

# **Women's representation in spaces of participation and power**

**A study of tribal and non-tribal women in local systems of governance in**

**Orissa, India**

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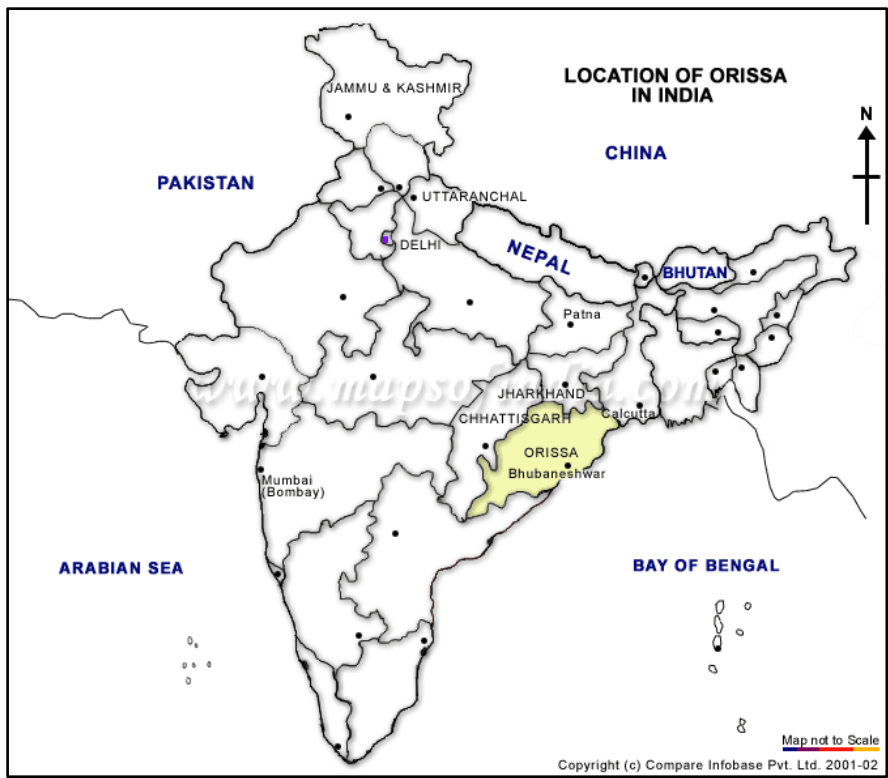


Figure 1 Map of India and location of the state of Orissa

Source: (Maps of India, 2001)

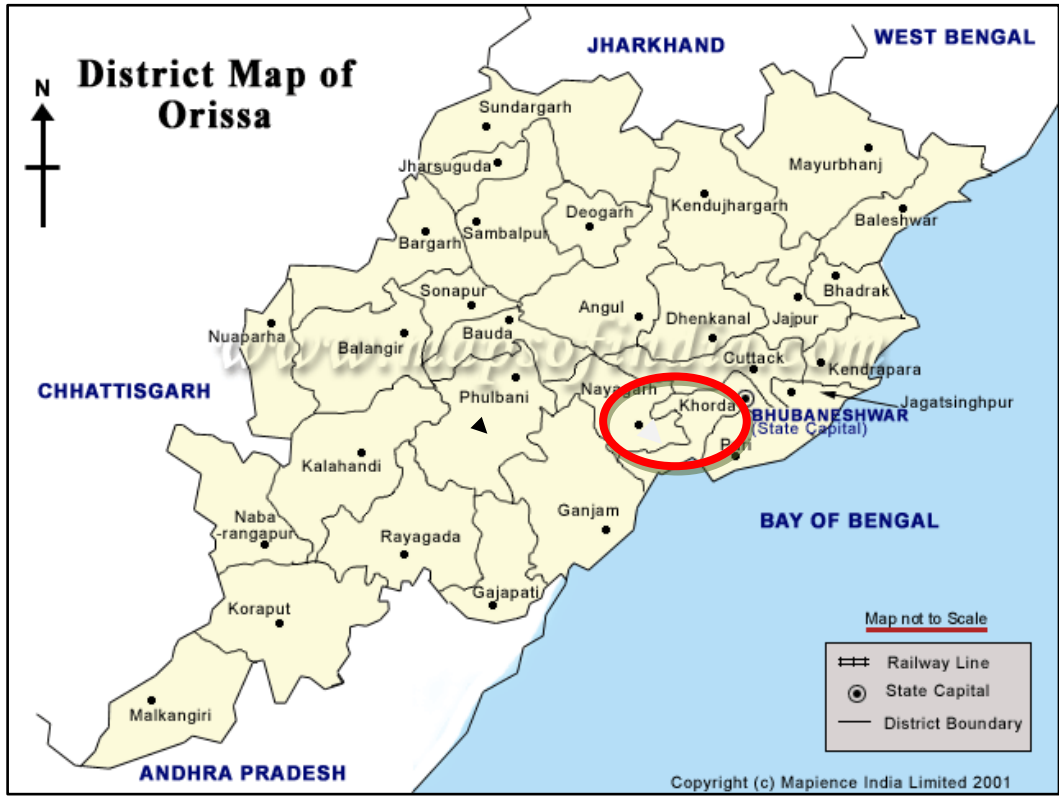


Figure 2 Map of Orissa and the study area

Source: (Tourism of Orissa, 2001)

## **Dedication**

This study is dedicated to all the women and men of Orissa who generously made this study possible. It is in deep gratitude to you that I now complete this work. All along the process you have been a source of knowledge, and witnessing your struggles for representation has been truly inspirational.

Picture on the front page: Tribal woman and her marriage jewellery.

*“Men are like Gods. Our husbands are like Gods and we shall obey them. These bracelets and our tikilis are for them, and we can not be angry at them”* (Interview A4).

## **Abstract**

This study investigates the real representation of women in two villages in Orissa, India. Through my own feminist lens I have brought in theory of spaces of participation and power and hence linked this to the concept of real participation.

Women from three different ranges within the local social hierarchies have participated in this study by sharing their knowledge, and I have tried to connect their stories and knowledge to political geography by captivating how they are represented in local governance.

Representation is an important concept throughout this study, and it concerns how people feel that their interests are being represented and listened to. The study reveals women's constraints and enabling factors to participate in formal or public spaces of governance. The studied women show that they lack real access to the invited spaces of participation in their local villages and thus they lack access to real representation through public spaces.

This study also investigates the links between different spaces of representation, and shows that real representation is vital in women's lives. When in practice excluded from the local public spaces of governance, these women claim spaces of participation and power by creating their own spaces of representation in the counter-publics.

**Key words:** *women, participation, power, representation, counter-publics*

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# 1. Introduction

On the runner up to the independence of India in 1947, Mahatma Gandhi, who had been guiding the movement towards emancipation from the British colonisation, made his thoughts about democracy and the village Panchayat (local village council). He had visions of the village as an independent body, and that the village Panchayat should have authority and be self-governing. The council should have the composition of local men and women with prescribed qualifications (Venkataramaiah, 2002).

In 1992 India passed the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment to the Constitution. This Amendment was finally pulled through after several years of committee work and a nation trying to find the best solution for decentralising the governmental power. By passing the Amendment in 1992 and implementing it in 1993, India became part of the decentralisation wave of the century, diminishing power to the grassroots. Among the objectives of this decentralisation was the idea of deepening the democracy, and not least to put those last in line to the front, through inviting the people to participate. People should be included and gain more importance through responsibilities in village development. Especially women, tribals and Dalits (untouchable casts) were to be included in governance through affirmative actions (Palanithurai, 2002).

The implementation of this Amendment, and hence the deepening of democratisation and equalisation of men and women, came simultaneously with the great wave of gender mainstreaming, which has been a project in many of the world's corners. The gender mainstreaming project had the objective of moving women into all legislative bodies, equalising the number of women to men through affirmative action (Rai, 2008).

When observing numbers of women in politics and bodies of governance growing in India, evidence are at the same time showing how the statistical representation of women may not be merely positive. Mohanty's study (2007) of women's presence in state institutions provides us with an understanding of a situation where women are being cynically used as formal participants in the village Panchayats. Women are encouraged to participate and run for elections, they are elected for the formal position on paper, while in reality their husbands or sons are the real representatives. Mohanty's findings show that men participate in the state sphere, acting and speaking their meanings, while women enter these arenas only to give their

formal signatures by virtue of their official position, often with no knowledge of what they agree to (Mohanty, 2007).

This case, among others which studies the oppression of tribal people, women and minorities trigger my interest and sense of justice. This accompanied by my interest in Indian society and life inspired this study of women's realities in India. This study seeks to understand how women are represented in local systems of governance in two villages in Khurda District in Orissa, India, with particular focus on changes in the aftermaths of the implementation of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment.

The fieldwork for this study was conducted in the state of Orissa in India. India seems to me to be one of the most diversified and interesting nations in the world, with great variety in religion, caste and socio-economy. As my interest for the marginalised and excluded in society has been strong, Orissa made an appropriate arena for the study, as more than 20 per cent of the population are tribals<sup>1</sup> (8 per cent nationally) (Karmakar, 2002). Orissa provides a contextual basis for an interesting and intriguing study, as the state is very traditional and at the same time highly diversified, in terms of ethnic groups, traditions, political history and corruption. The high percentage of tribal groups in Orissa gives this study an extra dimension, as I have intended to discover differences and equalities between caste women, the untouchable Harijan women and the tribal women, as they all are living in the same villages and operate within the same society.

With an applied gender perspective and interest in the agency of marginalised groups, I have aimed at undertaking a qualitative study, interviewing and observing local villagers, with special focus on women and tribal women. Karmakar (2002) claims that tribal women are in a triple malediction. First they are born women; they are born into a non-privileged class and finally; their lives are struggles in a hostile environment. As important as a tribal woman's contribution to economy and development is, she is not being recognised and attains a significantly low status in the society (Karmakar, 2002).

## **Personal goals and commitment to the study**

My interest in India as a study area has some years of history. After coming several times as a tourist, I have gained inspiration from the diverse cultures and structures of the Indian society

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<sup>1</sup> Term used in India to describe people from indigenous groups.

and when studying development studies I got an urge to study themes of development *in context*. I went back to India to study and collect data for an undergraduate thesis. At that time I had a particular interest for participatory development as an operational and instrumental tool used by NGOs in development work. The results of this study showed that using participatory methods could be a way of democratising development processes. By getting acquainted with the Panchayat system, I have learned that the true intentions behind it were to create a system of self-governance to the people in the rural areas. On the other hand, the study found that local power relations, and especially local governance systems like the Panchayats, could either be very supportive or very counterproductive for participants in such development processes. My first meeting with these governance systems thus made the preconditions for my ambivalent relationship to the Panchayat system and I could not leave the idea of bringing this further and into my graduate work.

Before entering the field of study, I got the intriguing idea of the Panchayat as a space of governance where the elites, meaning the strongest castes and those with financial strength, could govern freely and to their own private benefit. I had learned that the system was created in the vision of the Indian government under Gandhi's rule, to decentralise power and increase democracy through rural people. Therefore, I have been curious to figure out how the women, as the powerless in this relation, have been integrated into the Panchayat system after the implementation of the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment to the Constitution, which ensures women the right to participation in these organs.

Focusing at the legislative amendment to the Constitution, I find it interesting to find out how women, after having their right to participation in the Panchayat system ensured by law, now enter the spaces of power and participation.

The selection of women as the main category of study is causally connected to my understanding of rural Indian women as powerless and oppressed, this building on academic research findings (Mohanty, 2007; Rai, 2008). My choice of studying women in governance is also highly inspired by female activists I met through an organisation in Delhi. Working for women's rights realisation in India, these women drew me an appalling picture of half a population deprived from the right to make decisions about their own lives. This meeting also presented me with the idea of the so called *proxy wives*, women with important positions on paper, but represented by their husbands and male in-laws in reality. Not only does this provoke me to study these women, but I am also triggered into digging in to the field of

representation. Rai (2008) calls for attention to the representation of women's interests, and asks questions about how the institutionalisation of women's representation into national machineries, like the Panchayat system, can represent women. It is important to ask whether these quotas actually make a difference to women's representation, and even though many researchers are into the field, the study of female representation needs to be explored in different contexts.

Researchers displaying how women are descriptively represented, and in many cases not substantially represented, makes me ask whether there is any use of institutionalisation of rights through formal governance systems. Ideally the study seeks to find its place within feminist political geography, and as a project it tries to gain political significance and contribute to the discourse of re-politicising gender equity.

## **Research questions and objectives**

The research question stated below, together with the objectives of the study, has been shaped as an attempt to grasp the complexity of the situation in an area of cultural and ethnic diversity.

*How do women enter the spaces of participation and power in local systems of governance and what are their spaces of real representation in a class, caste and male dominated society?*

### ***Main objectives of the study***

The main objective of the study is to understand the real representation (substantial representation of interests) of women in the spaces of power and participation in local systems of governance in two different villages in Khurda District, Orissa.

#### **Objective 1:**

To study women's entry to participatory spaces by understanding the role, functioning and participation of women in local systems of governance, and to explore the factors which constrain or enable them to participate.



Study questions:

- *What constitutes the local spaces of participation?*
- *What constitutes representation (formal/ real)?*
- *How do women enter the spaces of participation and hence power?*

## **Objective 2:**

The study seeks to identify women's role in governance, and tries to reveal the links between the local systems of governance and the opportunities for change.

Study questions:

- *How are women's power and participation linked with the different spaces of governance?*
- *What indicates the local possibilities/ opportunities for change or enhanced participation of women in these areas?*

## **Structure of the thesis**

This study has been sectioned into seven chapters. The first chapter has presented the motivation for the study and the research questions and objectives.

The second chapter provides a contextual frame for understanding the setting around the studied area and topic.

The third chapter gives an account for the methodological choices which has been applied in the research process, as well as personal reflections with regard to the research and ethical considerations.

The fourth chapter treats the theoretical and analytical framework applied to this study, and gives a specific insight to feminist political geography and rights-based approaches. The analytical framework consists of conceptualisation of the spaces of participation, the spaces of power, and representation.

The fifth chapter brings the reader into the analysis, and specifically deals with women's spaces of participation and power in study village A. Here we meet both men and women and their representations of participation and power.

The sixth chapter deals with women's access to real representation in study village B. In this chapter the reader is also presented to an observation of the local Panchayat meeting, which contribute to the understanding of how spaces of representation are linked together.

The conclusion of this study is presented in the seventh and final chapter, which consist of an attempt to answer how women really are represented in these study villages. Further, it gives an idea about how the spaces of participation are linked to each other, and finally the chapter tries to predict opportunities for change in women's spaces of power and participation and their access to representation.

## **2. The contextual frame of the study**

This chapter has the purpose of giving the reader an understanding of the contextual frame and conditions of the study. First of all, it describes the area of the state and gives a brief view of how people live in Orissa. Second, the traditional system of Varnas or the caste system will introduce the composition of the people living in Orissa. Then, people of Orissa are presented by different ethnic backgrounds relevant for the study. I have also added a brief section of gender and the role of patriarchy in India, as this is particularly important when understanding the analysis. Next, this chapter explains the system of formal governance in India, with special emphasis at the local village level, the Panchayat. Finally, the chapter gives a view of women's statistical representation in Orissa and the study area, and a presentation of the groups which the research participants of the study belong to.

### **The study area**

Orissa is a state on the eastern coast of India, hosting more than 36 million people. About 85 per cent of the state's population live in rural areas, distributed among 51,350 villages. Orissa is an agrarian economy, more than 63 per cent of the states workers are occupied in the primary sector, although the potential for cultivation is greater, as about 40 per cent of the states' area is cultivable. Most people are still dependent on the land of higher castes. Additionally, cultivation in Orissa is a risky business as the state with its coastal line is highly exposed to environmental hazards like cyclones and floods.

Besides agriculture, Orissa has vast mineral resources, and possess about one third of the country's reserves of iron-ore. Foreign industries are established, as the mineral resources combined with the coastal line is attractive for business. Despite of these promising numbers and resources, Orissa remains the poorest state in the country, with 47 per cent of the population living below the poverty line, in comparison with 27 per cent on national average. The average income is Rs 22,397 per capita, which counts about 490 USD (Bhandari & Kale, 2009).

Khurda is one of Orissa's many districts depending on mineral industries like mining and stone exports. Large parts of the population live in rural areas, depending on the businesses of large mining companies extracting minerals from Orissa's mountains.

In this study, two villages have been selected carefully to represent three different strata of the village society in Orissa. Both villages are within Tangi Block, in Khurda District. The villages belong to two different Panchayats, and have been selected intentionally for this study, as they both are settled by a dominant caste, a minority tribal community and a small Harijan (untouchables) settlement.

## **People of India**

### ***The Indian Varnas and the caste system***

The social structure of Indian people is divided into a system which most know as the caste system. In reality, this is a complex system, although it seems like a hierarchical system of families. There are four *Varnas*, which are the stratification categories which puts the Brahman at the top and then *Kshatriya*, *Vaisya* and *Shudra* in descending order. Besides these classifications there are sub-groups of more inferior classes, or castes. The family names reveal a *jati*, which is the subdivision of a Varna, and every *jati* used to be designated to a certain profession or specific tasks (Louis, 2003; Yamazaki, 2005).

This system has functioned for centuries, classifying people into categories, and the hierarchies are strong. Brahmin and Kshatriya, respectively the caste or Varna of Hindu priests and warriors or officials are the most superior groups in all areas. One's placement in the hierarchy is based on birth, and a general rule is the cultural prohibition to marry outside ones own caste. Daily life is concerned with practicing purity of the caste, this means that mixing with people from other castes will be an unhygienic action or give a polluted situation, which require purification rituals and procedures. For this and other reasons, the superior castes never came to mix with inferior castes, and especially not those outside the Varnas, like the untouchable people who are recognised as the most impure. In turn, this led to an exclusive system, as the superior people had access to land and power over it, and exclusion of the impurity became an everyday action. The power in the hands of the superior castes has been the cause of vast abuse of and torture against inferior groups, and especially to the people who do not belong to any of the four Varnas, like the untouchables or the tribal people. It might seem like a paradox that it has persisted, as the higher and superior castes are counting about 15 per cent of the population, while controlling about 60 per cent of resources (Louis, 2003; Yamazaki, 2005).

With the abolishment of caste discrimination after the emancipation from the British rule, the social structure of India was supposed to even out, and ideally it would smooth out to a situation where everyone would have the same value. Unfortunately the process of removing discrimination seems to be a difficult task in real life, as the system is so deeply embedded in culture and daily life. The discriminative practice is still very vivid in most Indian societies (Louis, 2003).

### ***Hinduisation of Indian tribals***

The Varna system has come with its implications to society and to people of different Varnas and jatis. To those who are not included in this system at all, the consequences have been, and can still be crucial, as these people are placed at the bottom of the hierarchy. As an attempt to smooth out the differences in status between castes and tribals, many tribal groups have Hinduised themselves during a few generations, by accommodating Hindu traditions, customs and rites, and off course by taking on the belief of the higher Varnas. The word Hinduisation is just one of many nicknames of the process of tribal absorption into Hindu culture, and it is also known as Sanscritisaion, Aryanisaion and so on (Dash, 1998).

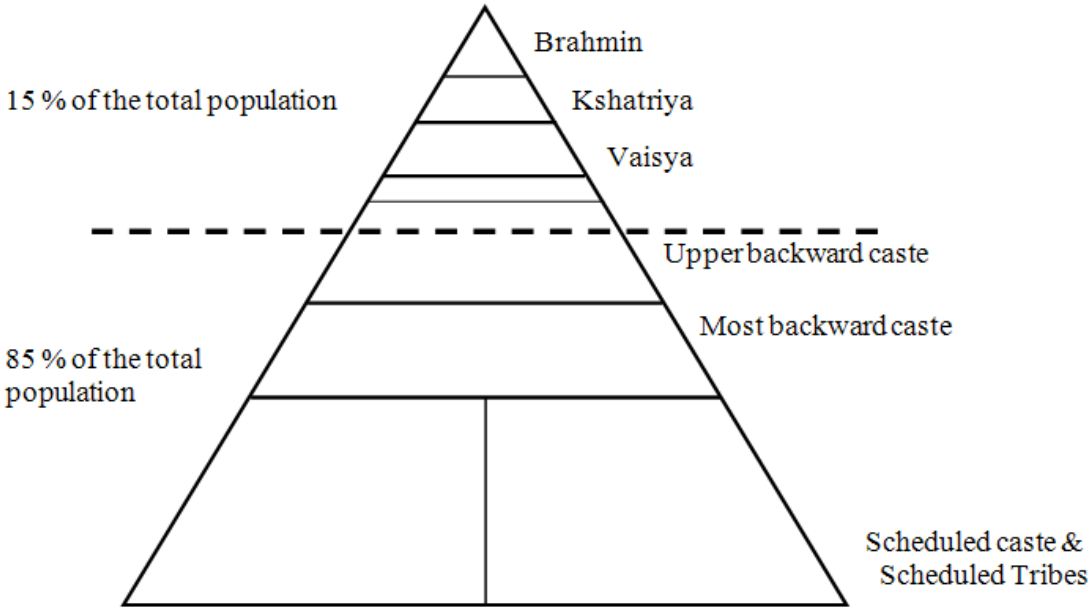
In most of the cases where tribal groups have been absorbed into Hindu society, they have been recognised as a new jati, either in the lower Varnas or considered as untouchables. In the literature they may also be known as the fifth Varna. Trying to adapt and to become the equals to peoples of caste, the tribals have abandoned many of their own customs and adapted the customs of the Hindus to become accepted and respected in their new societies. Still, many claim that the Hinduisation process never will be very promising for the tribals, as the higher Varnas always will recognise them as either outcastes or scheduled castes (Dash, 1998).

## **The people of Orissa**

### ***General Caste and Other Backward Castes***

It is customary to classify or categorise castes into different groups, not only according to Varnas. The superior Varnas, Brahmans and Kshatriyas, but also Vaisyas are always seen as superior, and they are categorised as upper castes. The Shudras are known as *backward* castes, and consists of two groups of people who are categorised into *upper backward castes*

and *most backward castes* (Louis, 2003). In the villages of study, the categorisation is slightly different, as most caste Hindu populations seem to have more or less the same social standards and occupations. In these areas they separate between *General Caste*, which are the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas, and the *Other Backward Castes* (OBC) which is a category consisting of about all others who are neither Adivasi nor Harijan people. There are no visible differences or distance between the General Caste and the OBC, although they occupy different hamlets in the villages.



**Figure 3** *Composition of India’s population*

*Source:* (Model recreated after the model of Louis, 2003, p. 50)

The model above gives a picture of how small the ruling population is, and how the major population is placed at the bottom of the hierarchy. In addition to this, it should be mentioned that the upper castes control about 60 per cent of resources, while the 85 per cent scheduled castes and scheduled tribes control about 5 per cent of the resources (Louis, 2003). Altogether, these statistics sum up a picture of skewed distribution.

### ***Tribal/ Adivasi people***

About 8 per cent of the Indian population are tribals, or Adivasis. Tribal groups used to live in the more remote areas, especially in the northern and mid part of India, making livelihoods in a self sufficient manner. As other ethnic groups of India, it is not very appropriate to generalise about the tribal populations, but a main cultural aspect of these groups is that their religion and their rituals are mainly concerning the worshipping of local village gods and the spirits of ancestors. With influence of Hindu culture, many are in addition celebrating different Hindu gods (Guha, 2009).

Looking at development indicators, the Adivasi people of India are living on the margins of poverty, and about half of them are living below the national poverty line. During the latest decades, liberalisation of the Indian economy has forced high shares of the tribal groups to migrate and many have lost their homelands due to commercialisation of land and forests. There are no clear numbers of people being forced to migrate, but there is evidence that many Adivasi people have to find space in other villages where the caste Hindus live (Guha, 2009). In the name of liberalisation, the government of Orissa has actively pushed the Adivasis out of their places, by encouraging corporations to settle and make businesses in their areas. Both Indian and foreign mining companies are to be found all over the state, and they heavily exploit the resources and areas which previously used to be the basis of the livelihoods of the Adivasis. It has led to great suffering and poverty to most of the Adivasi populations of Orissa (Guha, 2009).

Unfortunately for the tribal groups in the study area, the Hinduisation process has gone quite far, and as they keep abandoning their own traditions, they have lost touch with their native culture and customs. Another critical aspect is the change of their names, which also in this area has made many of them lose their rights to a tribal certificate, which proves their rights as scheduled, and gives them quotas in governance, government jobs, and rights to certain schemes.

The process of Hinduisation has in some places gone so far that it is giving the tribal populations changed power relations. As the Adivasis are primarily egalitarian communities, by being Hinduised they have in many areas gone from egalitarianism to a stratified society (Pattnaik, 1997). For the Adivasi women in the particular study areas, the Hinduisation process in Orissa can be interpreted as particularly devastating, as tribal culture is known to be very egalitarian and the equity between men and women has been extraordinary. When

Hinduised, women of the tribes seems absorbed into the patriarchy and lost their equality to men. Tribal men seem more or less adjusted to the roles of the Hindu patriarchs, and women seem involuntary oppressed. Tribal men and women share the agricultural work and they are both in labour, but when it comes to household women bear full responsibility (Pathy, 1997).

### ***Harijan/ Scheduled castes***

The terms *untouchables*, *Dalits*, *Harijan people* and *Scheduled castes* are just some of the names given to one of the most discriminated minorities of India. Gandhi, who was one of the advocates at the frontline of the quest of Dalit rights, called them the Harijan people, which can be translated as the men or the children of God. Even though there was a great opposition to the use of the term Harijan, it still makes sense to use it in this study, as this is used locally in the study area (Louis, 2003). The term *Scheduled castes* (S.C.) is the official language in state policies and so on, therefore it might emerge as a synonym below in the thesis.

Without going into the historical processes which led to these people's range at the bottom of the caste hierarchy, or even outside it, there is no doubt about their vulnerable position in India. In 1949 abolishment of any kind of caste discrimination was implemented in the Constitution, and a range of laws were implemented to protect the well being of the Harijans.

In Orissa, the experience of the untouchable people, or the Harijans, is that their ancestor's use of cow meat and leather made them unpopular and unhygienic to the other castes, since they believe that cows are holy and thus should not be killed for purpose of human beings. Even though the Harijan people in these areas have stopped the use of cow meat many generations ago, many of them still use leather from dead cows to make the traditional wedding and festival drums. The drumming is also an important part of their culture, e.g. they are required to drum during ceremonies or weddings of all castes.

There might of course be other important reasons for discrimination between castes in these areas, but it is quite hard to see through the system and discover the original reasons of discrimination as this has been going on for centuries.

## **Patriarchy and the role of gender in India**

*'When the female child becomes a wife, she acquires the functions of a mother; similarly the male child becomes a father'* (Padia, 2000, p. 29).



By stating this, Padia opens a discussion of gender roles in India. While the role of the woman or the wife is confined to housework, men and husbands are designated to the outer world, by making an income to the family. The external going male in general has a superior role to the woman, as the work she does in the private spheres is not seen by others.

In India the word gender, as Padia claims, has become a value loaded word in the meaning of '*social institutionalisation of sexual difference*' (Padia, 2000, p. 30). There is a social meaning forced to the different bodies of men and women, and these meanings are inhabited through generations. There are those who argue that socialisation and cultural factors of gender are hindering men and women of taking on equal roles, and thus make women reluctant to enter the systems of politics, as it is a male area (Iwanaga, 2008).

The term patriarchy keeps showing up in the literature of female participation in politics and governance, and it is clear that much of India is governed on patriarchal terms. The term patriarchy indicates the structural system of male domination, and according to Sinha (2000) it can both mean the rule of fathers, as well as the rule of men. Either way, it is the everyday experience of India's women. Understanding this system requires a deep dig into the history and making of culture, and it is difficult to grasp its real influence on the everyday lives and governance of Indians.

In Orissa, patriarchy is deeply embedded in traditions, and the different zones and responsibilities of men and women are highly visible. An obvious trait of this is the boy preference in the area, which has led to the murders of thousands of girls through infanticide. Even though the boy preference has been banned and prohibited for a long time and there are several organisations working to change traditional attitudes towards boys and girls, there is still evidence of higher numbers of boys growing up than girls. In the state Khurda, the sex ratio was in 2001 a number of 902 women to 1000 males (Bhandari & Kale, 2009).

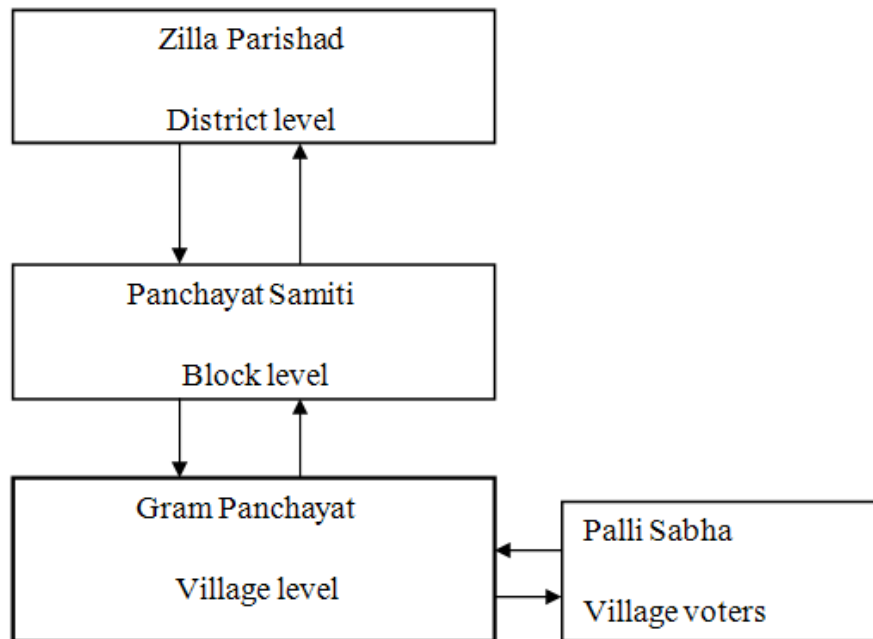
## **Democracy and governance in India**

With a population exceeding 1, 2 billion people, India certainly becomes one of the world's most populous nation-states, and it is today the world's largest democracy (Census of India, 2011). The country is divided into 28 states, in addition to some smaller Union Territories administrated by the central government (Charlton, 2004).

In 1959, India was established as a federal state, which means that the sovereignty is shared between a central government and the state governments. A Parliamentary system is the formal government structure of India, which is based on the British model of government. The Indian National Parliament holds the (lower) house of people (Lok Sabha), the upper house (Rajya Sabha/ Council of states) and the president of India. India has a symbolic head of state, which is the president, and the president is the formal appointer of the prime minister. Other than that, the president has a very limited political authority. The members of the parliament are elected by voters. The cabin government, which consists of the prime minister and the cabinet, holds the political authority, but only under the approval of the parliament (Charlton, 2004).

Hasan (2009) salutes the Indian way of institutionalising the democracy through constitutionalism, by implementing rule of law, regular elections, a free press and so on. Still, Hasan is critical towards the gap between the much admired democratic ideals and the social inequalities among the people. Much of his critiques are directed towards the system being more rhetorical than efficient, maybe because the existing social hierarchy was inherited into the new Indian state. With the gradual expansion of democracy, the Constitution has had its Amendments of importance to the decentralisation of authoritarian power. The 72<sup>nd</sup> and the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment to the Constitution coming into action in 1993 has made its changes (Hasan, 2009).

The local self-governance system, the Panchayati Raj system, was set into action in 1959, and is a three tiered system at the end of the democratic pyramid, which is the system of district levels in the states. Before 1959, the system already existed in many states which had passed their own acts. The three tier system is including all members above voting age in India, and takes place in their local areas.



**Figure 4** *The three tier Panchayati Raj system*<sup>2</sup>

The Gram Sabha, which in Orissa is called the Palli Sabha<sup>3</sup>, is a meeting where (ideologically) all members of the village meet, and elect their village representatives to the Panchayat. The Gram Panchayat is responsible for village welfare and reports to its villagers in the Sabha annually. The elected chairman of the Panchayat, the Sarpanch, becomes an ex-officio member of the Panchayat Samiti, which is the mid tier of the local democracy system. The Panchayat Samiti is located at the block, which is the next division under the district. This level provides the Gram Panchayat with amenities and is in charge of block development. The chairman of the Panchayat Samiti is again an ex-officio at the level of the district, the Zilla Parishad. The Zilla Parishad supervises the Panchayat Samiti, and they also cooperate with the state government and ministers (Mishra, 2002).

### ***The Gram Panchayat***

The Gram Panchayat, which from now will be referred to as the Panchayat, is the executive organ of the village government. This organ, or council, consists of elected members of the village, and there are provisions for reservations after the 73rd Amendment to the

<sup>2</sup> This figure is based on the researcher's own interpretation of the system through literature on the Panchayat system (Goel & Rajneesh, 2009; Mishra, 2002)

<sup>3</sup> The name Polli Sabha is difficult to retrieve from literature, here it is implemented with reference to the researchers own field experience.

Constitution. These reservations give women the right to hold at least 1/3 of all seats, as well as 1/3 for Scheduled castes and Scheduled Tribes (minorities). In addition there can be reservations for Backward Castes if their proportion of the local population is more than 20 per cent. The Panchayat's composition is supposed to mirror the society in general (Goel & Rajneesh, 2009).

The *Sarpanch* is the head of the Panchayat, and it varies between states how the Sarpanch is elected, either he/she is elected among the members of the Panchayat or of the people themselves. The Sarpanch seat is also supposed to reflect the people, and therefore also has reservations which circuits between all the Panchayats in the district. The Panches, or the members of a Panchayat are not supposed to have any political affiliation, as there is a ban on political parties, and ideally one member per 400 rural population is elected (Goel & Rajneesh, 2009).

The functions of the Panchayat are many, among them the mandatory functions of constructing and maintaining basic infrastructure of roads, street lights, and water-supply and so on. The Panchayat is in charge of promoting education, immunisation and health, and they levy local taxes and fees. The ultimate goal of the Panchayat should be to gain prosperity to the village through a participatory process inclusive of all citizens, which only is possible through diffusion of the power of decision-making (Goel & Rajneesh, 2009).

## **Statistical representation of women in Orissa and the study area**

According to the National Platform to Promote Decentralisation (2008) and their available national statistics, the average representation of women in village Panchayats, or Gram Panchayats in India is about 37 percent. In Orissa, the female representatives are reflected in the national average, as it is 36.5 per cent, and according to the state statistics Orissa's women were occupying 31131 seats, out of the total 85367 Panchayat representative seats, as per March 2008. After the Amendment was passed and implemented, women got the chance to stand for their first elections in the mid 90's. At that time the higher castes 'naturally' were elected as Sarpanches, but in the second elections it was more participation from other castes. Statistics reveal that many of the women elected in the second round were successors of their husbands.

Study village A is a part of a larger Gram Panchayat of four villages, where the total population of the Panchayat's territory is about 5,500 people, of which 43 per cent are female. About 7 per cent are scheduled castes, and less than 4 per cent are scheduled tribes. The majority group and also most powerful and well off is General Caste. This Panchayat has 15 seats, as of which 5 are occupied by women. Village A is the largest of the Gram Panchayat territory's four villages and holds 8 out of these 15 seats in the Panchayat. Within these 8 seats 3 seats are occupied by female representatives, which give women more than 1/3 of the local statistical representation.

Study village B is member of a Gram Panchayat consisting of 11 villages. The total population of the Gram Panchayat territory is about 9000, of which 44 per cent are female. 5, 6 per cent of the population are scheduled castes, while only 3, 7 per cent are scheduled tribes. Village B is the largest of these 11 villages and holds 6 out of 22 seats in the Gram Panchayat, of who 3 are women. Of the total 22 Gram Panchayat representatives, 8 are women, which give women about 36 per cent representation.

In this village the major ethnic group is OBCs, and they are recognised as the most powerful group. To an outsider it is difficult to tell any difference between the General Caste of village A and the OBCs of village B, as they seem to live in the same standard of living and housing.

### ***The research participants***

The research participants who participated in this study come from three different social layers in the villages. The Adivasi, which are the tribal groups are mainly poor day-to-day labourers. Both men and women share the plight of making a family income, and the income levels are not really sufficient through the year. Adivasi women are responsible for housework and caring for the family.

The Harijan participants of this study are in these areas considered as lower middle class people. They are outcasts as they are culturally looked upon as untouchables, but they manage economically. In their hamlets, men are responsible for making a family income, while women are in charge of the household.

The General caste people, but also the participants from the OBC hamlets are the most well off villagers in the study areas. As the Harijan people, men are in responsible for bringing in money, while women take care of house and family.

All three groups practice Hindu religion, but to varying degrees. Women from General Caste see themselves as deeply religious and take much effort in praying activities. The Adivasi people have adopted many of the Hindu gods into their culture, but at the same time they practice *Isana*, the praising of ancestors. Both Adivasi and Harijan people are not allowed to enter the local temples, as the higher cast looks at them as pollutants.

In general, this study has focused on women, and thus most research participants are female. For a complete overview, see Appendix 2.

### **3. Methodology – A qualitative approach**

The research problem becomes the ultimate guide when defining the methods to apply for a study, as the question asked itself will predict answers of a certain kind. Choosing a method for a study depends on what kind of information which is desirable (Smith, 2001). As the objectives of this study are to understand the situation of a group of women, the methodology naturally fell to a qualitative strand. In search of real life accounts and answers for the substance of matter, the women in focus themselves have stood at the core of the research. More specifically, the data, or call it knowledge, collected in the field for this study was brought to light through qualitative semi-structured interviews, but also through observational studies.

Entering the field, the main purpose was to investigate the lives of the women in focus. It is important to state that I have had a mission to represent the truth about their lives and situations through my own lens, however, through their own words. As I recognise that I will never be able to tell their stories from their own angle, this has been of great concern to me, and it has required lots of reflection and consideration. Therefore I wish to start this chapter by presenting the reader to some of my methodological anguish attached to my own positionality in the field and in the process as a whole.

This chapter give the reader an impression of preparations done before undertaking the research, the methods applied to collect and produce data, and how the methodological choices were made in order to suit the research questions. I continue by legitimating the choices, and I present the inconveniences as well as the great advantages met during the research. The selection of research participants for the interviews and the limitations will be justified. Thereafter, research ethics and the role and position of the researcher, as well as other important factors which affected the study and the data have been discussed here. Finally, the chapter gives a brief section on how the data have been analysed and handled through the study.

#### **Critical reflexivity, positionality and personality**

Crang and Cook (2007) stress the impossible task of doing an objective study, hence the researcher must recognise her situated and positioned role. The researcher is both situated and

biased and will always interpret the world from her or his own point of view. Finding an absolute truth is not the mission in ethnographic research, and recognising one's own subjectivity might contribute to deeper understanding of an issue (Crang & Cook, 2007). One way of recognising our own positions and situatedness might be through what Dowling (2000) calls *critical reflexivity*. Critical reflexivity is about the researcher assessing herself, being self-conscious in a way that can contribute to what I understand as more ethical behaviour towards the participants of the study and the general public's view of the researcher. Being a reflexive researcher implies relating to our own power and the relations we have to those being studied. Indirectly, these power relations and statuses which come into being between us and those we relate to may affect the information and data we collect in the field (Dowling, 2000).

Being able to assess my own knowledge and understand how the research participants interpret the world in comparison to my own interpretations is an impossible task to go through. The way the research participants produce their knowledge and the way I have been produced in the society where I have been brought up are in no way similar. Maybe the greatest challenge meeting these women is to re-represent these women's representations of reality. It is them, and only them, who can truly represent their stories, and with the knowledge I brought with me there I was never able to see their situations without my learned theoretical and social perspectives and presumptions. In an ethical dilemma I went as far as questioning myself and what right I had to tell their stories from my view, and particularly if it would at all have any significance. If not, then who was I to go into their life and intrude their routines and not at least their knowledge? And after spending time in the field I faced the dilemma of presenting their situation as democratically hopeless and desperate, when what I saw in these villages was a picture of people managing their life with great competence, knowledge and with joy of life?

Facing these dilemmas, my justifications became weaker, but at all times I have managed to keep in mind that research is meant to make changes, and not mere representations. Spending time with them gradually encouraged me to try to make a difference, and to accept the biased positions of knowledge.

### ***Positionality***

Moser (2008), with referral to McDowell, states the importance of recognising our own positionality as researchers, as well as the positionality of the respondents. Both the researcher



and the participants in a research study will be aware that there are differences in positions, and this may affect the way responses are given to the researcher. Moser's article on *personality* as a the 'new positionality' brings a new view into qualitative research, critically discussing that positionality has been too much about the researcher's status, skin colour, gender or age etc. and focusing minimally on the importance of *personality*. Moser claims that personality, the researcher's individual social and emotional qualities, may have significant value in conducting research. Pointing out what is important to be aware of, Moser, as Crang and Cook, recognise qualitative research as an unbiased business, never free from subjectivity. The knowledge being produced are affected by the researcher's individuality and particularities, like experience and culture, makes it impossible for a researcher to get rid of his identity to become objective and neutral (Crang & Cook, 2007; Moser, 2008).

*'Positionality is a highly selective version of oneself that usually serves to keep academic authority intact'.*

(Moser, 2008, p. 386)

By stating this, Moser refers to the shares of published research which accounts positionality as skin-colour, socio-economic background or the researcher's position towards theory. Descriptions like this give no information about the researcher's personal abilities, like being extrovert or introvert. Such personal qualities may have much more influence in the research process and in the field, than issues like being black or white, and according to Moser, far from all bear suitable personalities to conduct qualitative research at all.

During the initial phases of designing a research methodology I was made aware through my own reflections that I might not be suitable personally to do research at all. I am an outgoing, but at the same time timid person. Trying to imagining myself in the field was difficult, but at the stages when I had not yet left Norway I crossed my fingers that I might have the personal qualities and the courage to ask the questions I went out there to get. Entering the field, the fact that I acted according to local customs of respect, lived and ate in the village, and kept a smiling open attitude made me feel that the field was open to my presence and that my personality helped me to become a better researcher.

## **Making preparations for the fieldwork**

During the first weeks of staying in the research area, the main purpose was to acclimatise to the weather, getting to know the facilities and the organisation I stayed with, Centre for Action Research and Documentation (CARD), and to get close to the interpreters, who from here will be referred to as the research assistants, as they were much more important for the collection of knowledge than being mere interpreters.

The second day in the area I was literally thrown into a field together with the research assistants. We were exposed to how people lived in these villages, and at the same time villagers were exposed to me, the foreign object. With only few experiences with doing fieldwork, I had to sharpen my tools, and my skills learned from previously undertaken methodology courses were tested. I had practiced making some interview guides in advance, and some of these were tested in the field. During the first week in the area, I conducted a pilot study which made the basis for making further methodological choices with regard to the research. The pilot study was a fruitful experience and made solid grounds for the fieldwork.

In the following days after practicing interviewing, testing group interviews and the interpreter's language abilities, a few days were spent to reflect upon how the study could get as qualitative and useful information as possible, and how questions should be formulated to access knowledge. In addition, the research questions were sharpened and an approximate schedule was made in conversations with the organisation and the research assistants. This was also a natural stage for singling out the study villages, based on criteria guided from the research objectives.

My experience was that the organisation had a great impact on my entrance to the field and my access to research participants, and thus needs to be included in this section. The organisation has worked in the region for more than twenty years, in different degrees from area to area, and their visibility in the field over such a period has built a relationship with the villagers which have been of great value in this research.

### ***CARD - Centre for Action Research and Documentation***

The organisation which helped me facilitate the study is a non governmental organisation working with action research, sensitising and capacity building in Orissa. The organisation has about 15 employees, whom most are working in the field in close connection to the people. CARDs work is mainly based on field activities where they work closely to the people

in the villages, believing that the people has the capacity and power to develop, and that they need to be recognised and encouraged. This leads CARD mainly to facilitate training of local villagers, and especially training of women in thematic areas like girl infanticide or gender rights in local governance.

In the time I spent with CARD, living in their localities and socialising with the staff, I learned about their values, methods and their ways of getting things done. The centre was also used for training sessions of e.g. female Panchayat members in the district, and knowledge sharing and sensitising about health issues and the prevention of female infanticides. CARD actively invite people to their venues both to skill them with knowledge and methods for such prevention, or to practice women's abilities to speak in front of an audience, but they also invite them to relax, talk to other women and grant them a festive meal.

### ***The research assistants***

Before entering the field, I had great concerns about how and where to find interpreters for the study, and so many stories were told in methodological classes of this ever worrying challenge. When entering India, opportunities were waiting for me, and two employees of CARD were already prepared to work with me for the following months.

Both research assistants were fairly familiar with the research areas through working for the organisation CARD. They are both married women from General Caste, with higher education from local colleges. Tamasi<sup>4</sup> is in her late 20's and originates from an area nearby the research area. She is especially appreciated in some of the research areas, as she has a very sweet appearance and behaviour. Nayana is in her late 30's and originates from an area distant from the research area. Being a fieldworker for CARD, she has many years of experience in the field which we conducted research and most people were used to seeing her.

Being a field-based organisation, CARD trains their employees to be modest in ways of jewellery and behaviour, the research assistants thus are wearing modest looking saris and marriage-bangles, and fairly modest jewellery. In some areas they blended perfectly into the local dressing culture, while in the more poor areas and in the Adivasi hamlets they slightly stuck out, but not at all in contrast to the foreign researcher.

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<sup>4</sup> The research assistants' real names are used here after granting their informed consents.

### ***Placing the researcher in the field***

Orissan people are not very tall; they are dark in skin and black-haired. The exterior differences between the research participants and me made me very visible in the daily picture, and it gave me both advantages and disadvantages. On one hand, my difference triggered the interest of many people, so accessing people for interviews were not a problem as most people wanted to talk to me. This might not have been so unproblematic if I was of Orissan origin. On the other hand, the attention drawn towards me might have taken away some of the attention to the research participants. The interviews conducted were often distracted or disturbed by curious neighbours who wanted to see who I was and what I was doing there.

I might say that I had an advantage when entering an Indian field, as I several times before have visited the country, both as a tourist and as a student. This prepared me somehow for what difficulties I might meet. On the contrary, it might have constrained me from asking some of the important questions, as I may have thought that I knew the answers to in advance. Soon after arriving I also found out that this state, and particularly the areas of research were quite different from the India I already knew and I had to restructure my interview guides. My research assistants and the staff of CARD also helped me a great deal of tracking the local context, providing me with detailed information about culture, social economy, institutions and infrastructure of administration and governance.

Entering the field I found myself playing a different role than in any other setting. I dressed down, acted humbly and calm, showing special interest to aspects I found that I had in common with the research participants and the people in the field, which is our relation to India. Most people had a great pleasure in knowing that I managed to live in their culture and in a rural Indian setting. This made me in some way more honourable to them and this I believe, made many doors open for me in the field.

### ***The study area and the research participants***

Selecting areas for the study was a careful process of considerations between the researcher, CARD and the research assistants. The criteria was to find areas with a vast diversity where there were opportunities to get close to people of higher castes and those in authority, and to Harijan people and tribal people. Many villages are containers for two of these groups, but it is very rare to find an area with only one ethnic group. Some of the villages in the field filled

the criteria of containing caste, Harijan and tribal people, and the two villages were finally selected as they had representative women in the local Panchayat.

Both villages are split into many hamlets, and every hamlet is housing one ethnic group, it is practically impossible to find hamlets with mixed ethnicities, although they share traditions and customs, as well as the same infrastructure and facilities.

Altogether, I have interviewed about thirty men and women (see Appendix 2), of which twenty four interviews have been applicable to use in this study. Some of the interviews were eliminated as the research assistants felt no reliability in the research participant's answers, while others were eliminated because they were amputated by the participant's limitations of time.

For the observation study, I gained access to audit a formal Panchayat meeting in village B. The meeting was conducted with my presence, and the meeting participants were all aware of my presence and the purpose of the study. Present in the meeting was between fifteen and twenty participants, the number is 'blurred' as some came and some left during the meeting.

## **Methodological choices**

When making the choice of a qualitative methodology, the researcher is looking for people's meanings, their intentions of doing certain things, their emotions and to find out how people create meaning to their own worlds. Qualitative methodologies in geography stem from a humanistic and interpretative tradition, and the idea that knowledge is situated and unique to the individual or to places remain at the core. Qualitative methods are imagining the world as an unpredictable, non-fixed assembly of people's representations, social constructions and performances with no universal or absolute truth (Clifford & Valentine, 2003; Smith, 2001).

For Smith (2001), making the choice of doing a qualitative research is more of a political issue than it is a philosophical one. Engaging directly with people is a choice with political connotations and by doing this the real people and their experiences is placed at the research agenda and at the same time a challenge to the structures of hegemonic knowledge. It is about letting others be heard, in their own words or through qualitative representation. Smith is more critical to the way other methodological approaches which preaches to all researchers about not making traces in the fields they thread into. Ethical considerations are highly relevant and important, but if not going into the field is the option, then research is no longer

about making changes, and Smith asks the important question of what then is the point of research, if not changing the world? These freshly presented ideas by Smith certainly guided the understanding and the making of methodological choices in this study, especially by pointing out that all research is political and can make changes in people's lives.

## **The selected methods**

Collecting the knowledge required to answer the research questions, two methods were mainly applied. First, and the most weighted method, was interviewing. Secondly, I spent much time observing the areas where the fieldwork was undertaken, just by being present, and in addition I did a specific observation study of one of the local Panchayats in actions. Both methods bring their advantages, as well as backsides and limitations.

### ***Interviewing***

The use of interviews to get close to the subject has come to be the most applied tool when conducting qualitative research. Studying human behaviour or the consequences of it, making contact with the actors in the field gives access to a knowledge pool which may have been neglected by using quantitative research methods. Interviews are opening up for new voices to be heard and human beings can be represented in ways that they can contribute to their own change. Smith recognises the interview as a democratic social research method, as it allows multiple voices to speak. Choosing interviews may even create empowering settings, both for the researcher as well as for the research participant (Smith, 2001).

Choosing interviews as the main method for this study was a matter of recognising these women as more than pieces in a study, and the as utmost relevant contributors to this understanding of their situation. It is their knowledge which makes the substance to their lives and the way they perceive the world, and thus they should be the centre for answering these questions. It is their situated knowledge that alone can explain how they feel that they are represented. Trying to find answers in statistical numbers about these women's substantial representation was not possible, as the numbers only are headcounts of voters and holders of positions. No numbers could show how these women felt that they were encouraged to participate; neither do they show that women feel represented. I do not feel that I can emphasise enough that it is their voices and lived experiences which should be set in the centre of the research agenda.

Approaching the research participants with interviews, I chose to use semi-structured open-ended interviews, combining the technique of using interview guides with fixed questions, but with openings for elaborations and follow up discussions. Making the choice of using a quite fixed guide was especially done with considerations to the interpreting research assistants, who both felt more comfortable when they could practice the questions before going into the interview situations. It would have been desirable to enter the interviews with an interview guide approach, or to have conducted the interviews with open-ended questions. Due to some language difficulties with the interpreters, we went with a more structured question-guide, but with plenty of opportunities to follow up. As the research assistants gradually became more comfortable with their language and the work, the opportunities for asking more questions came along.

### ***Making a setting for the interviews***

Cook and Crang (2007) insist that making convenient arrangements of timing and setting may be crucial for interviews and for the research participant's contribution to the research. They claim that people display different facets of their identities between different places and at different times. The interview arrangements in the field were another difficult task, but it was necessary to do the interviews in the local hamlets where the people live.

In the beginning of the research, I tried as hard as possible to make an interview setting where the research participant were alone with the research assistant and me, but I was soon to understand that this was not possible. In these villages, everyone share everything, and in many cases the interviews took place at the local *mandap*<sup>5</sup> where people gather to meet. For many, this was the only option as some of them would not take us into their houses, and it was also a good venue for having shadow from the burning sun. Of course there were plenty of other people present, as their curiosity could not be stopped, but if the situations became too uncomfortable either to me, the research assistants or to the research participants, we tried to change the venue. The presence of others in an interview setting could have had some influence of the knowledge sharing through the interviews, but at the same time it also seemed more comfortable to many of the participating women to have the 'moral support' of their neighbours.

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<sup>5</sup> Local built concrete structure, often located in the centre of the hamlet under a tree, where people gather for conversations and gossip. In many cases the mandap is also associated with religious ceremonies and sometimes the mandap itself is the porch of the temple.

### ***The challenges of interviewing as a method***

Literature on methodology presents several challenges and conflicts which may appear in an interview situation. Obviously, there will be differences between the interviewer and the respondents. Features like language, gender, skin colour and age might affect the relationship between the informant and interviewer and may disturb the quality of the data collected. It might then be strategic to converge in style of dressing and actions to accord with the informants (Clifford & Valentine, 2003; Crang & Cook, 2007).

Another critical aspect affecting interviews, especially when interviewing people who are marginalised, are the power relations which occurs between interviewer and respondent. The danger of exploiting knowledge rather than contributing to empowerment will follow the interview if the researcher is not conscious about power relations. Such relations needs to be negotiated and trust must be established between the two (Kitchin & Tate, 2000).

Interviewing in this area of course came with its challenges and complications for the fieldwork. Some of the research participants were short in their way of answering, and others were reluctant to answer, either because of their own insecurity towards the researcher, or, in my own interpretation some of them may have felt insecure or inferior to male family members listening to them.

In another case, coming with at research assistant became difficult. The inhabitants of one of the hamlets where we undertook the research were not familiar with the research assistant, as she had never worked in that exact area. During two of the interviews conducted in this area, we were interrupted and questioned by some authoritarian men in the hamlet. They were at first angry, or upset about our appearance. These situations were handled by explaining thoroughly the name, position and background of the research assistant. The inhabitants had mistaken her for being an Adivasi woman, and therefore did not want to have her into their area. When they learned her name and her caste, they accepted her and the researcher into their streets and homes.

### ***Observation***

Feminist researchers have, according to Kitchin and Tate (2000), suggested that in order to achieve genuine trust with the informants, one needs to engage in their lives, e.g. through an organisation working with the issues which you are interested in. Observation as a method may be a useful tool in such engagements; it may also contribute to the researchers



understanding and reflexivity in the research process (Kitchin & Tate, 2000). There are two types of observations in qualitative approaches; direct observation and; participant observation. In the field I found it applicable to use participant observation. In participatory observation, the researcher joins a group or an activity, without hiding as an outsider. In this study I got the opportunity to work closely to a local Panchayat and I got to observe a monthly Panchayat meeting directly.

It can be claimed that observations is an easy method, as we all have done observations since the day we entered the world, but still there are challenges in doing observation for research (Clifford & Valentine, 2003). Observation needs to be done carefully, things which normally escape attention is often those needed to be noticed. In participatory observation another challenge is that of learning how to act as those observed, actions that the researcher may not be familiar with from her own background and culture. A further importance in participant observation is that observation in itself only is a part of the process, and the *commentary* production is essential in participant observations. Laurier (2003) claims that the researcher needs to develop an ability to make comments on cultural and social aspects in the observation, not merely providing us with objective descriptions of what being studied. The ability to give the most excellent comments may first be truly insightful when the researcher has been part in the experiences studied. Although I understand Laurier's thoughts on observation, I recognise my own limitations in actually playing the role as an observer. After completing an observational study, I still feel that there was lots of information which I must have missed, especially by not knowing the language. In addition, I do not feel that my observational skills were sufficient, even though this was completed at the end of the stay.

Of course there are ethical conditions applied in using participant observation in geographical studies. Participant observation as a method makes less room for suspicion to the researcher, who can 'hide' the role as an observant. This is highly ethically discussable, as it exploits the informants without their awareness of it and has not given their consent (Kitchin & Tate, 2000). In this case, all research participants, meaning the members of the Panchayat, were aware of my presence in the observation. They were all informed about being observed, as well as my appearance revealed the foreign object in the room.

The observation from this fieldwork was conducted near the end of my stay in Orissa. First, I approached the Sarpanch (head) of both Panchayat studied. They were positive about my request, and granted me permission to come and observe the Panchayat meetings.

Unfortunately, the meeting in village A was cancelled and postponed to a date after my departure.

At the date of the meeting in study village B I came with my research assistant and had some dialogue with the Sarpanch before the meeting started. Other members of the Panchayat were interested in my presence, and I made sure that I was thoroughly presented at the beginning of the meeting. During the actual observation I placed myself at a chair in the corner of the meeting hall, a bit outside the circle of participants. As the meeting went on, I made notes of what I observed, in addition to drawing a chart of the meeting participants. I also tried to capture the directions of the dialogue by drawing lines between the participants in my notebook. The observation was not interpreted at the meeting itself, as I did not want to disturb the meeting beyond my presence. Still, I made notes of all the words I could grasp and make sense of, and the research assistant was instructed to pay closely attention to what being said, as I wanted to go through the content of the meeting after the observation was completed.

### ***Methodological limitations***

An aspect which should be mentioned here is that the interviews were done during day-time and therefore many potential research participants were not available to join the study. Luckily for the study, many were still available due to a naturally postponed monsoon and it's following agricultural work. Also the fact that the multitudes of the research participants were women, we were lucky to meet them at time of housework and most of them could make time to participate in the study.

Observing the members of the Panchayat meeting I did not have the whole meeting interpreted as the interest of the study was not much in the cases they discussed, but rather of how they discussed and acted in the meeting. My direct presence in this meeting could of course have been a source of somebody's reluctance to speak during the meeting. It is impossible for me as an outsider to tell whether the meeting would have been much different without my presence.

A final limitation of the study was accessing the Panchayat meeting of village A, which unfortunately was cancelled and postponed until after my departure from the field. Here I would have been able to observe the female Sarpanch in action, and observe whether she

practiced her voice in the Panchayat as she claimed. Whether this postponement was purposely done to avoid my presence or not, I have no knowledge of.

## **Ethical considerations**

Ethics in research concerns the responsibilities which the researcher has towards respondents and others involved or affected by the research. Dowling (2000) suggests that when entering fieldwork, the social context of study needs to be thoroughly thought through, and that it may be necessary to apply guidelines of ethics to the research process.

### ***Ethical conditions for fieldwork and methodology***

In general, researchers in the field should apply an ethical behaviour, and try to understand the notions in the study areas about what is appropriate behaviour. Such ethical behaviour, according to Hay (2003), protects the rights of those involved in the research. Although researchers try to make the world a better place, they risk doing harm to the studied society by contributing to disempowerment instead (Hay, 2003). The researcher is morally and ethically responsible to the informants, as well as to the general public. To conduct a valid and reliable study it is necessary to gain trust with the general public (Dowling, 2000; Hay, 2003; Kitchin & Tate, 2000). Finally, there is a demand for accountability in research today, not only towards donors or towards the researchers own moralities, but to the societies studied, and the general public (Hay, 2003).

I recognise that my appearance in the study area was interfering with daily practice, and it may have had an influence on the people living there. For my own guidance and for avoidance of issues in the field related to ethics, I applied Patton's checklist presented in Mikkelsen's literature on methods for development research (2005). This figured as a framework for acting in the field, by reminding me to consider things like confidentiality, informed consent, data ownership, and so forth (Mikkelsen, 2005). It is important to be clear about the purpose of your appearance and study, always ask questions of who might be at risk due to the study. Starting the interview the research assistants stated clearly that the research participants would remain anonymous and that the study's intention was to map the situation of women in Panchayat and other informal representative forms of governance. The research participants were also told that they at all times could withdraw from the interviews. In some of these areas, people are getting used to being exposed to local and national NGO's coming

to do research, and sometimes they are promised resources or facilities. It was therefore very important to state before appointing an interview that the research would not be of any material or monetary benefits for the research participants. Still, it is not to be left out that many of the respondents could be expecting something in return, but most of them shared that they agreed to participate because they were curious to know what a foreigner were coming to their villages for.

Closing up the fieldwork, I still felt that I had to see these people again, and many of them had invited me to come back, and even to come and stay with them. Before leaving, I went to the field with the research assistants and visited every research participant. Although I had gone through the dilemma of paying them or granting them something in return for their favour as they had made them self available to the study, I brought them gifts to show them appreciations. The gifts were selected per participant in conciliation with staff from CARD; they made good suggestions based on the needs of the research participants. In addition it turned out to be a success to bring them framed pictures, as I had shot photographs of every one of them. As many of them had few opportunities to have their picture taken it was very much welcomed. When going back, I was met with the warmest welcomes, and got many invitations to come back. For those who were not at home I sent letters translated to Orya to communicate my appreciation. After the thesis has been submitted all research participants will again receive my letters of appreciation of their contribution to the study.

### ***Gender issues***

Mikkelsen (2005) writes about being a woman doing fieldwork and how this may affect the information and answers received. Presenting an example of a researcher who was a woman amongst female participants, she explains how the women were reluctant to giving answers because they wanted to make friends and gossip with the female researcher. This is one example which can give a picture of the different interests between the researcher and the study participants, and I assumed that this could appear as an issue during my own fieldwork too. Nevertheless, the experience was that when communicating through interpreters, this never became an issue, but instead many interviews led to open conversations about culture differences between Orissa and Norway as the research participants had the freedom to question the researcher back.

Being a woman writing about gender issues could, and I expected that it would, have great consequences for the fieldwork. In a fieldwork I did in India some years ago, I experienced

that being a young woman prevented me from getting access to interview participants and data, especially in the meeting with authorities. To my surprise, this was not an issue at all this time, as both men and women and authority persons welcomed me with great respect. I assume that my role as a woman became hidden and forgotten a bit by being present as a foreigner, and the fact that I came from another country made me an interesting object to the villagers. It is difficult to know how this may have affected the interviews and responses, but I believe that most of the research participants tried their best to respond honestly.

Another issue presented by Mikkelsen is that of using a field assistant. This may limit the results, as the assistants will have their own subjectivity and that their understanding of the world may not coincide with the researcher's ideas. Crang and Cook (2007) makes us aware that lots of information is omitted out when passing through an assistant or an interpreter.

Obviously, this study could never have been actualised *without* the use of research assistants and interpreters. The job of interpretation was one of the hardest tasks in the fieldwork, and the research assistants put great effort into the job. First of all, both of them practiced their English together, as they did not use it much in the field. In the beginning they were very reluctant to speak English in front of me, and especially in front of the organisation's head, as they felt language wise inferior to us. Luckily, their shyness cleared away and the job became easier. It is difficult to say whether the data from the study could have been much different if I knew the language myself. As the research assistants were very familiar with local traditions, customs and culture, they knew how to communicate to the research participants in ways which I could not have developed myself by staying for a short period. I therefore assume that the research assistants have contributed more to this study by granting me clearer data than if I had done it on my own.

## **Knowledge construction and analysis**

Following Dey's approach to analysis of qualitative data, Kitchin and Tate (2000) suggest that the analysis first must *describe* the data, *classify* them, and then look at how the concepts *interconnect*. It is necessary to understand and interpret meaning, and thorough descriptions can contribute to a deeper analysis of meaning (Kitchin & Tate, 2000).

A description is necessary for knowing how to situate the analysis, and may contain the situational context, where the social settings and context are explained, like telling about the

place the data is collected at. Description of research participant's meanings and intentions provides contextual information, but is a far more difficult task. As researchers we have the power to write up everything that is expressed, but we can not always know if the information given by researchers is completely honest or if it is just something that the participant thinks that the researcher would like to hear. Keeping focus at processes, and not solely on the present interview or observation and looking at what meaning which remains stable or changes during the research process, is important for the examination of consequences of actions and changes in behaviour (Kitchin & Tate, 2000).

Classification of data is when you break up the data into smaller components, placing them in categories. This gives a basis for comparisons and efficiency in the interpretative analysis. Categories are the researcher's own choice and this depends on what is being examined. By *splitting*, we categorise data for details, and by *splicing* categories we search for understandings of how things relate to each other (Kitchin & Tate, 2000).

In this study, notes were thoroughly made during the interviews and observations. The notes were transcribed as soon as possible after the studies had taken place, and were already ready to be handled when the fieldwork was completed. Using direct translations from the interpreters, rather than transcribing from tapes saved time, and was an important factor for efficiency in the field. I did consider using a tape recorder, but as this would have been more inconvenient than helpful, the idea was dropped. During my time as a student I have developed the ability to take fast and thorough notes, which made the basis for the transcribed data. Here I need to mention that the direct interpretations in the field made basis for the transcribed interviews, and due to some language difficulties and imperfections of the interpreters, I have taken the liberty to make small grammatical corrections when quoting in the text.

Returning from the field the thinking process was already started. Starting out working closer to theory and leaving the data for some time, the analytical framework developed, and with the concepts and theories in place, the categories for analysis were made. Then, the coding process started by sorting the data in a simple manner and using different coloured markers to indicate which data that belonged to which analytical category. After coding all data into coloured codes and categories, the sorted categories and quotes were linked together by using further colouring codes.

Coding the observation study was a more difficult task, as the categories were not so clear, and the language issue made the direct spoken information during the observation unavailable. Still, the data was useful, and after transcribing the bits and pieces observed, the observation study made sense. Using the categories of representation, power and participation, the actions from the observation was charged with utter meaning.

The process of writing has not been a straight depreciation. During the fieldwork period, I kept a day-to-day diary, which has been a resource during the writing process. The process of shaping theory and trying to fit framework to the research questions and data, has been time consuming beyond my expectations.

### ***Credibility and validity of the study***

When finalising the writing process and getting close to a deadline, knowledge production comes to a point where the validity and reliability of the data must be considered. How is the interpretation of the data collection of this study relating to the actual situation in the field? By doubting and questioning, there is never any objective truth of the material collected in the field, as well as there are no guarantees for what collected has been real in the first place. Interviewing in the field obviously discarded some information which could not have been true, but what do you do if you think your research participants are lying, or not telling the correct stories?

Even if this has been a mind intriguing issue, I have full confidence in the research participants. They all found time and space to participate in the study, and they made the study possible in the first place. If something is to be doubted here, it is my own abilities as a researcher to separate the truth from my own assumptions of the truth. And as mentioned at the start of the chapter, what kind of reliability does this study make if it aims to describe the local people and their situations as hopeless, when you find the strength and knowledge in these people who should not be underestimated.

The analysis of field material, and the way I have concluded is probably a strong result of my own theoretical interests and the knowledge that I possess. As Crang and Cook (2007) claim, someone else would probably have made a different conclusion of the same data material. I sincerely hope that I have not distorted the truth, and that the reader finds the study reliable.





## 4. Theoretical and analytical framework

This chapter constitutes the theoretical foundation for the study which has been the source of inspiration and the basis of the creation of the analytical framework to this thesis. The meta-narratives presented in this chapter may be interpreted as strong and viable critiques towards the gender mainstreaming project, thus the chapter starts by pointing out this project as one of the main causes of the emergence of feminist political geography. Then, feminist political geographers seeking to understand relations of power and representation of gender in different spaces of politics makes a central part of this chapter. The feminist perspectives may in large degree be interpreted as political academic attempts to destabilise and re-politicise gender into development discourses. The concepts from this strand will be elaborated, consisting of public and private spaces of politics, power and representation.

As an attempt to compliment the feminist political geographers, I address the rights-based approaches to development, also to balance feminist theory with a stronger focus on participation. Power and representation is important in the rights-based approaches, though understood in a different manner than in political geography. The two meta-narratives are contiguous and compliment each other in a sense which supports this study and gives grounds for a relevant analytical framework. These theoretical strands are of great interest to me, especially since they have a mission of speaking from the ground level as they try to represent the meanings of the oppressed or minorities. This section leads to an emphasis on a strand important in many development theories through the latest decades, which is participation. This concept or theory makes an important contribution to this study when approaching a suitable analytical framework.

Two key concepts which coincide in both political geography and rights-based approaches are pointed out to create a framework for the analysis; these are the spaces of *participation* and the spaces of *power*, which both lead to my understanding of representation. *Representation* remains the core category of analysis. These concepts together form the analytical framework and are presented in the way I prefer to understand them.

## **Basis of theoretical interest**

In 1992 India passed the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment to the Constitution. This amendment demands that no less than one third of seats are reserved for women, scheduled tribes and scheduled castes in the Panchayats. The Panchayats are decentralised governments with responsibility of economy and distribution at local village level in most states in India.

This situation presents a clear case of the gender mainstreaming project, a nation trying to democratise and equalise genders by implementing women through affirmative action in their local bodies of governance. The gender mainstreaming project, which ultimately had a noble mission of providing gender equality, has in its practical implementations made the foundation for massive critiques, which has led to the writing of this chapter.

## **Feminist political geography**

### ***The gender mainstreaming project as basis of critiques***

Gender mainstreaming has been a project with objectives of gender equality, and has during the latest decades been trying to integrate gender equality concerns into all spheres of policy and programme formulations. It is a direction where initiatives are done to enable both men and women to participate in decision-making, and promotes empowerment with a touch of accountability (Mukhopadhyay, 2007). Rai (2008) elaborates some of the mainstreaming projects, such as processes of democratisation and bringing women into all spheres of society. Although the mainstreaming project has shown great success in the form of statistical representation of both men and women, a great amount of critiques has been directed towards it. Mukhopadhyay, as well as Rai, has argued that instead of leading to gender justice, mainstreaming has led to a lost focus on women and it has de-politicised the gender equality project. She further claims that none of the transformative approaches ever explicitly seeks to change power-relations and growing equality between social groups, it has merely become an a-historical, a-political, and out-of-context technical project (Mukhopadhyay, 2007). From Mukhopadhyay's studies, it becomes clear that there is an importance of establishing citizenship as elementary for development. Much of these critiques may be found in feminist political geography, which tries to understand the relations between gender, power and institutions.

### ***Critiques from feminism and political geography***

Political geography, a relative novice to geography and development studies, is occupied with analysing and understanding relationships between power, space and place. The state has been a primary focus in the school of political geography, and thus also concerns of territorial integration, power and organisation of states and citizens (Painter, 2008).

Feminist scholars argue that we need to broaden our understanding of politics to not merely handle formal political institutions. They widen the concept of politics to include all kinds of social relations wherein power is being exercised. Gender is not solely the focus of the feminist scholars; they highlight *difference* as mode of analysis, including gender, race, ethnicity and so forth.

Feminist political geographers have been concerned with gender relations and transformation, and gives attention to the interpersonal interactions as politics, as well as recognising the importance of institutional levels and spaces. These scholars are not as concerned with the state as other strands of political geography, the feminist strand rather emphasise other scales of society, like the home sphere or the body itself. One of these debates concerns whether politics belongs in the public or also in the private sphere, while other debates what constitutes public and private spaces (Painter, 2008).

### **Concepts of feminist political geography**

Rai (2008) analyses women in democratisation and de-colonisation processes, and argues that with the new establishments of citizenship, women lost visibility through the universalised citizenship<sup>6</sup>. Rai argues that the processes of nation-building and the creation of citizenship is gendered, and constructed in a male shape. Men, as she argues, encounter each other in a public space they consider home, while such automation is not as easily accessible to women.

#### ***Public and private spheres/spaces***

Feminist political geography argues that the roots of patriarchy are deeply embedded in history, history as defined and determined by male power. Such historical structures place men naturally in the public sphere, women are placed aside to the private sphere of the home (Kofman, 2008; Rai, 2008; Werbner & Yuval-Davis, 1999). The feminist perspectives

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<sup>6</sup> In this study, citizenship is understood in coherence with the concept drawn from feminist political geography (Rai, 2008; Werbner & Yuval-Davis, 1999)

advocate a broader view, where competence and experience of different spheres should be recognised. Kofman (2008) criticises the common understanding of the public space as open and accessible for all. She argues that the use of 'public' spaces are varied, and points at Nancy Fraser's term 'counter publics', which refers to the spaces where marginalised groups and their members may express and raise concerns of common interest (Kofman, 2008).

Another contribution to this debate comes from Barnett (2008), who asks what it is that constitutes the public. The public sphere in a democratic understanding is about enabling or resisting the processes in decision making, where public communication has main importance.

He presents the common understanding of the public 'thing' or issue as a shared concern which members of the society gathers over, the '*objects of concerted action*' (Barnett, 2008, p. 404). While questioning this kind of definition of the public, Barnett discusses how the public is not a space on its own, and that it clearly contains both concerns and counter-concerns.

The private, as an opposition to the public, has traditionally been seen as sphere for cultivation of the essentials of citizenry. As others, Barnett now sees the borders between the private and the public as blurred and that the public is increasingly being controlled by authorities or powers. By excluding some citizens from a public space, and including others, one might ask if it is a true public space (Barnett, 2008). Feminist literature has been concerned for decades about the exclusion of women from citizenship. But rather than keeping the focus at women's exclusion from the public space, Rai suggests that we need to look at *inclusion* to the public sphere. Her suggestion is that by bringing the private and the public together, and by making the private more public, then first it is possible to have change (Rai, 2008).

The public and private spaces, or the mixes of it, invites to a gender debate, while inviting some citizens, it excludes others.

### ***Political representation***

The concept of representation in political geography is another source of debate, as it too has several meanings and definitions. Forest (2008) explores the concept of representation and points at political definitions explaining it as the making present of something which in some sense is not literally present. Further, definitions claim that the concept of representation is a way of overcoming the idea in democracies about every individual being the ruler and the

subject of politics. Being granted citizenship people get the opportunity to elect someone to represent their interests. Then it is in the mission of the *representative* to serve these interest, and when that is the situation, representation is too (Forest, 2008)

There is not one single form of representation, as it is difficult to measure and different to the eye that sees. Forest (2008) and Rai (2008) are among those debating the content and difference between representation as descriptive and representation as substantive. A common argument, though supported by very few feminists, is that a descriptive or numerical representation of women in governance will ultimately also lead to a more substantive representation of women's interests. The sceptics to such arguments are claiming that the transformation of representation from descriptive to substantial has yet to come, and ask why this is. They argue that some differences are being privileged over others and structural inequalities between gender seem strongly resistant to change (Rai, 2008).

Forest (2008) directs attention to the minorities of the society, like ethnic groups, but also to women. Minorities in many cases have positions or quotas and are thus represented in legislative bodies, but in many cases they also hold little power. Then we may ask whether there is any real representation, or just mere numerical and statistical presence of these minorities. Rai (2008) understates this by arguing that the creation of quotas to secure women's and minorities' representation are attempts to increase their representation, but also to compensate for their previous exclusion. Making quotas has been important to address the inequalities and the institutional exclusion, and one of its meanings has been to create an arena where women would gain empowerment and justice. Further, the debate of politics of recognition and redistribution is of value to this section, as feminists argue that the gender divide will continue if we do not implement a broader politics of recognition. For quotas to be effective, the recognition of women and minorities must take place, together with a redistribution of power (Rai, 2008).

Empirical studies show different results, even within similar regions, and no generalising assumptions about quotas improvement of substantial representation can be made. It is a complex system, and both equality and empowerment are determined by power, and being represented is not only about the possession of *power over*, but the *power to*. Power is embedded in institutional structures, which need to be recognised in order to make change, although it is no easy task to grasp good understandings of the concept (Rai, 2008).

## ***Power in political geography***

The concept of power in political geography is conventionally recognised as capacity and ability to control, either over people or what they do. Power in this manner is seen as control, authority and governance. These scholars tend to associate power with particular roles or individuals within institutions (Staehele & Kofman, 2004). Feminists broaden the traditional power perspective by analysing power as situated in networks and relationships between actors. Additionally, they recognise that power has different origins, and particularly interesting are the sources of power from the private sphere. These feminists do not provide a fixed definition of the power concept, as they argue for its multifaceted variations and complexities. Power thus is a contextual feature, distributed unequally and it is disguised in various ways of expressions, therefore the importance must be held at the power *relationships* (Staehele & Kofman, 2004).

The rights-based approaches may open up for a discussion of how these multiple maledictions of women can be encountered by focusing on rights, power and participation.

## **Rights-based approaches to development**

It is somehow difficult to place the rights-based approaches to development into one single discourse. Nederveen Pieterse (2001) in his deconstructions of development theory refers to Kothari who has claimed development to be the take-over from colonialism, and to Visvanathan who claim today's discourses are heading into being a civil-rights based movement against '*development as terrorism*' (Visvanathan quoted in Nederveen Pieterse, 2001, p. 27). By this, it is meant that development in itself has been forced upon people, especially by the first world upon the third world, with western norms as a self-legislative. Escobar (1995) has built upon this view, rejecting the development thought and claims that *underdevelopment* or other appellations as 'the third world' has been constructed in order to maintain colonisation. What Escobar requests is that we start a search for alternatives *to* development (Nederveen Pieterse, 2001).

The rights-based approaches, in my opinion, fit well as such alternatives *to* development, as they supposedly seek towards a higher degree of fulfilments of human rights. *Supposedly*, because it seems like there is little agreement on one single definition of what such approaches consist of. Development and human rights used to be seen as two separate fields,

but these started bridging after efforts by newly independent southern nations (A Cornwall & Nyamu-Musembi, 2004). In my interpretations I find it implicit in these theories that a fulfilment of rights will lead to a state of general improvements of standards, or if you want, development.

The rights-based approaches has tried to bring focus on making people conscious about their rights and what rights might mean to people. The approach has dealt with the advocacy of rights and with enlightening the causes of exclusion before treating the symptoms of it. (Tsikata, 2007). Drawing on instrumental frameworks like the United Nations Universal Rights Declaration or the Declaration on the Right to Development, rights-based approaches provide legal bases for work towards development. A normative framework is applied, meaning that there is a consensus on empowerment, accountability to the state and international actors, participation and non-discrimination, with special attention to vulnerable and marginalised groups.

### ***Gender researchers encouraging rights-based approaches***

McIlwaine and Datta (2003) claim that we now need to move away from the long lasting Gender and Development (GAD) regime. In GAD theory, the *relation* between men and women are emphasised as important for understanding the bigger picture and in order to reorganise oppressive power-relations. GAD sets empowerment as an important goal, the process where marginalised groups are gaining more power to control their own situations. Now, McIlwaine and Datta try to grasp the ‘failures’ of the regimes, which they claim has focused too much on women’s needs rather than their rights. In their opinion we should move on to a rights-based direction. Masculinities and femininities need to be included in the GAD theory and it is necessary to discuss role expectations. It is not enough to barely make people aware of their rights, one need to figure out how rights can be realised.

Gender equity, which seems to be an overall goal in many institutions and development policies, refers to ‘*equal legal rights to participate in an ever-expanding global capitalist system*’ (Connelly, Li, MacDonald, & Parpart, 2000, p. 63). It can also mean equal rights and obligations to participate in development programs, and it can even mean the effective power of overcoming barriers as caste, class and gender (Connelly, et al., 2000). Nevertheless, the rights-based approaches come with both advantages and disadvantages.

### ***Advantages and critiques of rights-based approaches***

There seem to be a great deal of advantages following rights-based approaches. First of all, there is the contribution of identifying rights, obligations and those accountable. Another focus aims at strategies which address injustice rather than doing relief, most take sides with those in a situation of exclusion, always recognising the importance of the human rights. Because rights-based approaches focus on rights, and not so much at needs as previous development discourses, an effort to promote institutional change has become a priority. The list goes on, as this seems to be growing into being a vast discourse (A Cornwall & Nyamu-Musembi, 2004; Tsikata, 2007).

Despite the harmony in such an approach there are conceptual issues arising related to the rights-based approaches. There is a lack of agreement on one single definition of the term or what constitute the approaches. What kind of rights should be prioritised and what legal basis should be used? Tsikata refers to Sengupta, who has discussed the importance of 'The Right to Development' as people's right to the *development process* which allows the realisation of all fundamental freedoms and rights, and extends peoples capabilities (Tsikata, 2007).

Other issues are of political concern, and critics are concerned that the rights-based approaches pay too much attention to the civil and political rights and tend to 'forget' the social and economic rights. There is also a danger of privileging a political elite when defining citizenship and to overlook the power-structures which gives limitations to participatory processes in rights-based approaches (Tsikata, 2007).

There seem to be many pros and cons related to the rights-based approaches. Tsikata argues that if the rights-based approaches shall be implemented and work properly for a gender-equality case, they need to be restructured and re-politicised. As it is today, it seems like the thought of gender mainstreaming has gotten too far and that it has de-politicised the broader struggle for gender justice, equality and representation (Tsikata, 2007). The most vital contribution, or media, which these struggles can be achieved through, may be participation in development.

### **Participation in development**

As a pioneer in alternative development discourses we find Robert Chambers and his theories from the late 1970's concerning methodologies of participatory development and '*putting the*



*last first*' (Chambers, 1983). Rapid Rural Appraisal, Participatory Rural Appraisal and Participatory Action Research are all different trends in the participatory development school, as extensions of alternative development. Participation is considered as a means to effective development, resource mobilisation and to empowerment of people, especially those marginalised by power structures in the society (Hickey & Mohan, 2004; Mohan, 2008)

Participation especially gained attention with the 1986 emphasis on participation as a right, fronted by the UN. 'The Right to Development', as mentioned above, became a trendy catchword within the development school, stating that development is an inalienable right which all human beings hold the title to, and includes the three focuses; participation, distribution of goods and international cooperation (Elliot, 2008; United Nations, 1986)

Quoting Article 2 in this Declaration (United Nations, 1986:2) shows us the clarity in how development should be achieved through rights: '*States should encourage popular participation in all spheres as an important factor in development and in the full realisation of all human rights*'.

Despite the fact that participatory development is highly agreed upon as effective and transparent methods, criticism has occurred, addressing how power relations in participation may be hidden in processes of decision making. Others have made the point that participation is used as an ideology to attract donors, and that participation becomes more of rhetoric than of practise in reality. Critiques from the South claim that the way in which NGOs use local participation appears as more exploitive than effective for change. Alumasa (2003) claims that information gathered through the use of participation in practise is actually being ignored when it comes to policy formulation and reports. Local people give more, and gain minimal. Another aspect is that these are processes which shall benefit all parts of a community, but often those with few resources have to work more for this common good than those with access to resources. Gaventa (2006) discusses whether mainstreaming of participation is a danger or an opportunity, and recognises the importance of keeping participation as a political project and not merely as tool for development. Participation is in his thoughts a way of exercising citizenship, which in turn is necessary for the realisation of rights.

### ***Participation and space***

There is a current challenge to develop democratic governance with fulfilment of everyone's rights and citizenship. Power is continuously being negotiated in the spaces of participation,

but often at a level which exclude citizens. Cornwall and Coelho (2007) claim that colonialism has given rise to new hybrid spaces of governance between the state and the society. Although spaces of governance most often are being placed within the state, Cornwall and Coelho name these as *the participatory sphere*, where institutions are relatively autonomous, and where resistance and cooperation between heterogeneous actors with different views and agendas occur (A. Cornwall & Coelho, 2007). They also claim that the preconditions for entrance in the participatory spaces are crucial, dependent on who enters them and who it is that makes the conditions. While referring to Dagnino, Cornwall and Coelho points at the ambiguity which participatory spaces are on one hand built upon the enhancement of citizenship, but on the other hand it is claimed to be what reduces the state responsibility to a minimum (A. Cornwall & Coelho, 2007).

Gaventa (2004) sum up Cornwall's different categories of spaces into closed space, invited space and claimed space. *Closed spaces* are those spaces of power and decision-making which are not open for public participation, all resolutions are made by particular actors behind closed doors.

*Invited space* is used as a term when spaces are created by different authorities who invite people with different relations to each other representing various interests to participate. Common for these different invited spaces are the exposure to external intervention, either this is done by NGOs or public authorities. Such spaces vary in terms of determination, in some spaces people themselves makes the decisions, in other they are just being consulted. These spaces may be vehicles for transformative participation and may create an arena between people's interests and the public authorities (A. Cornwall, 2004; Gaventa, 2004).

A third participatory space is the *claimed space*, which is a created space by those excluded from the invited or formal spaces. These spaces are claimed by autonomous actors with a common interest and can arise from popular mobilisation (Gaventa, 2004).

Mohanty explores the invited spaces, and claim that these spaces in reality often occur to be *empty spaces*. When the state fails to create proper conditions for actualisation of rights, excluded groups '*may never gain entry to actualise participation, despite their eagerness*' (Mohanty, 2007, p. 76).

## ***Concepts of power***

*'Power relations may appear so secure and well-established that both subordinate and dominant groups are unaware of their oppressive implications or incapable of imagining alternative ways of being and doing'* (Kabeer, 1994, p. 227).

Kabeer describes above a situation which is familiar to many scholars within power and participation. Gaventa is among those who recognise the importance of power analysis, especially in relation to citizenship and participation (Gaventa, 2004; J Gaventa, 2006). Power can be interpreted and understood in several ways, is often disputed and this in itself is a reason for why it is important to understand different concepts of power. Power is by some seen as something possessed by actors where some are powerful and others are powerless. Some see power as universal and embodied in us all as a capability (Eyben, Harris, & Pettit, 2006). Still, in the school of participation, Kabeer's power concepts *power to*, *power with* and *power within* seems to be in force.

*Power to* relates to power as the *'capacity of an actor to affect the pattern of outcomes against the wishes of other actors'* (Kabeer, 1994, p. 224) and tells something about who is in command in decision making processes. *Power within* refers to a sense of confidence and awareness, which is seen as a precondition for action. *Power with* refers to the effects of acting together in collaboration and alliances (J. Gaventa, 2006).

Gaventa describes a fourth *power over* as *'the ability of the powerful to affect the actions and thoughts of the powerless'* (J. Gaventa, 2006, p. 24) and claims that the *power to* is crucial for practising citizenship and realising rights in order to be able to act.

Different forms of power need to be examined too, as power differs in visibility. In sense of visible power, decisions are being made in a democratic and accountable manner which seeks to change the *'who, how and what of policymaking'* (J. Gaventa, 2006, p. 29). Hidden power is a state where institutions maintain inherited decision making processes in the continuation of excluding practices that consequently devalue broad representation. Invisible power consists of existing institutionalised norms which may hinder the participation and voice of particular groups, manifested e.g. in some people's lack of knowledge about rights (J. Gaventa, 2006; J Gaventa, 2006).

## ***Power and space***

Cornwall claims that spaces where people are invited into are never neutral, but shaped of existing power-relations, and that they can be reproducing hierarchies of power rather than challenging them. In one way or another, existing power will influence the processes of participation (A. Cornwall, 2004). As formulated by Gaventa '*these spaces of participation are not neutral, but themselves shaped by power relations*' (J Gaventa, 2006, p. 26).

If we follow Cornwall's theories, this means we need to look at all participation as a spatial practice. These spaces of participations exists in relation to each other, and through struggles for realisation and resistance they are continuously closed and opened, and as Gaventa claims, invited spaces can be created for the legitimisation of closed spaces. All such spaces are different and dependent on the context they are situated within. Cornwall (2004) explains how these spaces are shaped by power-relations and refers to Habermas when claiming that the creation of public space is a precondition for citizen participation. All spaces are permeated with power relations and representatives from the community need capacity building to grasp the opportunity to enable their citizenship and their ability to participate (A. Cornwall, 2004)

## ***An Indian understanding of power***

As much of the theory concerning power suggest that power is contextual and situated, I would like to add a small section trying to grasp power in context, especially in an attempt to remove my own western lens and understanding of power.

According to Pye and Pye (1985) Asian power is necessary to understand from an Asian view, even though they recognise the impossible task of being able to truly grasp the complexities of power. They thoroughly interrogate ideas of power and politics in Asia and reveal patterns of power. In India power is highly related both to the caste system and the political system, and the two of them are highly interrelated. The Varnas and the categorisation of jatis structure the social order of society, and are highly apparent today despite the rule of British imperialists attempt to enforce their own systems.

Pye and Pye show us that the social order can be identified with power. Power means social status, and is equalised to the exercise of social status. In Hindu culture, power and politics come secondary to religion, but at the same time it pervades every component of life.

Interpreting religious writings and laws, Pye and Pye render:

*'The whole world is kept in order by punishment, for a guiltless man is hard to find; through the fear of punishment the whole world is called to enjoy its blessings'.*

(part from The code of Manu quoted in Pye & Pye, 1985, p. 137)

Authoritarian power is pervasive in the Indian society, and members pay their respect according to their placement in the social ladder. That the society is driven by fear may be to exaggerate in the modern world of today, but it may also have some relevance for the understanding of power. Paying respect to the authoritarian powers is an Indian phenomenon, inherited by the aged Varna system.

Although this section is merely enough to give a good representation of power in an Indian context, it might emphasise the importance of culture and social orders in the exercise of power, which here can be interpreted as dominative and authoritarian.

## **Towards an analytical framework**

Trying to develop an analytical framework when dealing with issues of power and representation has been a difficult task, as there is no sole solution for understanding how people are represented, what power is or how people enter participation. The main purpose of the above presented theories was to make a setting for the reader to understand my own position within theory and to understand how I use concepts to enlighten the situation of the studied women's representation.

There should probably have been more room for defining *space* theoretically, as it is worded and acts as a geographical alibi to this study. Space in relation to participation and power is here understood mainly as an abstract category, but when analysing the data, space also has become a concrete physical category. I try to capture both the private and the public as spaces of representation, and thus also as political.

The concepts of participation and power are in my opinion and understanding deeply rooted in each other and thus there are no reasons to separate them when analysing the data. They are on the other hand split in this framework to show how the concepts can be understood separately. Another importance is to mention that the level of spaces of participation and power together will make the foundations for real representation, either this is in the home sphere, at work, in public matters and so forth.

### ***Spaces of participation***

Participation is achieved when people act to gain representation; that is to take part in decisions regarding the organisation of life and well-being.

Politics is not only about the public, the private also must be recognised as such. The public space of participation is made available to the people by e.g. governance authorities who *invite* to participation through participating in elections or joining politics. Such participation may be constrained or enabled by inclusive or exclusive practices of power. When the public space consist of a privileged elite excluding members of the society such as women or tribal people, this space can be considered as *empty*, as the purpose was to fill it with participating citizens. The public, as well as private spaces may also be *claimed* spaces of participation or counter-publics, where citizens take action and fills the spaces to realise their own rights and representation. When claiming spaces of participation, one tries to fill a space to compensate for the lost access in those *empty invited* spaces.

## ***Spaces of power***

Power is a multifaceted concept and it is always contextual. Power is not something that people possess, but rather something that can be exercised either as authoritarian and dominating, or as a positive force of mutual relationships. Power is understood as an ability to take charge of something, the means of action, or people's access to decision making. Holding power is not necessarily something all can do; the ability or the access to power is contextual and situated. Such power can be inherited, either through traditional customs, through hegemonies or it can be granted through fear or corruption. Such power is here recognised as the power *over*, and is in this framework recognised as a dominating negative power.

Access to exercise power depends on one's status or place in society, and power is more than controlling something or someone. Power can also be accessed through association, and a more democratic sense of power, is the power one can hold together *with* someone, or *within* a certain group or network. Such associative power exists in social relationships and as Allen (2003) claim when referring to Arendt's conceptions of power, such power is all about those ties which keep people together, especially if they are striving together towards a common goal. This power is perceived as a positive force of relationships, and encourages mutuality rather than the negative and asymmetrical power of domination (Allen, 2003).

## ***Representation***

Representation in governance is *real* when it is inclusive, when inequalities are recognised and power is redistributed. When representation only is descriptive, the excluded or marginalised non-substantial represented seeks to the *counter-public*, or to the private sphere to gain recognition. The concept of political representation is easily assessed as political in the means of being represented in some sort of governing body, like a local council or government. Representation in this study makes more sense when including the private sphere as a political sphere. By doing this, I try to include minorities and those who are substantially not represented in the official systems of governance, which makes it possible to see how they are represented in other spaces of power.

Quotas may contribute to a more substantial political representation, but for this to happen, everyone needs to recognise that power is deeply embedded in institutional structures. The embedded power must be redistributed and all must be willing to change.

Substantial or real representation of minorities may sometimes only be accessible through grouping of joint interests outside the official and public systems of governance, and by creating counter-publics groups provide spaces where they find themselves represented when withdrawn from the exclusive fields of public governance. Such counter-publics contribute also to people's representation as it creates space for agitation and action opposing dominant powers and authorities (A. Cornwall & Coelho, 2007; Kofman, 2008).

I understand real representation as not available if there is no presence of power *and* participation. To understand the spatial accesses, it is vital to understand the discrepancies between public spaces of governance and the claimed counter spaces of representation. The intention behind these spaces, as I see it, is to represent interests and people, but while one space is *empty*, another one has to be claimed to achieve access to *real representation*.



## **5. Women and spaces of participation and power**

This chapter mainly highlights the studied women's everyday situations within the existing power structures in the study areas. This analysis concentrates on study village A and women's spaces of participation of power. As the participation and power are deeply rooted in each other, they are difficult to separate. With one foot in theory of participation, power and political geography, and another foot in the reality of these women's situation, the analysis provide a picture of real life, and especially focus at the constraining and enabling factors which everyday help or hinder women in their endeavours towards substantial representation.

The first part of this chapter gives attention to men's images, impressions and opinions about women's spaces of participation and power in study village A. Stories from Adivasi, General Caste and Harijan men are presented. The second part of this chapter presents women's lives and gives a deeper insight of women's spaces of power and participation in study village A, categorised into General Caste women, Adivasi women and Harijan women.

Although the analysis is separating between General Caste, Harijan and Adivasi women, the study is not meant to be a comparison, but merely an enlightenment of their different or similar situations of representation within the same areas.

### **Men's impressions of women in governance**

Maybe not surprisingly, most men of the study villages have a matured mind when it comes to understanding women's situations. When asked, they all agree that women will make a good and fair contribution to local politics and in governance. First and foremost they see clearly that women are honest and do not have the ability of being corrupt or to perform blackmailing, and thus they see women as capable and honest contributors in governance. Despite this, many of the male research participants do not see much change since the implementation of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment when reservations for women were set into practice.

On the other hand, a positive development has made an entrance, as women in most families and in most hamlets have come together and developed Self Help Groups (SHGs) to make communities, small businesses, loan facilities and collections for the well being of their small

communities. These SHGs are in the male opinion well working exactly because there are no male members to force corruption into the SHG activities.

Through literature, men are in general blamed for practicing patriarchy and for seeing themselves as superior to women (Rai, 2008; Werbner & Yuval-Davis, 1999). At the same time, men are now getting new focus in the gender agenda, and development studies recognise the great importance of understanding men in order to enhance women's development (Chant & Gutmann, 2002). Without men's acknowledgement of women as equal citizens, and without their willingness to change, no changes can take place in real patriarchal societies.

### ***Adivasi men***

The men in the Adivasi hamlets seem to have a broad understanding of the unequal positions of men and women. While both men and women are making an income from daily labour, the women are also responsible for the nurturing of children, elders and husbands, and they are responsible for cleaning and maintenance of the home.

*"We think we should be equal, but in reality we are not. This is our habit, and women have many pressures... It [housework] is the duty of women...Men do not like housework..."*

*"During her absence, I should compromise. During her illness I should also compromise. But when she is home, I shall not..... We do not think about this, we are equal in income, but women have many pressures".*

(Interview A3)

One of the male participants claims that even though men are agreeing about the incorrectness of the unequal positions of men and women, the development is heading in the wrong direction.

*"In my mother and fathers time, they were cooperating with each other, but now we are not. How can I tell if there will be any change after some time? The change is in a negative way".*

(Interview A8)

This participant found it hard to explain why the situation is like this, but he acknowledges that it is a situation of injustice. It can easily be related to the Hinduisation process and the absorption into the patriarchal Hindu culture. With Hinduisation of tribal groups, the Adivasi

went from an egalitarian society structure to the culture of patriarchy. Women had least to win from this transformation (Dash, 1998).

In moral terms, these men are accepting that women are a part of governance systems, and that women are human beings with the same mental capacities as men. Still, in this village they claim that most of the women are not capable of taking on the role of governing and raising voice, as they are illiterate, reluctant and not sufficiently interested. There is a long walk from talk to action, and as Rai (2008) claims, no real change can happen without institutional structural changes. The willingness to such change seems to be lacking in these men's minds.

Another participant responded that women actually do participate, but in these cases there are often some pressures behind them and that the women participating in many cases are not interested or doing it willingly. One of these forces is the many political parties, which pressure people to participate with promises of change and access to resources and facilities. Although these parties may enable women's participation, they in some manner create a situation of forced participation and use their financial powers to get women's signatures. Despite the ban on political parties in the Panchayats (Goel & Rajneesh, 2009), the political parties are ruling the system and this can be interpreted as a deeply embedded form of corruption.

Women become afraid of participation. At first they may be encouraged, but after raising their voices in the presence of men, they get discouraged by these men's verbal abuse and patronising attitudes. When these women participate by taking small steps into the traditional male power areas, they are soon to be de-powered and de-motivated by male members actively making sure and mobilising for the failure of women's success. When men raise their voices and interrupt women talking, they are often loud and fearful. The counter forces seem too strong for these women who are so inhabited to the custom of male rulers. Some men are definitely using the power *over* these women by adding fear to the situation, as Gaventa (2006) claim, some are abusing their power *over* to influence or force through their thoughts to the powerless, in this case the women.

Illiteracy is crucial in the opinion of men concerning women's incapability to participate. The Adivasi come from generations of uneducated illiterate people, and at most some of them have gone to school until third grade of elementary school. They all know how to give their signature, but maybe at the cost of not knowing what they are signing.

An important dimension of this is how illiteracy and inadequate educational levels affect people's self-confidence. In the meeting point between Adivasi and General Caste people, the Adivasi people, both men and women, feel insecure and superior to the better educated and socially experienced General Caste people. This, in addition to the superiority of caste and class, makes the Adivasi people reluctant and discouraged to enter the spaces of participation, as the meeting between them makes an inconvenient situation and creates hurtful feelings. Again it becomes evident that the Adivasi people are placed on the bottom of the social ladder (Dash, 1998)

It would be good if women had more room for participation in governance. Adivasi men are of the opinion, like others, that women have a more innocent and inexpensive nature than men. While women are conscientious beings practicing righteousness, men in governance have an expensive nature, claiming resources to their own pockets. The majority of the research participants claim that males have an inherent corrupt nature, and that such nature does not reside in women's behaviour and attitude.

### ***Harijan men***

Both men and women are facing trouble mere by being born as *untouchables*, or Harijan people. In the Harijan areas, many situations are difficult as results of caste traditions and uneven power relations between higher castes and Harijan people. Long time ago, caste discrimination was forbidden by law, but in most of these societies and villages, the practice of creating hierarchies with Harijan groups at the bottom still is very vivid.

*"We are not able to raise voice, because if we raise voice they will not give anything to us. If we don't raise voice, they will give something, but by raising voice we get nothing".*

(Interview A7)

Both men and women are in the situation where information is kept from them, they are not informed about village meetings, the Palli Sabhas, and they feel that they are not priority and they are too few, they are a minority. It seems quite obvious that this hamlet is powerless under the existing power of privileged elites withholding information as they have the power to keep it from the Harijans.

Harijan men are open for women's contribution in governance, and some recognise women just as capable as men in handling official issues and politics.

*“We have two hands, they have two hands. Why cannot they do it? They have the right, now they have to prove it”.*

(Interview A7)

Still, it is only the Panchayat which has been opened up for women’s participation after the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment. Women are still not welcomed into the local village meetings and the Palli Sabhas.

*“Women’s signature is important, by using her signature all things happen... Directly women cannot do anything, but without her signature nothing happens”.*

(Interview A7)

It seems that women’s entry to these invited spaces of participation are filled by the bodies of women, but *empty* in regard of representing women’s interests (Mohanty, 2007). Another catch for the Harijan people is that they have been informed that the female quota in their Panchayat is reserved for the General Caste women and that Harijan women are not eligible to stand for elections. Either this is due to misconceptions, misunderstandings or corrupt forms of General Caste people to keep their positions in the Panchayat, the Harijan women thus never get the chance to participate on equal conditions as General Caste women. The information gap between those in power and the Harijan people is increasing, and it is difficult for both men and women to gain access to it, as they are seen as untouchables. It seems to be a misconception of many people, that when women get reservations for one third of all seats, it is generally assumed that this also are all seats women can get. In reality, women can occupy all seats, as there are no reservations for men. Either it is tradition, or men trying to convince women that one third only is for female, men stay in power, especially by maintaining a male majority. The power of the elites *over* the minorities is still the daily practice.

### ***General Caste men***

In conversations with male members of study village A’s General Caste, women now have a chance enter to development processes with the implementation of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment. Women are gaining more respect, as they enter positions outside the household, like bringing in loans from the SHGs. It is a need for these women to gain more power and insight in the society and in political life outside the household. They need strength to overcome the

consequences of men's drinking problems, which is a major problem in the area, and the abuse of women and power. Also in the General Caste hamlets, cultural traditions of women staying inside the household, within the private sphere is highly apparent, both for newly married women, as well as others. It is a sign of losing dignity when women are stepping outside, although some people are taking small steps towards acknowledging that female wage earners are not solely a negative occurrence. With the situation of men's unemployment, women's contribution to economy is life saving.

One example especially shows women's recent entry into spaces outside the household. Some years ago there used to be a major problem of men abusing liquor in the village, especially in the General Caste's hamlets. The women shared this concern together, and the power of these women together with the ASHA (local health worker) opposed to the government's liquor store and managed to break it down. The actions of vigilance now have made the abuse of liquor more difficult and less accessible to men. This is one of the local signs showing that women gradually are gaining power terrain, and serves as an example of the power women can hold *with* each other (Kabeer, 1994). At the same time these women are creating and entering the counter-publics, the *claimed* spaces of participation and power, as their interests has no importance or access to the public spaces of governance.

Some men have analytical insight into their own male to female situations, and see that men are much dependent on their wives. Women are taking care of their family members, housework like cleaning, cooking and animal care. Another aspect is that the women do not drink, and are thus able to manage monetary resources in a less selfish and more sensible way than their husbands. Although this problem has decreased, men are still wasting more money than women, by buying things like cigarettes, beetle nuts and other commodities for their personal enjoyment.

*"Men are eligible to income something. But after earning, he invests ¾ to himself and ¼ to his wife for house management. The money for himself is wasted. If that amount would be with women, women could be able to develop so much. They are also interested to make some income, but they do not get the chance".*

(Interview A11)

Men are gradually accepting that women are smart and clever beings. They used to be looked upon as illiterate and non-smart and the value of women has traditionally been very low in

comparison to men. Now, with women's formations of SHGs and networks, they are contributing to the family's income with loans which can provide the family with fruitful resources, e.g. many can now afford to keep small businesses. In this manner families become more self-sufficient, and their husbands and male family members are stepwise recognising the importance of her contribution. They also see that women have some capacities, which men earlier presumed they could not have. The women are becoming clever.

Additionally, men feel that women are becoming clever with the access to newspapers and TV. Earlier information about politics and rights were not accessible, but information is gradually getting through to the people in the villages. This situation of men recognising women's contributions becomes important and may serve as a door opener for future change. As Rai (2008) claims, no change is to happen without such recognition.

### ***Male support of women***

In supporting women through elections for positions in the Panchayat, General Caste men are very much backing the idea that women should be supported and encouraged by their husbands to stand for elections. But the major problem when standing for elections is that it requires tremendous amounts of money for wine, meat, fish and other means to buy the peoples votes, and most families do not access such monetary capacity. As a result, many political parties are exploiting the situation and convince members of the society to stand and give them access to these monetary resources. On one hand, women may gain votes as they can buy them from the people with the money from the political parties. On the other hand, the political parties are demanding their voice and impose their political strategies, values and goals to members who maybe are unaware of what they mean or want for their own society.

Some women are bought by political parties, while some are representing their husband's opinions. The women are used to give their signatures, as one third of the signatures must come from female representatives. Here, the greatest disabling factors seem to be the inner politics of corruption. Lies, in combinations with corruption, and some peoples strong urge to control and gain personal access to monetary and infrastructural resources constitute great obstacles for those who want honest and fair politics. Again we witness the power of the powerful *over* the powerless, and the maintenance of invited spaces to legitimate the closed spaces and the existing power structures (A. Cornwall, 2004).

## **Women about their daily lives in study village A**

Women tell their stories of their spaces in the local village, and by presenting themselves they reveal each other. To live in these areas implicates a strong bond of tradition to the axis of life. All women, regardless of caste status, tribal or economical status are in some way constrained to access full free movement in their virtue of being women alone.

Daily life for these women is tied to traditional power relations and women are entrusted to stay in the home sphere and not to leave the neighbourhood without permission of in-laws or husbands. In most families women are married into a family in a new village, due to long traditions of avoiding inbreeding. Newly married women carry deep respect and veneration for their in-laws and are expected to stay within the home for at least five years after the marriage takes place. In this period, the woman has very little right to raise her voice, she has to cover her head in respect of her new family and most housework is resting on her shoulders. In general, women stay within the house caring for children, livestock and house maintenance. They are not expected to perform paid work, as this traditionally is the responsibility of men. In this way women and men share responsibilities which place men in a public sphere and women in a private sphere. The only exception is for Adivasi women, who take on paid labour, as the tribal population has long traditions of not differing between men and women in matters of paid labour.

The situation of losing cultural dignity by working is apparent in the General Caste and Harijan population in the village, but the tribal women have a different experience. Their daily life is on one side much like the caste and Harijan women's, they are in total responsibility of children and of housework. At the same time, they are wage earners equally to their fathers, husbands and sons. These women confirm theories of tribal women as extra burdened (Karmakar, 2002), and especially in comparison to caste women, as they do heavy manual labour in addition to the housework. The Adivasi women are extremely tenacious of life, from rising early in the morning, taking care of their in-laws', husband's and children's needs, cleaning, cooking and caring before going to labour. The labour they take on is hard manual work, and walking distances between the home and the work location are often very long, in many cases several kilometres each way. While some are going to the forest collecting firewood or cashew nuts for selling, others are going to the mining companies for stone cutting. Both kinds of work are mainly physical, and the work gives these women a



rough appearance, signing them with a dark, furrowed skin, most of them looking very skinny and much too old for their age.

### ***Women in governance***

In this village, some few women are elected representatives. The head of the Panchayat, the Sarpanch, is a woman from General Caste, and there are also two female members, one from the Adivasi hamlet and another one from General Caste. They all claim their participation in Panchayat meetings, and are very convincing in their stories about what they have achieved as female representatives.

The reservation of the Sarpanch seat is shifting between elections, and in the period of this study the seat of the Sarpanch was reserved for a woman. Much statistics reveal that most of the female Sarpanches are wives of former male Sarpanches in the district, and thereof comes the expression *proxy wives*. The Sarpanch of this village seems to belong to the culture and category of proxy wives. The proxy wife phenomenon came into life simultaneously with the implementation of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment to the Constitution in India, and basically consists of women who are elected formally to represent their husband's, father's or brother's opinions and power. Being a proxy wife, means that you are elected as a formal person to represent the meanings and politics of a husband, and the expression has in short time gained a prominent position in the vocabulary of the villagers. In many cases such proxy wives are subdued, under the power of direct patriarchy. In some cases these women are interested in the position and may feel powerful, as little change happens without their signatures.

All three female representatives in this village claim that they are active in participation, decision making and voice raisings in the Panchayat meetings and activities, but they all are very clear about the other women being silent and subdued.

The lay women of Orissa are often shy and reserved, and this especially counts for newly wedded women or young women just entering voting age. It is not at all expected that they take part or are interested in the local governance systems, and they normally do not carry the capabilities of raising voice.

### ***The female Sarpanch***

The Sarpanch of village A is a tall, just above 30 years old, well educated General Caste woman with a very outgoing personality. Most of the time she is caring for children, and

taking care of kettle and housework together with her sisters in-law. She absolutely confirms the picture of women in the inside private sphere, and she herself claims that the main difference between men and women is that men are responsible for the outside work, while women are responsible in the house. She recognises that her role as a mother is very important as she takes the full responsibility of the children's health, education and socialisation when their father is not present. Her husband is a busy man, and as a former Sarpanch he has gained great respect in the village. Although the Sarpanch claims that she is the one in charge of the Panchayat work, we continuously, by being present in the village, observe her husband taking care of Panchayat work and responsibilities. One example is that at the day of the interview with the lady Sarpanch, he was eager to talk to us and wanted to answer the questions asked to his wife, but as he was in a rush to help out someone with a health problem in the neighbourhood, he had no time.

The lady Sarpanch, as she often is called, claims that she was encouraged to enter politics and stand for elections by some agents from one of the most powerful political parties. The reservation for women was the main reason for her encouragement, and together with her husband's achievements in the previous reign, she gained votes and support from many villagers. Another factor she highlights is that most women were not interested to stand, but they supported her when she did. She was *invited* to participate by the forces of existing powers.

The female Sarpanch claims that her position as a leader is a situation of real representation, meaning that she actually is in charge and in power of her position without her husband's help. When women are active and raising voice, they gain power directly as a positive consequence of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment. But she also recognises that party politics can be very exploitative of women, in particular to women who do not have the strength to raise their voices and take action.

As a woman, she has been able to focus on women's issues. One of her first actions was to claim more facilities for childbirths and maternity health. Being a woman enables her to talk to other women about their concerns and problems. In these areas it is somehow a taboo for women to express such concerns to men, and having the possibility to have a woman representing some of the female concerns, especially health wise concerns, is a step towards women's development. She has experienced how difficult it can be to discuss female problems with men. Before she was elected Sarpanch she had great trouble speaking frankly

to men. The private sphere and hence women's issues should be included in the public, as feminist political geographers claim, and thus real representation can be achieved (Kofman, 2008). Here, the female Sarpanch makes an effort to bring women's concerns and interests into the public sphere.

This Sarpanch is a proud woman, and nothing seems like a challenge to her. But being female restricts her movements, as women traditionally are expected to stay within the village, and particularly within the hamlet. If she was a man, she could have gone where she wished, and she could have travelled by motorbike, which is no option for women. Until women are married it is ok for them to ride bicycles, but after marriage she will only be respected when wearing a sari, covering her head and caring for children and family within the household. The cultural codes of patriarchy constrain women to a certain spectre of behaviours, thus participation becomes difficult, and hence little representation of women is apparent.

In conversations with women from the General Caste, the Adivasi and the Harijan hamlets, it seems as they have different opinions about who the Sarpanch is. When asking if they knew who the Sarpanch is, many of them gave us the name of her husband. Most of them are also aware that her position is important, as she is the only one who can sign her name on public papers. Some of these women are in full understanding of the fact that the female Sarpanch is not able to represent as a woman. They first and foremost see her as a mother and a wife and that she has to fulfil her responsibilities in the home. The duties and responsibilities of women in the home sphere seem to be of greater priority to women of all the hamlets in this village. They respect their husbands, and see it as a religious plight to serve them, like serving Gods, which coincide with traditional Indian ways of understanding power (Pye & Pye, 1985).

## **General Caste women**

Woman of General Caste see themselves as lucky to be members of their caste, they are more respected and in majority and they are proud to be in a superior caste. They are in most cases well informed about public issues and politics, although the elderly women do not seem very involved or informed. The older women are traditionally being taken care of by their sons and their daughters' in-law, and are not much bothered with village issues. Their families do not like to bother them as people in old age are culturally entitled to relax and to busy themselves with simple and non-heavy work, and with religious activities like worshipping. There is something of a generation gap between women, as the elders of these villages belong to even

more traditional ways of treating women, and grew up in a time where girls never had a chance to get an education. That this is changing is solely positive, in the opinions of the research participants. They all appreciate that girls are in school getting an education and they are all very positive to the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment's reservations for women.

An amusing story from one of the participants shows how cultural bonds have made elderly women incapable of understanding the importance of women's contribution to governance and politics. Replying to the question of what makes men more important in politics and what it is that differs between men and women she tells:

*“The daughter is never able to do the same as the son. This is because of one bone. The one bone is not in the daughter... This is why all the males are brave. Men also get more energy because of this extra bone.... Male leaders blackmail everything... Women have some fear about blackmailing, I cannot do this blackmailing. Men are not afraid of anybody; they are always ready to fight. The blackmailing is a tendency of men”.*

(Interview A2)

The same participant tells that she has a feeling of helplessness because she is woman, as men are able to take care of income and agriculture. The helplessness is a feeling she claims she would not have had if she was a man.

When it comes to participation in local governance she has never been invited to participate beyond giving her vote in elections. Voting also has become a matter of obligation, as she claims that she votes because unless she does, she does not get her pension. Women vote, but are not called to join either the Palli Sabha or the Panchayat work. When women experience troubles, they will never go to an authority with it. They will merely tell their husbands or girlfriends about it. Women seek comfort and membership in the private counter-publics, as the public does not include them.

### ***The ijjat of General Caste women***

A General Caste woman confirms the idea that women stay in the house. Income work outside the house is a male business only, and it has its cultural reasons.

*“In our caste, no woman does this work. If we stand anywhere outside, like in elections or income work, our husbands will be angry... Our ijat will go away by standing outside. I will lose my ijat, my prestige, by standing outside”.*

(Interview A12)

*Ijyat* in Orya language is an important part of culture. *Ijyat* is the respect, honour and prestige of people, often connected to religion and religious aspects. For instance, a woman has good *ijyat* when she is serving her Gods, her family and follows the plights of traditions and customs. An obedient and docile wife gives a well respected husband. Another consequence of the *ijyat* phenomenon is the even poorer treatment and respect of the Adivasi women. To General Caste people, all women having to take work outside for an income loses their *ijyat* and are looked upon as inferior, not clean, nor respectable. As the Adivasi people traditionally have been an inferior group, this contributes to an extra emphasis on their lesser worth.

### ***General Caste women in governance***

Within the General Caste areas in the village, people seem to have no objections to bringing their problems to the Sarpanch. Such problems may be of personal or formal character. The Sarpanch will be able to solve them. Many of the research participants referred us to the husband of the female Sarpanch when asked the name of the Sarpanch.

The information about who the Sarpanch is, reaches far in the village, but not all are aware of the proxy wife situation. They just assume that the husband of the Sarpanch is the one in charge and have no idea that they are misinformed. When women were made aware of this during the study, some of them experienced a comforting feeling, as they feel freer to express themselves to other women in preference to men. In a way, a new space was opened up to them. Other women could understand the proxy wife situation as they meant that the lady Sarpanch needed to be with her young children.

In general, most of the participants were agreeing that women in governance and a modernisation process towards more gender equality is a good thing. The fact that women are gaining terrain and may gradually be developed is an appreciated thought of the women of the General Caste hamlet. In time, they think women will be able to go more outside, experience change and even the ability to take on income work without sacrificing their *ijyat*.

### ***The informal fields of General Caste women***

All research participants were familiar with the local establishments of women's Self Help Groups (SHGs), and large shares of the female research participants are also members of such groups. The SHGs are small groups or clubs of women, and women only. One woman from every family in a hamlet has the right to join the local group. Many are members of one group, and some are members of two or more such groups, or are joining private market microfinance programs. In these programs one can enjoy the benefits of being women, as many of these companies are providing loans for women only.

In the SHGs women get together, either weekly or monthly, depending on its organisation. Most SHGs have small loan facilities as their main activity, and in every village one can find such groups initiated by government officials. Women tell about their experiences with the SHGs and clearly these groups are making a positive contribution to these women's lives. One of the research participants even revealed how she had turned her membership of three different SHG's or microfinance institutions into a business for her family. While taking small loans from all three groups, her family had become private lenders, giving small loans to others and profiting of the interest. By participating in a women's group, women create and enter the spaces of the counter-publics as they feel excluded from the formal and public spaces of governance.

### **Adivasi women**

Most women of the Adivasi people are engaging in paid labour, many of them collecting firewood or cashew nuts in the forest, or work as stone crushers. Common to them all is heavy manual labour during the day. In the morning and during the night they are all occupied with housework, cooking and caring for their families. This naturally puts them in a time pressured situation where they are not very able to make room for other interests, like bargaining for political terrain in the village. The priority is first and foremost to procure money to afford the daily basics of living, like rice and vegetables.

*"I get out of bed early, I clean the house, then I cook. Then I go to the forest to collect firewood. Then I go back to the house to process the firewood before I go to sell the wood. Then after selling this I go back home to cook. The walking distance for selling is 3*

*kilometres... ...The Sarpanch prioritise those who follow him, but I have no time to follow him”.*

(Interview A13)

The woman making this quote is just another case of women in a time pressured situation. At the same time, she emphasises that the Adivasi people are not putting up a fight for their rights, and they do not care so much about participating because they know it will not make a difference, in her opinion the Adivasi people will never be a priority of the Panchayat.

As her husband has become disabled, she has to make an income sufficient for the whole family. Her husband qualifies to get a disability pension, but the governance system has failed to recognise this. She is in total responsibility of taking care of her home, her husband, and she is also facing the dowry problem trying to get her daughter married. Although the tribal population originally did not follow the Hindu customs of giving dowry, they have adopted the traditions and this puts them in a vulnerable position, as the Adivasi people merely make enough money to cover their basic needs throughout the year.

*“I have spoken to the Sarpanch about this problem, but the Sarpanch gives no respond. I requested the Sarpanch for applying for my husband’s pension because of his leg, but the Sarpanch does not reply”.*

(Interview A13)

The quote above is just one out of many examples of Adivasi women being neglected when raising their voices. This Adivasi woman is in no way represented through the formal system, and as a solution to her problem, she has found comfort among her own people. She is an active member of the hamlets local *women’s group*. In this group she has a community with women in similar situations. They are neighbours, friends, and associates in the group, sharing problems and advices. In addition, they use the group as a loan facility, where they meet every week and all members bring money and a handful of rice. Through the small savings and loans, they are able to make small businesses, repay greater loans and ease their burdens in times of crisis like dowry problems. Together they hold power *with* each other *within* the women’s group. As a group with capabilities of obtaining strength when they are together, they have been able to raise their voices in the Panchayat, and to demand the solving of their problems. Together, they are able to claim a space for representation outside the formal systems.

The women of the Adivasi families are joining the SHGs both for community and to get access to loans. Some tell that they are denied to join these networks by their husbands, but that these women join despite their husband's denial. In turn, this has led to their husband's compromising ability as men have recognised the family's need to have this access to loans.

### ***The multiple burdens of Adivasi women***

*“Men are like Gods. Our husbands are like Gods and we shall obey them. These bracelets and our tikilis [bindis/ forehead marks] are for them, and we can not be angry at them”.*

(Interview A4)

Adivasi women follow the classic theories of tribal women being in a double or triple malediction. By being women, they have greater burdens; by being tribal they have to take on twice as much work, or even more in comparison to women of the caste system (Karmakar, 2002). As citizens they have lost their opportunities to participate on equal basis to men and higher castes in particular. As women, they are placed in the patriarchal system of having to please their husbands and his family with the respect they pay to gods, but the story is not necessarily as dark as the impressions. These people are focusing on their strengths and opportunities rather than seeking problems.

*“Because of the S.T. rate<sup>7</sup>s we are able to work, even if we are illiterate. If we were in General Caste or other castes we would not have this opportunity to earn”.*

(Interview A5)

*“We are Adivasi, and therefore we get a work chance. If born in General Caste, we would not have the chance to do this type of work, and that would make us feel bad. This work is difficult, but it is good for health”.*

(Interview A13)

The Adivasi women are lacking information about their rights to participate and to vote, they are rarely informed about anything outside their hamlets. One reason for this is that they are working outside the hamlet when someone comes to inform them. Another reason is the political corruption when powerful persons are withholding information to gain political

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<sup>7</sup> S.T. rates: Members of Scheduled Tribes are entitled to work in government provided jobs, like the access they are given to utilize the forests.



terrain. Whenever they gain access to information, it is again because of political parties trying to buy their votes.

*“There is a word in Orya: Dahana hata. It means right hand. Those who follow the Sarpanch are called dahana hata. These people informed us about the election 8 days before the voting”.*

(Interview A4)

This quote, and the conversation which followed, explains a situation where the local sitting Sarpanch wanted to be re-elected in the name of his wife, as there was a female quota. The people in the Adivasi hamlet were somehow pressured to vote for the Sarpanch. In a suspicious way of blackmailing the Adivasi people of the village, the Sarpanch’s followers promised them goods and facilities if they voted for the Sarpanch; and the opposites if they did not. Either way, the Adivasi people are placed in the dilemma of either doing what is ethically right versus what actually might bring them some advantages. As in most of the hamlets, people who chose to vote for an opposing party politician, today face troubles when trying to acquire those public schemes which they are entitled to, since the Sarpanch belongs to the opposing party. The very few families who voted in favour of the sitting Sarpanch give the impression to the other families in the hamlet that they have benefited by voting for the Sarpanch, by gaining access to larger forest areas which Adivasi people are depending upon for their livelihoods. The rights to use the same forests have been deprived from the majority of the Adivasi families.

### ***Adivasi women’s missing qualities***

Some villagers claim that Adivasi women are not interested in participating or joining governance systems. Not only lack of interest, but the lack of qualities to join, is an important factor. Human qualities and capabilities, or the lack of these, stand out as one of the strongest hinders for women’s participation and actions in the public spheres of governance. The husbands of the Adivasi women would have let their wives participate more in the local governance fields if they saw them as more capable and literate, and they too recognise that the Adivasi woman bears a heavy double burden.

*“I do not have the qualities to join. I cannot talk to anybody in a forum. Big males are there”.*

(Respondent A4)

By big males, she talks about the strong, voice raising and often angry behavioural men, who are in power and patronise women when they try to object to something or to add their opinions in a discussion. The existing powers are too strong and the Adivasi women become powerless.

### ***The female Adivasi ward-member***

Even though there is some truth in the idea that women are not interested to participate, this claim does not apply to all. There is a quota for the Adivasi people, and in this electoral period, an Adivasi woman represents her hamlet. She decided to stand for the elections as she had been the leader of the former women's group in the hamlet.

This women's group was initiated by CARD, the above mentioned NGO. In more than twenty years, CARD has been initiating projects and training for women in this village, and the Adivasi women have a special position in this development. Since CARD started working in the area, women have come out of their houses; they have acquired skills leadership and of raising their voices. The skills which the ward-member acquired during her time as leader of the Women's group also were a reason for others to encourage her to stand for the elections.

The female Adivasi ward-member is active in the Panchayat meetings, at least she claims, and tries to make a difference for the people of her hamlet. Her husband has no objections to her participation, and she is the one in charge, her husband has no voice.

As she is also one of the women in the crossroads between being a housewife, a mother and a wage earner, and not least being the financial manager of the income of both herself and her husband, it is difficult to see how she can make time for both Panchayat activities, as well as taking part in a Women's group.

*"I have to select my priorities, and I join according to priority. I am not always attending, and sometimes the meetings are not arranged. I do emphasise the Women's group, as this relationship is very old to me. The relationship with the group is strong, and has lasted for twenty years. The Panchayat meetings are only for five years, but the Women's group is for life".*

(Interview A5)

The representation this respondent feel is stronger in the informal, created and claimed spaces of the Women's group, and prefers to present her interests among women who are in a similar situation of life to her own.

### ***The Adivasi trap of local hierarchies***

Most Adivasi people claim that they are as Adivasi people being neglected and that information about rights, politics and issues concerning themselves are being hidden from them by people in power. Case after case shows us how the Adivasi people are not given the information they are entitled to, and even the ward-member from the Adivasi hamlet does not get her information in time to prepare for the meetings. The Palli Sabha is an arena without Adivasi people, and most of them have never joined the Palli Sabha meetings, not even the men.

Like the Harijan people are untouchable to many people of the caste areas, the Adivasi people are too. Relationships between General Caste and people from Adivasi or Harijan families are not accepted, nor found in these areas. The only relation they may have is the formal one in the Panchayat, and the Panchayat seems to be a zone free of caste prejudice, at least during the official meetings.

There are also misconceptions of the caste divides. The people of the Adivasi hamlets are agreeing that they think people in General Caste have free access to power. They also think that General Caste women are stronger and more capable of handling power and debates in comparison to Adivasi people. This happens at the same time as the proxy system is out in the daylight.

### **The Harijan women**

Approaching the Harijan areas, we were met with scepticism, as it turned out that these people were seldom visited by others. Their areas are looked upon by outsiders as unclean and somehow dangerous, and people of other castes do not visit these places due to untouchability. To us, the small hamlet seemed neat, the houses seemed fresh and well constructed, and it turned out that the people were school graduates, work migrants and retired government workers.

The lives of the Harijan women can be much similar to the lives of the General Caste; they are maintaining their homes, caring for their children and are more or less expected to stay within the home sphere. Even if they are traditionally bound to patriarchal customs, these people are opened minded and seem very satisfied with the way of life inside the hamlet.

We found a woman smiling and expressing her thoughts with no kind of dissatisfaction with the situation of women:

*“We are housewives and they [the men] are going outside. Our husband’s decisions should be stronger; men have much power in decisions. We obey them as elders, we think of them as elders. Anything they say, we shall respect, because they are maintaining the house financially”.*

(Interview A10)

There seems to be an agreement between men and women. They share the responsibilities, women maintaining the home sphere, and men as wage earners. There is an understanding between husband and wife which to them legitimates the placement of women inside the house and men outside. In one case, one of the research participants seemed happy about not working.

When being asked a question about her dreams and hopes for a future during childhood, one of the research participants gladly replied that she had wanted to serve her government. As her parents were both professionals, she had to stay with her grandmother, and at a point she dropped out of school to maintain the house of her grandmother. Still, she has the dream of working in government services, although she gave up achieving the dream due to her role in the home.

### ***The Harijan female generation gap***

There seem to be a major gap between the young and the elderly women of the Harijan hamlet. Some women in their older days have absolutely no idea about what is going on at the political and public front in their village. As they are elders, they do not have to pay attention to much, but males are discussing public issues and politics even as they grow old, women do not. It is a definite divide between men and women of the elder generations; women are confined to stay in the home, caring about housework, other family members and they are expected to not put their noses into Panchayat issues.

While the young women we meet are very willing to talk about their thoughts concerning the Panchayat system, public issues and women's problems, the older ones are extremely reluctant to answer. Not only is this due to the modernisation and the 'easing up' of traditions, but the elder women has been deprived from an education and from their political rights. They have little or no awareness and ability to understand political and public issues. In this way the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment can be a door opener for future generations of women to participate and engage with local politics.

The younger women of the Harijan settlement have showed that they can contribute in local politics and participate outside the home sphere. As others, they tell us that women are never invited to the Palli Sabhas, so whenever they have a problem in the families or in the hamlet, they bring it to the Sarpanch. Or so to say, they bring it to the husband of the Sarpanch.

One of the research participants from the Harijan hamlet does not find it critical that the female Sarpanch is not following the tasks she is given.

*"Maybe she has small children and that's why she cannot go outside? I think this is why, but I do not know what the problem is... Her husband does everything, but she should be present. If there is any meeting or price giving ceremonies, she is going. But if you need the Sarpanch outside, then her husband goes".*

(Interview A10)

She claims that they can have this relationship because there is a good understanding between the husband and the wife. It might be constraining the real participation of the female Sarpanch, but on the other hand it may be a door opener for her, when her relationship to her husband is good.

Finally, women in this hamlet do not necessarily feel discriminated by their gender, or that they are constrained from living a worthy life, but many of them recognise that they would have had much more freedom of movement and choice if they were born as men. They recognise that men get a better chance to develop, in all castes, and that women from other castes do not have the equal opportunity to develop as men have in the force of being male alone.

Recently, the formation of a women's group has started in this hamlet. Not many seem to be members, but the group came into being as a government scheme has encouraged them to

form this group. Previously a women's Samiti<sup>8</sup> existed in the area, but due to quarrelling between the members, the group resigned. Even though there is much evidence of the positive effects for women participating in SHGs or Women's groups, there is evidence sometimes showing the results of women's intriguing characters. It is not necessarily true that women are stronger together, and this can serve as an example explaining the complex situatedness and contextual aspects of power.

One voice of this village, the granddaughter of one of the research participants, claims that the village has been neglected, as the Sarpanch belong to the opposing party to the one which most Harijan people have voted for. In a system where party-politics are banned at the local levels, it seems peculiar that it is constraining the development of so many hamlets. The levels of corruption are visible, and it may be important to question corruption levels in the village, as well as throughout the state. The problem seems to be deeply integrated in people's mindsets and corruption serves as a regular strategy for gaining power and terrain locally. As far as we have learned throughout the fieldwork period, no programs fighting corruption and the local forces of party politics was ongoing or planned to be set into action throughout the state.

## Summary

Throughout this chapter we have learned about women's real representation through the lens of both men and women.

Men in study village A in general have an open mind and opinion about women. They all mean that women carry qualities as men, and that women too can contribute to politics and governance. With the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment men see that women can get the opportunity to develop. There are on the other hand many women who do not have the qualities of raising voice or to participate, but the reasons for this are in the men's opinions many.

Constraints like illiteracy, corruption and little access to information keep women from the different groups from participating. Some of them have the skills and capacities to act and join governance, while most are being de-motivated by male authorities trying to scare the women back to the private sphere of the home by using loud voices and implicating that women are of lesser worth. High corruption levels require large sums of money during

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<sup>8</sup> Council/ committee

elections to buy voters, and in the social conditions of this village, that is not an option for most people.

Men are recognising women's contributions to households and their financial contributions to the family through SHG loans. At the same time, men are not really willing to let go of their privileged situations as men, and change thus becomes slow or impossible.

The women themselves have many interesting views of women's participation and power in the study area. As the head of the Panchayat is a woman, one would believe that female representation is good in the village, but the story is really of a different character. Women are interested to be heard and to have a voice, but in so many cases they face obstacles while trying to enter the spaces of participation.

Women spend most of their time doing housework and their activities are restricted to the inside sphere of the home. General Caste women especially have to keep their positions within the home sphere, as they risk losing their cultural dignity if they step outside and take part in governance. Still, the female Sarpanch comes from General Caste, but as her fellow villagers claim, her husband is in charge and she herself is a proxy wife staying in the home taking care of housework and caring for children.

Adivasi women face the double burden of being in total responsible for the housework at the same time as they work as much as their husbands in paid manual labour. Here, the time constraints are hindering women from taking part in activities in their spare time.

The factors that constrain women from participating in the spaces of power in the village, and especially from participating in the public sphere of governance, are many and complex. It still seems that women are locked into a situation of male power and authority and with little strength to gain power terrain within the real institutional structures. It is difficult to say if women are being represented at all in the local Panchayat, or if women's issues have any value in public concerns. The levels of women's real representation in local governance are low.

On the bright side of this summary, women do find spaces for representing their interests. When they are not welcome to share their problems and concerns in the public and in the Panchayat, they find strength to participate *together with* other women. They help each other, and in their local SHGs they council each other and contribute to solve the worries and

concerns of women. The hold power *within* the groups and in these communities their interests are substantially represented.



## 6. Access to real representation

In this chapter we meet the men and women of study village B. This village, like village A, has a diversity of ethnic groups, and here the OBC population is in majority.

In the first part of the chapter I present some of the findings from interviews with local villagers from the Adivasi, Harijan and OBC people. This part may seem similar to the previous chapter, but is more of a compressed version of the stories to give a picture of women's access to spaces of participation and power in this village. At the same time, the chapter will show that there are differences between the two villages, even though they are very near each other in distance. The compressed version also introduces the major obstacles to real representation faced in local governance.

In the second part of the chapter I present an observation study from the local Panchayat meeting in village B, and I try to explain how the observed matters may contribute to a deeper understanding of women's spaces of power and participation in the area, and how these spaces are linked together. This part of the chapter particularly seeks to explain the links between the invited spaces of the Panchayat and the claimed spaces of women's representation in the counter-publics.

### *Living in the village*

Study village B is dominated by the high number of OBC people, and in this case the OBC people live their lives in a standard comparable to the General Caste population of study village A. They occupy the most central areas, own most of the land, and they run the local shops and businesses. The houses are of good standard and nicely decorated. The roads are of concrete standard, there is access to electricity all over and in many homes you find good furniture and household appliances, televisions and radios. The people are nicely dressed and women wear heavy jewellery.

Approaching the Harijan hamlet studied, this is located nearby, although a little less central. The standard of living decreases the further you move away from the OBC hamlets. Some still live in mud-houses, but also in the Harijan hamlet there are nice concrete houses, some of them painted in bright and fresh colours. Some of the households have access to electricity through private companies, as well as television signals. Furniture are fewer than in the OBC

hamlet, but sufficient. These people do not own much land, but they manage economically, mainly by selling traditional handicrafts made of leather or bamboo.

When arriving at the Adivasi hamlet on the outside of the central areas, the standard of housing and living become a stark contrast to the other hamlets. The houses are mostly built of mud on rented land, and the roads are not made of concrete and thus in ruins after rains. Suddenly there are no electricity lines, no street lights and the access to latrines is minimal. In the houses we visited there were not much furniture and the Adivasi people most of the time use mats to sit on. They have beds, but if it is enough to cover the family needs is another question. Standard of clothing is poor.

The differences between the three hamlets studied in study village B are most visible, even for an untrained eye, which naturally gives an expectation of similar difference levels in political status and importance.

## **Living an Adivasi life**

The Adivasi women of village B live in a hamlet deprived of social goods and sufficient standards of living. Within the hamlet there are also social differences, some families struggle more to hold their head above water than others. What the Adivasi people call *caste feeling* implies the higher castes discriminatory practice towards the Adivasi and the Harijan people and is a major concern in the Adivasi hamlet. Everyday, both men and women suffer severely from being placed at the lower end of the social hierarchy.

The Adivasi children go to school, but most of them drop out after second or third grade, as they are not interested or encouraged to study, and their parents has never had much schooling either. When they are in school with the other children in the village, they are treated differently and their status is low already as children. Some of them make friends with children from other castes, but this friendship is strictly restricted to the areas of the school.

Youth have little hopes for their future. One of the young women we met was depressed about her lack of access to further education. After passing tenth grade, she wanted to continue her studies, but could not afford it and there were no scholarships for her to apply for.

Family incomes are very low, although income levels vary within the hamlet. Most families live in houses on land rented from OBC people, and in the seasons with lesser chances to get

work, income is not sufficient to bring food to the table. These families are recipients of the BPL<sup>9</sup>-card, which entitle them 25 kilos of rice per month.

### ***Gender differences***

Besides taking care of housework and having a job either in the forest as firewood or cashew nut collectors, or at the stone crushers, women are also in charge of family income and all handling of money. Men are in paid labour, most of them in heavy manual labour like stone cutting at the stone mining companies, and when they get paid they hand over the salaries to their wives. In matters of private life, women are responsible for children and household activities, while men are in charge of the outside errands, like going to the bank or the market. Here, women enter both the public spaces of formal work, as well as they have a strong position in the private spaces of the household.

Another difference between men and women is the areas they move within. While men are able to go freely among villages as well as they can migrate for work, women need permission from men to go outside the neighbourhood. Women are afraid of going outside, as they do not know the roads. They also have a much higher risk of going outside.

*“Men are more powerful, they go to the market and to villages outside. Women do not. One man can go from village to village alone. I can only go together with others, not alone... Because of society fear... ..I don not go to the villages, because sometimes some men’s attitude is very bad... In the afternoon the men drink and do drugs and that is why their attitude is bad. They beat the women. ...Only the men do this”.*

(Interview B2)

### ***Access to representation***

Both men and women are working in paid labour. Still, Adivasi women are very dependent on men, and if they lose their husbands or fathers, they are treated as minors and their access to welfare goods are reduced, and women will get into trouble. Unmarried women, even above the age of voting, are not voting at elections, because they are as unmarried looked upon as minors. When married, they may again face some troubles when voting as they marry in other villages, and the time it takes to inscribe their name in the local census is often long. One of the younger married women we met was thirty years old and had children, but she had never

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<sup>9</sup> Below Poverty Line card, a government scheme providing staple food to people living in great poverty.

participated in the elections by voting because the authorities did not care to enrol her name into the local census. Another young woman did not think she had the right to vote because she was still unmarried.

*“I want to attend, but the general caste is attending, so I don not... When I go to sell firewood, the other women know that I am tribal and that I sell the firewood. It s embarrassing and I feel ashamed when I am around general caste”.*

(Interview B2)

The quote above clearly states the shame people carry because of their caste or tribal status. The access to the spaces of participation may be present both physically and legally, but traditions and culture still restrict the Adivasi peoples, and in particular Adivasi women’s real access. In this way, Adivasi people are excluded from the formal systems of governance in the public spaces.

Women do not have access or information about local governance and the Panchayat, first because of the fact that they are women and of patriarchal traditions, second, because they are Adivasi and thus not in priority of the authorities. Much of the information which reaches the Adivasi from the local Panchayat never reaches the women, and far from most of them knows about the reservation of seats for women and tribals. If they are invited to a meeting by the Sarpanch, women claim that they will come, but if not invited, they do not spare much time for politics and official issues, as they rather would, and need to, make an income in any spare hour.

*“All men are busy doing work and has not time for this [participating in Palli Sabha meetings]. People think if there is a spare hour they rather would go to the forest and collect wood. Money is their priority...”*

(Interview B2)

All of the research participants from this Adivasi hamlet have problems related to government schemes. They are entitled to different government schemes, such as housing, work and pensions, but the Panchayat is not granting these basics to them. Most of them do not want to take the case further to another instance as they do not know much about what their rights really are. They do not know the law, and are thus afraid of reporting about the Panchayat not

granting them the facilities which the Adivasi are in deep need of, thinking they might be mistaken.

Some time ago, a SHG was established in the hamlet to contribute to the improvement of life in the hamlet. When women really need to share their problems with someone, they rather take it to their SHG than to the Panchayat. In the SHG they are able to take care of each other's problems, and they get access to small loans. These SHGs empower women to share their problems, even as they are very shy and reluctant to do so. Women find solutions and become powerful together *within* the group. Women become *represented* in a real and substantial way. Even though the SHGs are restricted to contain only one member per family, the membership represents all women in the family, and as women consider all household problem as common, also men's interests become represented. Men are not allowed membership in these groups, but as the women gain from their memberships, they also access their families with resources of loans. Women gain respect and *power within* the women's groups and within the family.

Some women also use the neighbours for help, by lending money or asking advice outside the SHG, the neighbourhood community is good, and people are caring for each other. Being Adivasi means to be at the outcast of society, and both women and men stick together and find comfort with each other, facing their troubles isolated from the outside world, in a society where they are not invited to participate. They have few forums to find support and to be represented.

Almost ironically, women might experience more real representation than men, as the women make their own counter-publics and handle their problems despite of hardship from the public systems and the Sarpanch's deprivation of tribal rights. Men in this hamlet are under-represented, and suffer great from their societal status.

## **The Harijan life**

In the Harijan hamlet, people live more or less as outcasts in the village, but within their place they seem to manage well. Some families have well-educated men who work in the city, while others are more traditional and base their livelihood on agricultural activities on OBC's

land. Many are also carrying on the traditional work of the Harijans, like the *Jaya*<sup>10</sup>. They also make traditional handicrafts of bamboo, like buckets and baskets, for sale in the local markets. Unfortunately, many young men are unemployed.

Women are solely responsible for the home and housework and they take care of all family members. Men are responsible for making an income for the family, and for doing grocery errands in the market. When people are able to take care of their parents and their family, they claim that life is good and harmonious.

In this Harijan hamlet, many marriages are based on love, and as most people in the state prefer arranged marriages, the case here seems special. Women and men seem to have an agreement or an understanding with each other, and the patriarchal traditions are not very visible in comparison to caste areas, even though it is present in the way society is organised in terms of responsibilities.

### ***Participation in governance***

Villagers here are physically close to the Panchayat office and to the ruling class in the village. In this way they are granted much more information than the Adivasi people.

Women are more active than men in the local governance, both in the formal system of the Panchayat, and in the local SHG. Here, we find a female ward-member who claims she is very active in local politics. One of the major political parties in the area supported her candidature, and she was elected during the latest elections. Her hamlet fellows had great confidence in her at the time of election, and her friends and neighbours voted for her, hoping she would bring some public resources and facilities to the Harijan hamlet.

Unfortunately, little has been granted to the hamlet since her entrance to the Panchayat. She claims this is due to her female position.

*“If I was a man, I would be able to get some facilities to our hamlet, because then I would have more knowledge about the Panchayat system... ..The men have voice raising capacities, they raise their voice in the meetings and get votes. I am female, and I raise voice, but my voice is valueless”.*

(Interview B5)

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<sup>10</sup> Marriage drums. In festival season and marriage season the Harijan people are hired to make musical arrangements.

The situation of women in the Panchayat meetings is vulnerable and men create male coalitions within the Panchayat. Together, men gain *power over* women, and whenever the Panchayat effects internal voting, the men are winning the facilities voted over. In a female ward-members witness, the Sarpanch is handing out government resources to his own affiliated and to the rich members of the village. If the ward-member from the Harijan hamlet would be able to grant more facilities if the member was male, is impossible to tell, but it is apparent that Harijans in general are not very much prioritised by those in power.

The Harijan women have recently established a SHG in the hamlet, and some women claim that the SHG contribute to solve monetary problems, and that they achieve some empowerment. The SHG does not allow male members into the group, and the power these women gain together within the group is possible in the force of being women only. Women expect that men would use the monetary resources from the SHG in a much more wasteful way if they had the access. Thus, women are influencing their own lives by bringing in monetary resources to the family, solving problems and participating in the private decisions which affect their lives in the home sphere.

Men, on the other hand, are of the opinion that women do not handle the SHG properly. They are convinced that power struggles within the women's networks are too prevalent and that women's drama and intrigues create conflicts and unfortunate atmospheres. Thus, they think women are incapable of managing SHGs. It is difficult to tell who is telling the most adequate stories. Power struggles among women are not unlikely to occur, as well as the men may accuse women of mishandling of the SHG as men do not have access to the SHG and the group's resources themselves.

## **OBC life at the top of the hierarchy**

The most central area of the village is occupied by the OBC, which is the caste at the top of this villages' status hierarchy. They are resourced and educated people, land owners in agricultural business or occupied in government jobs. Most have access to official information and are aware of their political and social rights. Still, the social situation of the OBC people is not one-sided. Also among the OBC people differences exist, and many villagers are not being granted the pension or schemes they are entitled to. The corruptness in governance deprives people from their rights.

### *OBC women's spaces*

The women of the OBC hamlet are confined to the inner private space of the household and the closest neighbourhood. Here, they are preoccupied with cleaning, cooking and caring, while their husbands and fathers are outside earning an income for the family. When women have errands outside the hamlet or the village, they need male supervision, or at least permission from other family members to leave the house.

Older women gain more respect than younger and they are freer to walk within the neighbourhood. Young girls have a certain freedom and can move freely within the village, but when they get married they instantly lose their freedom of movement. The newly wedded women have to stay in the house most of the time, and during the first 5 or 6 years of marriage they have to be accompanied whenever they go outside the house. In the house, they are usually accompanied by their female in-laws, sharing household activities.

Meeting a female OBC ward-member, I got the impression of a strong woman without the fear of male authority. Although she is a member of the local Panchayat, she admits that she does not know her role in the Panchayat fully. This, she claims, is because the Sarpanch holds back information. In her opinion, the Sarpanch restricts her access to information which she is entitled to know, and that he is very corrupt in the sense of taking the Panchayat money to himself.

*“Only he [the Sarpanch] has this nature [of being corrupt], not the other... ..When he stood for the elections, the people did not know the Sarpanch's nature... ..The women are few, men are many [in the Panchayat] so the men want and think they can get all facilities. The Sarpanch is a man, he listens to the male ward-members decision priorities”.*

(Interview B9)

It is a concern, both for the female OBC ward-member and for other women that they are always in minority. Men are withholding the traditional patriarchal powers by standing together, using the force of being male against women. It becomes a power struggle between men and women, where men has the power *over* women, in force of being in majority.



“Our women are not united, and not all ward-members prioritise the Panchayat work. All members do not raise voice. Other women do not even attend the meetings, but their husbands come”.

(Interview B9)

There is reason to believe from interpreting these statements, that the spaces women are invited to join are statistically and not realistically filled by women. As Mohanty (2007) claim, such spaces are in reality *empty* spaces of participation.

Women are generally not very active in the Panchayat, although there is a few joining the meetings. When women have problems or get into trouble, they normally bring their issues to other women, and together they find solutions. Women rarely consider the Panchayat to be a ward for problem solving or counselling. The OBC women of this village are actively using the local SHG, both for increasing income and business, but also to solve problems in an arena more suitable than the corrupted Panchayat. These women have made many small businesses, like preparation of spices and hand made products for sale. The businesses created also open up for women to take part in a semi-formal work, and the prejudice against women in labour eases up.

## **Women’s claimed spaces**

Women gradually feel empowered, their access to spaces of power has increased and women gain power *with* each other. Women’s local representation in the village is limited and marginal in the formal spaces of the Panchayat and the Palli Sabha. The SHGs can be interpreted as a way of *claiming spaces of participation*, and here women find power *within* these spaces which they have claimed. These spaces are not fully private, as the women handle concerns which are of common interest to solve. On the other hand, the spaces are not totally formal, as they have to be claimed because of real exclusion of women from the public spaces of participation. These women create an access to power and participation by establishing such space in the *counter-publics* (Kofman, 2008).

Men are aware that women’s positions in the area are far from good and righteous. Most men are recognising the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment and the reservations for women, but their actions towards including them are still to come.

*“Female reservation is a good thing. But in Orissa, the female Panchayat members’ husbands are working [in the Panchayat]... ..In this region female members are valueless... ..The Orissa tradition is in priority of men. Men are more educated, and women are not aware about the governance systems. It’s very conservative...”*

(Interview B4)

The patriarchal traditions are deeply embedded in people’s minds and acts as a barrier to women’s emancipation and participation. Women stay behind in the democratic development and are not traditionally entitled to engage in decisions regarding their own life. A last statement explains this, said by one of the local well-educated OBC men in village B;

*“Female freedom has come, but it came late... The men do not like females to run for elections, because then men’s dignity is lost”.*

(Interview B4)

Men do use their dominating *power over* women, not necessarily because they think it is the right thing to do, but according to culture and traditions they will lose face and dignity if women are in head of them.

## **Observing the Panchayat**

Trying to finalise this study of women’s representation, it was possible to perform an observation study of the Panchayat in study village B. This study may contribute to the understanding of how claimed spaces occur among the women.

### ***The location and the participants of the meeting***

When arriving at the location for the Panchayat meeting my interpreter and I had a small chat with the Sarpanch and thanked him for allowing us to observe the meeting. He assured us that we would be of no trouble for the meeting, and gave us some chairs to sit on in one of the corners. Since there was a local religious celebration going on in the village, the regular Panchayat meeting room was in use, and this meeting was held in a building nearby. The building is more or less just a structure of walls and floors, with a roof and two windows, and maybe 40-50 square metres. Plastic chairs were provided to all participants of the meeting.

People started to show up, and grouped into different clicks in the locality. A small group of women dressed in what I think is their best saris, shiny jewellery and with their heads slightly bent and covered. Three of the women, from OBC group together in one of the corners talking quietly with each other. Two other women arrive, one of them bringing her young child to the meeting. The other woman, the Harijan ward member from study village B, sits next to her.

The men who arrive are placing themselves in different parts of the room, all finding their spots in the circle. The Sarpanch and the secretary sit together in the middle of the room talking to each other. The secretary is coming from the administrative unite of the block and is supposed to be neutral in the Panchayat meetings. The physical distances between the groups of women and men are very visible, and might be due to the culture, which determines that men and women should not touch each other or come close to each other in public.

### ***The Panchayat meeting***

First point on the agenda was the introduction of the visitor. I presented myself and explained the purpose of my presence. I got greeted with friendly nods from the listeners. Thereafter the Sarpanch and the secretary went on with the planned meeting agenda.

The meeting itself was about some of the local schemes in the village, and also about some economic disturbance in the Panchayat. Most of the time, the secretary was the one speaking.

After some time with the secretary holding a monologue, one man takes the word and starts commenting to the secretary. The secretary and the Sarpanch, who seem like close friends, talks a bit among themselves and sneer.

During the next fifteen minutes, the dialogue in the room becomes more cheerful and another man dears voicing. The Sarpanch receives a call on his cell-phone and leaves the room. A few men have begun participating in the dialogue, but it is still mainly the secretary who speaks. He has a loud voice and seems to be lecturing the group. The Sarpanch is back in the room and tries to say something, but is interrupted by the secretary. Then the dialogue continues, but only between the secretary and the Sarpanch.

At the end of the meeting, five men are contributing to the meeting by presenting their views of a matter. Some women are talking, but only among each other with low voices. Again the Sarpanch and the secretary make internal commentaries to each other and laughs.

After less than an hour, the meeting is over.

### ***After the meeting***

When closing up the meeting, some start clearing the room for chairs, while others group outside in small clicks. The women were grouping at one side, and the men in three small clusters. One man approaches the group of women, he talks to me and tell me that women here has no power.

Then, I get called into the office of the Sarpanch. Entering the room, I observe that the secretary and the Sarpanch are already there, together with six of the male ward-members. They are interested in the project, and the conversation concerns the Indian Panchayati Raj system. The men are served tea, and the atmosphere in the room tells us that these are the men in charge of it all.

When we leave, I discuss the happening with the research assistant. She sums up the discussions from the meeting and it seems that there is a grave situation of corruption both at the Panchayat level and at the block level. Some of the villagers have picked up a rumour about the Sarpanch taking all the ward-members fees into his own pocket. The ward-members are entitled to a small amount of money for participating in the Panchayat meetings, but the total amount of this money has been given to the Sarpanch and none of the members have gotten any money for the last nine months. The Sarpanch and the secretary had explained that the money all had been covering expenses in the Panchayat, but the ward-members did not want to believe that. Another ward-member had visited the block level office to see the records of the Panchayat schemes. He had found that names of local villagers were already registered as receivers of the housing scheme, but in reality they had not been granted anything and still stand without houses. There are strong indications that both the Sarpanch and the secretary are corrupt.

### ***What does this mean?***

This observation could imply many things. For one thing, it may be guessing, or partial to think that the Sarpanch is corrupt. Still, the word about him in the village is not very positive, and as far as I can understand, he is not really serving his voters. Wearing a big and fancy watch and branded jeans, he entered the place on a big and shining motorbike, which stands in

bright contrast to the other ward-members casual shirts and dhotis<sup>11</sup>. He is young and not so experienced, and one starts wondering why he was elected as Sarpanch.

In this village, the Panchayat does not only seem to be governed by patriarchal power and male authorities, even though these are evident. A deeply embedded form of corruption is highly apparent and almost legitimated as almost all citizens have an idea about what is going on. As the Panchayat seems to be governed by the Sarpanch and his friend, the secretary, there is reason to ask if the villagers have any representation at all in the Panchayat matters. Even though there are elected ward-members with powerful voices and courage to contradict the Sarpanch, they seem to have little real power to actually affect and influence local politics and decisions.

The Panchayat is controlled by corruption and the negative powers of domination. Women are entering these invited participatory spaces, but with no significance. Women are present, but the real invited space of the Panchayat is *empty*. Strangely enough, some of these women claim that they are making a difference in the Panchayat, and why they do this can be interpreted as a matter of holding up face for the researcher. It is obvious that these women want change more than they can influence change themselves. The powers which are *over* them are too strong to contradict, and thus women keep silent. The spaces are in reality what Gaventa (2004) calls closed spaces. People are merely invited to participate as legitimisation of closed spaces of power.

In this case, not only the women hold their tongue. Only a few of the men in the meeting dared to speak up, even as most of them had facial expressions which revealed both interest and objections to the discussed issues in the meeting. Questions start to arise if the men of these villages really have free access to the spaces of power and participation, or if they too are controlled by the strong and dominating powers. A small elite consisting of those with monetary resources and willingness to negotiate politics on behalf of political parties seem to be in control of more than what is visible. Another question is whether the Panchayat and the local systems of democracy really have any significance for the people. The Panchayat is supposed to represent a cross-section of the village, but exploring the real representation of women, it becomes somehow clear that neither women nor men have access to real representation in the formal and public space of the Panchayat.

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<sup>11</sup> Traditional cloth men tie around their waist to cover the lower part of the body.

## Summary

The Adivasi population of study village B are placed at the bottom of the social and economical hierarchy, with little access to the basic amenities, poor living standards and without being represented in governance. Harijan people come out second on a social ranking. They have sufficient living standards, but their status as untouchables are constraining their access to real representation in governance. The OBC people are ranked at the top of this hierarchy of access to social goods and have better living standards, even though there are differences between families.

Women of all three groups do not find any real representation in formal local governance of the Panchayat. In matters of being represented, gender comes before caste status, and women experience that men vote in favour of other men, because they do not want women to succeed in matters of power. When women succeed, men will lose their male dignity.

Women from all the three hamlets studied do not experience representation through men, and in these hamlets only women can understand women's interests and issues. Women are better represented within their own networks where women care for women, but also for men and other family members, and perform inclusive politics and practices as both men and women benefit from their work. In the SHGs, no form of corruption is accepted, even though there may be conflicts between women. Women solve their problems democratically and as equals in the SHGs.

Finally, there is evidence revealing that neither women nor men find real representation in the Panchayat. They both fill the spaces which they are invited to by the Panchayat, but as the Sarpanch and the secretary of the Panchayat is governing in an immensely corrupt manner, the spaces of the representatives become empty. The system is infiltrated by corruption, powered by people with monetary resources. The Panchayat in simple terms thus brings real representation only to the Sarpanch, the block secretary and their affiliates.

## 7. Towards a state of real representation?

Throughout this study I have focused on women from two different study villages in Orissa, India, and how they are represented in local systems of governance. In order to understand these women's real representation I have studied how they access and use the spaces of power and participation.

Following Adivasi women, Harijan women and caste women in two villages, I have learned about their lives and about their struggle for real representation. These women are captured in a patriarchal system with little recognition of women's importance. Although these groups of women live separate from each other and in very different styles and standards of living, they experience how it is to be deprived from accessing their own rights, either to social goods, participation or having their interests represented.

### Women's empty spaces

The access which women have to the formal or invited spaces of participation is there, but with its flaws. The invited spaces of the Panchayat merely provide them with physical seats and women are used as statistical alibis for fulfilling the formal requirements of quotas, rather than contributing to the gender equality project. In this manner, it is possible to conclude that the gender mainstreaming project and the implementation of quotas and affirmative action has made no significant changes to the existing structures of power and to women's right to participation.

The enabling factors for women's participation in these spaces are few. Even though men recognise that women hold the capacities necessary to contribute to governance and politics, they do not take any steps forward to include women into the male dominated structures. In village A, some women had experienced the enabling factor of being empowered with skills from their women's group. Information and knowledge about women's rights and the quota system are also strengthening their self confidence, but until this point without any significance for their participation.

When women actually try to access the invited spaces of participation, they face multiple constrains. They are met with resistance in terms of dominating powers, and they are frightened to take their arguments further. Most women in the Panchayat are either a product

of bribes from political parties with financial strength, or they are registered as members, while their husbands sit in their places. The spaces which these women fill in the Panchayat are in reality empty.

### ***Claiming spaces of representation***

The claimed spaces of women in these villages are of a more informal character. Whether the women groups and the SHGs are public or private is another debate, as the borders between these spaces are blurry and difficult to line up. When women enter the SHGs they are entering spaces which are reserved for women only. Since these groups are excluding men, all citizens are not entitled to use these participatory spaces, and women are in total power of these spaces. On the other hand, they are using these spaces for many reasons, but they seem to have become necessary as the women are excluded from equal participation in the formal spaces of governance. When women have lost, or never gained, access to the formal spaces, they find access to their own spaces of participation by claiming it in the private, or in the *counter-publics*. Here, women share their interests, and some of their problems are solved; they gain real representation.

In the case from village B, we saw a situation where the Panchayat really did not have any representational value for the members, with the exception of the Sarpanch himself. The villagers do not have a voice in the Panchayat, which also is the only formal platform for public concerns. At the same time, the Panchayat and the patriarchal forces of tradition has pressured women out of the formal and public spaces, where they have created their own forums to raise concerns. In the SHGs, or the counter-public, these women find space to represent their interests, and the interests of their families. Women are thus actually voluntarily representing men by voicing family interests and hence their husbands interests. But in this case because they have the power to it; they are not forced to it.

A final comment to this section may be that the Panchayat also excludes many men from participating. Women may actually gain more real representation than men through their memberships in the SHGs.

### ***Linking the spaces of participation***

When women insist on presenting their interests and issues through the more informal space of SHGs, they create and claim a space where they can participate and where they can gain real representation. Through the analysis of these women's claimed spaces of participation



and power these spaces have been categorised as the counter-publics, as it deals with issues which concern large masses of the population, but is not accepted by the public governance systems.

The claimed spaces of women in these SHGs may be linked to the local governance system and the invited spaces of participation. As the Panchayat clearly has a discriminative practice towards women, women become frightened and lose their will to participate in this forum. Indirectly, the women in the Panchayats are excluded, as a result of dominating negative power over them, exercised by male authoritarians or men with financial power.

Women's issues remain unsolved, as they are not of a common public interest, and in some cases women do not even dare to present their issues to men, following the strict patriarchal traditions. Still, the issues need solving, and this is when the women claim a space of their own, they find power together with other women, and participate in a space which is inclusive and real. These spaces claimed in the counter-publics are necessary for women's lives to function efficiently and well, and this is a space where women gain real representation.

First, we see that the spaces claimed by these women are coming into existence because of exclusion from the right to be represented and participate in the formal local governance. The need to gain representation and to have a forum for sharing interest is strong and women find their own way. If one the door is closed, women use another, even if they have to build it themselves.

### ***Opportunities for change?***

The final question still to be answered is if these women, based on the findings from the study, may have any opportunities for change in a long term perspective.

I found, and I believe, that the system of the Panchayati Raj institutions in these areas is pervaded by age-long traditions of corruption. These councils are governed on a basis which empowers and brings prosperity to the higher castes and classes, while not contributing to the development of all, and particularly not the minorities. The 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment here works as a statistical legitimacy; it tells us that women are represented. But in reality, it is not making any difference, as it does not seek to change the institutional structures and powers. In order for this Amendment to have a real influence on these women's lives there is a need for a turnaround, shaking off the shackles of patriarchy and the already existing power.

Still, I believe that change will take place for these women, but in a long-term perspective. As these women are gaining power in their own circuits, getting access to knowledge and information about their rights, they become empowered. One case showed that Adivasi women gained voice in their village, as they had gained confidence and skills through sensitising from the local organisation CARD. This example may implicate that through awareness and through gaining self-confidence through education and capacity building, these women may have a stronger voice in the future. With time passing, women can become less afraid of the male authoritarian powers.

The implementation of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment and women's reservations might not have much significance for women's representation today, but the process is still young. The situation of local Panchayats and the way these discriminate against women needs to be set at a political agenda. It is necessary to understand that quotas are not sufficient on their own.

Men are still in power over women, but they are gradually accepting that women are important. They recognise their abilities to contribute equally to men, and hopefully the day will come when men open the doors of power and give spaces of representation to women.

As a final word, I would like to say that this study contributes to understanding how women experience and claim real representation. In this case, the formal and public spaces of the Panchayat is closed for real representation, and thus women seek to the informal spaces within private networks to gain real representation. When the spaces they fill as head counts are in reality *empty* in matter of representation, they have to create and claim their own spaces through what has been called the *counter-publics*. These spaces are closely interlinked, and through the analysis of the women in these villages I have unpacked their spaces of participation and power and visualised how the absence of representation in the invited spaces creates counter-publics of representation.

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## APPENDICES

## **Appendix 1: Interview guides**

### ***Interview guide 1: Status of women / responsibilities and issues in the household***

Age

Married/ marital status

Children

Education/ schooling/ skills

Occupation

Responsibilities in the household?

Are these normal responsibilities for women in this village? Has it always been this way?

Describe your daily routines (morning to evening)  
(Time consumption)

Can you please tell me what you think the main differences between men and women are in your village, except physical differences?

Why do you think this is different?

What kind of access do you have to technology, employment, unions, politics, loans, clinics, education etc? How do you make use of your accesses?

What do you lack access to? Why?

Do you have any (other) responsibilities outside the household?

What are the difficulties you face in your household/ in your personal life?

What do you do to solve these problems?

## ***Interview guide 2: Lay members participation in local governance***

Do you vote at the PRI elections?

If yes: Who do you vote for, and why?

If no: why not?

Are you informed about the elections?

What kind of information do you get about the Panchayat's work and activities?

From where do you get this information?

If not informed, why do you think you are not informed?

Do you participate in the Palli Sabha?

No: Why don't you participate?

Do you want to participate?

If you have a problem which needs to be solved outside the household, do you bring this problem to other instances?

To where/ who do you bring your problems to be solved?

Do you bring it to the Palli Sabha/ Gram Panchayat?

Why/ Why not? How is it handled in the Palli Sabha?

### *Interview guide 3: Change in women's participation / from women's view*

How was it for women to participate in governance before 1996? Could you enter an election then?

Did women in earlier generations in this village have access and participate in elections and politics or other governance bodies?

How did women use enter politics and areas of governance in the earlier generations of your village?

How do you feel this has changed since you were young, and from when your mother was young? Please explain.

Has this changed much after the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment (since the implementation in 1993) with reservation of seats?

How is your feeling of integration in official issues in the village today? Was it always like this?

What difference do you think women will make in the governance systems/ Panchayat?

Why do we need women? In politics, in life?

Are women able to do anything different than men?

But is there any use to have women's positions when they don't have power as members?

How do you think women can get such power?

What other barriers do you (think you will) meet if you chose to participate in the local Panchayat or Palli Sabha?

Would your husband or in-laws allow you to go to meetings or elections? If no: why do you think this is so?

Would he allow you to participate if you belonged to a different caste/ class/ tribe?

Would the other men in the village allow you to participate? How? Or why not?

If you were to participate in the Panchayat, would you take care of women's issues?

Would you do what men have done before or would your focus be different?

Would you handle things concerning women's issues better than men? - How?

Would your participation and access to governance systems be any different if you were a man?

Do you think that your access to information and acting in the Panchayat politics is constrained by your caste/ tribal status?

## ***Interview guide 4: Ethnic differences***

### ***Adivasi / Harijan women***

Please explain how it is to be an Adivasi/ Harijan in this village

What differences are there between you and the OBC/ GC?

Do you practice different cultures/ religion? Which/ how?

Have you adopted/ do you practice any Hindu cultures? Which ones?

What would be different if you were born into other castes?

### ***General Caste / OBC Hindu women***

Please explain how it is to be OBC in this village

What differences are there between you and the OBC/ GC?

Do you practice different cultures/ religion? Which/ how?

Which religion/ culture do you practice?

What would be different if you were born into other castes/ as Adivasi?

### ***Interview guide 5: Women leaders in Panchayat***

Why did you stand for elections?

What encouraged you/ who nominated you (men/women)?

Why do you think they nominated you?

When you were elected, what was/is your role in the Gram Panchayat?

Can you tell me what the activities a ram Panchayat is responsible for?

Did you receive any training/ get any skills in the Gram Panchayat?

Did/ do you attend the meetings? How often?

Do you ever send your husband for these meetings?

What do you think other people think of you when you are a member of the Gram Panchayat?

Would you do what men have done before or would your focus be different?

Would you handle things concerning women's issues better than men? - How?

Would your participation and access to governance systems be any different if you were a man?

Do you face any problems being a female member of the Gram Panchayat? What, and why?

What changes took place in your period in the Gram Panchayat?

## ***Interview guide 6: Women's agency outside the formal PRI-system***

Are you a member of any other group or network outside the household? Please elaborate.

Why did you join?

Who encouraged or initiated this group/ network?

What kind of activities does this group do? Do you participate?

Does this group make you feel integrated or empowered in any way?

What changes does your membership in this network make in your life?

Are there members of different caste/ class/ tribe?

How does this work?

Are you ever denied to enter this group by anyone, like you husband, in-laws, others?

Why do you think they don't want you to join this group?

What kind of changes has happened in the village after this group was formed/ after you became a member?

Do you see any changes in politics and women's participation after the women were granted seats in the Panchayat system?

How /what/ why

Why do we need women in the Panchayats and governance systems?

If this is a women's group, would you allow men to come?

Why not?

What would be different if men participated in the group?

Do you think you would participate on a different level in community politics if you were member of a different caste/ class?

How do you think you would participate if you were born as a man?



***Interview guide 7: Men's ideas about women in the local political sphere***

Age

Married/ marital status

Children

Education/ schooling/ skills:

Occupation

Responsibilities in the household

Describe your daily routines (morning to evening)

(Time consumption)

Do you have any (other) responsibilities outside the household?

What are the factors that are important for your lives to function well?

What kind of problems do you face/ what are you worried about?

Do you bring these problems to the Palli Sabha or to the Gram Panchayat?

How is the problem solved?

What actions do you take?

***Interview guide 8: Men's impressions of women in PRI/ other governance institutions***

What is your opinion and feelings about the reservation for women and STs in the PRI-system? -Why/ Explain?

Do you think women can handle politics in the same manner as men? - Why/ Explain?

Are the women participating in elections? -Why/ why not?

How are women in your village entering the governance systems?

Do you see any changes since this started? What and how?

How about changes in the household?

Do you encourage women to vote?

Who?

Do you see some women as more capable of participation than other women in this village?

Who? And why are they more capable? (Skills maybe?)

What do you think about women forming groups on their own?

Why do you think they do this?

If they allowed men to join, would you consider becoming a member?

Do you think men and women are equal in this village?

How? Why?

Do men and women share the same responsibilities?

Why/ why not? Which ones?

Are there any kinds of activities you think women should be excluded from?

Which ones and why?

If there was a seat for female Sarpanch or Gram Panchayat elections, would you let your wife or your daughters stand for elections?

Do you think you have an influence on the way they vote and participate?

When women are not joining, what do you think is constraining them?

(How) Does this need to change?

## Appendix 2: List of interviews and observations

### *Interviews from pilot study*

<b>Interview</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Who</b>
Interview 1	18/06/2010	Adivasi Female ex-Ward-member
Interview 2: Group Interview	18/06/2010	Adivasi Women
Interview 3	19/06/2010	Adivasi Female Ward-member
Interview 4: Group Interview	19/06/2010	Adivasi Women
Interview 5	20/07/2010	Adivasi Female ex-Ward-member
Interview 6	20/07/2010	Adivasi Lay Woman

### *Interviews from study village A*

<b>Interview</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Who</b>
Interview A1	28/06/2010	General Caste Female Sarpanch
Interview A2	28/06/2010	General Caste Lay Woman
Interview A3	01/07/2010	Adivasi Lay Man
Interview A4	01/07/2010	Adivasi Lay Woman
Interview A5	19/06/2010	Female Adivasi Ward-member
Interview A5b	01/07/2010	Follow up interview from interview A5
Interview A6	03/07/2010	Harijan Lay Woman
Interview A7	03/07/2010	Harijan Lay Man
Interview A8	04/07/2010	Adivasi Lay Man
Interview A9	04/07/2010	General Caste Female Ward-member
Interview A10	08/07/2010	Harijan Lay Woman
Interview A11	08/07/2010	General Caste Lay Man
Interview A12	08/07/2010	General Caste Lay Woman
Interview A13	19/06/2010	Adivasi Lay Woman

***Interviews from study village B***

<b>Interview</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Who</b>
Interview B1	29/06/2010	Adivasi Lay Woman
Interview B2	29/06/2010	Adivasi Lay Woman
Interview B3	07/07/2010	OBC Lay Woman
Interview B4	07/07/2010	OBC Lay Man
Interview B5	07/07/2010	Harijan Female Ward-member
Interview B6	09/07/2010	Harijan Lay Man
Interview B7	09/07/2010	Harijan Lay Woman
Interview B8	10/07/2010	Adivasi Lay Woman
Interview B9	10/07/2010	OBC Female Ward-member
Interview B10	12/07/2010	Adivasi Lay Woman
Interview B11	12/07/2010	Adivasi Lay Man

***Observations from study village B***

<b>Observation</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Description</b>
Observation B1	20/07/2010	Observation of the monthly Panchayat meeting in village B
Observation B2	20/07/2010	Observation of an after-meeting after Observation B1.