Women's Movements and Environmental Activism in India: Theoretical Reflections based on the study of New Delhi

Caroline Michon, ATER Canthel (Université Paris Cité)
Docteure associée au CEIAS, EHESS

Key words: Feminist Movements, India, Environment, Activism

Mots clés : mouvements féministes, Inde, environnement, militantisme

From November 2020 to the end of 2021, after the Indian Parliament passed the Indian agriculture acts (also known as Farm Laws or Farm Bills 2020), farmers initiated massive protests in New Delhi. Their main criticism was levelled against precariousness due to the withdrawal of the State from market regulation, and against policies favouring large companies and multinationals.

Women farmers held a central and singular place in these demonstrations by articulating their experience in term of gender, class and caste (Bolazzi *et al.* 20), namely the lack of recognition of their economic participation, the difficulties they faced in terms of land ownership (Agarwal *et al.*, "How Many" 4) and their exclusion from decision-making roles within local and national institutions[1]. Indeed, while women account for nearly 80 % of the Indian agricultural workforce, they remain largely absent from the discourse and policy measures regarding agriculture, including agricultural land and legal acknowledgement of their work (Agarwal, "Green governance" 3). As a matter of fact, women are more affected than men by environmental degradation and the privatization of land, mainly because they are largely dependent on the commons for the provision of food and water for the household (Agarwal 10). These mobilizations highlighted, once again, the specificity of gender issues in rural areas and the gender-based aspect appeared as an echo of contemporary women's environmental struggles since the 1960s.

---

[1] https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/farm-laws-women-and-men-are-standing-shoulder-to-shoulder/article35548985.ece. Accessed 16th November 2022.

Women's environmental struggles in India could be considered as a part of a broader movement called the Indian women's movement. Initiated at the end of the 19th century, the women's movement has gone through several phases of expansion and backlash. In its contemporary form, the women's movement in India could be described as a national network with permeable borders composed of formal and informal groups (women's and feminist organizations, autonomous organizations, professionalised organizations, platforms, political women's branches, student unions, trade unions), social workers and activists struggling for equality. This national women field cause (Bereni) is based on several ideologies and branches of feminism including environmental women's movements.

Of course, using the term 'feminism' in Third world countries and especially in India is a major issue. Feminism in the form of socio-political movements and ideologies for gender equality is one of the conceptions that is associated with it worldwide. However, its diverse variety of beliefs, shapes, and agendas could explain the unwillingness of a number of women to use it to describe themselves. In India, the debate around whether or not women's collectives and activists should define themselves as 'feminist' is part of the colonial and postcolonial debate. For some activists, feminism in India is considered too tied to its Western origins and colonial legacy (Kishwar). Furthermore, feminism might not reflect the diversity and the specificity of the contemporary women's anti-patriarchal mobilizations because of its 'westernness'.

Discussions on the relevancy of feminism in India characterizes the debate around ecofeminism. Some activists like Vandana Shiva advocate for a local Indian ecofeminism. This movement has sprung from the idea that women are intrinsically linked to nature because of their dependence on it. In this version of ecofeminism, the patriarchal violence against women is compared to the exploitation of nature. For some others, ecofeminism is not relevant in the context of India (Nanda WS2; Agarwal, "Gender and environment" 119). Among other things, they make the point that ecofeminism in India has remained blind to the multiple identities that shape women's experience (caste, class, religion) and has neglected the material aspect of domination and labour.

In this essay based on field research on urban women's movement in New Delhi conducted between 2012 and 2016, I wish to highlight the deployment of women's environmental movement in India and underline the debate around ecofeminism as it

has taken shape through discussions among women activists in New Delhi and the connection between feminism and environmental issues.

Women's struggles for environmental issues in India, a long *herstory*[2]

In India, the social and political environmental coalitions have a long *herstory* of mobilization. Environmental concerns have been rooted in social and development concerns because of the significant impact of environmental destruction on people's lives. The environmental movement in India is an umbrella term covering a variety of local and national mobilizations claiming for the conservation and improvement of the quality of the environment (Gadgil and Guha). At first glance, these conflicts seem to assemble people from different backgrounds, castes, classes, genders and religions. However the study of local struggles shows that most of the time, environmental conflicts oppose the rich and the poor, the upper castes and lower castes and women against men (Guha and Martinez-Alier 4).

Throughout the history of the environmental movement, the concern about environment may have varied, but the most dramatic conflicts have been around the access to natural resources such as forests, land, water and air, with issues of pollution, restriction of access to local communities, and privatization. Within India, since the 1980s rapid industrialization and urbanization for the purpose of economic development have exacerbated the trend of alterations in the environment but also social inequalities (Sethi). For the past decade, lots of Adivasi and Dalit communities from rural areas have been displaced because of the construction of big dams or the privatization of communal lands (Benbabaali 138).

Environment management based on social, economic and health considerations is described as "utilitarian conservationism" by Sunita Narain, as opposed to the concept of "protectionist conservationism" which prevails across paradigms of environment management in the western world. Broadly, because of their dependence on water, firewood, food, medicinal plants and so on, marginal groups or local communities have been directly affected by the destruction of forest and close environments. The mix of poverty, dispossession of rights and health concerns brought about by climate change, deforestation and soil and water pollution have generated awareness amongst the most affected population regarding the need to

---

[2] *Herstory* is a term used by feminist scholars to emphasize the role of women in history.

maintain a sustaining balance between environment and development. It has also highlighted the importance of communities' participation in resource governance (Sahu 7).

The attention paid to the social, material and political contexts of these environmental justice movements enlighten some differences in the origins, between Western and Southern environmental movements (Guha and Martinez-Alier 16). Collective mobilizations of disadvantaged people mostly from the global South could be theorized as "environmentalism of the poor" (4). According to this approach, nature-based conflicts had their roots in peasant and rural communities struggle over access to and exploitation of resources. As opposed to the "environmentalism of the poor," in the West, environmental issues were mostly related to the protection of nature, the management of outdoor recreation areas and the creation of safe living spaces to counter-balance concretization and urbanization of spaces, also known as "mainstream environmentalism" or "first world environmentalism". One of the offshoots of which is the violent displacement of poor people in the name of wildlife conservationism and the protection of the natural habitats of animals (Baviskar, *Uncivil City* 120). While "first world environmentalism" ignored environmental harms affecting the poorest, the "environmentalism of the poor" is rooted in social movements advocating for environmental justice (Guha and Martinez-Alier). While the distinction has been relevant in many ways, the study of women's struggles in urban centres such as Delhi shows a coexistence of these two strategies in Northern and Southern countries.

In India, while environmental issues have not been considered central by feminist movements for a while, women's mobilizations and the environmental movement are tied by social and political concerns. Women play a paramount role in the management, conservation and use of natural resources. Despite serious limitations in access and control of these resources, women are mainly responsible for gathering and supplying food for their households, along with collecting water and firewood for heating and cooking. Environmental degradation intensifies women's burden by making their tasks more difficult and time consuming (Agarwal, "Gender and environment" 124).

In the 1970s, women came out to participate in environmental movements in several parts of India (Agarwal, "Gender and environment" 145), one of the most famous and globally celebrated ecofeminist agitations being the Chipko movement.

While at its beginning, agitations were mostly led by local men workers claiming their rights over benefits of the forests in several areas of the Himalayas, women took the lead of the movement after thousands of houses were destroyed by monsoon floods exacerbated by deforestation. Women appeared at this time as immediate victims of environmental destruction not only because of the loss of their house and goods by floods but also because of the State selling out the right to use of neighbouring forests to external companies and local workers. By embracing the trees to protect them, women from the Chipko movement created a new method of struggle and became the symbol of the ecofeminist movement in India (Jain 1791).

Following these demonstrations, that spread all over India, in 1980, the Indian State decided to decentralize environmental governance to local communities by amending the Indian Forest Act. The joint forest management programme gave the priority to local communities on forests' exploitation and conservation. In spite of this, while some men were associated with the decision-making process, it appears that this programme had a limited impact in creating a significant shift in decision-making dynamics between men and women (Agarwal, "Green governance" 51). Indeed, studies conducted in 2000 exposed the ongoing process of women's exclusion from decision-making around the preservation of forests and from the formal economy.

Environmental protests were also related to the displacement of people due to the construction of dams. These conflicts arose for instance around the Tehri dam in Uttarakhand (1967), the Koel-Karo dam in Jharkhand (1973), the Subarnarekha dam in Bihar (1979), the Ichampally dam concerning the states of Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra and Telangana (1983), and the Narmada Bacchao Andolan in Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra (1990) (Gadgil and Guha 72). Once again, these social movements highlighted the correlation between environmental degradation and impoverishment (Agarwal, "Gender, Resistance and Land" 81; Pattnaik *et al*. 2). Dalit, lower castes and Tribes have been the primary victims of land privatization, evictions, displacements and environmental degradation (Fernandes 88), worsened by the deregulation of the market economy and privatization (Gadgil and Guha 34). Among them, women have been disproportionately hit by environmental destruction and privatization.

From environmental feminism to ecofeminism in India

Since the end of the 1980s, due to environmental concerns and concomitant to the rise of ecofeminist theory and practice in different parts of the world, interest in the women-nature relationship has grown in India. Despite the variety of ecofeminist analyses (including those who do not claim to be part of this movement) and internal debates, ecofeminists all over the world share a wide understanding of the gendered dimension of ecocide, based on the nature-culture division and the correlation between gender violence and the domination of nature.

The term ecofeminism was coined by Françoise d'Eaubonne in 1974, and mostly forged as theories in the West (Sale; Warren). According to Karen Warren, ecofeminism is a plural space of practices and texts, that brings women activists together around an analytical approach based on

> the position that there are important connections—historical, experiential, symbolic, theoretical—between the domination of women and the domination of nature, an understanding of which is crucial to both feminism and environmental ethics. (Warren 125).

This position is also shared by the leading pioneers of the ecofeminist movement in India like Vandana Shiva, for whom "the violation of nature is linked to the violation and marginalization of women, especially in the Third World" (Shiva 41). At the heart of Vandana Shiva's analysis, is the idea that the exploitation and degradation of nature is connected to the subordination and oppression of women. She connects this violence with the growth of the capitalist economy and patriarchy in the colonial context. From her perspective, patriarchal capitalism simultaneously sustains the 'non-recognition' of women's traditional ecological knowledge and contribution to the economy as workers and farmers and deprives women of their rights over their bodies (Mies and Shiva 33).

The overexploitation of nature negatively affects women's health and food security, and also increases gender violence and domestic burden. The perception of nature by modern sciences and international development projects as something that needs to be controlled and exploited, is compared by Shiva to men's domination and subjection of women's bodies (14). Underlying her criticism of modern science is the idea that before colonization, Indian women and men had an egalitarian relationship with nature, considered as a living and creative process (*Prakriti*) associated with feminine principles (*Shakti*) (Shiva 38). She ends with the perspective that the

"feminine principle" is the central key for women to "stay alive" and oppose the system.

Despite the high visibility of Vandana Shiva's analysis of patriarchal science and the traditional power of women, some aspects of her work have been challenged by activists and scholars both inside and outside the women's movement. In India, the term ecofeminism is criticised as being gender essentialist and not paying attention to the plurality of women's identities (Agarwal "Gender and environment" 119; Nanda WS2). The glorification of traditional power of womanhood is also shared by the Hindu nationalist movement, which at the same time tends to associate India to Hinduism, and by extrapolation, englobing Indian women as being Hindu. Thus it denies the secular nature of the Indian culture and prevents from the questioning of its patriarchal practices (Dietrich, "Women, ecology and culture" 79). Moreover, the romanticization of the past often makes the environmental debate caste-blind by not recognizing the dependence of Dalits on natural resources and their central role in nature preservation (Omvedt, "Dalits"; Sharma 47).

For Bina Agarwal, who advocated the use of the term "feminist environmentalism," the link between women, men and nature should be understood in their materiality and singularity ("Gender and environment" 146). On the one hand, women and men's connection to nature is related to the context and the local history. On the other hand, the intersectional dimension of identities makes it difficult to speak of female power as a unique identity. This criticism comes along with the rejection of the idyllic vision of Southern countries before colonization, and the lack of consideration of the plurality of religious identities in India or its caste hierarchy (Agarwal 125; Sharma 47). In addition to this, for Meera Nanda, Vandana Shiva's rejection of modern science as a western patriarchal paradigm, contributes similarly to the naturalization of patriarchal customs and beliefs but it also denies women's autonomy and feminist epistemological production (WS2).

In the shadow of theoretical debates, environmental concerns in practice have been limited to rural areas for many years, enhancing the discourse on an Indian rural tradition (Gadgil and Guha 103). However, India's urbanization coupled with climate change and growing pollution, has given rise to a mix of mainstream and local environmentalism in cities. As usual, women have played a critical role in the politicization of social and environmental concerns by driving local and national actions.

The Women's Movement in New Delhi

Historically, New Delhi has had a bustling culture of protests. Now at the epicentre of India's political power, New Delhi offers a high national and international visibility to protest movements. Since the middle of the 20th century, many farmers, workers, Dalits or women's mobilizations mainly from the northern part of India, have taken place in Delhi (Gadgil and Guha 61; Kumar 130; Omvedt, "new peasant" 127).

In the late 1970s, in New Delhi, several feminist groups emerged in response to dowry deaths (women killed by their husbands' families over not bringing enough wealth from their homes) and gender violence faced by women inside and outside the private sphere. In a concomitant manner, India was also marked by agitation against rape (Gandhi and Shah 273). Composed mostly of urban women from middle and upper classes, feminist collectives claimed the "autonomy" of their groups from any political parties and trade unions. Driven by the momentum of this period of awareness, feminist and women's collectives undertook a large range of actions based on a plurality of concerns (campaigns against dowry, rape, low wages, land rights, the gender-blind nature of development projects) (Gandhi and Shah 23).

A few years later, at the beginning of the 1990s, the local movement experienced a paradigm shift in a disturbing political context. While suddenly women's issues were brought at the forefront of international and national concerns, India experienced a social, political and economic turn marked by economic liberalization, the rise of Hindu nationalism and an exacerbation of communal conflicts.

The adoption of neo-liberal economic reforms in India at this time deeply impacted the women's movement. The market deregulation and the privatization of industries and several sectors including welfare services, resulted in State withdrawal from social responsibilities and the opening of the country to international investors (Biswas 4407). Concurrently, in order to assist in development projects, international institutions provided funds to reduce discrimination against women, seen as an obstacle to development. In line with the principle of revitalizing civil society that prevailed at that time, they turned toward women's civil society organizations to drive women's emancipation program and local communities' development (Bernal and Grewal 302). Because of the massive influx of development funding targeting poor women, lots of professionalized, funded organizations close to Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) were founded in cities like Delhi. While benefiting from the decentralization and delegation of State power to the civil society, organizations had

to demonstrate their professionalism and meet the standards of international institutions which led to the incorporation of managerial and professional structure in funded organizations (paid employment, 9 to 5 working hours, internal hierarchy, fund-raising) (Menon 242). Unlike most of local women and feminist organizations which had a political and/or strategic approach of women's liberation, funded organizations were pushed to adopt a practical approach of development, based on social and economic empowerment with projects related to access to education, healthcare, food, etc. (Mitra 66; Molyneux 232). This increased number of funded organizations working on women's development could be described as an NGOization of the women's movement. NGOization is not only the increase in the number of NGOs but also the worldwide deployment of the liberal ideology of development and the adoption by political movements of the tools and discourses of international agencies (Alvarez 176; Roy, "Beyond NGOization" 97). In many ways, NGOization is related to the globalization of gender (Cîrstocea *et al.* 11), which refers to the international adoption and circulation of the concept of gender and related terminology by international institutions and the institutionalization of struggles for gender equality.

In cities like Delhi, NGOization has led to a homogenization of practices inside the women's field but it doesn't mean that at the local level, political approaches no longer exist. As a matter of fact, professionalized organizations dedicate a large part of their time to apply for grants, to promote women's access to school and basic amenities. While professionalization has become a standard for most of the activists (Menon 176) working in the women's development sector, a number of feminist and women's organizations have tried to challenge local patriarchal ideologies by supporting grassroots mobilizations. In the meantime, the post-1990 social and political context has catapulted new mobilizations around gender-related issues in India focusing on issues of freedom, choice and desire while denouncing the latent violence in the Indian society. In hindsight, the fear of depolitization caused by institutionalization has been questioned by the emergence of a new generation of activists bringing new concerns and practices into the movement.

This period was also marked by the growing visibility and militancy of caste politics. Lower caste women, including Dalit, challenged the woman subject of feminism. While denouncing the upper caste and middle-class domination on the women's movement, these women founded their own women's collectives to address

gender issues related to caste as well as religion (Dietrich, "Dalit movement" 57; Arya and Singh Rathore 26). The will to build an all-inclusive type of feminism in India based on an intersectional approach of gender, has paved the way for a new approach of identities and struggles for equality.

In the late 1990s, growing AIDS Awareness in India and the availability of monetary resources finally helped legitimize discussions on sex-related matters outside the heteronormative framework. While men were first targeted, it also offered support and legitimacy to lesbian women who were asked by some women's organizations not to raise their issues inside the women's movement (Menon and Nigam 131; Dave 120). The democratization of the conversation around sexuality has also been facilitated by the explosion of audio-visual media, internet and cellular phone, combined with a rise of consumerism and increased mobility. For Nivedita Menon and Aditya Nigam (86) this social and economic turn has led to the rise of a "new economies of desire" mostly in cities.

The intensification of new aspirations has resulted in variations in membership, priorities and practice within the women's movement. The new generation of women, men and transgender people entering the movement in the 2000s have politicized new demands related to freedom, desires and gender identities. They have been taking the streets to defend rights and denounce sexual violence, harassment, gender discrimination, gender wage gap and to reclaim freedom to move and act. Like previous movements, which raised significant issues in the past, this new generation of activists is facing hostile backlash from the government as well as from the neo-conservative and right-wing forces. After the Nirbhaya case (2012) in Delhi involving a gang rape in a bus which led to the death of a young student, people came out in the streets of Delhi to protest against the inaction of the state, the attitude of police and the society as a whole which condones violence against women. In 2014, the Kiss of love protest denounced moral policing. The Happy to bleed movement began in 2015 to counter menstrual taboos and stigma in India and the #Metoo movement in 2016 have become in a few years, the symbol of this new wave of struggles for equality where the politicization of intimacy is linked to the exposure of ongoing gender violence (John, "#Metoo" 138).

As we can see, the history of women's activism in India is inseparable from the history of the growth of neoliberalism, development politics, but also workers, Dalit and environmentalist movements.

Women's activism in Delhi and the Environmental Cause

Yet, for a long time, the impact of cities on environment and agrarian peripheries received little attention (Soni 78). The belated interest in ecological issues in urban areas seems to be the result of the distancing of agricultural considerations from everyday life and the prevalence of a modern approach implied by policy development (Sethi; Green et al. 267). But due to the increasing air and water pollution, government and citizens have started to consider the impact of environmental degradation on people's health and lives.

Ecological awareness first appeared in the 1990s around environmental injustices (Baviskar, *Uncivil City* 56). At that time, air and water pollution, access to resources and affordable and decent housing became a matter of public concern. Nevertheless, instead of bringing more equality, many cities set on new policies that have increased inequalities. In the urban context, ecological issues go hand-in-hand with gentrification and politics of cleaning up the cities of the poor (Baviskar, "Violence and Desire"; Bhan).

The undergoing transformation of Delhi into a "world-class city" since the 1990s has worsened social fragmentation and social exclusion (Baviskar, *Uncivil City* 47). Whereas the urban development policies have fostered the emergence of a new middle class claiming rights over urban citizenship and governance (Ghertner 176), it has also intensified segregation and eviction of the poor (Dupont, "The Challenge of slums" 78). Indeed, while the most disadvantaged people bear the brunt of environmental dangers, a lot of urban environmental policies are anti-poor, justified on the side of policy-makers by environmental concerns (Baviskar, *Uncivil City* 4; Bhan 218).

Urban environmental conflicts at the local and national levels show two different and concomitant approaches to environmental issues. On the one hand, the policies implemented in the city aim to improve the living conditions of the most affluent populations, by providing them safe spaces for gathering and active recreation. On the other hand, because of the State withdrawal from development policies, NGOs have become the main actors of policies development targeting poor and vulnerable people with palliative care policies. Consequently, it reinforces inequalities regarding access for poor citizens to the "right to the city". This concept covers both the citizens' right to access resources and infrastructures, to participate in urban

governance, to be safe and the recognition of their civil and political rights (Dupont *et al*. 2). While the spectrum of environmental approaches and concerns is broader than that, these two trends have been dominant in cities like New Delhi.

The way in which environmental issues have emerged in cities such as Delhi explains in part the way in which women's and feminist organizations have embraced environmental problems. Since the 1980s, a large number of women's and feminist organizations have established their headquarters in New Delhi in order to benefit from the proximity of central power and institutions (Michon 34). Together, they politicized women's issues at the national level and led many battles for equality. In the 1990s, because of the healthcare and social services privatization, professionalized organizations have become the main actors addressing questions related to women's poverty and poor living conditions including environmental issues.

In Delhi, environmental issues have been raised quite early in the 1980 by women's and feminist organizations through both the analysis of the way in which gender shapes women's relation to nature and the denunciation of the insanitary living conditions of women. Since the 1980s, women's organizations and activists in Delhi have taken actions by three different and complementary ways to address ecological issues.

First, when political or climatic tragedies occur, many activists and organizations come together to help victims in the various states of India. They mainly help women and children who are the most affected by providing essential goods, such as food, clothes and medicines. They also send equipment or financial aid, teach children, help women to organise canteens and support them. This is what happened, for example, after the Bhopal explosion in 1984 or during the flooding in Uttarakhand in 2013, in Gujarat in 2015, and in South India and Kerala in 2019. These humanitarian responses to environmental disasters are to some extent the consequences of the growing participation of NGO in the implementation of State development policies. Consequently, women's organizations have had to fill in the gaps in the State policies by endorsing social responsibilities.

At the crossroads of feminism and environmentalism, the second type of women's organizations campaigns focus on resource-less women. The denunciation of their vulnerability and the implementation of development campaigns are the two main types of work run by women's and feminist organizations. In most Indian cities, women living in slums face everyday problems to access water, food and other

resources. The lack of access to basic amenities tends to generate greater inequalities between men and women. Because of the gender division of labour, women and girls are predominantly in charge of water and fuel collection, cooking and taking care of the household. This reproductive work and its repetitive nature is further burdened by the decline of resources, considerably shortening the time they have available for school, work or self-care. In addition to this, the absence of urban sanitation has a direct impact on women health and increase the risk of (exposure to) violence (Datta, "The Intimate City" 323). The gender environmental perspective through the prism of poverty adopted by women's organizations since the 1990s is linked to the development-based strategies of the international institutions. The international politics of development adopted in the 1990s, called "Women, environment and development" (WED) (Green *et al.* 260) have promoted sustainable development projects based on economic growth, social inclusion and environmental sustainability. In some respects, the changes in emphasis and approach by the NGOization of the women's movement could be a lens for the analysis of the way environmental issues have been endorsed by women's organizations. However even if practical gender interests ride over strategic gender interests[3] (Molyneux 232), the study of the everyday practices shows that a large part of these organizations tries to raise women's consciousness about gender inequality.

The third environmentalist approach of women's organizations relates to violence against women and men belonging to the most precarious categories in the context of urban sanitation and beautification policies. Urban development plans, which are considered to be tools for controlling pollution and improving the quality of urban life, are accompanied by the eviction of shanty towns from city centres, the relocation of polluting companies and a ban on individual polluting practices (fires, burning of waste, old cars, construction activities) (Chakravarty and Negi 204).

Since the 1990s, the way poor people are viewed has changed, with a move towards the criminalization of poverty. Several studies have shown that actions carried by the middle classes in the name of environment are often "othering" pollution, by attributing the causes of pollution to the poorest (Véron 2096). By doing so, they associate air pollution, waste management, noise and visual pollution

---

[3] Practical gender interest is seen by Maxine Molyneux as a direct response to women's need that doesn't necessarily go hand-in-hand with structural change whereas strategic gender interest is based on a political analysis, the purpose of which is to overcome inequalities and oppression (233).

practices with lower class along with the "irregular" use of public space (Baviskar, *Uncivil City* 47; Anjaria 393).

Moreover, in the past couple of decades Delhi witnessed an increase of rural to urban immigration leading to the growth of unauthorized settlements colonies or slums. While migrants have been part of the development of Delhi economy and also provided essential services to middle and upper classes, most of the time they have not been seen as relevant citizens in Delhi (Dupont, "nomades" 29). Since the 1990s, the Delhi authorities enforced masterplans with the target of fighting pollution and making the city more attractive for middle and upper classes. These operations of beautification (Dupont, "Slum Demolitions" 79) led to the destruction of several slums and unauthorized colonies, and the resettlement of some of them at the Delhi borders (Dupont *et al*. 9). For many of the residents who were displaced, this spatial segregation resulted in unemployment, loss of the solidarity network and their isolation from urban infrastructures like the metro or bus services.

Between 1996 and 2005 the Delhi government, under pressure of a Supreme Court Order, decided to close hazardous factories and relocated polluting industries outside the city (Baviskar, *Uncivil City* 60). The closure or the shifting of these industries had a major impact on workers who lost their jobs or had to move with their families. Furthermore, the attempt to clean Delhi's water and air was not a long-term sustainable solution. It mainly moved the problem outside Delhi in areas that are no longer limited to industries because of spreading of urban areas and workers migration towards them.

In response to this, women's organizations based in Delhi like Jagori, Action India, and Action Aid have launched campaigns with displaced populations with the aim of lobbying for the recognition of their rights as legitimate urban citizens. In practice, women's organizations are helping local residents who were displaced to obtain water tanks and to access electricity or sanitation. By doing so, women's organizations are creating together with women residents a safe space where women can feel confident to address and combat inequalities and gender violence.

While women's and feminist organizations have tackled issues that cut across gender, poverty and the environment, during my fieldwork undertaken between 2012 and 2016 in Delhi, I found that in most of the publications and on the field, activists hardly ever addressed climate change and nature-based concerns directly. However, by reclaiming women's rights to live free from violence and discrimination, to own

property, to access food, sustainable livelihood and to be educated, women's organizations have been providing a framework to address the gender dimension of environmental degradation.

The reason why ecology was something that was hardly ever discussed by fieldworkers or activists in Delhi could be found in the way environmentalism was embedded in discourses in national and international institutions and local governments. In cities like Delhi, environmentalism focused on fostering development rather than addressing social justice and basic needs. In addition, environmental laws have often failed to protect the poorest and people from communities that were bearing the brunt of urbanization policies. Accordingly, it could also explain why ecofeminism had until now, found little resonance in the Indian women's cause.

In recent years, in urban and rural areas, a new generation of activists belonging to a younger generation have got involved in environmental political struggles because of the rise of climate anxiety (Hickman *et al*.; Singh, "Indian Youth"). Built on previous environmental and feminist struggles, youth activists claim their belonging to feminist and environmentalist movements while supporting Dalits, Muslim and peasant struggles. By doing so, they enjoy a certain visibility expanded by the political opportunity provided by the transnational environmental youth activism. Once again, young women have been path leaders of demonstrations by raising a range of political issues about feminism, caste and ecology. For instance in 2017, Ridhima Pandey took legal action against the State after the 2013 floods in Uttarakhand. She accused the State of being responsible for the mishandling of the crisis. The same year, in the fishing village of Allapad in Kerala, a young girl took action against mines and soil erosion. In 2019, for several weeks students from the organization "Friday for the Future" marched into the city to denounce State inaction against the climate crisis.

In July 2020, despite the mediatization and being symbolically associated as hope for the future, some of the youth activists were attacked and charged by the police for conspiracy against the government after supporting the farmers' protests and adapting an activist kit distributed by Greta Thunberg (Chen). A few days later, it was the turn of two other activists, Shantanu Muluk and Nikita Jacob, respectively involved in the Save Mollem movement and Extinction Rebellion India groups (India today) to be arrested and accused of conspiracy with pro-independence Sikh groups.

Like feminist organizations, these groups are mostly characterized by urban roots and the fact that their members belong to the middle classes. However, we may wonder if this new generation of activists who claim to be part of the transnational environmental network advocating for climate justice will provide a space for the rise of a national urban ecofeminism where women from disadvantaged background could be heard.

Works cited

AGARWAL, Bina. *Gender and Green Governance: The Political Economy of Women's Presence Within and Beyond Community Forestry*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010.

———. "Gender, resistance and land: Interlinked struggles over resources and meanings in South Asia". *The Journal of Peasant Studies,* vol. 21, nº 1, 2008, p. 81-125.

———. "The Gender and Environment Debate: Lessons from India". *Feminist studies, vol.* 18, nº 1, spring 1992, p. 119-158.

AGARWAL, Bina, Anthwal Pervesh and Mahesh Malvika. "How Many and Which Women Own Land in India? Inter-gender and Intra-gender Gaps". *The Journal of Development Studies,* vol. 57, nº 1, 2021, p. 1807-1829.

ALVAREZ, Sonia. "Beyond NGO-ization? Reflections from Latin America". *Development, vol.* 52, nº 2, 2009, p. 175-184.

ANJARIA, Jonathan Shapiro. "Guardians of the Bourgeois City: Citizenship, Public Space, and Middle–Class Activism in Mumbai". *City & Community,* vol. 8, nº 4, 1 December 2009, p. 391-406.

ARYA, Sunaina and Singh Rathore, Aakash. *Dalit Feminist Theory: A Reader*. London / New York: Routledge, 2020.

BAVISKAR, Amita. "Between Violence and Desire: Space, Power, and Identity in the Making of Metropolitan Delhi". *International Social Science Journal,* vol. *55*, 2003, p. 99-98.

———. *Uncivil City*. New Delhi: Sage, 2020.

BENBABAALI, Dalel. "Bhadrachalam Scheduled Area, Telangana". *Ground Down by Growth, Caste, Class and Inequality in 21st Century India,* Alpa Shah, Jens Lerche, Richard Axelby, Dalel Benbabaali, Brendan Donegan, Jayaseelan Raj and Vikramaditya Thakur (eds.). London: Pluto Press, 2018, p. 115–142.

BERENI, Laure. "The women's cause in a field: rethinking the architecture of collective protest in the era of movement institutionalization", *Social Movement Studies*, vol. 20, nº 2, 2021, p.208-222.

BERNAL, Victoria, Grewal, Inderpal. *Theorizing NGOs States, Feminisms and neoliberalism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014.

BHAN, Gautam. ""This is no longer the city I once Knew" Evictions, the urban poor and the right to the city in millennial Delhi". *Environment & Urbanization, vol.* 21, nº 1, 2009, p. 127-142.

BISWAS, Nilanjana. "On Funding and the NGO Sector". *Economic and Political Weekly, vol.* 41, n°42, 2006, p. 4406-4411.

BOLAZZI, Floriane, Guérin Isabelle and Haritas, Kaveri Ishwar. « Pas par hobby, mais par survie ! ». M*ultitudes, vol.* 3, nº 84, 2021, p. 19-28.

CHAKRAVARTY, Surajit and Negi, Rohit. *Space, Planning and Everyday Contestations in Delhi*. New Delhi: Springer, 2016.

CHEN, Amber. "A Year After Her Arrest, Indian Climate Activist Disha Ravi Is Still Not Free". *Atmos*, 16 February 2022. https://atmos.earth/disha-ravi-india-climate-justice-year-anniversary/. Accessed 16th November 2022.

CÎRSTOCEA, Ioana, Lacombe, Delphine and Marteu, Elisabeth. *La globalisation du genre Mobilisations, cadres d'actions, savoirs.* Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2018.

DATTA, Ayona. "The Intimate City: Violence, Gender and Ordinary Life in Delhi Slums". *Urban Geography, vol.* 37, nº 3, 2 April 2016, p. 323-342.

DAVE, Naisargi. *Queer activism in India. A Story in the Anthropology of Ethics.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2012.

INDIA TODAY. "Delhi Police Questions Nikita Jacob, Shantanu Muluk in Toolkit Case". 22 February 2021. https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/nikita-jacob-shantanu-muluk-delhi-police-toolkit-case-1771832-2021-02-22. Accessed 16th November 2022.

DIETRICH, Gabriele. "Dalit Movement and Women's Movements". *Gender and Caste*. Anupama Rao (ed.). New Delhi: Zed Books, 2005, p. 57-79.

———. "Women, Ecology and Culture". *Gender and Politics in India.* Nivedita Menon (ed.). New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999, p.72-95.

DUPONT, Véronique, Tawa Lama Rewal, Stephanie and Zerah, Marie-Hélène. "Right to the City and Urban Citizenship in the Indian Context". *Urban Policies and the Right to the City in India.* Delhi: UNESCO/CSH, 2011. https://horizon.documentation.ird.fr/exl-doc/pleins_textes/divers20-12/010054551.pdf. Accessed 16th November 2022.

DUPONT, Véronique. « Création de nomades urbains et appauvrissement. Impact des politiques d'éradications des camps de squatters à Delhi ». *Revue Tiers Monde,* vol. 1, nº 201, 2010, p. 25-45.

———. "Slum Demolitions in Delhi since the 1990s: An Appraisal**".** *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 43, nº 28, 2008, p. 79-87.

———. "The Challenge of Slums and Forced Evictions". *Urban Policies and the Right to the City in India: Rights, Responsibilities and Citizenship.* Véronique Dupont, Stephanie Tawa Lama Rewal and Marie-Hélène Zerah (eds.). Delhi: UNESCO/CSH, 2011, p. 76-97.

EAUBONNE, Françoise d'. *Le féminisme ou la mort*. Paris: Pierre Horay, 1974.

FERNANDES, Walter. "Development induced displacement and sustainable development". *Social Change,* Vol. 31, nº 1 & 2, 2001, p. 87-103.

GADGIL, Madhav and Guha, Ramachandra. *Ecology and Equity: The Use and Abuse of Nature in Contemporary India*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

GANDHI, Nandita and Shah, Nandita. *The Issues at Stake: Theory and Practice in the Contemporary Women's Movement in India*. New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1991.

GHERTNER, Asher. *Contesting the Indian City: Global Visions and the Politics of the Local*. UK: Wiley Black, 2014.

GREEN, Cathy, Joekes, Susan and Leach, Melissa. "Questionable links: Approaches to Gender in Environmental Research and Policy". *Feminist Visions of Development: Gender, Analysis and Policy*. Cecile Jackson and Ruth Pearson (eds.). London and New York: Routledge, 1998, p. 259-283.

GUHA, Ramachandra and Martinez-Alier, Juan. *Varieties of Environmentalism*. London: Earthscan, 2006.

HICKMAN, Caroline, Elizabeth Marks, Panu Pihkala, Susan Clayton, R. Eric Lewandowski, Elouise E. Mayall, Britt Wray, Catriona Mellor, and Lise van Susteren. "Climate Anxiety in Children and Young People and Their Beliefs about Government Responses to Climate Change: A Global Survey". *The Lancet Planetary Health, vol.* 5, nº 12, 1 December 2021. https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196(21)00278-3/fulltext#%20. Accessed 16th November 2022.

JAIN, Shobita. "Women and People's Ecological Movement: A Case Study of Women's Role in the Chipko Movement in Uttar Pradesh". *Economic & Political Weekly, vol.* 19, nº 41, 1984, p. 1788-1794.

JOHN, Mary E. "Feminism, sexual violence and the times of #MeToo in India". *Asian Journal of Women's Studies, vol.* 26, nº 2, 2020, p. 137-158.

KISHWAR, Madhu. "A horror of 'Isms': Why I do not call myself a Feminist". 1990. https://madhukishwar.blogspot.com/2014_07_05_archive.html. Accessed 16th November 2022.

KUMAR, Radha. *The History of Doing: An Illustrated Account of Movements for Women's Rights and Feminism in India 1800-1990*. New Delhi: Kali for Women / Zubaan, 1993.

MENON, Nivedita. *Recovering Subversion: Feminist Politics Beyond the Law*. New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004.

MENON, Nivedita and Nigam, Aditya. *Power and contestation in India since 1989*. London: Zed Books, 2007.

MICHON, Caroline. *Faire corps des affrontements : Le Mouvement Indien des Femmes dans la ville de New Delhi, un réseau militant polymorphe.* Thèse de Doctorat EHESS, 2019. https://www.theses.fr/2019EHES0160.

MIES, Maria and Shiva Vandana. *Ecofeminism*. London: Zed Books, 1993.

MITRA, Aditi. "Feminist Organizing in India: A Study of Women in NGOs". *Women's Studies International Forum, vol.* 34, nº 1, 1 January 2011, p. 66-75.

MOLYNEUX, Maxine. "Mobilization without emancipation? Women's Interests, the

State and Revolution in Nicaragua". *Feminist Studies*, vol.11, nº 2, 1985, p. 227-254.

NANDA, Meera. "The Science Question in Post-Colonial Feminism". *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol. 31, No. 16/17, 1996, WS2–WS8.

NARAIN, Sunita. "Changing environmentalism". *Seminar* 516, 2002. https://www.india-seminar.com/2002/516/516%20sunita%20narain.htm. Accessed 16th November 2022.

OMVEDT, Gail. "The "New peasant movement" in India". *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars, vol.* 20, nº 2, 1 June 1988, p.14-23. https://doi.org/10.1080/14672715.1988.10404445. Accessed 16th November 2022.

———. "Why Dalits Dislike Environmentalists." *The Hindu*, 24 June 1997, p. 12, http://ces.iisc.ernet.in/hpg/envis/doc97html/envenv627.html. Accessed 16th November 2022.

PATTNAIK, Itishree, Lahiri-Dutt Kuntala, Lockie Stewart, and Pritchard Bill. "The feminization of agriculture or the feminization of agrarian distress? Tracking the trajectory of women in agriculture in India". *Journal of the Asia Pacific Economy*, vol. 23, nº 1, 2017, p. 138-155.

ROY, Srila. "The Indian Women's Movement: Within and Beyond NGOization". *Journal of South Asian Development*, vol. 10, nº 1, 2015, p. 96-117.

SAHU, Geetanjoy. "People's Participation in environmental Protection: A Case Study of Patancheru". Working paper. Bangalore: Institute for Social and Economic Change, No. 180, 2007. http://www.isec.ac.in/WP%20-%20180.pdf. Accessed 16th November 2022.

SALE, Kirkpatrick. "Ecofeminim: A New Perspective". *The Nation*, 1987, p. 302- 305.

SHARMA, Mukul. "Dalits and Indian Environmental Politics". *Economic and Political Weekly, vol.* 47, nº 23, June 2012, p. 46-52.

SHIVA, Vandana. *Staying alive : women, ecology and development*. London: Zed Books, 1989.

SINGH, Varsha. "Indian Youth & Climate Change: From Advocacy to Action". *Media India Group* (blog), 4 October 2021. https://mediaindia.eu/environment/indian-youth-climate-change-from-advocacy-to-action/. Accessed 16th November 2022.

SONI, Anita. *Urban Conquest of Outer Delhi: Beneficiaries, Intermediaries and Victims*. Delhi: Manohar, 2000.

VÉRON, René. "Remaking Urban Environments: The Political Ecology of Air Pollution in Delhi". *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space, vol.* 38, nº 11, 1 November 2006, p. 2093-2109.

WARREN, Karen J. "The Power and the Promise of Ecological Feminism". *Environmental Ethics, vol.* 12, nº 2, 1 May 1990, p.125-146.