inte var lätta att se eller benämna i det vardagliga, och om mönster jag fann när jag undersökte språket man använt och handlingarna man företagit sig – kunde jag inte bara lägga åt sidan. Det var viktigt för mig att försöka förklara det jag upplevde som väsentligt, även om det inte hade blivit föremål för förhandlingar. Något annat vore fel i en forskning som vill utmana dominerande förståelser och undersöka praktiker som ger upphov till ojämlikhet. Att inte göra så hade dessutom inneburit ett avvisande av våra försök ”att få bygden att leva.”

Jag fann att jag fick inta rollen av den som har tolkningsföreträdet (jfr. Acker 1991). Dorothy Smith skriver: ”[H]ur skapar man en sociologi för kvinnor och inte om kvinnor?” När jag började min forskning trodde jag att svaret låg i att vara ”med kvinnorna”. Men senare fann jag att min position som utanförstående inte bara gav mig privilegier, utan också andra slags skyldigheter än kvinnornas, eftersom vi avsåg att arbeta på olika sätt med liknade problem. Ibland hade kvinnorna nytta av att jag som forskare tolkade händelserna och berättade hur jag såg på saker och ting. Som Kajsa sa var det bra för dem ”att få veta hur andra ser på oss.” Vad jag vet mindre om är om, och i så fall hur, det skrivna kommer att bli läst, och vilka verkan det kan få. Jag hade velat bedriva forskning som män och kvinnor i byn upplevde som angelägen. Deltagarorienterad forskning skapade utrymmet för det och gjorde det möjligt att grunda forskningen i ett socialt sammanhang. Den gjorde mig också medveten om nödvändigheten att ifrågasätta

teorier och uppfattningar som vanligen tas för givna i utvecklingsammanhang och i den akademiska världen.

I slutändan var det jag som, med Robert Chambers ord, fick staven (en symbol för att ha kunskap och rätten att tala), men jag vill påstå att det är en annan stav än den jag inledningsvis hade. Jag hade börjat med deltagande forskning för att överbrygga det jag såg som ett avstånd mellan universitetet och fältet. Jag kom dock att inse att det inte bara handlade om att överbrygga avstånd. Mina studier visade att vissa arbetsformer är normaliserade och att sociala köns- och maktrelationer återskapas tvärsöver strukturella avstånd. Detta är den tredje frågan jag tar upp i avhandlingen i och med att jag studerar hur makt- och utvecklingsdiskurser formar kvinnornas handlingsutrymme.

(iii)

Medan jag höll på med att avsluta avhandlingsarbetet fick Wangaari Maathai (biträdande miljöminister i Kenya) Nobels fredspris och frågan om kvinnors rättigheter i miljösammanhang aktualiseras än en gång. I en artikel skriven av Maathai och Lena Sommestad, den svenska miljöministern – båda är aktiva i nätverket av kvinnliga miljöministrar – hänvisar de till ett beslut taget av FN:s miljöprogram (UNEP) den 25 februari 2005, vilket poängterar det betydelsefulla sambandet mellan jämlikhet mellan könen och miljön. De skriver att man i miljöpolitiska handlingsprogram måste ta större hänsyn till kvinnors intressen. De konstaterar att jämlikhet mellan män och kvinnor är en central utvecklingsfråga – något som är nödvändigt för en effektiv och hållbar utveckling, i synnerhet i fattigare länder (2005).

Tredje världens kvinnors förhållande till den miljö de är beroende av för sin och sin omgivnings överlevnad är uppenbart. ”Utveckling” och en viss levnadsstandard gör att denna fråga verkar mindre angelägen för kvinnor och män i miljöpolitiska sammanhang i ett rikare land som Sverige. Vad betyder min forskning med kvinnorna i de båda byarna för kunskapen om hur genus- och miljödiskurser formar kvinnors handlingsutrymme? Forskning i Sverige har, som jag diskuterat tidigare, visat att kvinnor som lever och arbetar med skogen osynliggörs i diskussioner om arbete och skog. Undersökningen som gjordes tillsammans med kvinnorna gav en glimt av hur detta går till och visade att frågor om kön och makt i miljöarbete är lika viktiga i detta sammanhang, som i utvecklingsländerna. Om man förstår det, kan detta öppnar en möjlighet för att öka kvinnors handlingsutrymme, ett utrymme som tycks krympas under utvecklingens, välfärdens och tillväxtens retorik.

Att träffas i kvinnoforum i den svenska byn eller i de indiska kvinnogrupperna var vare sig naturligt eller självklart. Det var ett utrymme som kvinnorna i de båda undersökta orterna medvetet skapat. Bildandet av detta gemensamma utrymme var inte bara ett resultat av att de var kvinnor. Kvinnors subjektpositioner är mångskiftande och komplexa. Sociala skrankor mellan dem utplånades inte alltid när de organiserade sig tillsammans, men de uppmärksammades ofta när kvinnorna hittade sätt att relatera till varandra över dem. Erfarenheten av kollektivitet visade sig utgöra en styrka och inte ett tecken på någon svaghet hos

dem som individer. En rädsla för att uppfattas som svaga på grund av att man organiserat sig som ”kvinnor”, fanns dock på olika sätt bland kvinnorna och männen på bägge orterna. Att de skapade alternativa utrymmen avbröt emellertid dominerande diskurser. Den deltagarorienterade undersökningen och dess analyser gjorde det möjligt för mig att upptäcka de genuskodade processer som begränsade, men också gav värde åt kvinnors agerande inom landsbygdsutveckling och lokal förvaltning.

Det faktum att kvinnorna i studien i Indien talade mer om hur de diskrimineras, innebar inte att makt- och diskrimineringsfrågor saknade aktualitet i Sverige. Snarare var det så att utrymmet för diskussioner om makt och diskriminering var mindre i Sverige. Paradoxalt nog dolde den i Sverige så framträdande retoriken om jämställdhet vissa typer av underordning och gjorde det svårt att ifrågasätta ”neutraliteten” hos olika strukturer. I den indiska utvecklingskontexten accepterades utifrån kommande ingripanden i genusfrågor, men i Sverige uppfattades sådana ingripanden som inblandning i vad som ansågs vara personliga förhållanden. Slutligen begripliggjordes genus- och relationer till skogen på speciella sätt i vardera kontexten; men de präglades också av externa krafter. Starka normativa föreställningar om utveckling och jämställdhet eller empowerment återfanns på båda orterna. En komplex rörelse av globala idéer om vad det innebär att vara utvecklad, lantlig eller urban, inflytelserik och oberoende, kom till uttryck i det vardagliga praktiserandet av ”utveckling”.

Genom att låta de två fallen ställa frågor till varandra blev det möjligt att analysera de genuskodade konsekvenserna av hur dessa diskurser uttrycktes i specifika sammanhang. Antagandena om sätt att uppnå utveckling och lokalförvaltning belystes. Det gjorde det möjligt att förstå hur dessa sätt också kan bidra till att förstärka dominerande maktförhållanden. Denna jämförelse (eller diffraktion) hjälpte mig att ifrågasätta förhärskande metaforer och kategoriska uppdelningar, och att hålla i minnet de maktrelationer som organiserar världen. Det blev möjligt att situera vardera fallstudien i dess kontext och ändå föra en dialog mellan dem över vad som kan tyckas vara en utvecklingsklyfta.



