Fritzi-Marie Titzmann

Mediatised Solidarity

Media Practices of Contemporary Indian Social Movements

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1 RePLITO Digital Knowledge Archive: https://replito.de/Home/#All (accessed 07/03/2024).

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1 Introduction

The expression of solidarity can be understood as a core element of living together, through which togetherness, characterised by acceptance and support, can be promoted. However, solidarity can also demonstrate a unifying oppositional attitude toward political and social conditions. Solidarity, in the sense of a feeling of devotion and commitment of the individual to others in a collective, is also one of the defining characteristics of social movements. It is considered an essential motivation for joint action, since it collectivises what would otherwise remain individual experiences and emotions (Stewart & Schultze 2019, 100251). Due to the interaction of media and society, media practices play an essential role in this context, in that they can support both social disruption and the propagation of social cohesion. In the recent pandemic situation of physical distancing, solidarity was expressed through media even more than before – via social media, television, internet news or radio.

The research for the case studies that this book brings together originated in the framework of a joint research project titled 'Beyond Social Cohesion: Global Repertoires of Living Together' (RePLITO) that took marginalised and neglected repertoires of living together as its starting point to rethink social cohesion from a transregional perspective. Central to our approach is a critique of social cohesion as a normatively loaded term that continues to be primarily linked to nationally or territorially defined collectiveness. This inevitably raises the question of boundaries and the exclusivity of community concepts as well as the cultural and historical narratives that promote or counteract them. Which concepts, historical narratives and actions do they employ or bring back to envision a fresh communal existence and to (re-)establish connections based on mutual trust, recognition and attachment? RePLITO's emphasis lay on the realms of imagination, creativity and individual agency within environments where individuals are already engaged in productive activities and actively seeking solutions for the various challenges, crises and changes they are currently facing (Schneider 2022). This is where the relevance of social movements and their visions and practices of 'living together' come into play.

In their introduction to a collection of essays in the RePLITO Digital Knowledge Archive on 'Imaginations, Narratives and Mediated Performances of Solidarity and Community' that emerged from an experimental exercise in collaborative publishing between graduate and PhD students from Delhi and Berlin, Schneider and Chaudhuri (2021) state that the collection is 'less interested in solidarity as theory or pedagogy, but rather in exploring the changing solidarity reasonings and legitimising narratives of whom "we" should be solidarity with'. Using the example of cow protection campaigns in India, they highlight that calls for solidarity can 'promote very different, even contradictory kinds of political subjectivities and citizen activism; they can deepen a feeling of solidarity among a majoritarian group' and not necessarily lead to an improvement of 'living together'.

Recent years offer numerous case studies of different protest movements in India, in the context of which people have shown solidarity with and among protesters in diverse and creative ways. The aim of many such movements has been to highlight the challenges and shortcomings of Indian democracy and work towards a more just, equitable and sustainable society. In all cases, medialisation has played a major role in visibility and mobilisation and, thus, also in the creation of solidarity. Among others, the highly publicised anti-corruption protests in 2011, led by Anna Hazare and his team, motivated people across the country to show solidarity with the slogan 'Main hun Anna Hazare' (I am Anna Hazare) by adjusting their profile pictures on social media, wearing Nehru caps with the slogan and participating in nationwide marches. The protestors of Anna's 'India Against Corruption' (IAC) movement employed a strategic blend of religious and patriotic symbols to market their cause, amalgamating images of Bharat Mata or Mother India associated with the Hindu right, posters of revolutionary hero Bhagat Singh, executed by the British in 1931, and Gandhi's iconic caps and photographs. Alongside this, the tactical utilisation of television played a significant role, although many critics dismissed the IAC agitation as an absurd revolution of the middle class orchestrated for and by television. Above all, their strategies cultivated solidarity and fostered identification with historical revolutionaries, drawing on historical repertoires to strengthen their movement's resonance and legitimacy. This multifaceted approach encapsulated the complexities and nuances of their 'revolution', intertwining contemporary media tactics with timeless symbols and historical narratives to garner support and mobilise the masses effectively (Sharma 2014, 366–368).

A year later, the brutal gang rape and subsequent death of a young woman in Delhi in December 2012 led to an unexpectedly high level of attention from national and international media. However, the resulting protests against sexual violence, patriarchal structures and the lack of gender equality not only took the form of demonstrations on the streets but also translated into a digital public sphere made up of various blogs and social media networks such as Facebook and

Twitter. These platforms were used to mobilise for local actions while, at the same time, providing a space for discussion and exchange. The case itself and the protests that followed in the Indian capital and throughout the country in the weeks that followed can, therefore, rightly be described as a media event. I have argued elsewhere that social media debates formed an integral part of the dynamic discourse in which the protest movement was situated (Titzmann 2014).

Since 2014, protest movements have continued around the country's universities, leading to global expressions of solidarity. Despite its topicality, a considerable research literature already exists on the weeks-long protests in Shaheen Bagh in the winter of 2019–2020 against the Citizenship Amendment Act, represented primarily by Muslim women (see Chapter 2). In 2016, Dalit scholar Rohith Vemula's suicide generated not only a national debate on casteism but also global visibility for caste discrimination as a rampant issue. In an article on the Ravidassia context, Kirchhof (2021) explores how 'Dalit pride' as a notion of solidarity has since become increasingly mediated through artists like Ginni Mahi, whose songs and music videos also reflect visions of solidarity *beyond* caste and beyond assertions of 'Dalit' self-awareness.

While, on the one hand, the increasing popularity of candlelight demonstrations and vigils is an aesthetic approach to new global urban forms of protest (Schneider 2014, 9), there is also a constant recourse to historical repertoires and forms of expression of solidarity and social cohesion. A vivid example of this is the revival of the tradition of *langar*[2] from Sikhism in the context of the recent farmers' protests in India. The forms of resistance of the Indian independence movement – strikes, sit-ins, civil disobedience – are also frequently cited and serve a wide variety of actors as a frame narrative for their respective stagings of protest and solidarity. At the same time, new media are effectively used to document protests in the sense of witnessing and creating a collective memory, to comment on them, to support them artistically and to generate attention on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter (now X). The resulting corpus of sources to be potentially studied is composed of complex text–image–video combinations, increasingly mediated by digital media, that are often parts of trans-medial initiatives. Treré (2018) foregrounds the communicative complexity of contemporary social movements by exploring not only the divergence of media formats but also the activists' merging of the physical and the digital, the human and the non-human, the old and the new, and the corporate and the alternative.

2 In Sikhism, a *langar* (Punjabi: 'kitchen') is the communal kitchen of a gurdwara that serves meals free of charge to all visitors – without distinction of religion, caste, gender, economic status or ethnicity.

A paradigmatic example of the centrality of text–image circulation is women's participation in the 2020–2021 Indian farmers' protest against three new agricultural laws in India. A photo widely circulated on social media shows veiled women farmers from Haryana sitting on tractors, joining the protests in the capital. The accompanying text varies by post but suggests an intentional production of iconic imagery and evidences a visual staging of solidarity as a media strategy of the movement. For example, @indianwomenblog writes on Instagram:

> By having women ride into the Capital on January 26, which is in itself an empowering initiative in patriarchal Haryana, the farm unions don't just hope to get media coverage but also send a message that their families stand behind them in the agitation. (@indianwomenblog)

The intentional use of gender as another category thus stages protest and solidarity not only visually but also intersectionally. Similarly, the Instagram channel @media_vs_modi links narratives of empowerment, media attention and solidarity, in which the same photo is accompanied by the following text:

> 'Instagram models don't need your attention women farmers do' Picture needs to be global symbol for women empowerment. (@media_vs_modi)

Here, the focus is placed strongly on the visual staging of femininity on the Instagram platform, and the actual protest against agrarian reform recedes into the background.

This context gives rise to the following questions, which are addressed in all three case studies:

— How is solidarity with and among activists and protestors medially and artistically staged and performatively realised?
— To what extent is recourse made to shared memories and cultural heritage in order to stage social cohesion – possibly as utopia?
— How are social categories such as religion, social class and gender negotiated in the media discourse of solidarity around social movements?

The focus in this book is on the period from 2014 to the present, during which India has witnessed a surge in protest movements, particularly in its liberal universities, leading to unprecedented expressions of solidarity both within the country and globally. The central aim is to provide a theoretically informed analysis of how media and visual art is utilised in the staging of solidarity within Indian social and protest movements. This objective is pursued through an in-depth exploration of three case studies: (1) the Shaheen Bagh protest in 2019–2020, (2) the farmers' protest in 2020–2021 and (3) contempo-

rary Indian youth climate movements. By examining these cases, I seek to unravel the intricate ways in which media practices shape and are shaped by contemporary expressions of solidarity in India and to what extent recourse is made to shared memories and cultural heritage in order to stage social cohesion.

Defining Solidarity[3]

Solidarity is frequently evoked in contexts of resistance to the normative order. The emergence of an 'oppositional consciousness' (Mansbridge & Morris 2001, 240) requires an understanding of injustice as systemic, at least a partial identification with unjustly subordinated groups and the drive for collective action. Accordingly, it is one of the defining characteristics of social movements. It is considered an essential motivation for joint action, since it collectivises what would otherwise remain individual experiences and emotions (Stewart & Schulze 2019). However, solidarity creates networks but does not necessarily facilitate egalitarianism: it is a relation that is negotiated across power imbalances (Mohanty 2003). The dynamics are often contradictory. Regarding the media and performative dimensions of solidarity, the social discourse at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic conjured up global solidarity in many ways. At the same time, its exercise has been called into question, for example, by the unequal distribution of vaccines. Also noteworthy is the invocation of transnational solidarity in postcolonial contexts, both in anti-colonial solidaritisation (Craggs 2014) and in the understanding of postcolonial global feminist solidarity (Mohanty 2003).

> Solidarity often acts as a conceptual bridge between imagined siblings: "fraternity" was the original conception of political modernity (as per the French revolution) before "solidarity" took its place, suggesting a move away from family and the immediate Gemeinschaft [community] towards the broader political community of the Anthropos. This wider humanistic sense allowed the imagining and encompassing of remote relations in a polity whose scope transcended immediate, face-to-face allegiances. (Rakopoulos, 2016, 146)

The political origins of solidarity are especially found in struggles of the antifascist, anticolonial, antiapartheid and civil rights movements. As noted above,

3 Parts of the introduction have been published in an entry to the RePLITO Digital Knowledge Archive. See Titzmann (2021).

transnational solidarity is often evoked in postcolonial context, e.g. in the Tricontinental that founded the Organization of Solidarity of the Peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America (OSPAAAL) (Mahler 2018) or the Non-aligned Movement (Arnold 2010).

According to Hannah Arendt, solidarity is the alternative to pity – conceived by her as the perversion of compassion. It is through solidarity that a community of interest with the marginalised, oppressed and exploited is (deliberately and dispassionately) established. The common interest can be summarised as 'the dignity of man' (Reshaur 1992, 724). Terminologically speaking, 'solidarity is a principle that can inspire and guide action' (Arendt 2006).

Arendt identifies four categories of solidarity. The first one is *exclusive solidarity,* by which she describes sharing a commonness of situation or circumstance. This form of solidarity comprises joint struggles of the oppressed and marginalised to remove or improve circumstances that place certain groups at risk or deprive them of social and political opportunities. It could be understood as an act of 'self-help' (Reshaur 1992, 725). The second form is *inclusive solidarity* and includes those who suffer and those who attempt to make common cause with them. This is perhaps the most widely practised form of solidarity, and recent social research particularly pays attention to it in terms of solidarity with refugees arriving in Europe (della Porta 2018; Sajir & Aouragh 2019, 550–577). The other two categories are *universal solidarity* as a fundamental and unavoidable articulation of the plurality of humankind and the highly contested conceptualisation of *natural solidarity* as based on a given affinity towards one's 'own kind' (Reshaur 1992, 733–735).

Solidarity is often evoked in response to political, social and economic crises in emphasising a new connectedness and politicised claims to reciprocity. It is not an exogenous analytical concept but 'an idea inspiring people in contexts of everyday life in crisis' (Rakopoulos 2016, 142). Therefore, Cabot defines solidarity as the 'other side of crisis' (Cabot 2016, 152). In a variety of sociopolitical contexts, solidarity strategies reinvent pre-existing repertoires. Practices of resource pooling, community kitchens or mutual aid as a guiding principle of village culture are invoked with the intention of forging solidarity.

Rakopoulos establishes solidarity as a concept that bridges – 'that is, captures loosely and yet in tension – diverse modes of practices, forms of sociality and mechanisms of envisioning future prospects for people's lives. It links diverse networks of people and sometimes contradictory meanings' (Rakopoulos 2016, 142). The emergence of new alliances could be seen within the context of the anti-CAA protests and at Shaheen Bagh, but in particular, the Indian Farmers' Movement espouses a highly heterogeneous composition of different unions, movements and caste groups that were still united in their rejection of the neoliberalisation of agriculture and their demand of a

different politics. Collins, in turn, emphasises emotions as the 'glue of solidarity' (Collins 1990) that is particularly important within contemporary fluid, network-based movements that rely on non-traditional modes of identification and commitment (Juris 2008, 63). Earlier, Hochschild referred to 'emotion management' (Hochschild 1979) as necessary to maintain commitment and participation among protesters and supporters, a factor that all three case studies in this book vividly demonstrate. Solidarity in social movements is thus shaped around the public display of emotion facilitated by ways of storytelling – increasingly through social media engagement – and 'feeling one's way into events', creating 'affective publics' (Papacharissi 2014).

Until recently, numerous scholars in media studies argued that the growth of online communication fosters democratic principles, openness, connectivity and inclusivity. However, there is a growing trend among scholars to critique this notion as an overly optimistic view of online communication's systems (Schaflechner & Kramer 2024). Treré (2018) illustrates the ambivalent character of contemporary digital activism, demonstrating that media can be either used to conceal authoritarianism or to reimagine democracy. He thus looks at both sides of algorithmic power: strategies of repression and propaganda as well as empowering appropriation and resistance. Dean adds another layer that problematises the current scenario as 'communicative capitalism' (Dean 2021) by looking at communication as a tool for capitalist accumulation.

Nevertheless, the active social media engagement of the Shaheen Bagh protestors as well as contemporary climate activists exemplify the importance of digital networking, curation, circulation and re-mediation. It is crucial to note, though, that Shaheen Bagh as a protest movement did not eventually lead to political success, and many participants ended up in jail. The hope and solidarity circulating were thus bolstered by citizen media activism while simultaneously being countered by mediated propaganda from right-wing groups and the government.

All three case studies are located in a precise historical moment and in a precise geographical location; yet they are orientated towards the future, propagating a vision and actively pursuing collective memory-making and the rewriting of dominant narratives about themselves and about Indian history and the present. Wertsch and Roediger (2008, 319) understand collective memory as a space of contestation over controlling the understanding of the past. The sites of contestation hereby include family discussions, museums, monuments, history textbooks, national holidays, arts and media. They consider it more appropriate to speak of a collective remembering, a constant process intertwined with the present and tied to identity projects. 'Cultural tools' such as language, images and technology shape memory in different and fundamental ways (Wertsch & Roediger 2008). The Hindu Right in India

are particularly skilled in appropriating social media through the assembling of facts, figures and treatises as an ideological exercise by net-savvy volunteers. Sahana Udupa (2016) argues that this practice of online archiving constitutes a distinct politics of history-making. She illustrates the importance of archiving as a means of shaping history, especially in the context of religion's interaction with cyberspace and the various ways in which online users participate in religious politics. She points out how people weaponise archives by copy-pasting ready-made 'archived' data and dropping it into conversations to destroy communicative contexts. Thus, online archiving for religious politics challenges certain universal claims often associated with highly praised user-generated content.

In protest movements, the mere production of protest artefacts as well as the circulation of symbols and discourse create a collective memory of protest. This can be described by 'the manner by which movements utilise digital media in order to document, archive and curate cultural memories' (Merrill et al. 2020, 20). The process of memory-making happens quasi-simultaneously with the events through new media affordances. Protestors film and photograph what they see and post it on social networking platforms, sometimes in real time, thereby producing an ever-expanding archive of images and self-representations of protest events (Cammaerts 2012, 125). The visual curation and documentation of the events in Shaheen Bagh by two artists, which I discuss in Chapter 2, is a prime example of collective remembering and memorialisation of a counter-hegemonic narrative of India and a direct response to the history-making of the Hindu Right.

Solidarity, Media and Social Activism

The concept of mediation captures 'diverging articulations between media, communication, protest and activism' (Cammaerts 2012, 118) and enables linking up various ways in which media and communication are relevant to protest and activism. These include framing processes in mainstream media, self-representation and counter-narratives of activists; the use, appropriation and adaptation of media technologies to mobilise for and organise direct actions; and media practices that constitute resistance in their own right (i.e. hacktivism). Despite its asymmetric dynamics, mediation does attribute a degree of agency to those resisting, to those watching or using media by 'meaning-making' (Cammaerts 2012, 118). The Indian farmers' movement's newsletter *Trolley Times* provided an excellent example of a transmedial strategy to mediate a counter-narrative. It aimed at countering mainstream media narratives, informing about the cause and building affective ties among protestors and support-

ers. It did so via a differentiated multilingual transmedia strategy including social media handles, video material, print publications and public performances. It is thus deeply immersed in what Cammaerts describes as 'meaning-making'.

The discussion on how solidarity is mediated relates in many ways to the aforementioned conceptual approaches. Media, social movements and solidarity are entangled in multilayered ways. Roughly, three constellations are distinguishable:

1. **Mass media representation:** Reporting in favour of or criticising movements can elicit or reduce solidarity.
2. **Activist self-mediation:** The production and circulation of counter-narratives via (independent) media generates collective identity and supports solidarity among participants and sympathisers. Activist self-communication is empowering and signifies the strong interrelation of solidarity and agency.
3. **Mediating solidarity via digital media by (external) sympathisers:** Despite being often dismissed as ineffective, 'clicktivism', Cammaerts argues, 'is highly relevant in terms of mediation and seems to resonate with many citizens who often fail to make time in their everyday lives for "active" activism. From this perspective, such forms of internet-mediated resistance bearing witness to injustice do contribute to the building of collective identities and global awareness' (Cammaerts 2012, 128). Additionally, social networking sites and mobile technologies are effective tools of facilitating, coordinating and organising resistance and, thus, generating solidarity. While Cammaerts was writing in a moment of internet euphoria, more recent research (Udupa 2016; Treré 2018; Schaflechner & Kramer 2024) stresses the ambivalent nature of digital media in times of digital capitalism.

For instance, sharing images is functional to activism and solidarity because it illustrates and disseminates the underlying message of those protesting or suffering (Sajir & Aouragh 2019, 560). Practices of remediation (Bolter & Grusin 2002) correspond in this respect with Arendt's definition of inclusive solidarity as establishing a community of interest with the oppressed and exploited. The circulation of emotionally touching content enables connective emotions which stipulate activism (Sajir & Aouragh 2019, 559). Although some content awakens compassion, it does not all lead to solidarity. This is why Arendt distinguishes between solidarity (principle) and compassion (passion) (Arendt 2006).

In their introduction to an edited volume titled *The Aesthetics of Global Protest,* McGarry et al. (2020, 16) state that the 'performing of solidarity is created through different voices being heard'. One way of making voices heard

or protests seen is through the aesthetics of protest, which comprise the communicative, material and performative culture of protests, i.e. slogans, art, symbols, humour, graffiti, bodies, clothes, objects, etc. These create an alternative space for people to engage with politics (McGarry et al. 2020, 18f). In the past, almost exclusively mass media representation through protest images shaped ideas about the protesters. In recent years, connected to the rise of social media and citizen journalism, research seeks to shift focus to protesters themselves and how they document and produce protest through aesthetics (Juris 2005; Ahmed et al. 2017; Dey 2018; Bernárdez et al. 2019; McGarry et al. 2020, 17) in a way that Cammaerts (2012, 125) terms 'self-mediation'. The internet provides extensive opportunities to inform independently, debate internally and link up directly with interested publics in cost-efficient ways and across the time–space continuum. Key expressions of dissent in relation to the anti-CAA protests have become globally visible through media, e.g. the highly visible presence of a local community of Muslim and other women in the physical protest space in Shaheen Bagh, Delhi. Bhatia and Gajjala's research explores how Muslim women use their physical bodies at protest sites to show resistance and challenge India's hyper-masculine Hindu body politics (Bhatia & Gajjala 2020, 6286). Their research also highlights how the protestors incorporated social media as a strategy. In the interviews conducted by the two researchers, the importance of social media for planning, organisation and international visibility was highly emphasised: 'Through social media, protestors, organisers, and leaders contribute to the labour of making the protest visible' (Bhatia & Gajjala 2020, 6295). The immediacy of information circulation helped to mobilise large crowds in specific locations. Many used social media accounts to share information about protest locations, times and activities and to document events from an 'insider perspective'. This contributed to the creation of (counter-)narratives that sympathised with Muslim women's struggle against CAA/NRC. Just like artists Prarthna Singh and Ita Mehrotra (Chapter 2), the intention to create and circulate more inclusive and truthful narratives was instrumental here. This form of social media work is done against the backdrop of a strong bias in local and national media that renders the struggles of marginalised communities invisible and unheard. Bhatia and Gajjala (2020, 6296) state that 'social media labour contributes to forms of affective exchanges, such as solidarity building, information exchange, and extending support and/or resources both online and offline'.

The emergence of digital social movements entails a complex process rooted in multiple layers of offline engagement. Criticism labelling it as 'slacktivism' fails to acknowledge the strategic implementations of digital activists, who craft thoughtful campaigns that synergise with offline strategies (Gajjala

2019, 119). Social media's potential to reach broader audiences and unexpected local demographics can galvanise large groups into action (Gajjala 2020, 120). For instance, the 2006 Jessica Lal case exemplifies how news reports combined with SMS mobilisation sparked mass protests, prompting a retrial of the case. Recognising that digital tools must always complement physical spaces is crucial, and all three case studies in this book illustrate that. Despite debates on whether the term 'activism' aptly applies to social media, Gajjala contends that 'being immersed in the use of digital media is a form of living in a digital place' (Gajjala 2019, 123), highlighting the interconnectedness of online and offline realms in modern activism.

The close interlocking of new digital spaces with sites of physical protest in India also generates immediacy and proximity to a widely dispersed target group, which may foster sympathy and solidarity. In this respect, any protest movement should by now be understood as mediatised and always studied as a media event. To do justice to the increasingly hybridised forms of contemporary activisms, the crucial role of physical presence in protest movements must be included. Thus, the analysis of staging and performances of solidarity calls for cultural studies perspectives that focus on interactions of media technologies and physical practices.

The Case Studies in This Book

The three main chapters in this book each deal with a case study and are organised chronologically. The perspective is slightly different, starting with Chapter 2, which focuses on visual art as an activist tool to create a legacy of the impactful Shaheen Bagh protest movement, to then focus on a newsletter as a counter-medium in Chapter 3 and issues of social media use and gendered visibility within the Indian climate movement in Chapter 4.

Witnessing in Solidarity: Recording the Legacy of Shaheen Bagh through Visual Art

This case study delves into the transformative power of art and media in shaping narratives of solidarity and resistance within the context of the historic Shaheen Bagh protests that unfolded in New Delhi during the winter of 2019–2020. These protests, sparked by the contentious Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), witnessed a unique convergence of Muslim women as protest leaders, redefining the gendered perception of the Muslim minority in India. The movement also introduced innovative forms of feminist solidarity

and non-violent protest strategies, including the use of digital tools for transnational outreach. The chapter spotlights the artistic endeavours of two young women artists who utilised their creative talents to bear witness to the events and craft testimonials for posterity. From one perspective, each act of witnessing necessitates mediation, primarily translating an experience into language to convey it to those who weren't present or who look at it retrospectively. Conversely, every act of mediation contains an element of witnessing, particularly evident when technology steps in as a stand-in for an absent audience (Frosh & Pinchevski 2009). Prarthna Singh's photo book *Har Shaam Shaheen Bagh* (2022) and Ita Mehrotra's graphic novel *Shaheen Bagh: A Graphic Recollection* (2021) serve as case studies to investigate the processes of visually mediating the legacy of the Shaheen Bagh movement. Key questions explored include the production and mediation of solidarity through art and media, the narratives conveyed by these works, prevalent visual tropes within them, the interplay of gender and resistance in their narratives, the new spaces opened up by their artistic interventions and the positioning and framing of the artists themselves.

Mediating Counter-narratives and Solidarity: The Case of *Trolley Times* in the Indian Farmers' Movement

Through the lens of *Trolley Times*, the dedicated newsletter of the Indian Farmers' Movement, this case study analyses the movement's approach to countering mainstream media representations. *Trolley Times* employed a multifaceted, multilingual transmedia strategy that encompassed social media, video content, print publications and public performances. A meticulous analysis of *Trolley Times'* content and imagery unveils several thematic elements within the newsletter's narrative. It prominently features an anti-capitalist critique directed at the new farm laws and the government's policies. Simultaneously, the movement is depicted as a model for an ideal Indian society, emphasising trans-regional and trans-ideological solidarity as well as a commitment to unity and secularism in opposition to the divisive agenda of the BJP government. The notion of secularism in this context aligns with India's unique framework, promoting religious equality and the right to practice one's faith, underpinned by the slogan of 'Unity in Diversity'. The chapter explores *Trolley Times* not as an isolated initiative but as an integral part of the intricate dynamics of political mobilisation, solidarity building and media engagement within the Indian Farmers' Movement. It scrutinises the strategies of mediation, mechanisms of circulation, meaning-making and the creation of solidarity.

Youth Climate Activism in India: Bridging Global Conversations and Local Concerns

The last case study explores the dynamic landscape of contemporary youth climate activism in India, situated at the intersection of global climate justice movements and deeply rooted local environmental traditions. While it may appear to be a recent urban phenomenon, Indian youth climate activism draws from a rich history of environmental concerns and engages in a global conversation about climate justice. The chapter investigates the emergence of global climate movements like Fridays For Future (FFF) in India and their unique characteristics, including their extensive use of social media, increased youth participation and the prominence of a feminised public image. It further discusses the challenges faced by these activists, such as legal pressures and a perceived atmosphere of repression, impacting physical participation in protests. The narrative also underscores the significance of localised activism, rooted in concerns specific to Indian cities and regions, as well as the influence of indigenous and historical movements like the *Chipko Andolan* and *Narmada Bachao Andolan* on contemporary climate activism. An integral research question is the gendered nature of youth climate activism in India, acknowledging the prominence of young women activists and the interplay between climate change, gender and power relations. While the mainstream media often emphasises the youth and feminised public image of the movement, the case study uncovers nuances in the composition of local activist groups, revealing diversity in terms of gender and age.

Notes on Research Praxis and Positionality

The research that lead to this book commenced with a distinctive vision, aiming for collaborative exploration alongside activists and artists. I have orientated myself on the principles of a critical, feminist decolonial research ethic, as outlined by Andrea Fleschenberg and Rosa Cordillera A. Castillo (2022) in their editorial to a two-volume special issue on 'Negotiating Research Ethics in Volatile Contexts' (2022/2023). Informed by indigenous, decolonial and feminist perspectives, they conceptualise research ethics not merely as a collection of directives governing research methodology and behaviour but as intricately linked with the dynamics of power and politics within knowledge production. They acknowledge the historical and ongoing potential for research and knowledge production to perpetuate exploitation, extraction, racism and inequality, especially in the relationship between the Global North and the Global South (Fleschenberg & Castillo 2022, 496). Research, states Castillo in a discussion of

'Critical Research Ethics as Decolonial Praxis', is 'simultaneously an epistemological, political and ethical endeavour' (Castillo 2023, 23). The research we undertake carries significant implications, and as researchers, we hold numerous responsibilities for the knowledge we generate. The research ethics outlined in the discussion correspond to the evolving practice of decolonial action, characterised by a cyclical process of thought, action, reflection and further action. It aims at rehumanising the world, redistributing resources and producing counter-knowledges and counter-praxes (Castillo 2023, 23). It advocates for discovering and cultivating methods that involve collaborating with knowledge co-creators rather than speaking on their behalf or discussing them in isolation. This entails integrating a feedback loop and engaging in dialogue within the research framework with both knowledge co-creators and marginalised knowledge contributors and practitioners (Castillo 2023, 25).

In discussing the rearrangement of research tools and parameters against the backdrop of the recent COVID-19 pandemic, Fleschenberg & Castillo (2022, 498) stress several challenges and concerns in the special issue's editorial. Among them features the need for sensitivity towards power relations between researcher and knowledge co-producers (who are always more than mere informants or interlocutors), including interview partners and colleagues from the Global South. Critical research ethics also acknowledges and scrutinises the inequitable structures within post-colonial contexts, which have influenced the conduct of research and the production of knowledge about the Global South, even by scholars from the Global South themselves (Castillo 2023, 24). For the context of this book, the social categories of class, gender, caste and religion played a significant role not only for the analysis of discourse but also for the complex positionalities of the knowledge co-producers vis-à-vis the marginalised communities they engaged or solidaritised with. These questions are addressed in the discussion of each case study in Chapters 2, 3 and 4.

Furthermore, Fleschenberg and Castillo emphasise 'the need to navigate research via digital means, new technologies and spaces while remaining mindful of communication, connectivity, resources and agency divides' and 'the need to revisit notions of care, reciprocity and relatedness in research to counter extractive research practices and gazing' (Fleschenberg & Castillo 2022, 498). Strategies to facilitate decolonial and critical research ethics in order to address these challenges include 'slow research', which entails a 'practice of pragmatic solidarity' (Backe 2021, quoted in Fleschenberg & Castillo 2022, 499) and a 'rethinking of authorship' (Fleschenberg & Castillo 2022, 500). Kramer and Schaflechner (2020) similarly call for 'slow-paced and multi-mediated research' in the social sciences and suggest calling this form of critical and creative reflection 'slow theory'.

Set against the global pandemic, the initial research process for this book adapted to the digital landscape. All interviews except those related to the case study on Indian youth climate groups (Chapter 4) took place via Zoom, and the entire process was complemented by digital analyses. Uncertainty surrounding physical research feasibility underscored the need for adaptability in hybrid and flexible research methodologies. Follow-up interviews were conducted at intervals of around six months with some interviewees to capture evolving perspectives and changes. This temporal lens aimed at adding depth to the research, acknowledging the dynamic nature of the subject matter. From the initial contact and interview followed further collaboration with Prarthna Singh in particular. During a three-day academic–activist–artist gathering in Berlin, Singh's presentation of her book (see Chapter 2) and subsequent discussions enriched the research, adding more details and perspectives (Streva et al. 2022).

Finally, in 2023, with the subsiding of COVID-19-related restrictions, a physical six-week research visit to India was possible. There, in-person meetings with my knowledge co-producers Navkiran Natt, Ita Mehrotra and Prarthna Singh fostered joint reflections on the project, its findings and discussions on the form of publishing. A significant segment of the research visit was dedicated to youth climate groups in Delhi and Mumbai. This involved one-to-one interviews, visits to Youth for Climate India's climate library in South Delhi and participant observation, including group and walk-along interviews in events like the global climate strike organised by FFF in Mumbai. An interdisciplinary academic workshop in Delhi further provided a platform to discuss preliminary findings with Indian and international colleagues, enriching the research through collaborative exchange.

Furthermore, within the RePLITO project, we employed a project-specific practice of collaborative peer-reviewing via PubPub to create our Digital Knowledge Archive.[4] This not only meant critical assessment of the prior versions of two out of the three chapters in this book but also guaranteed quality assurance.

After data collection and coded analysis of images, texts and transcribed interviews[5] with the software MAXQDA using a grounded theory approach, the focus shifted to reciprocity. Seeking comments and feedback from my interview and research partners, the process extended to partial co-production of content, hopefully transforming the research into a reflexive and dynamic endeavour acknowledging the interdependence between the researcher and the

4 See https://replito.de/peerreview.

5 I particularly thank Lara Kauter for her support in transcribing the interviews.

researched. I was also deeply inspired by Radhika Gajjala's approach of iterative engagement and collaborative writing (Gajjala 2019).

In essence, the research methodology embraced a holistic and inclusive approach, transcending conventional boundaries by integrating activism, art and academia. It not only navigated pandemic challenges but also fostered a reciprocal engagement with the majority of the knowledge co-producers and attempted to integrate a critical research ethic characterised by decolonial feminist approaches.

Nevertheless, the process of fieldwork also involves the researcher's cultural biography, and it requires an examination of the power relations between the researcher and the people she encounters in during her research process (Parameswaran 2001, 69). Many researchers have written about the limitations of the research process within existing boundaries of nation, race, gender and class (Parameswaran 2001, 71). In the context of this research project, my positionality differed from case study to case study. In general, I established myself as a feminist media scholar in accordance with the objectives and ideologies of the individuals and groups under study. This aspect of my stance facilitated dialogue and collaboration, fostering trust between myself and the participants. However, I occupy a distinct position shaped by my identity as a white female academic at a German university, as well as disparities in age, education and life experiences compared to several interview partners, many of whom were in their early or mid-twenties. The collaboration with the artists Prarthna Singh and Ita Mehrotra as well as with Srijani Datta, who is active in the Indian climate movement, and the former *Trolley Times* editor Navkiran Natt was characterised more by an exchange at eye level due to similar educational biographies and professionalism. Similarities in the social categories of class and gender also facilitated access.

However, reflecting on the implications of my identity as both an ally and an outsider for fieldwork with Indian activists reveals the potential risk of inherent power relations based on the aforementioned hierarchical differences in age, education and, most importantly, social capital due to my affiliation with a research institution in the Global North. This last, of course, provided me with a 'safety net', i.e. I could take a plane back to Germany at any time or lean back in front of the Zoom screen and did not have to deal with the consequences of activism as my knowledge co-producers had to. I recognise that the research process of reciprocity, mutual support and respect described above cannot erase global and individual power imbalances; but it was my approach to ethical research practice in the hope of achieving positive impact, even within asymmetrical power structures and some potentially problematic encounters during the research process.

2 Witnessing in Solidarity: Recording the Legacy of Shaheen Bagh through Visual Art[6]

Introduction

Beginning on 15 December 2019, residents of the neighbourhood of Shaheen Bagh in New Delhi began an indefinite sit-in blockade on the highway following the brutal police crackdown on peacefully protesting Jamia Millia University students. The 101 days of protest in the winter of 2019–2020 against the new Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) were extraordinary in many ways. As media reports and a growing body of research literature documents, the movement featured Muslim women as protest leaders and thus contributed to a shift in the gendered perception of the Muslim minority (Bhatia & Gajjala 2020; Faisal 2020; Hashmi 2022; Kapoor 2022) and to new forms of (feminist) solidarity and re-appropriations of non-violent protest strategies (Bhatia 2021; Sengupta 2021; Rai 2022; Mitra 2023), including digital tools that facilitated the transnationalisation of the movement (Basu 2021; Edwards & Ford 2021; Edwards et al. 2023; Gajjala et al. 2023). With its production of iconic images of students, veiled women and grandmothers opposing a Hindu nationalist state apparatus, Shaheen Bagh became a symbol of resistance and immediately part of a counter-hegemonic national consciousness and memory.[7]

Art, especially street art and performances, came to be a distinct feature of the protest site and was incorporated as means of communicating and building a collective identity (Ghosh 2020). Consequently, several artists took to document-

6 A shorter first version of this chapter has been published in Dastavezi. See Titzmann (2023b).

7 I will not elaborate on the political background and timeline of the Shaheen Bagh protests, as they are well documented elsewhere. For example, two detailed journalistic accounts were instantly published after the movement ended abruptly through the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. See Mustafa (2020) and Salam (2020).

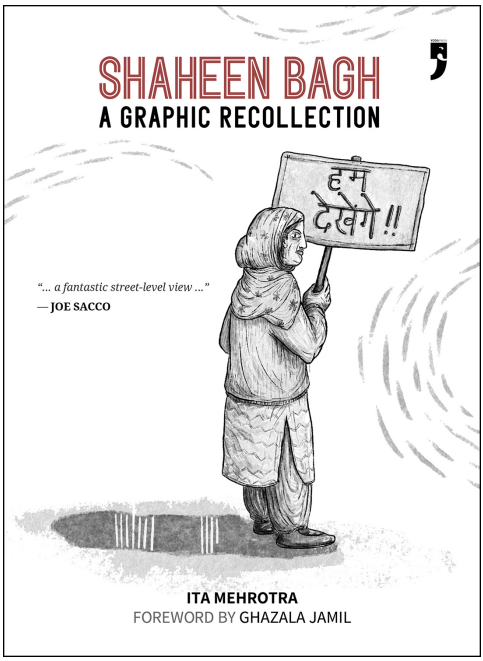


Figure 1. *Shaheen Bagh: A Graphic Recollection* by Ita Mehrotra (2021). © Yoda Press

ing the events. This article introduces the works of two young women artists among the many who stood in solidarity on-site and used their artistic capacities and reach to stand witness and to produce testimonials for future generations. It explores how remembering and mediating the legacy of Shaheen Bagh is central to Ita Mehrotra's graphic novel *Shaheen Bagh: A Graphic Recollection* (2021) (Fig. 1) and Prarthna Singh's photo book *Har Shaam Shaheen Bagh* (2022) (Fig. 2). Whereas photography is a classic visual medium and hundreds of photographs of the events were published in the media, the graphic novel in question is situated in between literature, journalism and visual art in that it tells a story in the style of a report, including interviews and featuring the artist herself on her quest of documenting what Shaheen Bagh was. By means of these two examples, this article investigates practices of visually mediating the legacy of that movement by examining the following questions: *What is solidarity, and how can it be produced and mediated via art and media? Which narrative(s) of Shaheen Bhag do they communicate? What are the predominant visual tropes found in the two works? How do they link gender and resistance in their narratives? Which spaces are opened up by their artistic intervention? How do the artists position themselves and frame their work?*

Methodologically, I carried out a mixed-method visual and content analysis of the two works and conducted qualitative interviews with both artists

Figure 2. *Har Shaam Shaheen Bagh* (2022, 6–7) by Prarthna Singh. © Prarthna Singh

(ca. one hour each) that were enhanced by further personal and email communication in the process of analysis and writing. With support of the software program MAXQDA,[8] I developed code derived from my research questions and applied it in both the textual analysis of the interviews and the visual analysis of the photographs and the graphic novel. I linked my own interpretation with the accounts of the artists and discussed them, considering the existing research literature and central arguments contained therein.

Artistic Expressions in Shaheen Bagh: Catalysts for Solidarity and Contributor to Collective Memory

In the context of Shaheen Bagh, traditional protest media such as leaflets were used alongside digital tools for mobilisation and documentation. Several scholars have examined strategies of digital activism and transnationalisation of the

8 MAXQDA is a software program designed for computer-assisted qualitative and mixed-methods data, text and multimedia analysis.

anti-CAA movement (Bhatia & Gajjala 2020; Basu 2021; Edwards & Ford 2021; Edwards et al. 2021). Singh's and Mehrotra's visual documentations belong to a larger context of integrating art into protest and vice versa (Agrawal 2020). The protest site was vibrating with masses of protestors, with political slogans and speeches. It also came alive through overlapping ways of performative, visual and audible artistic expressions: street art, theatre performances, songs and poetry. Graffiti and murals[9] greeted those nearing the space and were immediately painted over by the government after the protests were disbanded on March 24, 2020 with the onset of the first COVID-19-related nationwide lockdown. 'The white walls of Shaheen Bagh are symbols – of oppression, of erasure and of resistance', writes Adrija Ghosh (2020, 4). Many initiatives, such as an open library in the middle of the protest site or art programmes for children that were taken care of in the makeshift crèche, became symbols of what Shaheen Bagh characterised beyond its immediate political activism: 'Shaheen Bagh was not only about politics, but it was also about art and education, and about the women who braved the Delhi winter and sat with strangers in solidarity against the iron fist of the government' (Ghosh 2020, 3). Adding to that, the protests were marked by a high degree of intermediality, as protestors and observers, journalists and citizens recorded and documented the movement. Digital media was used extensively for circulation, distribution and re-circulation. Mehrotra's and Singh's visual documentation is different than the impromptu on-site art and performance, as their publications were planned and curated and involved longer production process in assembling or drawing. Through that, they combine the dimensions of curating, circulating and claiming memories, as both artists are themselves very active on social media.

Visual activism is one of the central media spaces of resistance (McGarry et al. 2020, 27) in that it 'works to record things, to represent, to signify, to make visible, to argue, to create affect, and the form can be frivolous or meaningless' (McGarry et al. 2020, 24). Visual culture can cut across linguistic and 'speak' about things that are not immediately visible. Herwitz considers French philosopher Jacques Rancière's notion that the politics of dissent are about 'issuing forth new forms of visibility to challenge the state by bringing to light its fault lines and forms of exclusion' (2021, 16) and further argues that 'Rancière's idea finds its perfect home in characterising one of the great possibilities of photography – its ability to render visible that which is otherwise consigned to darkness within a democratic (or other) dispensation' (ibid., 17). The role of

9 Delhi-based Fearless Collective documented their famous mural at Shaheen Bagh on their website. See Fearless Collective.

Figure 3. Instagram post by @ita_mehrotra during the ongoing protests in January 2020 (Screenshot). © Ita Mehrotra

visual art is particularly important in the context of producing protest narratives. Herwitz (2021, 5) writes on the capabilities of visual art: 'Visual art can bring home the raw intensities of reality, in a way that cries out for action'. Writing specifically about the graphic narrative of protest, Salmi (2021) emphasises that these narratives function as 'intermedial texts': 'it is precisely when prose fails, or there are no words to be had, that the intermedial text bears witness to its failure and presents alternative avenues for confronting state force' (Salmi 2021, 171).

The two examples at hand do feature textual components, though. The genre of the graphic novel usually combines text and images and, therefore, sets the narrative. Unlike a conventional novel, the graphic storyline does not narrate everything in detail: certain passages remain purely visual (Salmi 2021). Singh's photos come without captions but are integrated into a larger multimedia project that includes writings. Singh is very active on social media and circulated some of the series' photographs prior to the book launch via her Instagram account (@prarthnasingh) and added text in varying lengths. Ita Mehrotra is active on social media as well and regularly posted drawings from the protest site of Shaheen Bagh on her Instagram account (@ita_mehrotra) before the book was completed and published in 2021 (Fig. 3).

In a recent edited volume, Merrill et al. (2020) examine the 'digital practices of social movements' memory work', focusing on the curation, circulation

Figure 4. Instagram post by @prarthnasingh on Independence Day 2020, almost five months after the protest was dissolved (Screenshot). © Prarthna Singh

and claiming of memories. By 'claiming' they mean the appropriation of – in particular, digital – spaces for counter-histories (Merrill et al. 2020, 17). Although not exclusively digital, the two artists at issue in this article engage in exactly these tactics of curating a living archive, circulating and remediating a narrative that they would like to preserve as cultural memory. Both productions are intended as contributions towards a collective memory of Shaheen Bagh and were thoroughly and thoughtfully curated and are, thus, embedded in the artists' narration of events, aesthetic choice, and political and social positionality as well as within their media practices of circulation (Fig. 4).

Protest and Witnessing: Two Women – Two Books

Prarthna Singh is a graduate from the Rhode Island School of Design and currently resides in Mumbai. Her work explores female identity in contemporary India, within the intersection of gender and nation. Working across digital media, film and video, Singh's photographs have appeared in *The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal* and several other magazines and newspapers. Earlier works include a series of portraits of Indian female wrestlers who later attracted media attention in 2023 for their protest against sexual harassment by the president of the Wrestling Federation of India (Rajvanshi 2023).

Select photographs of Prarthna Singh's photo series *Har Shaam Shaheen Bhag* were first published in the US-American photography magazine Aperture

(summer 2021) with an accompanying article by Kamayani Sharma. Earlier and repeatedly circulated via Instagram, she finally self-published her photo book in 2022 in collaboration with the designers Sameer Kulavoor and Zeenat Kulavoor. It is a multimedia portrait that includes photographs, drawings, songs, letters and other memorabilia.

While the women's portraits are the core of the artists' series, the book also features a comprehensive appendix with translations into English, Hindi and Urdu and further information on the movement. Upon its launch, the book received very appreciative reviews in the press, including *The Indian Express* (Fernando 2022) and the *British Journal of Photography* (Fletcher 2022).

> Har Shaam Shaheen Bagh is my attempt to resist the active erasure of a political moment, one that was brought to an abrupt halt with the onset of the pandemic and one that is scarcely addressed in popular discourse even two years later. This book bears witness to friendship, to love, to the possibility of joy in the face of violence. (Singh 2022, Appendix)

The photo series is the result of Singh's regular visits to the protest site and her interaction with the protesting women of all ages. Several of the women were involved in the creation of the book by contributing writings or drawings.

Also, as the book happened to be published during Ramadan 2022, Prarthna Singh celebrated its launch along with this group of women with an *iftar* [10] in New Delhi (Fig. 5). Forms of reciprocity are integral to Singh's work. The artist writes on the last pages of her book:

> In the first week of January I joined the Shaheen Bagh movement as a protestor. As friendships were struck, and meals were shared, I gradually began to make images. This growing intimacy soon took on a tactile form. For every portrait I made, I created an identical Polaroid or "jadoo ka kaagaz" ("magic paper") as they were playfully renamed, to give the women and children I photographed. A few days in, we had set up an impromptu photo studio, as my documentation became a community exercise. […] Har Shaam Shaheen Bagh was made across several days and nights, over innumerable meals of biryani, warm embraces and tender exchanges. Some of the portraits made on-site have been layered with images of shawls and burqas worn by fellow protestors, to evoke the camaraderie and kinship that formed the essence of the protest. (Singh 2022, Appendix)

She explained how in the process she used different mediums, ranging from Polaroid to disposable camera, medium format film camera, digital camera and her iPhone: 'I also had to be often not visible, because as soon as you have a

10 The meal with which Muslims break their fast at sunset.

Figure 5. Instagram story by @prarthnasingh: Book launch with the ladies of Shaheen Bagh, 2022 (Screenshot by author). © Prarthna Singh

camera in your hand and you're a woman, people also ask you questions. I want to make sure that I'm able to be there, not get caught and taken away somewhere' (Prarthna Singh, personal interview, 21/07/2021) (Fig. 6).

Considering theories of media strategies of social movements, I would like to highlight two aspects of this project in particular: first, the act of self-publishing, which corresponds to the processes of curation, circulation and claiming of memories that Merrill et al. (2020) describe (it also represents a form of being the media and producing a counter-narrative in Cammaerts' [2012] understanding of self-mediation); second is the act of witnessing that precedes the process of self-publishing and corresponds to one of the three distinct (but not mutually exclusive) logics that activists ascribe to their protest actions. The logic of bearing witness to injustice operates through tactics that knowingly break what are considered unjust laws or symbolic provocation. During the process of creating the book, the project website explained:

Figure 6. Prarthna Singh with two girls holding the Polaroid pictures that they took at the impromptu photo studio in Shaheen Bagh. © harshaamshaheenbagh.com

> This book will serve as evidence to the revolutionary spirit of the women of our country, an urgent and necessary document that celebrates the very core of our now endangered secular, democratic values. Two years in the making, our project is now in its final stages. Given today's political climate, as independent artists we have decided to self-publish this body of work to retain complete creative and editorial control. (harshaamshaheenbagh.com, accessed January 11, 2022)

Ita Mehrotra faced similar obstacles in finding a publisher for her graphic novel *Shaheen Bagh: A Graphic Recollection,* which finally was published by independent Yoda Press in 2021. Mehrotra graduated with an MPhil in feminist graphic narratives in contemporary India from the Arts and Aesthetics School, Jawaharlal Nehru University, in 2017. She is a visual artist, arts researcher and educator with published and exhibited works by thewire.in, Zubaan Books, the Goethe Institute, AdAstra Comix and others. She currently serves as creative director of Artreach India, a non-profit arts education initiative for children, young people and women from marginalised communities across India (Artreach India).

Her highly acclaimed graphic novel tells the story of the Muslim women who started the protest at Shaheen Bagh.[11] It is based on conversations and

11 See reviews, i.e. Raina (2022); HT Weekend (2021); Khalid (2021).

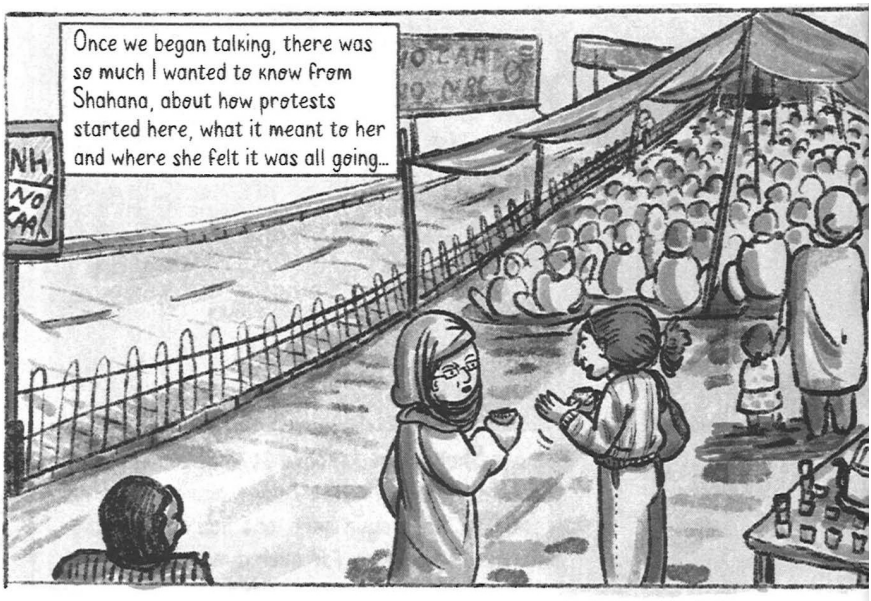


Figure 7. Beginning the conversation with Shahana (Mehrotra 2021, single image from a panel on p. 16). © Yoda Press

interviews and drawings that the artist made during her own participation in the protest (Fig. 7).

Mehrotra's book appears journalistic in its retelling of the story of the protest. With reference to Salmi's (2021) conception of graphic novels as intermedial texts, Mitra (2023, 3) states that 'in utilising a graphic medium for memorialising such protest, the affects used for carrying out resistance through the protest could be portrayed more effectively through using this "intermedial text" rather than through solely prose or the spoken word'. In her excellent analysis of Mehrotra's depiction of strategies of affects of safety and emotional solidarity through sharing food, songs and artwork, Mitra's (2023) explores the interplay between collectivity, mobilising emotions and political effectiveness in depth.

Ita Mehrotra situates herself in a feminist political trajectory. She does so via the genre of the graphic novel, which is rather new in the Indian art world and travelled from Europe to become an elite subculture in India. Mehrotra classifies it simultaneously as an English-speaking, urban niche with a limited readership and a new and flexible genre that allows for experimentation:

> That's exciting also as artists. […] Some comics makers say it is that because there's no long legacy of like a hundred years of comics here, it's open to a

> lot of flexibility of what we want to do at the moment. (Ita Mehrotra, personal interview, 15/10/2023)

She sees comic makers also as digital art pioneers who have been at the forefront of using these social media platforms as radical art tools. Her strategy of illustrating the women's testimonies and conversations, like Singh's photographs, relates to the strategy of self-mediation by creating space for the voices of those who own a protest, sustaining a counter-narrative, and follows – like Singh's work – the logic of bearing witness.

The books by Singh and Mehrotra are not the only visual testimonies of the Shaheen Bagh protests and related events. Several books have been published to record voices and images, among them the widely discussed photo book *Hum Dekhenge: Protest and Pogrom* (2021), curated by Aasif Mujtaba and Md Meharban and published by White Dot Publishers in New Delhi. Sourced from 24 photographers, artists and journalists with over 200 photos, *Hum Dekhenge* comprises photographs from the events that panned out from 12 December 2019 to 22 March 2020 in Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and protests in other parts of the country. The curators included a majority of young (mostly male) Muslim photographers to let a community tell their own story (Das 2022). While the book received praise by many sympathetic commentators, it also generated controversy around the use of deceased Pulitzer-Prize-winning photographer Danish Siddiqui's name. The curators had dedicated the book to him as their 'mentor', apparently without approval of his family (Express News Service 2022).

Hum Dekhenge deviates from the women-centric narratives of Mehrotra and Singh, with one of the curators, Aasif Mujtuba, crediting himself along with Sharjeel Imam as an initiator of the Shaheen Bagh protest (Mujtaba & Meharban 2021, 11). Singh's and Mehrotra's narratives, on the other hand, emphasise the leaderlessness, spontaneity and female-led nature of the protest site. A further difference in the narrative framework chosen for *Hum Dekhenge* is the incorporation of the pogrom against Muslims in Northeast Delhi in February 2020. The book's introduction tells a linear story from the bravery and hope of Shaheen Bagh, distorted and misused by right-wing propaganda which led to the incitement of the brutal pogrom (ibid., 10–15). Collective remembering is the pivotal purpose of curating the photo book, in order 'to ensure that such barbaric subjugation never disappears from our memory' (ibid., 14). The photographs record violence, insurgence, injuries, death and overall injustice, including some graphic images of murdered people and cut-off limbs. In this, the collection decisively differs from the tales of female solidarity and hope that both Mehrotra and Singh document.

Telling a Story of Hope and Solidarity: A Contextualised Visual Analysis

At the centre of the visual imagery in both works are images of protesting women: portrait photography by Prarthna Singh and drawn images of narrating individuals and groups of protesting women in Ita Mehrotra's graphic novel. Singh's photographs acquire even more meaning with the larger context of how the artist produced the series as a process of reciprocity, fun and a personal quest to bear witness to that moment and the women of all age groups involved in it (Fig. 8).

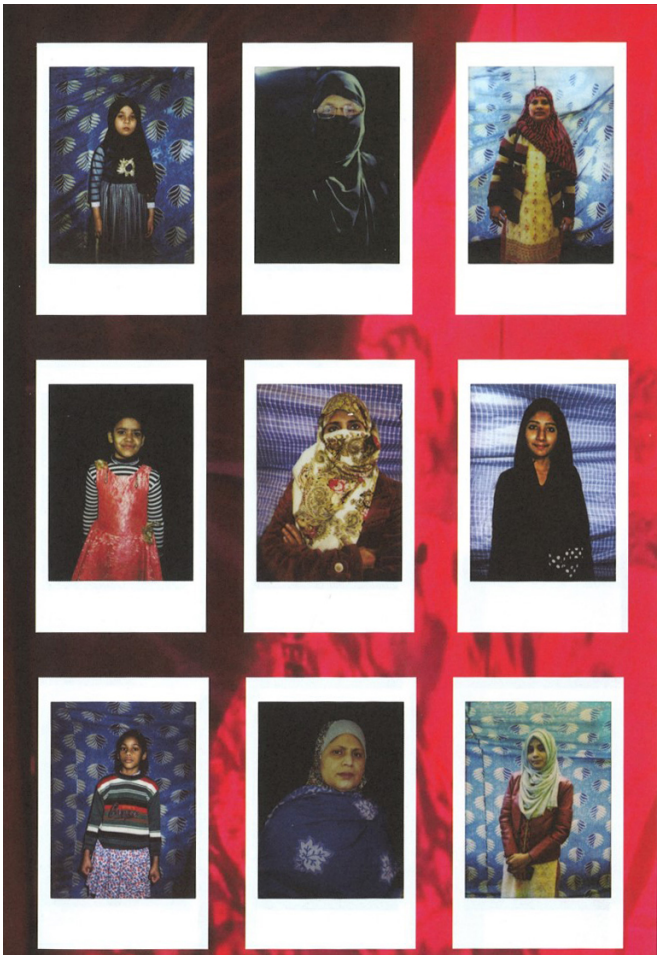


Figure 8. Polaroid images Singh (2022, 26). © Prarthna Singh

Figure 9. Mehrotra (2021, 54). © Yoda Press

On over 100 pages, Mehrotra's graphic novel offers more variety in terms of motifs, but the image of the protesting woman or women dominates here as well. Mehrotra tells her story through the narratives of Shahana and Shafina, two women from Shaheen Bagh, whom we see in close-up portraits, in physical and Zoom conversations with Mehrotra and in action on the protest site. Quotes and depictions of friends, prominent figures of the movement and unnamed co-protestors add to a multi-layered account. Her book also includes drawings of protesting masses where the individual is subsumed.

One particular trope is very prominently represented in both works, that of the inspirational 'dadis', the grandmothers of Shaheen Bagh (Fig. 9 & 10).

Existing research and media discuss how remarkable the presence of older Muslim women over the course of more than three months at Shaheen Bagh was. 'Bilkis Dadi' came to symbolise the entire protest movement, even making

Figure 10. Singh (2022, 71). © Prarthna Singh

it onto TIME magazine's list of 100 most influential people (Ayyub 2020). Bilkis credits the fierce Rani Laxmibai, who fought against the British colonisers during the uprising of 1857, as her inspirational idol (Tarrant 2021). Lal (2023) places the stoic presence of the 'dadis' in a historical continuum of *satyagraha,* the Gandhian strategy of non-violent resistance, while a team of feminist researchers examines Twitter publics to map how the 'dadis' emerged as political subjects through transnational media space, even though they themselves did not directly access social media (Gajjala et al. 2023) (Fig. 11).

By foregrounding not only students but mothers, grandmothers and children, the visual imagery emphasises women of all ages as active agents. The gendered particularity of women leading a protest around the question of who can claim citizenship has additional symbolic value in that it counters structural processes of invisibilising women and not circulating their contributions and voices in political movements and in history in general (Rai 2020; Sengupta 2021; Hashmi 2022; Kapoor 2022; Günther 2023). During one of our conversations, Ita Mehrotra referred to earlier movements like the *Chipko Andolan,* [12]

12 The *Chipko Andolan* (movement) of the 1970s and 1980s has been a leading example of a nonviolent social and ecological movement by rural villagers in the sub-Himalayan region, particularly women, aimed at protecting trees and forests slated for government-backed logging. See also Chapter 4.

Figure 11. Mehrotra (2021, 106). © Yoda Press

where women led the protests but only the names of male leaders appear in history books. Both works intervene exactly at this juncture by making minority women visible and audible in their resistance and document the empowering dynamics of this historical moment. In her introduction to Prarthna Singh's photo series in Aperture, Sharma observes the 'reciprocal gaze' of Singhs' photo subjects in both photographic and political terms as a very familiar one of average women (Fig. 12). She adds that 'Singh's medium-shot compositions emphasise how radical is the very presence of these oft-marginalised, singular bodies on camera, and by extension, as a collective in the agora' (Sharma 2021, 126).

Figure 12. Singh (2022, 78–79). © Prarthna Singh

Atmospheric Recollections: Affective Ties and Joyful Hope

The stories as told by the two artists are aligned to the self-mediated discourse of the movement that can be accessed through empirical research and accounts of protestors.[13] In keeping with the visual staging of emotional warmth, during our conversations both artists spoke of sisterhood, friendship, kinship, honesty, togetherness, empathy and good conversations. In opposition to Indian mainstream media representations that sought to malign and discredit the protestors as 'anti-national' troublemakers, Singh describes a joyful place featuring songs, plays and children. Mitra (2023) remarks that mobilising affects of safety through singing songs is a distinct protest strategy that not only characterised Shaheen Bagh but many non-violent movements before and after it. 'Affects like persuasiveness, affective information, excitement, inspiration, empathy and hope are central to communal singing, the affective quality of protest songs has played a crucial role for centuries in mobilising people for resistance' (Mitra 2023, 8). Singh included hand-written poems and songs in her book (Singh

13 I.e. Salam (2020), Mustafa (2020), Mujtaba & Meharban (2021).

2022, 16; 52; 109). Two songs whose performance has been illustrated in Mehrotra's graphic novel are Varun Grover's *Kagaz Nahi Dikhaenge* [14] and Faiz Ahmad Faiz's *Hum Dekhenge*. The latter became the national anthem of the protest and was sung worldwide in the many global demonstrations against the CAA. It became the name-giver for Mujtaba and Meharban's photo book and, eventually, the cover design of Ita Mehrotra's book. Analysing the presence of these songs within Mehrotra's book, Mitra (2021, 10) argues, '[t]he affects that are in play here are empathy and hope'.

> Going to Shaheen Bagh felt like going to a place where you were going to meet like-minded people, you will be hearing these songs, these young girls would put up street plays, every evening they would have different performers and artists and musicians come and it really gave you a lot of hope. So, I think that idea of within all of what was happening in India at that moment, Shaheen Bagh was really full of colour, it was full of joy, it was full of camaraderie. (Prarthna Singh, personal interview, 21/07/2021)

Visualised Solidarity

Mitra discusses what she calls 'anti-individualistic tactics', such as hospitality, female bonding, confidentiality, defiance (of gender roles), empathy, and love and comradeship as affects in circulation in the protest site and represented in Mehrotra's graphic recollection. She argues that '[t]hese affects are collectively utilised to impart feelings of safety and security, which forms the overall affective strategy of the protest' (Mitra 2023, 4). Not only Mehrotra visualises solidarity through reference to material sharing of clothes, food and care responsibilities: in Singh's portraits, the background of shawls used during the protest refers to the cold winter nights that posed an additional challenge to the perseverance of the protestors, but also to the ethics of care and reciprocal solidarity in keeping each other warm by sharing these shawls (Fig. 13). 'Through the harsh winter, the warmth of shared shawls thrown across shoulders in solidarity became part of the pictorial narrative' (Sharma 2021, 126) (Fig. 14).

Mehrotra draws images of protesting masses and adds their accounts of how people felt 'warm' despite the cold, indicating the affective ties that kept the protestors together and their spirits up. What Mitra (2023) terms 'anti-individualistic tactics' Bhatia and Gajjala call the 'ethics of care', which, they argue, are closely linked to certain practices of 'organic' solidarity that is con-

14 *Kagaz Nahi Dikhaenge* is a poem that Grover wrote and then recited on Twitter in December 2019 to protest the CAA and NRC.

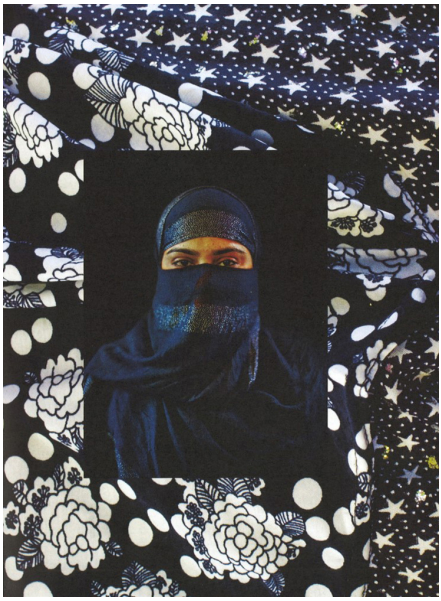


Figure 13. Singh (2022, 13). © Prarthna Singh

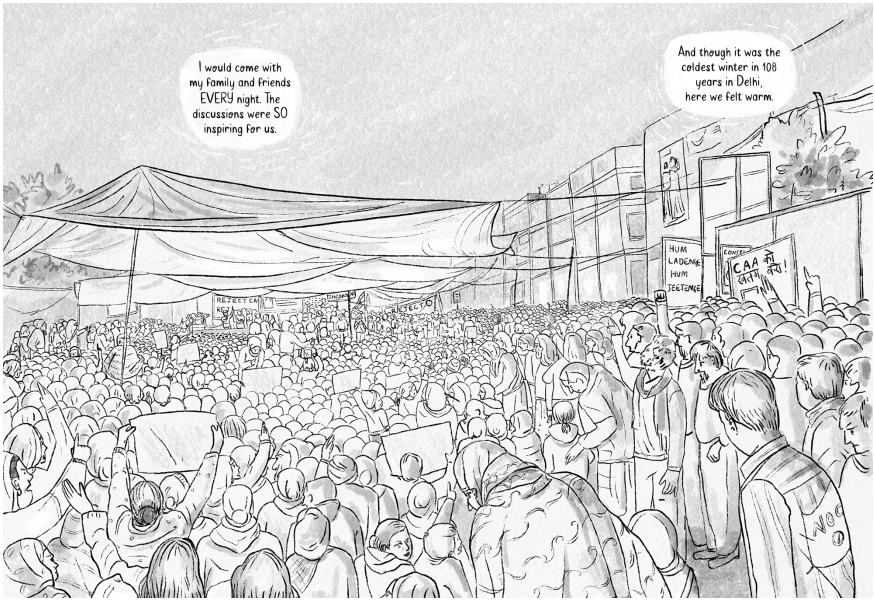


Figure 14. Mehrotra (2021, 52–53). © Yoda Press

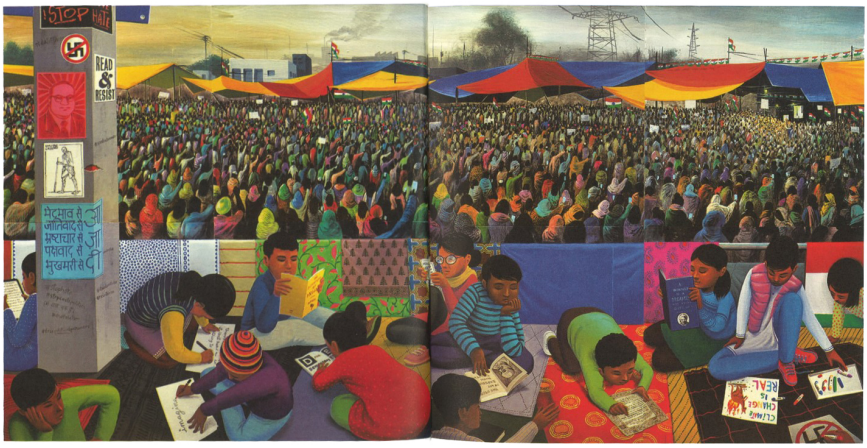


Figure 15. Drawing by Sameer Kulavoor titled *Read & Resist* (2020) in Singh (2022, 40–41). © Prarthna Singh

stituted through sharing of food, care and organisational responsibilities. The protest strategy of mobilising affects through food has its roots in the Sikh religious tradition of *langar*. In several of Mehrotra's images, it is men who prepare tea or food to support the protesting women. 'The use of *langar* by Muslim and Sikh men and women to combat Muslim persecution under Hindu fanaticism recontextualises *langar* in a unique expression of secularism. At the same time, it challenges gender roles in both communities, underlining the importance of seeing Shaheen Bagh as a feminist radical social protest', observes Mitra (2023, 7).

Relating to the aspect of mutually caring for each other, Singh talked about the makeshift crèche (Fig. 15):

> There was a proper site, there was people selling tea, you know like everything kind of organically grew around the site. All the shops in that area were shut, but they had built a makeshift crèche for the children, whose mothers would be at the protest site and the Jamia students were running this incredible crèche. (Prarthna Singh, personal interview, 21/07/2021)

She interprets this as an invocation of local repertoires of solidarity, which Rakopoulos (2016) termed the 're-contextualisation of village-hood' in times of crisis:

> That to me is like the essence of India, you go to somebody's house in India and […] no matter what their social economic background is, they will always, always make sure they have arranged tea or a meal for you. (Prarthna Singh, personal interview, 21/07/2021)

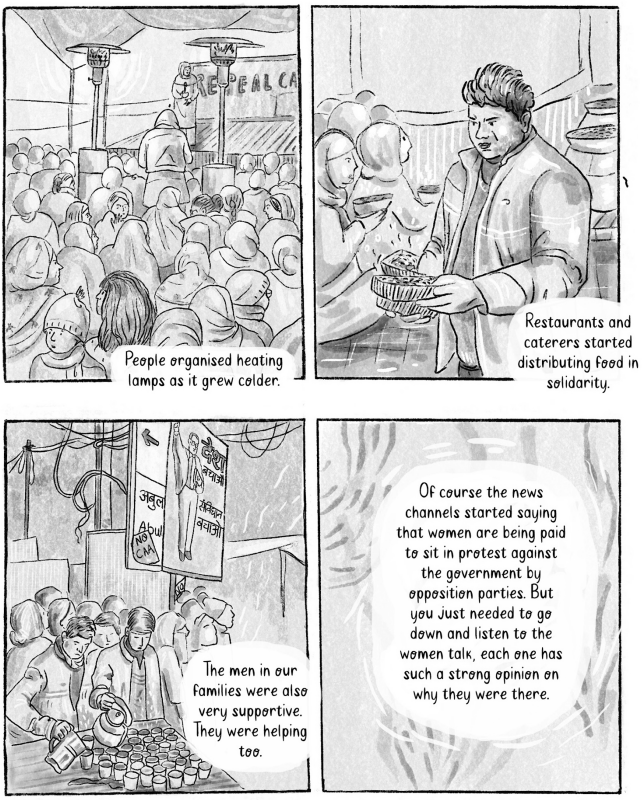


Figure 16. Practices of solidarity and resistance to counter attempts to malign the movement by government and mainstream media. In: Mehrotra (2021, 47). © Yoda Press

In line with Mehrotra's and Singh's account and depiction of Shaheen Bagh, Bhatia and Gajjala conclude: 'Embodying care translated into practising nonviolence at the protest site and challenges the legitimacy of violence enacted by the police, the government, and those supporting the CAA and the NRC in India' (Bhatia & Gajjala 2020, 6299) (Fig. 16).

Understanding the ethics of care as a decisively female way of resistance brings some problematic connotations with it. Günther (2023) discusses how 'body politics' have emerged as a gendered method of protest against the background of patriarchal regulations of female bodies all across the world. Nevertheless, the emphasis of an ethics of care, i.e. food-sharing, childcare and organising in female-led protests, speaks to an essentialised notion of femininity associated with these practices and romanticises care without reflecting on the problematic linking of (unpaid) care work and femininity.

Challenges to Gendered (In)visibility and Religious Stereotypes

The way the women of Shaheen Bagh challenged both the gendered organisation of their own community and the gendered visibility and mobility in public space deserves special attention (Bhatia 2021; Ray 2022; Chopra & Sanyal 2023). The emergence of 'body politics' (Günther 2023) as a decisively gendered way of staging resistance has its roots in the image of women and their fixed social roles that locate the female body in the private sphere. Secondly, Günther (2023, 209) argues that rigid sexual policies to control the population of modern states contributed to the female body being objectified and labelled as something that must be treated and policed by the state. By confronting the state forces physically, the women of Shaheen Bagh embodied resistance to state control on various levels. Bhatia and Gajjala (2020) note that public space in India is not only patriarchal but also Hindu-dominated, and the predominantly Muslim women protesting in Shaheen Bagh used their bodies to break through this logic of visibility. Therefore, it is particularly noteworthy that Muslim women were appropriating the 'hostile' public space and reconfiguring it as an inclusive and democratic place of participation, changing the meaning of public spaces and making them accessible to marginalised people (Fig. 17). The visibility of women in protest movements is not unique; however, the visibility of Muslim women in this particular scenario represents bravery and an attempt to counter global stereotypes of oppressed Muslim women whose men are terrorists (Bhatia & Gajjala 2020, 6293).

> This was just so radical, more radical than feminist groups organising it. […] They're kind of taking over the highway. So, that control of public space to begin with was just mind blowing for anybody in Delhi, not just Shaheen Bagh. As a woman I've grown up in Delhi and I've been here most of my life, I've never experienced that. The liberation from the first time that I walked in to that space, I just couldn't believe what was happening, there was the highway, this huge highway that links Delhi to Noida, is blocked and there's women sitting on the road and […] not just talking against the CAA, but also explaining and putting down really strongly what the country should do, what should Modi do, what should he do with employment and education, universities, protection of women in hostels. (Ita Mehrotra, personal interview, 15/10/2021)

In her narrative, Mehrotra links the particularity of this gendered resistance to the observation that she not only witnessed a protest against a specific issue (CAA) but narrates how the protest went beyond it and generated visions of an alternative to the status quo and even a temporarily lived utopia of inclusivity and inter-religious togetherness.

Figure 17. Mehrotra (2021, 45). © Yoda Press

Singh's work itself is a testimony to her own solidarity towards the women of Shaheen Bagh, and Mehrotra's graphic account includes several passages dealing with solidarity from all over India and across communities – again, especially through the preparation and sharing of food (Mehrotra 2021, 60; 61) and in particular among different minorities (Mehrotra 2021, 83). All these forms of solidarity can be seen as opening up new physical and discursive spaces.

New Spaces

As argued above, the sheer physical presence of Muslim women changed the public space. Shahana, Mehrotra's main interlocutor in the graphic novel, is depicted saying: 'From a place of protest, it grew into a space for democratic dialogue. People from across the country were coming to speak and sit with

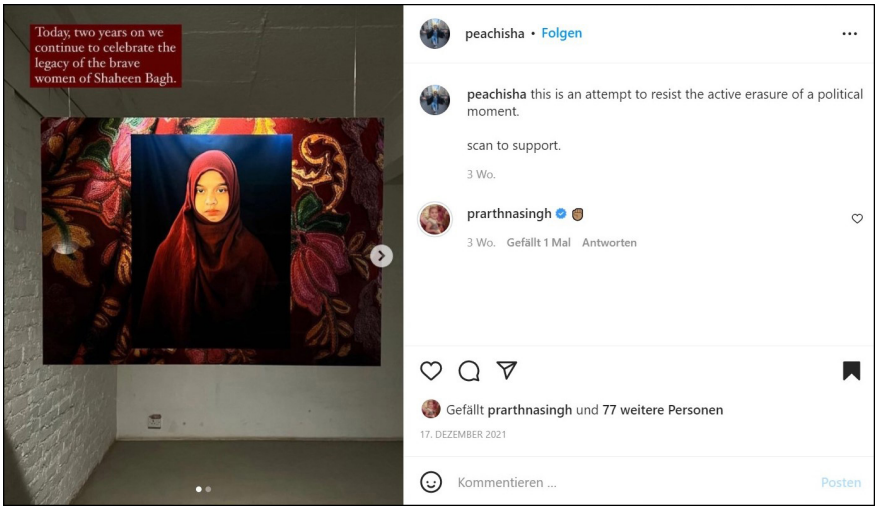


Figure 18. Pop-up display in Delhi of one portrait from Singh's series marking two years since the protest (Screenshot of Instagram post by @peachisa).

US!' (Mehrotra 2021, 51). The artist herself remembered, 'that kind of inverting of public space, I might never see that again. It's almost like this other world opened up for some time, and it allowed for a very rich, democratic dialogue then' (Ita Mehrotra, personal interview, 15/10/2021). Singh's work contributes to this opening of an 'other world' by enabling the self-expression of the women in Shaheen Bagh through reciprocity in her artistic process. She also commits to making these effects last through maintaining new friendships and collaboration beyond the actual temporality of the protest and by reclaiming the public sphere through a pop-up exhibition from the photo series in Delhi in December 2021 (Fig. 18).

> I had hung one portrait in Delhi to commemorate two years of the protest. December 16th is when the protest began, so that's the date we hung the image. I also shared a QR code that took you to the website along with it. Just a way for people to engage with the work and learn more about my forthcoming book. Also, most importantly to keep the memory of the resistance alive (Prarthna Singh, email, 17/01/2022).

Circulation as one of the three key digital practices of social movement's memory work, according to Merrill et al. (2020), keeps the counter-narrative alive and visible and contributes to what Ita Mehrotra similarly aims at by creating room for the diverse voices of the protestors, along with providing historical and political context to the multi-layered story of Shaheen Bagh and documenting sisterhood. In a similar vein, Shalimar Books, a London-based South Asian

bookstore and distributor, launched Ita Mehrotra's graphic novel in the UK in February 2022 and, thus, kept the conversation going. The online launch included a discussion with Ita Mehrotra, Arpita Das of Yoda Press and protestors and activists Atia Khursheed and Safoora Zargar, both of whom were involved in the Shaheen Bagh sit-in and anti-CAA movements. Atia Khursheed is represented as the main narrator Shahana in Mehrotra's book. Safoora Zargar, who, as a student activist from Jamia Millia Islamia University, was arrested and charged with sedition and other serious charges, shared how the book felt like an 'acknowledgement of your struggle', as it makes 'space for yourself in the narrative of the country'.[15]

The medium of comics and graphic narratives itself can be understood as opening up new spaces as well. Salmi (2021) understands graphic novels as intermedial texts that combine visual and textual elements. Mehrotra added that an important aspect of the medium is the blank spaces on pages of comics and graphic novels that allow readers to 'enter the frames' and imagine what might have happened in between. She further stressed that many Indian comics that have appeared lately on social media are personal narratives that otherwise would not appear in artwork.[16] They invite dialogue on social media in that they respond to the political situation very vocally (Ita Mehrotra, personal interview, 15/10/2021). She confirms Mitra's (2023) analysis of art as a locator of emotions and affects by stressing that 'methods of creative expression provide locators for people to remember what they experienced, maybe why they still feel so strongly to have these kinds of online discussions that happen around the book. Or people sharing something about it on social media and hundred others would say what they feel' (Ita Mehrotra, personal interview, 15/10/2021). Her book thus created a memory of feelings. Mehrotra sees an urgent need for more such spaces and an infrastructure of bold publishing houses and courageous academic and intellectual spaces that allow these works to circulate and to a amplify critical voices.

Positionality and Framing: Towards Conclusions

One aim of this article was to go beyond a visual analysis of the works to include the artists' own understanding and framing of their work as acts of aesthetic witnessing, documentation and communicating a political standpoint. Ita Mehrotra describes her artistic process as 'recording histories which otherwise

15 The book launch was organised by The Rights Collective and Shalimar Books via Zoom, 23/02/2022.

16 For further examples of protest comics from India, see Ruya Maps (2020).

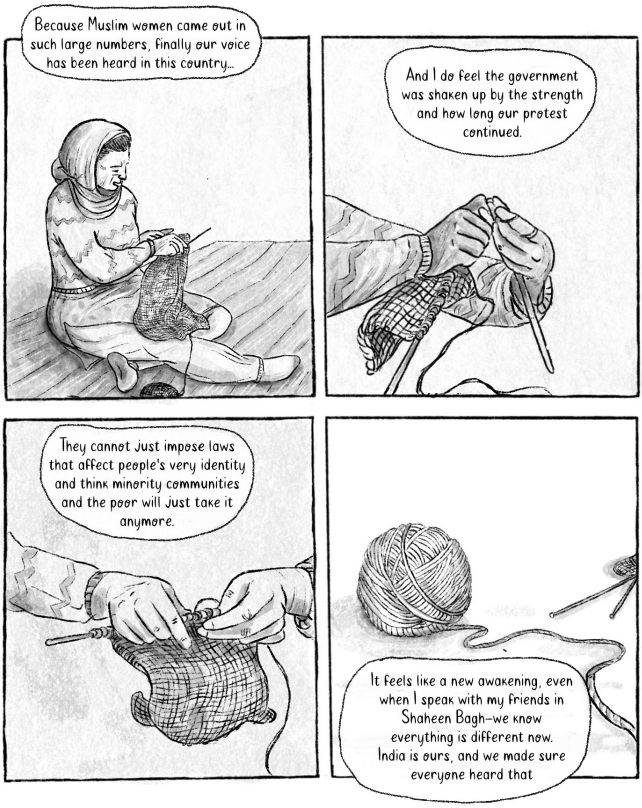


Figure 19. Knitting as a symbol for memory creation (Mehrotra 2021, 104). © Yoda Press

won't be told from the perspective of individuals who have been part of it, otherwise the grand narratives here of the government and mainstream media are very controlling, they have full power at the moment to tell the story' (Ita Mehrotra, personal interview, 15/10/2021). One of the last images in her book distils this claim, with a woman knitting as a symbol for weaving a narrative and creating memory (Fig. 19).

Bearing witness and recording history are also active attempts to counter the co-option of historical narratives by Hindutva forces and their re-writing of India's history by deleting the histories of minorities and subaltern communities and, thus, re-imagining India as a Hindu nation. In addition, Prarthna Singh sees her book not only as a possibility of returning a reflection of the experiences to the women in Shaheen Bagh but also a means to help her and others to find a closure to these events, which ended abruptly with the first wave of COVID-19 and left most of them isolated, unable to continue their conversation in person.

A feminist-inspired notion of solidarity plays a central role in both artistic processes and the artists' framing. bell hooks (1986) defines sisterhood as political solidarity between women. Mostly, however, this 'woman' turned out to be from the urban middle class, if not rich, and mainly English-speaking. She thus represented and suppressed the voices of village women, poor women, Dalit women, Adivasi women, OBC women and marginalised Muslim women who came from a political orientation that required naming one's social location (Patil 2017). Other than the curators of *Hum Dekhenge* (2021), both artists position themselves partly as outsiders through their privileged position in Indian society (not being of a minority, living in a good urban neighbourhood, being educated). Given her privileged background, Singh emphasised how important the collaboration with women from Shaheen Bagh who are firmly located in that social context is for her. Nevertheless, Singh and Mehrotra see themselves as part of a continuum of transnational female solidarity across communities united against the current government and, beyond that, in a global resistance against racism, ecological destruction and gender inequality. Singh dedicates her books with the following words: 'For the women of Standing Rock and Black Lives Matter, the women of the Dandi March and the Chipko Movement, for those at the front lines of India's non-violent protests, this book is an act of remembrance, to preserve the powerful legacy of women at the forefront of historic revolutions' (harshaamshaheenbagh.com). 'Mehrotra's graphic memoir', writes Mitra (2023, 13), 'participates in this feminist collective struggle [of non-violent resistance] as a postcolonial narrative'. In her introduction to Singh's series, Sharma (2021, 126) concludes: 'Viewing these images is a sort of "being there" too, it mimics the act of witnessing as a civic imperative. The anti-CAA protests that took root across India and included secular-minded Indians of all faiths became a national witnessing of the suffering the government inflicted on its citizens.' Ghazala Jamil's foreword to Mehrotra's book ends by stating that Mehrotra 'does not claim to capture all that Shaheen Bagh was. What she achieves instead is to effectively conjure a channel through which we can partake of the rich legacy of Shaheen Bagh that is now our national heritage' (Mehrotra 2021, 9).

By means of documenting and mediating solidarity through aesthetic witnessing, Ita Mehrotra and Prarthna Singh keep alive a particular narrative of Shaheen Bagh that is represented through visual tropes of female agency and multigenerational and cross-community solidarity and care and links gender and resistance as mutually constituting each other. Their visual art and the accompanying narrative testify that other ways of living together in harmony and solidarity are possible and contribute to opening up new spaces through artistic intervention.

3 Mediating Counter-narratives and Solidarity: The Case of *Trolley Times* in the Indian Farmers' Movement[17]

Introduction

The production of counter-narratives by protest movements is an important feature of their internal and external communication strategies. Self-mediation or 'being the media' is a regular response to mainstream media representation that often invisibilises or stigmatises social movements. The 2020–2021 Indian Farmers' Movement against three new agricultural laws offers interesting examples of how the protest was supported medially and the ways counter-narratives and solidarity were mediated. The movement's newsletter, *Trolley Times,* was one such initiative that aimed at countering mainstream media narratives, informing about the cause and building affective ties among protestors and supporters. It did so via a differentiated multilingual transmedia strategy including social media handles, video material, print publications and public performances.

An analysis of the content and imagery of the newsletter reveals several themes that shape the *Trolley Times'* narrative of the Farmers' Movement. In terms of content, the strong anti-capitalist critique directed at the new farm laws and the government in general dominates. On another discursive level, the movement is portrayed as a model for an ideal Indian society via its visions and practices, which include a strong sense of trans-regional and even trans-ideological solidarity and an emphasis on unity and secularism in opposition to the BJP government's divisive agenda. The ideal of secularism in this context must

17 I would like to thank my colleague Fathima Nisaruddin for drawing my attention to *Trolley Times* and my colleagues Nadja-Christina Schneider, Dhanya Fee Kirchhof and Julia Strutz for discussing, reading and commenting on draft versions of this article. The first version of this chapter was published for the RePLITO Digital Knowledge Archive. See Titzmann (2020).

be understood within the Indian framework, which refers to the equality of all religions and the right to practice one's faith rather than a strict separation of state and religion (Bhargava 2002). It is inextricably linked to the concept of unity as propagated in the popular nationalist slogan 'Unity in Diversity' from the first decades of independent India.

By analysing the mediation strategies of *Trolley Times* as well as its content and ideas, mechanisms of circulation, meaning-making and the creation of solidarity will be explored. In the following chapter, *Trolley Times* is not regarded as an isolated initiative but is understood as being embedded within complex dynamics and practices of political mobilisation, solidarity and media engagement.

The Farmers' Movement and Its Demands

The Farmers' Movement or Samyukt Kisan Morcha (Hindi: 'United Farmers' Front'), formed in November 2020, is the term for a coalition of over forty Indian farmers' unions. The movement originated in resistance to three new agricultural laws passed by the Indian government in September 2020. Protests arose immediately and continued with increasing intensity for over a year. In the course of this, there were repeated clashes with the forces of law and order, and after a year, the movement lamented several hundred deaths. The majority of protesting farmers hailed from the agriculture-intensive regions in North India: Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. Protests also quickly emerged from farmers in other parts of the country, as did expressions of solidarity from all sectors of the population. While the overarching solidarity across religion, caste and gender has been emphasised by activists, the dominance of Jat farmers from Uttar Pradesh and Punjab cannot be ignored and is largely explained by the historical background of peasant movements in northern India (Lerche 2021). The participation and unification of numerous, very heterogeneous farm unions from all over India, including those of marginalised communities such as Muslims and Dalits, was still remarkable.

Following the 'Rail Roko' (Stop the Trains) campaign, which interrupted train services in Punjab, the unions organised the massive 'Dilli Chalo' campaign in November 2020, with an endless convoy of tractors and trolleys moving towards the national capital. The march on Delhi was accompanied by a nationwide general 24-hour strike by millions of people across India on 26 November 2020 in support of the farmers' cause, and thousands gathered at various border crossings on the way to Delhi. They turned into month-long blockades along the highways leading from Punjab and Haryana to the capital.

Figure 20. At the protest site in New Delhi. © Rupinder Singh on Unsplash

On 26 January 2021, India's Republic Day, tens of thousands of farmers held a farmers' parade and again drove a large convoy of tractors with trolleys to Delhi. Even though a partial victory was seized in January 2021 when the Supreme Court ordered a stay of the bills, the final withdrawal of the laws was only achieved on 19 November 2021. The ultimate success was celebrated extensively, even though the assumption lingers on that it was merely a tactical move by the government in view of the upcoming regional elections in Punjab and Uttar Pradesh in early 2022.[18]

Why were the farmers against the new laws? In her 'Graphic Story', Vidyun Sabhaney (2021) briefly reviewed the three key points that are critical to understand the urgency of the protest and the origin of the discourse emanating from the *Trolley Times* newsletter:

1. **Abolition of the Minimum Support Price:** The Minimum Support Price (MSP) is a recommended price for basic food items that is part of existing agricultural policies in much of India. This informal 'support price' is recommended by the government and is intended to provide farmers with a minimum profit for the crop while increasing food security in the country. Its abolition would leave farmers completely at the mercy of fluctuating market prices.

18 The Punjab elections were nevertheless won by the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the Indian National Congress (INC), with the AAP providing the new chief minister.

2. **No limit on crop hoarding:** The removal of the current restriction on crop hoarding would mean that prices could be driven up by those with purchasing power, i.e. large companies.
3. **Access of companies to agricultural land is facilitated:** Corporate companies can agree on contract farming and thus get access to the land through loopholes in case of debt, loss of control over cultivation decisions and possibly the land itself.

Against the backdrop of a decades-long ongoing agrarian crisis that has generated high debts for many farmers, severe diseases caused by pesticides and the sad notoriety of increasing numbers of farmer suicides across the country, all three points triggered instant fears of poverty, hunger, job loss, complete neoliberalisation and capitalisation of the agricultural sector.

In their protest against these propositions, farmers invoked metaphors that emphasised their elemental role in providing food for the entire nation. Many slogans used during the rallies characterised them as providers and nurturers: 'No Farmer, No Food', 'grain-givers', *'annadata'* (Hindi: 'provider of food'). In this way, they were able to secure broad support among the population across the country. (Fig. 20).

Protest Aesthetics and Mediation Strategies

Besides its very basic function of a medium for communication, the production of *Trolley Times* broadly falls under what existing research calls protest aesthetics: the performative and communicative expressions of a protest that constitute a movement through the performance of politics (McGarry et al. 2020, 15). Protest aesthetics comprise a material and performative culture with a high capacity to be replicated digitally and shared across social media networks, ideological terrain, state borders and linguistic frontiers. This includes slogans, art, symbols, slang, humour, graffiti, gestures, bodies, colour, clothes and other objects. These create an alternative space for people to engage with politics (McGarry et al., 19). Attempts to theorise protest aesthetics note that the production of protest artefacts, the circulation of symbols and discourse contribute towards the creation of a collective memory of the protest (Cammaerts 2012). Protestors film and photograph what they see and post it on social networking platforms, sometimes in real time, thereby producing an ever-expanding archive of images and self-representations of protest events (Cammaerts 2012, 125) (Fig. 21). With regard to the Farmers' Movement, this archive of protest aesthetics is composed of the stored contributions and images from various media channels, eyewitness accounts, photos and print materials that circulate. It is a rich resource for the following analysis.

Figure 21. At the protest in New Delhi. © Rupinder Singh on Unsplash

I further use Cammaerts' mediation opportunity structure to specifically analyse the mediation strategies at work in the context of *Trolley Times*. Cammaerts describes strategies of producing counter-narratives, of being the media (in the sense of 'indymedia') and of dissemination independently from mainstream media as 'self-mediation' (Cammaerts 2012, 125). Although one can legitimately question the 'self' in his conceptualisation,[19] the strategy of mediating counter-narratives by the movement's activists is at the heart of what constitutes *Trolley Times*.

The *Trolley Times* Newsletter

Against the background of these theoretical considerations, *Trolley Times* offers a most interesting example in terms of both content and circulation. The newsletter, by volunteers from the Farmers' Movement, for the movement, combined

19 The question is where/what the 'self' is in the context of a movement that is formed around an issue and is not about identity. The Farmers' Movement has no clearly defined identity that could serve as a collective 'self'. It is rather similar to leftist and union movements that form around a cause. It is not an identitarian movement and even intentionally blanks out the socioreligious affiliations and backgrounds of its participants. I thank Nadja-Christina Schneider for pointing out this inconsistency.

NEWS FROM TROLLEYS

ਟਰਾਲੀ ਟਾਈਮਜ਼

ਕਿਸਾਨੀ ਤਾਂ ਦੇਸ਼ ਦੀ ਅਰਥ ਵਿਵਸਥਾ

VOICE OF KISAN PROTEST 2020 | TROLLEY TIMES | VOL 1. edition No. III | SATURDAY, 26th DECEMBER, 2020

1 ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਕੌਮ
ਰੂਪੀ ਕੌਰ, ਟੋਰਾਂਟੋ

2 ਘਰ से सिंघू बार्डर तक - एक दिन
कृष्णा कुमार [illegible]

3 ਕੁਝ ਕਦਮ ਗੁਰੂ ਨਾਨਕ ਦੇ ਨਾਲ
[illegible] ਨਲ ਅਤੇ ਟਾਗਰਾ

ਇਤਿਹਾਸਕਾਰ ਮੰਨਦੇ ਹਨ ਕਿ ਇਹ ਉਹ ਬੀਬੀਆਂ ਸਨ ਜਿਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਨੇ ਪਹਿਲਾਂ ਪੌਦਿਆਂ ਨੂੰ ਫ਼ਸਲਾਂ ਦੇ ਰੂਪ ਵਿੱਚ ਪਾਲਣਾ ਸ਼ੁਰੂ ਕੀਤਾ ਅਤੇ ਇਸ ਤਰ੍ਹਾਂ ਖੇਤੀ ਦੀ ਕਲਾ ਅਤੇ ਵਿਗਿਆਨ ਦੀ ਸ਼ੁਰੂਆਤ ਕੀਤੀ।
- ਮ. ਸ. ਸਵਾਮੀਨਾਥਨ

ਕਿਰਤੀ ਕਿਸਾਨ ਮੋਰਚਿਆਂ ਵਿਚ ਔਰਤਾਂ ਦੀ ਹਿੱਸੇਦਾਰੀ

ਹਰਿੰਦਰ ਬਿੰਦੂ ਨਾਲ ਸੰਗੀਤ ਤੂਰ ਦੀ ਗੱਲਬਾਤ

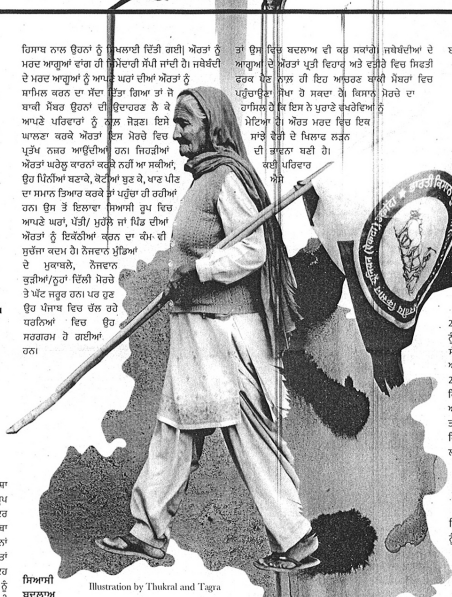
ਲਿਖਤੀ ਰੂਪ: ਜਸਦੀਪ ਸਿੰਘ

ਬੀਬੀਆਂ ਸੰਘਰਸ਼ ਦਾ ਅਸਿੱਧੇ ਰੂਪ ਵਿਚ ਹਿੱਸਾ ਹਮੇਸ਼ਾ ਰਹਿੰਦੀਆਂ ਰਨਾ ਪਰ ਕਿਸਾਨ ਮੋਰਚੇ ਵਿਚ ਉਨਾਂ ਦੇ ਸਿੱਧੇ ਰੂਪ ਵਿਚ ਆਉਣ ਦਾ ਕਾਰਨ ਜਥੇਬੰਦੀਆਂ ਦੀ ਘਾਲਣਾ ਹੈ। ਹਰਿੰਦਰ ਬਿੰਦੂ ਭਾ. ਕਿ. ਯੂ. ਏ. ਉਗਰਾਹਾਂ ਦੇ ਇਸਤਰੀ ਵਿੰਗ ਦੇ ਸੂਬਾ ਪੱਧਰੀ ਆਗੂ ਰਨ। ਉਹ ਪਿਛਲੇ ਤੀਹ ਸਾਲਾਂ ਤੋਂ ਕਿਰਤੀ ਕਿਸਾਨਾਂ ਦੇ ਹੱਕਾਂ ਲਈ ਲੜ ਰਹੇ ਰਨ। ਜਦੋਂ ਮੈਂ ਉਹਨਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਫੋਨ ਕੀਤਾ ਤਾਂ ਉਹ ਸਰੇਹ ਦੀਆਂ ਮੀਟਿੰਗਾਂ ਲਈ ਤਿਆਰ ਹੋ ਰਹੇ ਸਨ। ਇਹ ਗੱਲਬਾਤ ਓਸੇ ਤਿਆਰੀ ਦੌਰਾਨ ਹੋਈ। ਉਹਨਾਂ ਦੇ ਪਰਿਵਾਰ ਨੂੰ ਪੇਪਸੂ ਮੁਜਾਰਾ ਲਹਿਰ ਵੇਲੇ 1950ਵਿਆਂ ਵਿਚ ਜ਼ਮੀਨ ਮਿਲੀ ਸੀ ਅਤੇ ਹੁਣ ਜਦੋਂ ਨਵੇਂ ਕਾਰਪੋਰੇਟ ਖ਼ਿਲਾਫ਼ ਮੁਜ਼ਾਰੇ ਬਣਾਉਣ ਦੀ ਤਾਕ ਵਿਚ ਰਨ। ਉਹ ਇਤਿਹਾਸ ਦੇ ਇਸ ਪੁੱਠੇ ਚੱਕਰ ਨੂੰ ਮੋੜਨ ਲਈ ਤਣੇ ਹੋਏ ਰਨ।

ਲੋਕਡਾਊਨ ਦੇ ਚਾਰ ਪੰਜ ਮਹੀਨਿਆਂ ਦੌਰਾਨ ਬਿੰਦੂ ਜੀ ਨੂੰ ਚਾਰ ਜਿਲਿਆਂ ਦੀ ਸੰਗਠਨ ਪ੍ਰਧਾਨਗੀ ਦੀ ਜ਼ਿੰਮੇਵਾਰੀ ਲਈ, ਜਿਸ ਵਿਚ ਉਹਨਾ ਨੇ ਨਵੀਆਂ ਇਕਾਈਆਂ ਬਣਾਉਣ ਦਾ, ਮੀਟਿੰਗਾਂ ਕਰਵਾਉਣ ਦਾ ਕੰਮ ਕੀਤਾ। ਜਿਸ ਵਿਚ ਉਹਨਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਇਹ ਕਦੇ ਨਹੀਂ ਮਹਿਸੂਸ ਹੋਇਆ ਕਿ ਇਕ ਆਗੂ ਔਰਤ ਹੋਣ ਕਰਕੇ ਉਹਨਾਂ ਦੀ ਗੱਲ ਨਹੀਂ ਸੁਣੀ ਜਾ ਰਹੀ। ਮਰਦ ਇਸ ਗੱਲ ਤੇ ਮਾਣ ਮਹਿਸੂਸ ਕਰਦੇ ਹਨ ਕੇ ਉਹਨਾਂ ਦੀ ਜੱਥੇਬੰਦੀ ਵਿਚ ਔਜਿਹੀ ਆਗੂ ਔਰਤ ਹੈ ਅਤੇ ਔਰਤਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਇਹ ਯਕੀਨ ਹੁੰਦਾ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਉਹਨਾਂ ਦਾਜਤੇ ਲੀਡਰਸ਼ਿਪ ਵਿਚ ਔਗੇ ਜਾਣ ਵਿਚ ਉਹਨਾਂ ਦਾ ਔਰਤ ਹੋਣਾ ਰੁਕਾਵਟ ਨਹੀਂ ਹੈ।

ਹਿੱਸੇਦਾਰੀ

ਖੇਤੀ ਔਰਡੀਨੈਂਸ ਜਾਰੀ ਹੋਣ ਤੋਂ ਕੁਝ ਮਹੀਨੇ ਪਹਿਲਾਂ ਉਗਰਾਹਾਂ ਜਥੇਬੰਦੀ ਨੇ ਪਿੰਡ, ਬਲਾਕ ਅਤੇ ਜਿਲੇ ਪੱਧਰ ਤੇ ਕਮੇਟੀਆਂ ਬਣਾਈਆਂ ਅਤੇ ਔਰਤਾਂ ਦੇ ਖਾਸ ਇਜਲਾਸ ਕਰਵਾਉਣੇ ਸ਼ੁਰੂ ਕੀਤੇ। ਬਲਾਕ ਕਮੇਟੀਆਂ ਨੇ ਪਿੰਡਾਂ ਵਿਚ ਜਾ ਜਾ ਕੇ ਇਕਾਈਆਂ ਬਣਾਈਆਂ ਅਤੇ ਪਰਿਵਾਰਾਂ ਦੀ ਸਮਾਜਿਕ ਸਿਖਲਾਈ ਕਰਵਾਈ ਤਾਂ ਕਿ ਜਦੋਂ ਔਰਤਾਂ ਇਜਲਾਸ ਵਿਚ ਹਿੱਸਾ ਲੈਣ ਜਾਣ ਤਾਂ ਬੰਦੇ ਘਰ ਦੀ ਜਿੰਮੇਵਾਰੀ ਸਾਂਭ ਸਕਣ। ਔਰਤਾਂ ਦੇ ਸਫੈ ਵਿਸ਼ਵਾਸ਼ ਦੇ ਹਿਸਾਬ ਨਾਲ ਉਹਨਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਸਿਖਲਾਈ ਦਿੱਤੀ ਗਈ। ਔਰਤਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਮਰਦ ਆਗੂਆਂ ਵਾਂਗ ਹੀ ਜਿੰਮੇਵਾਰੀ ਸੌਪੀ ਜਾਂਦੀ ਹੈ। ਜਥੇਬੰਦੀ ਦੇ ਮਰਦ ਆਗੂਆਂ ਨੂੰ ਆਪਣੇ ਘਰਾਂ ਦੀਆਂ ਔਰਤਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਸ਼ਾਮਿਲ ਕਰਨ ਦਾ ਸੱਦਾ ਦਿੱਤਾ ਗਿਆ ਤਾਂ ਜੋ ਬਾਕੀ ਮੈਂਬਰ ਉਹਨਾਂ ਦੀ ਉਦਾਹਰਣ ਲੈ ਕੇ ਆਪਣੇ ਪਰਿਵਾਰਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਨਾਲ ਜੋੜਣ। ਇਸੇ ਘਾਲਣਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਔਰਤਾਂ ਇਸ ਮੋਰਚੇ ਵਿਚ ਪੁਰੀ ਤਨਦਾਰ ਆਉਂਦੀਆਂ ਹਨ। ਜਿਹੜੀਆਂ ਔਰਤਾਂ ਘਰੇਲੂ ਕਾਰਨਾਂ ਕਰਕੇ ਨਹੀਂ ਆ ਸਕੀਆਂ, ਉਹ ਪਿੰਨੀਆਂ ਬਣਾਕੇ, ਕੋਟੂਆਂ ਬੁਣ ਕੇ, ਖਾਣ ਪੀਣ ਦਾ ਸਮਾਨ ਤਿਆਰ ਕਰਕੇ ਤਾਂ ਪਹੁੰਚਾ ਹੀ ਰਹੀਆਂ ਹਨ। ਉਸ ਤੋਂ ਇਲਾਵਾ ਜਿਆਸੀ ਰੂਪ ਵਿਚ ਆਪਣੇ ਘਰਾਂ, ਪੱਤੀ/ ਮੁਹੱਲੇ ਜਾਂ ਪਿੰਡ ਦੀਆਂ ਔਰਤਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਇਕੱਠੀਆਂ ਕਰਨ ਦਾ ਕੰਮ ਵੀ ਸੁਚੱਜਾ ਕਦਮ ਹੈ। ਨੌਜਵਾਨ ਮੁੰਡਿਆਂ ਦੇ ਮੁਕਾਬਲੇ, ਨੌਜਵਾਨ ਕੁੜੀਆਂ/ਨੂਹਾਂ ਦਿੱਲੀ ਮੋਰਚੇ ਤੇ ਘੱਟ ਜਰੂਰ ਰਨਾ ਪਰ ਹੁਣ ਉਹ ਪੰਜਾਬ ਵਿਚ ਚੱਲ ਰਹੇ ਧਰਨਿਆਂ ਵਿਚ ਉਹ ਸਰਗਰਮ ਹੋ ਗਈਆਂ ਰਨ।



ਸਿਆਸੀ ਬਦਲਾਅ

Illustration by Thukral and Tagra

ਹੁਣ ਪਿੰਡਾਂ ਦੀਆਂ ਔਰਤਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਇਹ ਭਰੋਸਾ ਬੱਝ ਗਿਆ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਸਰਕਾਰ ਜਿਹੜੀ ਮਰਜੀ ਆ ਜਾਏ ਜੇ ਅਸੀਂ ਜਥੇਬੰਦ ਹਾਂ ਤਾਂ ਕਿਸੇ ਵੀ ਮਸਲੇ ਦਾ ਹੱਲ ਆਪੇ ਲੱਭ ਲਵਾਂਗੇ। ਜਦ ਕਿ ਪਹਿਲਾਂ ਲੋਕ ਰਾਜਸਥਾਨ ਸਿਆਸੀ ਪਾਰਟੀਆਂ ਦੇ ਦਰਵਾਜੇ ਖੜਕਾਉਂਦੇ ਸਨ। ਮਿੰਨਤਾਂ ਤਰਲੇ ਕਰਦੇ ਸਨ। ਹੁਣ ਲੋਕਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਸਮਝ ਆ ਗਿਆ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਸਿਆਸੀ ਤਾਕਤ ਉਹਨਾਂ ਦੇ ਹੱਥ ਵਿਚ ਹੈ, ਨਾ ਕਿ ਹਕਮਰਾਨ ਪਾਰਟੀਆਂ ਦੇ। ਲੋਕਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਕਾਰਪੋਰੇਟ ਘਰਾਣੇ ਅਦਾਨੀ ਅੰਬਾਨੀ ਕੋਣ ਨੇ, ਉਹ ਕੋਂਟਰੈਕਟ ਖੇਤੀ ਵਿਚ ਕਿਉਂ ਕਰਨਾ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਨੇ, ਇਸ ਨਾਲ ਲੋਕਾਂ ਦੀਆਂ ਜਮੀਨਾਂ ਕਿਵੇਂ ਖੁੱਸਣਗੀਆਂ ਬਾਰੇ ਪਤਾ ਲੱਗ ਗਿਆ ਹੈ। ਕੁਦਰਤੀ ਸਰਮਾਏ ਅਤੇ ਦੇਸ਼ ਦੇ ਵਿਕਮਿਤ ਢਾਂਚੇ ਉਤੇ ਕਬਜ਼ੇ ਦੀਆਂ ਇਹਨਾਂ ਚਾਲਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਲੋਕ ਸਿਆਣਣ ਗਏ ਹਨ। ਇਸੇ ਕਾਰਪੋਰੇਟ ਘਰਾਣੇ ਕਿਵੇਂ ਪੰਜਾਬ ਦੀ ਸਰਕਾਰ ਨੂੰ ਖਰੀਦ ਕੇ ਲੋਕਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਹਥਿਆਉਣ ਲੱਗੇ ਹੋਏ ਸਨ, ਇਹ ਵੀ ਲੋਕਾਂ ਨੇ ਇਹ ਵੀ ਜਾਣ ਲਿਆ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਸਕੂਲ, ਹਸਪਤਾਲ, ਸੜਕਾਂ, ਰੇਲਾਂ ਸਾਡੇ ਸਾਂਝੇ ਹਨ। ਲੁਮੈਨ ਫ਼ੋਕਸ ਸਾਡੇ ਹਨ। ਉਹਨਾਂ ਵਿਚ ਇਸ ਸਾਂਝੇ ਸਰਮਾਏ ਵਾਸਤੇ ਮੋਹ ਜਾਗ ਪਿਆ ਹੈ ਤੇ ਨਾਲ ਹੀ ਇਸ ਨੂੰ ਬਚਾਉਣ ਦੀ ਤਾਂਘ ਵੀ।

ਦਖਦੇਰੇ

ਸਮਾਜ ਦੇ ਵਿਚ ਔਰਤ ਮਰਦਾ ਦਾ ਦਖਦੇਰਾ ਹੈ। ਪਰ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਇਹ ਸਮਝਣਾ ਚਾਹੀਦਾ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਔਰਤ ਮਰਦ ਇਕ ਦੂਜੇ ਦੇ ਦੁਸ਼ਮਣ ਨਹੀਂ ਬਲਕਿ ਦੁਸ਼ਮਣ ਸਮਾਜ ਦਾ ਪੁਰਾਣਾ ਨਾਬਰਾਬਰੀ ਵਾਲਾ ਢਾਂਚਾ ਹੈ, ਜਦੋਂ ਅਸੀਂ ਹਕੂਮਤ ਤੇ ਜਾਇਜ਼ੇ ਲੈਣ ਲੱਗਦੇ ਹਾਂ ਤਾਂ ਉਸ ਵਿਚ ਬਦਲਾਅ ਵੀ ਕਰ ਸਕਾਂਗੇ। ਜਥੇਬੰਦੀਆਂ ਦੇ ਆਗੂਆਂ ਦੇ ਔਰਤਾਂ ਪ੍ਰਤੀ ਵਿਹਾਰ ਅਤੇ ਵਤੀਰੇ ਵਿਚ ਸਿਫਤੀ ਫ਼ਰਕ ਪੈਣ ਨਾਲ ਹੀ ਇਹ ਆਚਰਣ ਬਾਕੀ ਮੈਂਬਰਾਂ ਵਿਚ ਪਹੁੰਚਾਉਣਾ ਸੌਖਾ ਹੋ ਸਕਦਾ ਹੈ। ਕਿਸਾਨ ਮੋਰਚੇ ਦਾ ਹਾਸਿਲ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਇਸ ਨੇ ਪੁਰਾਣੇ ਢਾਂਚਰੇਵਿਆਂ ਨੂੰ ਮੇਟਿਆ ਹੈ। ਔਰਤ ਮਰਦ ਵਿਚ ਇਕ ਸਾਂਝੇ ਵੈਰੀ ਦੇ ਖਿਲਾਫ਼ ਲੜਨ ਦੀ ਭਾਵਨਾ ਬਣੀ ਹੈ। ਕਈ ਪਰਿਵਾਰ ਐਸੇ

ਈਸਾ ਮਸੀਹ ਨੂੰ ਸੂਲੀ 'ਤੇ ਚਾੜ੍ਹ ਦਿੱਤਾ ਗਿਆ। 21 ਨਵੰਬਰ ਨੂੰ ਗਦਰ ਪਾਰਟੀ ਦੇ ਬਾਨੀ ਬਾਬਾ ਸੋਹਣ ਸਿੰਘ ਭਕਨਾ ਦੀ ਵੀ ਬਰਸੀ ਸੀ, ਸਿਹਤੇ 1930 ਵਿਆਂ ਵਿਚ ਕੁਲ ਹਿੰਦ ਕਿਸਾਨ ਸਭਾ ਦੇ ਪ੍ਰਧਾਨ ਰਹੇ ਅਤੇ ਜਿਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਕਿਸਾਨ ਮੋਰਚਿਆਂ ਦੌਰਾਨ ਕਈ ਵਾਰ ਕੈਦਾਂ ਵੀ ਕੱਟੀਆਂ। ਇਸ ਕਿਸਾਨ ਸਭਾ ਦੇ ਕਿੰਨੇ ਹੀ ਜੱਥੇ ਅੱਜ ਵੀ ਇਸ ਕਿਸਾਨ ਮੋਰਚੇ ਦਾ ਹਿੱਸਾ ਹਨ। ਸ਼ਹੀਦਾਂ ਦੀਆਂ ਇਹ ਯਾਦਗਾਰੀ ਪੌਦ ਦੀਆਂ ਦਿਹਨਾਂ ਠੰਡੀਆਂ ਰਾਤਾਂ ਵਿਚ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਜ਼ਾਲਿਮ ਨਾਲ ਲੜਦੇ ਰਹਿਣ ਦਾ ਬਲ ਬਖ਼ਸ਼ਦੀਆਂ ਹਨ ਅਤੇ ਹਰ ਹਾਲ ਵਿਚ ਮੋਰਚੇ ਉਤੇ ਡਟੇ ਰਹਿਣ ਦਾ ਸੁਨੇਹਾ ਦਿੰਦੀਆਂ ਹਨ। ਮਾਤਾ ਗੁਜਰੀ ਵਰਗੀਆਂ ਮਾਂਵਾਂ ਸਾਡੇ ਅੰਗ ਸੰਗ ਹਨ, ਦਸਮੇਸ਼ ਪਿਤਾ ਦੇ ਅਖ਼ਰਿਣਤ ਪੁੱਤਰ ਭਰਾਵਾਂਧਾਰੀ ਹਾਕਮਾਂ ਖ਼ਿਲਾਫ਼ ਲੜਾਈ ਵਿਚ ਡਟੇ ਹੋਏ ਹਨ। ਜੇ ਕੇਂਦਰ ਸਰਕਾਰ ਦੇ ਚੱਲੇ ਇਸੇ ਤਰ੍ਹਾਂ ਲੋਕ ਦੇਖੀ ਰਹੇ ਤਾਂ, ਇਤਿਹਾਸ ਵਿਚ ਪ੍ਰਧਾਨ ਮੰਤਰੀ ਨਰਿੰਦਰ ਮੋਦੀ ਦਾ ਨਾਂਅ ਵੀ ਔਰਗਜ਼ੇਬ ਅਤੇ ਬਦਨਾਮ ਰੋਮਨ ਬਾਦਸ਼ਾਹਾਂ ਵਰਗੇ ਜ਼ਾਲਿਮਾਂ ਦੀ ਸੂਚੀ ਵਿਚ ਸ਼ਾਮਲ ਕੀਤਾ ਜਾਵੇਗਾ।

22 ਦਸੰਬਰ ਨੂੰ ਸਰਕਾਰ ਨੇ ਇਕ ਵਾਰ ਫੇਰ ਕਿਸਾਨ ਜਥੇਬੰਦੀਆਂ ਨੂੰ ਗੱਲਬਾਤ ਕਰਨ ਵਾਸਤੇ ਇਕ ਚਿੱਠੀ ਭੇਜੀ। ਅਜਿਹੀਆਂ ਫੋਕੇ ਸੱਦਿਆਂ ਨਾਲ ਸਰਕਾਰ ਭਰਮ ਪੈਦਾ ਕਰਨਾ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੀ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਅਸੀਂ ਤਾਂ ਤਿਆਰ ਹਾਂ ਪਰ ਕਿਸਾਨ ਗੱਲਬਾਤ ਤੋਂ ਮੁਨਕਰ ਰਨ। 23 ਦਸੰਬਰ ਦੇ ਕਿਸਾਨ ਦਿਹਾੜੇ ਵੇਲੇ ਕਿਸਾਨਾਂ ਨੇ ਮੰਗ ਕੀਤੀ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਕੇਂਦਰ ਸਰਕਾਰ ਮੁਡ ਮੁਡ ਸੋਧਾਂ ਦਾਝਾ ਪੁਰਾਣਾ ਰਾਗ ਅਲਾਪਣ ਦੀ ਥਾਂ ਇੰਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਕਾਨੂੰਨਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਰੱਦ ਕਰਨ ਲਈ ਕੋਈ ਠੋਸ ਤਜਵੀਜ਼ ਲਿਆਵੇ। ਸੰਘਰਸ਼ ਨੂੰ ਹੋਰ ਤਿੱਖਾ ਕਰਨ ਵਾਸਤੇ ਕਿਸਾਨ ਜਥੇਬੰਦੀਆਂ ਨੇ ਕਈ ਐਲਾਨ ਕੀਤੇ ਹਨ। ਇੰਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਲੜੀਵਾਰ ਭੁੱਖ ਹੜਤਾਲ, 27 ਦਸੰਬਰ ਨੂੰ ਪ੍ਰਧਾਨ ਮੰਤਰੀ ਦੀ 'ਮਨ ਕੀ ਬਾਤ' ਦਾ ਤਾੜੀਆਂ ਅਤੇ ਥਾਲੀਆਂ ਵਜਾ ਕੇ ਵਿਰੋਧ ਕਰਨਾ, 3 ਦਿਨ ਲਈ ਹਰਿਆਣਾ ਦੇ ਟੋਲ ਮੁਫ਼ਤ ਕਰਵਾਉਣਾ ਅਤੇ ਬਾਕੀ ਬਚੇ ਸ਼ਾਹਰਾਹਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਜਾਮ ਕਰਨਾ ਸ਼ਾਮਿਲ ਹਨ।

ਇਸ ਤੋਂ ਇਲਾਵਾ ਪੰਜਾਬ ਵਿਚ ਲੋਕ ਰਿਲਾਇੰਸ ਦੇ ਫ਼ੋਨ ਟਾਵਰਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਬੰਦ ਕਰ ਰਹੇ ਹਨ। ਮਹਾਰਾਸ਼ਟਰ ਤੋਂ ਵੀ ਕਿਸਾਨਾਂ ਦੇ ਜਥੇ ਆ ਰਹੇ ਹਨ। ਹਰਿਆਣੇ ਵਿੱਚ ਕਿਸਾਨ ਜਗ੍ਹਾ ਜਗ੍ਹਾ ਭਾਜਪਾਈਆਂ ਨੂੰ ਘੇਰ ਰਹੇ ਹਨ। 29 ਦਸੰਬਰ ਨੂੰ ਬਿਹਾਰ ਦੀ ਰਾਜਧਾਨੀ ਪਟਨਾ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਵਿਖੇ ਕਿਸਾਨ ਜਗ੍ਹਾ ਜਗ੍ਹਾ ਭਾਜਪਾਈਆਂ ਵਲੋਂ ਇਕ ਵਿਸ਼ਾਲ ਰੋਸੀ ਤੇ ਮੁਜ਼ਾਹਰਾ ਕਰਨ ਦੀਆਂ ਤਿਆਰੀਆਂ ਜੋਰਾਂ 'ਤੇ ਹਨ। ਕਿਸਾਨ ਮੋਰਚੇ ਦੇ ਹੱਕ ਵਿਚ ਬਾਹਰਲੇ ਮੁਲਕਾਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਵੀ ਜੋਰਦਾਰ ਆਵਾਜ਼ ਬੁਲੰਦ ਹੋ ਰਹੀ ਹੈ ਅਤੇ ਭਾਰਤੀ ਦੂਤਾਵਾਸਾ ਨੂੰ ਘੇਰਿਆ ਜਾ ਰਿਹਾ ਹੈ। ਇਹ ਸਭ ਕਿਸਾਨ ਅੰਦੋਲਨ ਦੇ ਪ੍ਰਭਾਵ ਦਾ ਦਾਇਰਾ ਫੈਲਣ ਤੇ ਗਹਿਰਾ ਹੋਣ ਦਾ ਹੀ ਪ੍ਰਮਾਣ ਹੈ, ਪ੍ਰਤੱਖ ਹੈ ਮੋਦੀ ਸਰਕਾਰ ਉਤੇ ਜਨਤਕ ਦਬਾਅ ਨਿਰੰਤਰ ਵੱਧ ਰਿਹਾ ਹੈ। ਟਰਾਲੀ ਟਾਈਮਜ਼ ਜਸਬੀਰ ਸਿੰਘ ਛਿੰਦਾ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਪੱਤਰਕਾਰ ਨਾਲ ਕੀਤੀ ਬਦਸਲੂਕੀ ਦੀ ਸਖਤ ਨਿਖੇਧੀ ਕਰਦਾ ਹੈ। ਹੁਕਮਰਾਨ ਪਾਰਟੀਆਂ ਲੋਕਾਂ ਦੇ ਸਵਾਲਾਂ ਤੋਂ ਭੱਜ ਰਹੀਆਂ ਹਨ।

ਸਾਰੇ ਵੀਰਾਂ ਭੈਣਾਂ - ਮਾਸ ਕਰ ਨੌਜਵਾਨਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਸਾਡੀ ਬੇਨਤੀ ਹੈ - ਇਸ ਵਾਰ ਨਵਾਂ ਸਾਲ ਦਿੱਲੀ ਮੋਰਚੇ ਉਤੇ ਮਨਾਇਆ ਜਾਵੇ। ਇਸ ਵਾਰ ਨਵਾਂ ਸਾਲ ਕਿਸਾਨ ਸੰਘਰਸ਼ ਦੇ ਨਾਮ!

ਮੋਰਚੇ ਦੀ ਚੜ੍ਹਦੀਕਲਾ ਦਾਸੀਵ ਆਸਵੰਦ
ਟਰਾਲੀ ਟਾਈਮਜ਼ ਟੀਮ।

ਮਹਾਰਾਸ਼ਟਰ ਤੋਂ ਤੁਰੇ ਕਿਸਾਨਾਂ ਦਾ ਜੋਸ਼ੀਲਾ ਜੱਥਾ ਅੱਜ ਰਾਤ ਸ਼ਾਹਜਹਾਂਪੁਰ ਵਾਲੇ ਮੋਰਚੇ ਉਤੇ ਰਾਜਸਥਾਨ, ਹਰਿਆਣਾ ਅਤੇ ਗੁਜਰਾਤ ਤੋਂ ਆਏ ਮੋਰਚੇ ਤੇ ਡਟੇ ਆਪਣੇ ਕਿਸਾਨ ਭਰਾਵਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਜੱਫੀਆਂ ਪਾਉਣ ਆ ਪਹੁੰਚਿਆ ਹੈ। ਪਰਸੋਂ ਤੋਂ ਹੀ ਅਸੀਂ ਉਹਨਾਂ ਦੇ ਅਰਾਮ ਲਈ ਤਿਆਰੀਆਂ ਚ ਰੁੱਝੇ ਹੋਏ ਸੀ ਅਤੇ ਚਾਅ ਨਾਲ ਉਡੀਕ ਰਹੇ ਸੀ। ਤਗੜ ਸਿੰਘ ਤੇ ਸਿਵਰਾਮ ਰਾਜਗੁਰੂ ਦੀ ਜੰਦੀ ਪੈ ਗਈ ਹੈ। ਹੁਣ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਜਿੱਤ ਤੋਂ ਥਿਰਤਰ ਮਾਦੀ ਦਾ ਲਾਲ ਰੰਗ ਲੁ!

Figure 22. *Trolley Times*, ed. 22. © Trolley Times

journalistic counter-narratives in the style of 'indymedia' and artistic expression in support and reflection of the movement. It was published bilingually in Hindi and Punjabi, and the first three editions were translated by the editorial team into English, followed later by a published collection of select translated articles in English. *Trolley Times* put out 22 editions at irregular intervals within one year (Fig. 22). Its first edition was published on 18 December 2020; its last, on 9 December 2021. The newsletter's publications ended with the perceived victory of the movement, with the Modi government taking back the laws on 19 November 2021.

The following observations are mainly based on an in-depth analysis of the first three editions' English versions (eds 1–3) and on two interviews with *Trolley Times* co-editor Navkiran Natt.[20]

Navkiran Natt is a dentist by profession and also has a degree in film studies, but since 2020, she has been what Rohit Kumar from *The Wire* has called an *andolanjeevi* (professional female activist) at the Farmers' Movement. She comes from a family of activists, with both her parents being involved in the Punjab peasant movement for decades. Her mother, Jasbeer Kaur, was one of the leading activists in the protests against the three farm bills. At the Tikri protest site, Navkiran Natt ran a library, organised film screenings, gave speeches and founded *Trolley Times* with a group of young volunteers.

Mediation Strategies

In line with Cammaerts' notion of 'self-mediation', *Trolley Times'* major aim was to be a voice of the protestors and to publish counter-narratives to the government's framing and mainstream media reporting, which were, with the exception of Punjabi media, perceived as biased and anti-farmer. The goal to provide real news amidst fake news resulted in a kind of 'battle of narratives' (Singh 2020, 1), with the 'BJP troll army' on one side and the activists' accounts on the other. Images and testimonies of a peaceful, non-violent protest helped to justify the movement and symbolised an alternative to the violent, discriminatory ways of the government and police. This was carefully integrated into the self-representation of the movement: 'The peaceful nature of the agitation has ensured that the narrative continues to remain in the favor of farmers' (Singh 2020, 1).

20 An edited version of the first interview with Navkiran Natt is available on YouTube. See Natt & Titzmann (2021).

Figure 23. Newspaper delivery by bicycle © Ravi Sharma on Unsplash

To spread the farmers' self-narrative, it was essential to ensure circulation. *Trolley Times'* first mode of distribution was a printed newsletter at the protest sites (Fig. 23). Starting with 1,000 copies, they eventually reached 7,000. According to Navkiran Natt, the target audience was rural elderly Indians who are not fluent in reading English media. This also explains the focus on publishing in Hindi and the regional language Punjabi, which is the mother tongue of many protesting farmers.

Navkiran Natt recalled a certain nostalgia attached to producing print media, as newspapers are the oldest mass medium. Furthermore, she mentioned the rural target audience as a decisive factor to not limit their initiative to an online platform. Particularly during the height of the protests, internet connectivity was weak and only partially accessible from the protest sites. Another intention was to create a sense of collectiveness through the shared reading and discussing of the newsletter. The volunteers distributed one copy per trolley to motivate groups of protestors to engage with each other and the writings in *Trolley Times.* Navkiran Natt described the particularities of the print medium as follows:

> Mobile phone, tablets, iPad and all that, it made that experience [of reading] very individualistic. Which is in a way very lethal for organising the masses, because when you are experiencing things individually, you don't get that collective sense which you get while you are sitting together and discussing one particular agenda or one particular political issue. (Navkiran Natt, personal interview via Zoom, 08/07/2021)

Her assessment here is entirely consistent with the assumption that solidarity collectivises what would otherwise remain individual experiences and emotions and, in this way, becomes an essential motivation for joint action (Stewart and Schultze 2019, 100251). Thus, the collective reading of *Trolley Times* was meant to help forge these necessary solidarities to support the movement. Navkiran Natt also saw the joint creation of publications as central to political activism and explained how the editorial team was particularly keen on involving young people to facilitate a learning experience of basic forms of activism. In emphasising the important role of publications for a movement, she also drew a connection to historical movements such as the Ghadar Party, which revolved around a publication.[21]

Parallel to the classic print medium, the editors followed a cross-media strategy, with the maintenance of a website that included all editions as PDF downloads, social media channels (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) with additional postings and a video production called 'Trolley Talkies' via YouTube. From the initial editors, circulation was taken into the hands of people who wanted to publish the newsletter and distribute it in their neighbourhoods. Navkiran Natt explained that they simply asked people to not change any content; otherwise, the newsletter could be re-published by anyone. She further emphasised the importance of social media in reaching a wider audience and a very engaged diaspora. *Trolley Times* had more than 80,000 followers collectively on its social media handles.[22]

Social media speaks to what Papacharissi has called 'affective publics' (Papacharissi 2014): publics created through emotional and affective communication via images or texts that touch people's heart and soul. She argues that

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21 The movement, which came to be known as the Ghadar Party, initially consisted of Indians from the North American diaspora who advocated for India's independence from the British colonial regime. It became an international political movement and spread to India and Indian diaspora communities around the world. Its main activities took place between 1913 and 1917, while the party was not formally dissolved until 1948. The movement took its popular name Ghadar (Urdu: 'rebellion') from the vernacular newspaper *Hindustan Ghadar*, launched in coordination with the Hindi Association of the Pacific Coast. See also Oberoi (2009).

22 Facebook: 13,000 followers; Twitter: 11,600 followers; Instagram: 58,500 followers (25/01/2022).

Figure 24. Shahmukhi translation of *Trolley Times* ed. 11. © Trolley Times

social media does not make revolutions, but it does give an emergent, storytelling public its own means to empathise with events, often by making participants part of the unfolding story. Technologies facilitates networks, but it is our stories that affectively connect us. That was exactly what *Trolley Times* did: by giving protesters the space to share their stories, thoughts and opinions, it fostered an affective community.

The role of language is significant in achieving this affective appeal. As already mentioned, the use of regional languages over English facilitated access to a wider audience. After the initial translations by the editors themselves, more people volunteered to translate *Trolley Times* into other Indian languages, i.e. Bengali, Malayalam and Marathi, but also into French and Spanish. Most of these volunteers were not known to the editorial team. During our first interview, Navkiran Natt mentioned interesting acts of solidarity in the form of distributing and translating the newsletter. For instance, volunteers in Pakistan translated it from the (original) Indian Gurmukhi script for Punjabi into the Shahmukhi script, in which Punjabi is written in Pakistan (Fig. 24). Navkiran explained this engagement with the many cultural, social and geographical similarities across the border and a shared issue of agrarian crisis.

Narratives of Solidarity

Creating avenues for self-mediation and counter-narratives is one way of establishing solidarity with the Farmers' Movement. Rakopoulos conceives of solidarity as a concept that bridges – 'that is, captures loosely and yet in tension – diverse modes of practices, forms of sociality and mechanisms of envisioning future prospects for people's lives. It links diverse networks of people and sometimes contradictory meanings' (Rakopoulos 2016, 142). Solidarity as a 'bridge-concept' thus describes a perceived unity that spans ideologies and social and regional categories. Similarly, McGarry et al. links the enactment or performance of solidarity to 'different voices being heard' (McGarry et al. 2020, 16).

Figure 25. Protesting women. © Rupinder Singh on Unsplash

In the discourse in and around *Trolley Times,* people often described the Farmers' Movement as bringing communities of different religions and occupations together (i.e. farmers and workers), as being trans-regional and trans-ideological is emphasised, as is the significant involvement of women (Fig. 25). *Trolley Times'* mission statement already hinted at the aforementioned concept of 'bridging':

> We are aware that partisan publishing representation can create rifts in the movement. Our team works round the clock to choose write ups that **look beyond such differences** and commit to the progress of current movement that is exemplary because of the **unity of farmers, labourers and other sections**. […] The organisations' leadership has worked resolutely to tread the ideological differences between themselves and bring this united movement to a point where its ultimate conclusion is victory. (Trolley Times 2020, my emphasis)

The narrative of solidarity across divisions was very present in many articles published in *Trolley Times*, e.g. 'The movement is an inspiration for India's future, where people from different ideologies and backgrounds can come together and work for the collective benefit of all' (Sharma 2020, 3). Other remarks were more specific about the divisions that the movement transcended, e.g. gender differences: 'It is an accomplishment of the farmers' protest that it has erased these historical differences. Women and men have chosen to unite against a common enemy' (Toor 2020, 1).

However, solidarity helps create networks but does not necessarily facilitate egalitarianism: it is a relation that is negotiated across power imbalances (Mohanty 2003). A strong narrative of solidarity and unity might even serve to make these power imbalances between social groups invisible. For instance, Lerche elaborates on the dominance of Jat farmers in past and contemporary agrarian movements and the difficulties in creating a political coalition with Dalit and Muslim farmers' unions and argues that 'the unity of the movement is forced upon the concerned social groups' (Lerche 2021, 1380). He cites several reasons why the struggle over agricultural laws was important for exploited and oppressed groups as well as for capitalist farmers. Most importantly, Lerche stresses the potential of challenging the current government's political oppression far beyond the agricultural sector. However, he does not foresee this broad-based unity lasting beyond the protests (Lerche 2021).

The dominant narrative from within the movement, of which *Trolley Times* is an important voice, emphasised a conceptualisation of solidarity that works in tandem with the notions of unity and secularism. Unity is often equated with

collectivity. The poem 'It's a Festival' by Surjit Patar, published in *Trolley Times* (Patar 2020, 4), featured two exemplary lines:

> No, this is not a crowd, it is a sangat,[23] the collective of souls.
>
> Leaving I behind, to go to Us and We

This discourse connects to the notion of secularism, which, in the Indian understanding, is not the strict separation of state and religion but the mutual tolerance and acceptance of all religions. The Farmers' Movement shared a recurring reference to India as a secular republic with other recent protest movements in India. The anti-CAA protest in Shaheen Bagh[24] (see Chapter 2) was spearheaded by Muslim women who challenged the dominant media representation of their religious community, but the protest on the ground was secular in nature. Symbols of the Indian republic, such as the national flag, or regular protest activities like public readings of the preamble of the Indian Constitution, document secularism, equality, socialism and sovereignty as core values and guidelines through which the Constitution gains its validity. 'Through their conversations, discussions, and debates, they [the women of Shaheen Bagh] were imagining a secular nation into being – a country where questioning the government, working together as citizens, and challenging discrimination and hatred through peaceful ways is the new normal' (Bhatia and Gajjala 2020, 6294).

Indian flags could be found at the Farmers' protests as well, and on the occasion of Republic Day (26 January) 2021, *Trolley Times* published its eighth edition, with the preamble of the Indian Constitution as its cover page (Fig. 26).

The discursive way secularism is referred to in the Farmers' Movement is similar to the anti-CAA movement and usually includes a reference to the idea of the 'oneness of humanity' in Sikhism, thereby connecting political and religious discourse.[25] Guru Nanak envisioned a fundamental, common truth under-

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23 *Sangat* is a Punjabi word used for community (of Sikhs).

24 The Indian Parliament passed the new Citizenship Amendment Act 2019 (CAA) on 11 December 2019. It amends the 1955 Citizenship Act by providing a pathway to Indian citizenship for persecuted religious minorities from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan who are Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis or Christians and who arrived in India before the end of December 2014. The law does not provide this option for Muslims from these Muslim-majority countries. Vociferous protests against the CAA developed across the country, of which the large protest in the Shaheen Bagh neighborhood of New Delhi received particular attention.

25 For an extensive discussion of the idea of oneness in Punjabi devotional culture, see Kirchhof (2021) and Kirchhof (2022) in the RePLITO Digital Knowledge Archive.

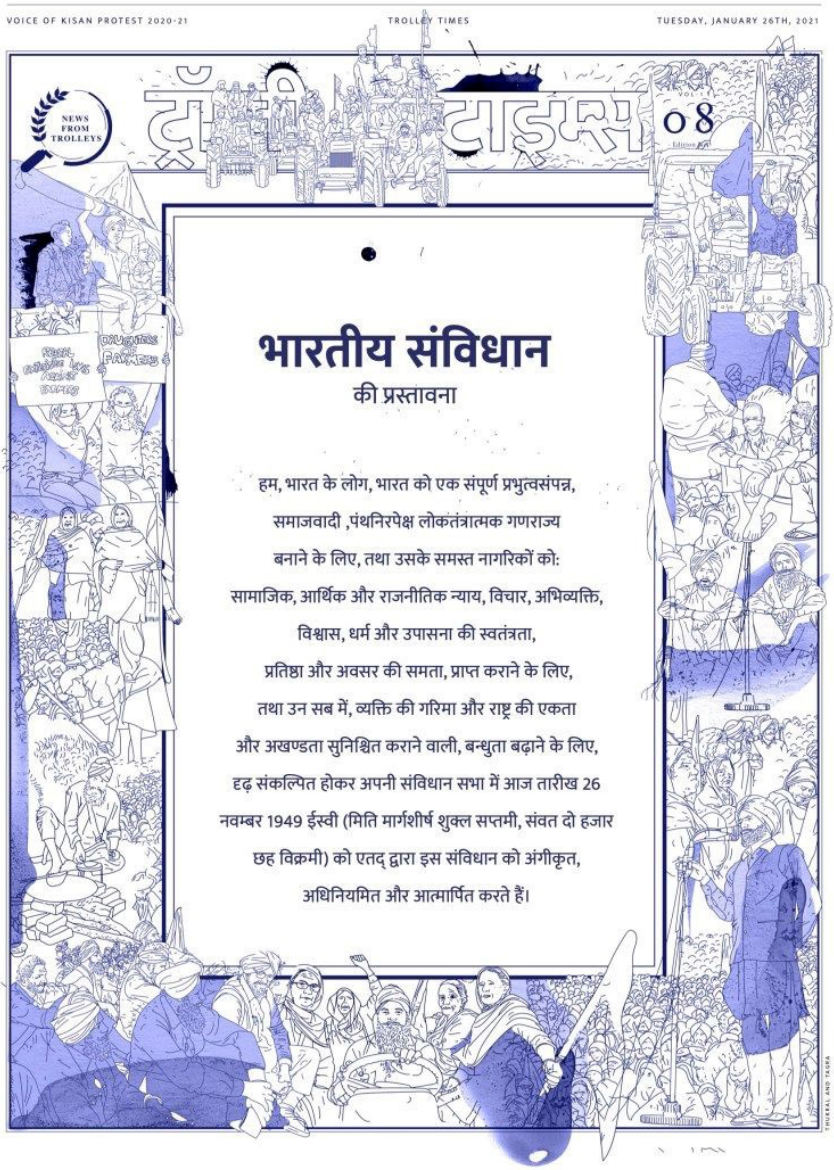

Figure 26. 'The Preamble to the Indian Constitution' (Hindi), *Trolley Times*, ed. 8, 26/01/2021. © Trolley Times

lying the faiths of diverse people, and, for him and his followers, the equality of humanity was to become the ethical paradigm (Singh 1992, 340).

Visions and Practices of an Ideal Society

> *Those who want Sarbat Da Bhalla (Wellbeing of all) are presenting an exemplary character to the world.* (Mahesari 2020, 2)

Connecting to the idea of oneness, many comments indicated a strategic decision to demonstrate peacefulness, unity and non-violence in order to provide an ideal example of how humans can live together (Fig. 27). During interviews and in the *Trolley Times* stories, participants described the protest sites as exemplary spaces, almost utopian 'ideal towns' or 'ideal societies', in contrast to the decaying Indian democracy.

Figure 27. At the protest site. © Rupinder Singh on Unsplash

Navkiran Natt elaborated how she sees the protest sites at the Delhi borders as good examples of communal living:

> These are small towns and they are having each and everything that one town should have. They are having their own libraries, and film screening centres and schools and everything. […] These protest sites they are exemplary spaces in the sense how a community should live. That sense of collectiveness, the opportunities or the material things are available for everyone across caste, class, region, religion and race, everything, even gender. I want

Figure 28. Preparation of a communal meal at the protest site. © Rupinder Singh on Unsplash

> the same sense to prevail globally as soon as possible and we will fight until then. (Navkiran Natt, personal interview via Zoom, 08/07/2021)

Her account informs us of practices of resource pooling, community kitchens and mutual aid. These are guiding principles of village culture, here invoked with the intention of forging solidarity. Thus, solidarity is at once specific to a certain situation but also has a sociocultural history of its own. Rakopoulos calls this the 're-contextualisation of village-hood' (Rakopoulos 2016, 143) in times of crisis.

A vivid example was the revival of the Sikh tradition of *langar* that became a symbol for the Farmers' Movement (Fig. 28).[26] It is clearly a tradition that belongs to a specific socio-religious repertoire of the subcontinent and has been practised for centuries. Cooking, eating and distributing food as a performance of bonding and solidarity became very typical for the Farmers' Move-

26 In Sikhism, a *langar* (Punjabi: 'kitchen') is the communal kitchen of a *gurdwara* that serves meals free of charge to all visitors – without distinction of religion, caste, gender, economic status or ethnicity.

ment. There exists, perhaps, even a kind of global repertoire of practices within protest movements, such as community kitchens, libraries, eating together and in public, etc. Many of these practices share a kind of 'nostalgia for the rural', imagining a quasi-rural or anti-urban form of community – even when they are not about peasants.[27]

Historical Repertoires and Capitalism Critique

A form of political nostalgia characterised the movement even beyond its reference to the rural. By evoking images of 'indigenous' struggles towards a better future, contemporary protest movements produce a certain kind of nostalgia for India's socialist past as well as for historical movements against oppression and exploitation, in contrast to the undemocratic and repressive reality under the current Hindu nationalist regime. Repeatedly-referred-to historical repertoires and figures during the farmers' protest included Bhagat Singh, Mahatma Gandhi,[28] B.R. Ambedkar, the Ghadar movement, Sikh gurus and various historical Sikh warriors (Singh 2021) (Fig. 29).

The dominant narrative in *Trolley Times* juxtaposed the struggle of the aforementioned historical pioneers for a just and equal society with the current political scenario. A dominant feature was a strong critique of India's neoliberal economic policies and capitalism in general. The criticism was directed in particular against the 'sell-out' of agriculture to large corporations. Two of India's richest businessmen, Mukesh Ambani, head of Reliance Industries, and Gautam Adani, head of the Adani Group, became symbolic figures of exploitative capitalism in this struggle.

> In sating the intentions of Ambanis and Adanis, this government has sold the education of this country so it can open Jio University.[29] It has sold the security of this country so Ambanis can make Rafaels [sic!],[30] sold airports and ports so Adanis can make a profit. It has sold railway stations. Only our soil was left but they are preparing to sell it too. (Kumari 2020, 3)

27 I thank Julia Strutz for her important comment on the global scope of community practices in the context of protest movements.

28 Gandhi is less referred to in posters but more rhetorically in the adaption of the term *satyagraha* ('non-violent struggle').

29 Jio University is a private university financed by Mukesh Ambani, to be built outside Mumbai.

30 Rafale is a French fighter aircraft.

Figure 29. Images of revolutionary Sikh role models (from left to right): Udham Singh, Kartar Singh Sarabha (a leading member of the Ghadar Party), Bhagat Singh holding a Punjabi translation of the novel *Mother* by Maxim Gorki, and Baba Banda Singh Bahadur. © Rupinder Singh on Unsplash

One of several cartoons published in *Trolley Times* depicted Prime Minister Narendra Modi pushing Mukesh Ambani on a swing that is actually a gallows. In the background, farmers who died by suicide are seen hanging from trees. 'Farmers Suicides' is written on the tree trunk (Fig. 30).

Figure 30. Cartoon by Mir Suhail. *Trolley Times,* ed. 1, p. 3. © Trolley Times

The message is easy to understand and similar to many other texts published in the newsletter: Modi and his corporate 'friend' Ambani were amusing themselves by ignoring the plight of the farmers and even used the structure that kills them for their own benefit (the gallows became a swing). The protestors claimed that the Modi government favours business tycoons at the expense of ordinary citizens and that businessmen would benefit from the agricultural laws that farmers opposed. However, the cartoon also points to an imminent danger for the swinging Ambani: if he slips, the gallows will strangle him.

Conclusion

The initial insights into the vast array of materials within the Farmers' Movement's dispersed protest archive highlight the significance of generating alternative narratives as a crucial element of their internal and external communication tactics. Engaging in self-mediation or 'becoming the media' emerges as a common response to the tendency of mainstream media to either overlook or stigmatise social movements. *Trolley Times* offers a compelling illustration of

Figure 31. Protest in solidarity with the Indian Farmers' Movement in New York City. © Gayatri Malhotra on Unsplash

how protest is bolstered through media support, showcasing the mechanisms by which counter-narratives and solidarity are conveyed. Its objectives encompassed challenging mainstream media portrayals, educating about the movement's objectives and fostering emotional connections among protesters and sympathisers through a diverse multilingual media approach, which includes social media platforms, video content, printed publications and public performances (Fig. 31).

According to a follow-up interview with Navkiran Natt (personal interview via Zoom, 27/01/2022), the impact of *Trolley Times* was felt in the very positive response from the protesting farmers and especially by the positive feedback from the global readership of the newsletter, which was primarily composed of the Indian diaspora. The editorial team is convinced that their one-year-long initiative has aided in making the movement nationally and internationally more visible. Building on this successful strategy of activism, *Trolley Times* continues to exist in a slightly different format as a multimedia offering focused on issues and policies affecting agriculture. Its prime target group, according to Navkiran Natt, is young people in Punjab. *Trolley Times* will continue as indymedia and at the same time be an entry point for young people into activist publishing.

Within the one year that the farmers' protest lasted, the production of protest artefacts, the circulation of symbols and discourse have created a collective memory. It is the task of future research to investigate what happens to this collective memory: will it enter the national consciousness and become an integral part of a broader national narrative? By transferring knowledge, social movements become 'epistemic communities' (Lipschutz 2001) – but will this community survive after the immediate cause? Even though the movement achieved its primary goal with the withdrawal of the three agricultural laws, many issues related to the agrarian crisis and conflicts with the current government remain.

The fact that the Samyukt Kisan Morcha was formed on the basis of a coalition of farmers' unions needs to be reflected upon when we discuss the aesthetic and communicative practices of the movement and also the performance of secularism and anti-capitalist critique. Navkiran Natt situated the initiative of *Trolley Times* within a certain kind of nostalgia for 'old' activism and traditional print media that connects this recent movement to earlier socialist and unionist movements on the subcontinent, which were dedicated to anti-capitalism and notions of equality and secularism as well. There is much discussion about 'new' social movements in the digital age, but this successful protest movement seems to prove that 'old' social movements are by no means dead. One might even assume that such heterogeneous mass movements have even greater chances of success, since they are able to reconcile many concerns and give the impression of a true representation of the people.[31] It is quite certain that the political mobilisation of farmers and many other social groups in India will last; and so will the need for further research.

31 I would like to thank Nadja-Christina Schneider in particular for adding this point to the conclusion of this chapter.

4 Youth Climate Activism in India: Global Conversations, Local Concerns and Gendered Visibility[32]

Introduction

Indian youth climate activism appears as a rather recent and mostly urban-middle-class phenomenon. Nevertheless, it is simultaneously embedded in long-standing local traditions of environmental concern and in a global conversation about climate justice. The emergence of global movements and their local franchises like FFF signifies a new phase in climate activism marked by an increased use of social media, increased youth participation, a strong emphasis of global interconnectedness and an emphasised feminised public image of the movements and their leading figures. The old oppositions between ecological planetary-scale interventions and local, situated environmental justice struggles have faded, argues Ghosh (2021), 'returning spectrally in new face-offs between "top-down" planning and participatory activism "from below"', with media as 'the new seams for these complex interfaces' and as amplifier of purposefully communicated images, such as the young female activists of the Greta Thunberg model.

Whereas the pivotal role of youth climate activism from the Global North is being acknowledged in a growing body of literature on the role of Greta Thunberg and FFF, young people's climate activism from the Global South remains surprisingly underexplored, even though scientists agree that climate change affects women, children and marginalised groups disproportionately and many regions of the Global South are directly confronted with severe impact. Except for journalistic publications, in particular around the arrest of FFF India's founder Disha Ravi; a published BA thesis by Matilda Olstedt titled 'Geopolitical or Generational Responsibility? A Framing Analysis of the Fri-

32 A shorter preliminary version has been published in the RePLITO Knowledge Archive. See Titzmann (2023a).

days for Future Movement in Indian Newspapers' (2019, Uppsala University); and peripheral mentioning in a few journal articles (e.g. Tuli & Danish 2021), to my knowledge, no major research comparable to the extensive research on FFF in Europe has been conducted on Indian youth climate activism. The aim of the research that supports this chapter was, thus, to explore contemporary forms of youth climate activism in India, to unravel the interlocking local and global discourses that inform these activisms and to analyse the gendered narratives that are intricately intertwined with environmental and climate discourses.

Methodology

The easing of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2023 finally allowed for in-person field research; therefore, this chapter combines a dense, multi-layered collection of oral, visual and experiential sources, complemented by digital communication and analysis. The chapter draws on existing research about Fridays For Future globally and on a preliminary analysis of social media discourse, predominantly Instagram[33], by Indian youth climate organisations and individual activists. The focus on social media is interrelated with the supposed class/caste matrix that undergirds youth-led climate movements in contemporary India. According to the Lokniti Report (2019, 19) by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) on Social Media & Political Behaviour, young people (those aged 18–35), people of the middle and upper classes, and the upper castes (Lokniti Report 2019, 23ff.) are more likely to own a smartphone and access social networks through it.

The research is further based on fieldwork that included participant observation and ten interviews conducted with climate and environmental activists in India in February and March 2023. The interviews were coded and analysed using the MAXQDA software program. My case study focuses on two contemporary youth climate organisations: Fridays For Future India (Delhi and Mumbai chapters) and Youth for Climate India (YFCI), a Delhi-based group. Both will be introduced in more detail later in this chapter. Initial contact with representatives was established either via the organisation's website (YFCI) or through

33 The Lokniti Report (2019) covers the years 2014–2019. Instagram grew exponentially after this period, and for many young people, it replaced Facebook as the most popular platform. Similar to the other social networks included in the study (Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, YouTube), Instagram continues to be dominated by upper- and middle-class, educated, urban users in the Indian context.

Instagram (FFF Mumbai and Delhi), then taken to an individual level of communication via WhatsApp, Zoom and email and, finally, through several meetings in person[34], visits to the Climate Justice Library in New Delhi and participation in FFF Mumbai's Global Climate Strike action in March 2023, where walk-along interviews with almost all present participations were carried out. Some of the activists who are a part of these groups maintain very active and visible social media profiles using their real names, such as Srijani Datta of YFCI, who publishes regularly about climate and environmental issues. When referring to her official publications, I use her real name; otherwise, all interviewees remain anonymous to protect their identities.

The process of fieldwork also involves the researcher's cultural biography, and it requires an examination of the power relations between the researcher and the people she encounters in the field (Parameswaran 2001, 69). Many researchers have written about the limitations of the research process within existing boundaries of nation, race, gender and class (Parameswaran 2001, 71). In this case, I clearly positioned myself as a feminist media scholar with a political affinity towards the researched groups' goals and ideologies. This part of my positionality opened doors to conversation and exchange and helped to build trust between interview partners and me. Additionally, I share an urban middle-class background with most of the people involved in this study, and many of the problems discussed with activists are universal and prevalent in discourses in my home country of Germany, too (changing weather, questions of responsibility, improving urban infrastructure, etc.). On the other hand, I inhabit a clearly differentiated position due to my location as a white female academic at a German university and due to a difference in age, education and life experience compared to the informants, who were predominantly in their early or mid-twenties. A reflection of the implications of my identity as both an ally and an outsider for field research with young Indian activists reveals the possible risk of inherent power imbalances based on the aforementioned hierarchical differences in age, education, etc. Despite, or precisely because of, this constellation, I tried to co-produce knowledge and meaning with my interlocutors by keeping in touch beyond the research period, by asking their feedback on research results and the drafts for this chapter and an earlier, shorter version, and by exchanging further knowledge and research literature. Nonetheless, my own positionality influences knowledge production insofar as I bring

34 Despite several attempts and (cancelled) appointments, I was not able to meet members of FFF Delhi in person. The insights are, thus, solely based on digitally mediated communication and media analysis. Therefore, the group does not feature as central in my case study.

in a theoretical framework related to my academic background, and despite my endeavours towards ethical knowledge co-production, the analysis is still limited to a particular epistemic horizon that I bring to this work.

Young People's Climate Politics

My conceptual understanding draws on Benjamin Bowman's (2019) suggestion that climate action is more than a response to a perceived crisis: it is a 'world-building project' or what Monika Arnez (2022) describes as 'decolonial worlding'. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has significantly influenced the discourse on the concept of worlding, as discussed in Spivak (1985). Drawing inspiration from Heidegger, she defines worlding as the process of the colonial powers' assertion of authority, operating under the assumption that the 'Third World' represents an 'uninscribed earth' to be cultivated and moulded. According to Spivak (1985, 253), the coloniser is actively 'worlding his own world', often at the expense of the indigenous populations inhabiting the affected lands. This colonial worlding is characterised by the establishment and perpetuation of imbalanced power structures, the manipulation and exploitation of labour, and the excessive depletion of natural resources. Drawing on Spivak's research on worlding, Arnez's case study of environmental protest aesthetics in Malaysia analyses how different local groups shape processes of 'decolonial worlding', i.e. re-appropriating their environment.

The dynamics that Spivak frame as 'colonisers versus indigenous populations' have become more complicated today, with the new Asian superpowers India and China also pursuing neo-imperial policies in Africa, Southeast Asia and South America in the name of decoloniality. A more recent form of (neo)colonial worlding can be observed in the adoption of iconic infrastructure brands. In the study conducted by Roy and Ong (2011) on the dynamics of worlding in Asian cities, Haines (2011, 173; 177) demonstrates how cities worldwide seek to embrace the 'Dubai brand' as a form of (neo)colonial worlding.

Bowman (2019, 302) recommends exploring the 'imaginations of future worlds' of young climate activists. He further stresses that young people's politics is different and does not function within traditional binary approaches of political engagement and political disengagement or private and public. With the term 'Do-It-Ourselves (DIO) citizens', Bowman (2019, 299) theorises young people's expanded toolbox for political action, which includes lifestyle politics, political consumerism, boycotting, issue-based politics and local and global networking. From this, it follows that relevant analysis has to include different forms of politics that go beyond typical action strategies and appear apolitical at first sight.

In a big data analysis on FFF's first global school strike in 2019, Spaiser et al. (2022) describe the movement as 'norm entrepreneurs' capable of changing the discourse of climate delay and denial, particularly in that it is a movement of children and young people appealing to intergenerational justice and intersectionality. Therefore, 'youth' not only relates to participants' age statistics but is also used as a discursive category to foreground the relevance of the struggle for future generations. The report stresses that it is precisely the intergenerational framing that makes the movement salient to the Global North. Although solidarity with the Global South continues to be a key factor, the impact of the climate crisis in the Global North has been denied for a long time, and only since devastating floods, wildfires and other environmental catastrophes have reoccurred in recent years have people in the Global North begun to feel directly affected (Spaiser et al. 2022). Starting in 2018, FFF gained great mobilisation success worldwide within a very short period of time. Its signature protest form the school strike – a mild form of civil disobedience – is a collective norm violation that references the societal norm violation of inaction regarding the climate crisis and, therewith, children's rights violations (Bleh 2021). It is this powerful normative discourse that provides emotional and argumentative legitimacy for their protest.

> What gave Fridays for Future its great mobilisation power is the perception of a moral wrong, of an injustice against young people in the world. (Spaiser et al. 2022, 2)

The roots of these narratives have been advanced by international, often indigenous, climate change protest movements. The occurring normative shift from environmental issues to human rights and global justice can be largely attributed to these earlier movements' influences, according to Spaiser et al. (2022).

Returning to contemporary youth climate groups, the media plays a crucial role here in promoting the visibility and mobilisation effectiveness of these movements. To be successful as 'norm entrepreneurs', activists need to be particularly skilled in their communication practices. Thanks to Clifford Bob's research on 'The marketing of Rebellion' (Bob 2005), we understand that NGOs have a history of adapting their messages to suit the market. Social-media-savvy activists, too, have recognised the importance of converting their concerns into emotionally resonant and shareable content to harness the network effects of social media. This aspect was, thus, of particular interest for the following case studies.[35]

35 I thank my colleague Max Kramer for this important observation and his many other helpful comments that have contributed to the improvement of this chapter.

Youth Climate Activism in India

In India, as elsewhere, older approaches to environmentalism and ecofeminism have made way for a global and increasingly mediatised conversation about climate justice. Nevertheless, local and national concerns still dominate Indian activism. In 2019 and early 2020, the Indian government faced nationwide protests through mass flooding with emails raising objections against the notification that intended exemptions of a long list of industries from Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) (Tuli & Danish 2021, 161). This instance not only brought environmental concerns to the forefront but also rendered activists more visible and, consequently, put them at a higher risk of being perceived as threatening. Disha Ravi, the founder of FFF India, coordinated and co-organised the email protest along with other organisations. Critical voices allege that her arrest in February 2021 over a digital protest toolkit in the context of the Farmers' Movement was just a pretend and that her role in the campaign against the EIA Notification was the real reason why the government suddenly perceived her as dangerous (Ranjan 2021). The arrest of Disha Ravi, in turn, changed the perception of Indian youth climate activism as serious political engagement.

Like everywhere across the globe, online activism gained major importance during the pandemic in India, given its long and strict lockdown. 2020 seems to have been a crucial year, since several hitherto-active organisations ended their activities, while others started off with an initial focus on digital campaigning. Wilson (2020) documents the shift in online activism across the world. One of the earliest groups with international connections and participation in international events like COP[36], the Delhi-based Indian Youth Climate Network, appears to have been inactive since 2020. Extinction Rebellion India (XR India), with 17 regional groups discontinued their social media channels in 2020/2021 as well. At the same time, FFF began to gain momentum on the subcontinent. From the inception of the Indian branch in 2019, they managed to increase their active membership through digital activism during 2020 and 2021.[37] Another Delhi-based organisation, YFCI was founded in 2020, and, after an initial digital stage, they now run a climate justice library in South Delhi and many campus campaigns across the city; conduct skill training; are very vocal on social media; and feature a website in Hindi and English. They plan to expand their offline activities. In November 2023, the second climate justice

36 COP: Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate change. COP events take place annually in different member countries. The 27th COP took place in November 2022 in Egypt.

37 Personal interview with FFF Mumbai activist, 06/03/2023, Mumbai.

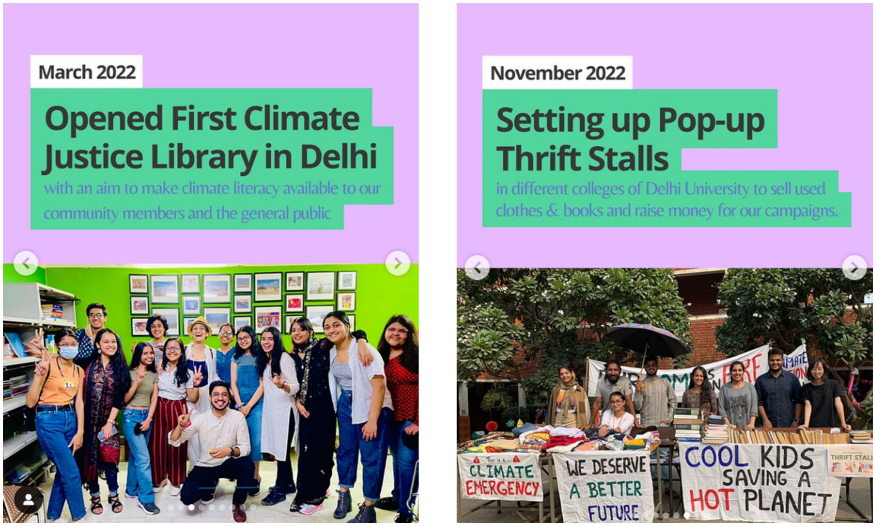

Figure 32. Instagram posts by @youthforclimateindia about their activities in 2022 (Screenshots taken by author in December 2022).

library was opened in Ambikapur, Chattisgarh, and more libraries are planned in different regions of India (Fig. 32 & 33).[38]

Besides organised, mostly youth-orientated groups, all major cities feature local groups, NGOs or neighbourhood organisations that address environmental issues within their localities. For instance, in urban areas, local communities often organise clean-up drives of beaches, parks and other public areas (Fig. 34).

> Clean-up drives have become one of the most important and common community actions people take to address growing environmental concerns in India. Millions of corporate social responsibility (CSR) funds are being diverted towards the beautification and cleanliness of parks, beaches and roads every year. (Datta 2023)

YFCI activist Srijani Datta criticises these clean-ups as 'short-term fixes' that do not address the real problems of waste production and management, of unequal power relations and consumption, or of awareness. Instead, she claims it is 'time to cover the entire cycle of waste generation, collection and dumping, and also question excessive consumerism by the affluent' (Datta 2023).

38 Instagram post by @climatejusticelibrary and @youthforclimateinida, 16/11/2023.

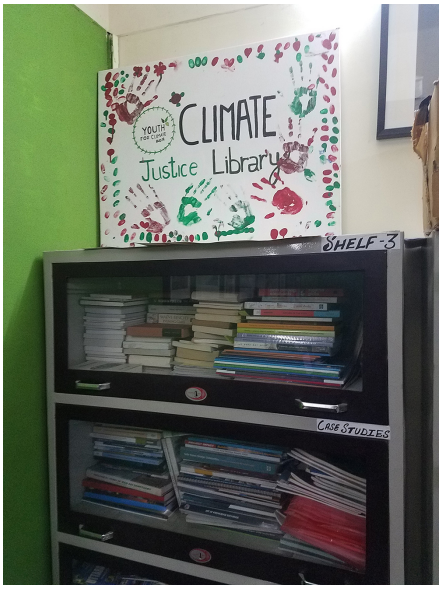

Figure 33. YFCI Climate Justice Library in New Delhi. © Fritzi-Marie Titzmann

Figure 34. Clean-up initiative in Bandra, Mumbai. © Fritzi-Marie Titzmann

Local Repertoires of Environmental Activism and Thought

As mentioned above, climate activism includes local chapters of large global movements like FFF as well as regional and local organisations. In many rural areas, tribal and Dalit communities have long faced the consequences of environmental disasters and climate change and have organised against the destruction of their livelihoods, against eviction and against resettlement for grand development projects such as dams (Parameswaran, 2022; Omvedt, 1993). Along with *Narmada Bachao Andolan* (Save Narmada Movement)[39] and its leader Medha Patkar, the *Chipko Andolan* of the 1970s and 1980s has been a leading example of a non-violent social and ecological movement by rural villagers. *Chipko Andolan* emerged in the sub-Himalayan region, aimed at protecting trees and forests slated for government-backed logging, and is considered a women-led movement. Young activists particularly cite these two movements as inspirational models for their contemporary activism.

Interviewees also mentioned the existence of religious environmental approaches and bio-divinity as well as Gandhian environmental thought but emphasised that their organisations do not work with these approaches. This might possibly be explained by the desire to distance themselves from religion as a factor of exclusion and conflict in opposition to the dominant ideology of Hindu nationalism and to assert the secular character of their activism. Tomalin (2004) has written comprehensively about cases of co-opting of environmental campaigns by Hindu nationalist forces in India. Many religious traditions (including Hinduism) teach that the earth is sacred, and this should lead to people treating the earth better. This understanding of bio-divinity differs from religious environmentalism, which 'involves the conscious application of religious ideas to modern concerns about the global environment' (Tomalin 2004, 265). Using the example of sacred grove preservation in India, Tomalin examines the extent to which the claim that Hinduism is environmentally friendly is the product of an elitist environmental ideology of the middle class and, therefore, of little relevance to the majority of Hindus. She argues that environmental concerns are used by Hindu nationalist groups and that parallels can be seen between the historicist strategies of Hindu nationalists and religious environmentalism. Narayan (2018) discusses cow protection as casteist speciecism in a similarly critical way. She argues that religious environmentalism in India perpetuates speciesism and hierarchical oppres-

39 *Narmada Bachao Andolan* is an Indian social movement spearheaded by tribals, farmers, environmentalists and human rights activists against a number of large dam projects across the Narmada River that runs through western and central India.

sive tendencies, not only impacting humans associated with specific animals and landscapes but also undermining the broader environmental discourse rooted in scientific understanding and community-driven initiatives. In their comparative analysis of virtual environmental activism on Instagram, Tuli & Danish (2021) found remarkable differences in the construction environmentalism between the viral case of the death of a pregnant elephant through firecrackers in Kerala and the oil and gas leak in Baghjan, Assam. In the elephant case, the sacredness of the animal (in Hinduism) was central, and the ensuing discourse upheld the human/non-human dichotomy and vilified humans' fight for livelihoods (Tuli & Danish 2021, 177), whereas, in the virtual discourse that evolved around the Baghjan oil leak, the responsible corporation was criticised for causing dual destruction of wildlife and human livelihoods, so humans were seen as part of the ecosystem. The Hindu religious overtone was, thus, much stronger with regard to the elephant case and decisively shaped the social media debate (Tuli & Danish 2021, 160).

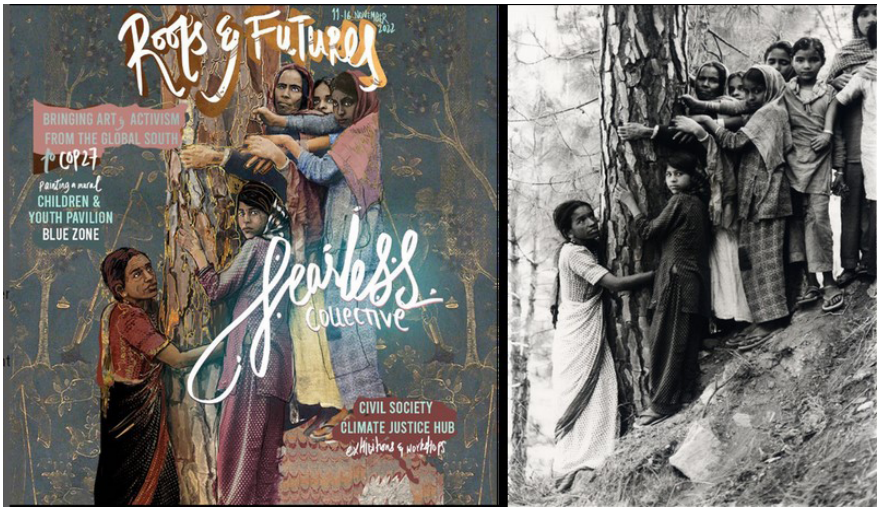

Figure 35. Left: Instagram post by @fearlesscollective, 04/11/2022 (screenshot); Right: Chipko Movement in North India (1970s), date and photographer unknown. Source: https://rightlivelihood.org/the-change-makers/find-a-laureate/the-chipko-movement/ (accessed 10/01/2024).

Despite their ambiguities, contemporary activists revive local environmental repertoires. Fearless Collective, an India-based collective with a gender-specific

agenda of artivism,[40] announced their planned activities at COP 27 in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt with the Instagram post above (see Figure 35). The imagery creates a direct link to the *Chipko Andolan* by refashioning one of the iconic photographs that captures their signature protest strategy of tree-hugging, from which the term *chipko* (Hindi: 'to hug', 'to cling') was derived. Following this inspiration, urban groups like YFCI increasingly attempt to join hands with tribal and/or rural movements such as the youth organisation Van Gujjar Tribal Yuva Sanghatan (@van_gujjar) of the Van Gujjar Community in Uttarakhand, which is advocating for forest rights and the protection of their livelihood as nomadic buffalo herders.[41]

Mediating the Climate Crisis: Mobilisation and Communication

In terms of social media work, Instagram and X (formerly Twitter) are the most-used channels, with Instagram being the most popular due to the combination of images and text. The Lokniti Report (2019), among others, has documented that WhatsApp is instrumental for coordination and electoral mobilisation among already existing groups or communities of interest. The popularity of Instagram and X/Twitter is representative of a general popularity in the class and age groups that dominate media-intensive climate activism in India (and globally).

FFF India consists of a nationwide umbrella group and 47 local chapters; some represent entire states or regions, but most are city-based. FFF India's website in 2022 simply featured links to Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube and leads to the Instagram pages of the local chapters. When I revisited the site in January 2024, a dynamic 'map of actions' had replaced the map of regional chapters shown in Figure 36.

FFF India usually shares images of activities and calls for action by the local chapters as well as general information about climate change and global events like the Global Climate Strike that took place worldwide on 3rd March 2023 (FFF Mumbai held its event on Saturday, 4 March). Mumbai, Delhi and Karnataka are the most active local chapters, which is reflected in the convergence of activities organised in the physical urban sphere and digital mediation. YFCI entertains a very active website and social media channels on X (formerly Twitter), Facebook

40 A combination of art and activism, or artistic activism, artivism involves employing imaginative and artistic means of communication to protest, foster consciousness and inspire societal transformation.

41 Personal interview with YFCI activist, 02/03/2023, New Delhi.

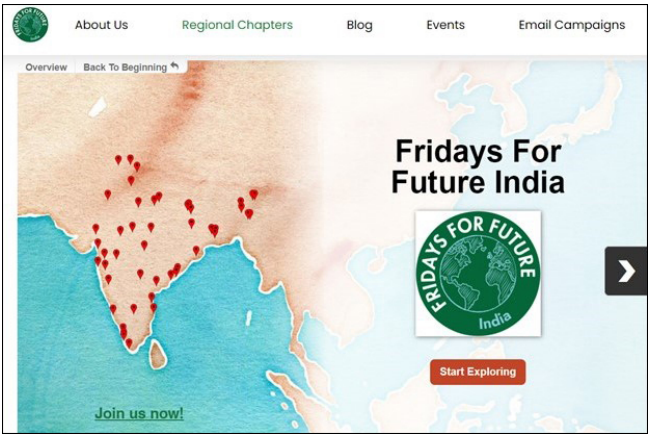

Figure 36. FFF India's local chapters (Screenshot from fridaysforfuture.org, 2022).

and Instagram (@youthforclimateindia) (Fig. 37). The Instagram account in particular is very active, with well-curated content and around 15,000 followers.

Instagram Activity
@fridaysforfuture.india: 736 posts, 45,500 followers + regular 'Stories'
@fridaysforfuturemumbai: 632 posts, 8,430 followers + regular 'Stories'
@fridaysforfuture.delhi: 304 posts, 4,407 followers + regular 'Stories'
@fridaysforfuture.karnataka: 228 posts, 4,301 followers
@youthforclimateindia: 962 posts, 153,000 followers + regular 'Stories'
(All data derived on 11/01/2024.)

Nevertheless, the groups are rather small and, even during larger events such as the Global Climate Strike, attract less than hundred participants. The reasons are manifold. Activists have claimed people are too lazy, too busy or too scared to come out for physical protest. The latter may be due in part to the lingering effects of three years of social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic but is more likely due to a general atmosphere of repression. The FFF Mumbai chapter was originally born out of the struggle to preserve the Aarey forest (Aarey Conversation Group). The Save Aarey Movement did mobilise huge crowds for regular protests and several artists published songs and videos in solidarity.[42] Since the movement did not, in the end, succeed, many

42 See Aarey Colony's Rap Revolution; The Warli Revolt ft. Prakahs Bhoir / Swadesi / Azadi Records; Save Aarey – ProfeSIR-J.

Figure 37. YFCI on X (accessed 12/01/2024).

activists now face legal charges and are intimidated by further participating in physical action.[43]

In her detailed social media frame analysis of 12 active Indian climate actions groups on Instagram, Srijani Datta (Datta 2024) used three major collective frames, as laid out by Benford and Snow (2000): (1) diagnostic framing identifies societal issues and assigns responsibility; (2) prognostic framing proposes solutions and alternative perspectives; (3) motivational framing aims to inspire action by providing reasons for engagement, emphasising efficacy and invoking duty, urgency and severity. These frames help mobilise support and drive social change within movements. Her study found that most youth-led climate action groups effectively communicate the climate issue but lack emphasis on 'problem attribution' and 'injustice frames', which diminishes their political dimension. They struggle to highlight the impact on vulnerable groups, such as young people and minorities, as noted in FFF's discourse. Additionally, the limited use of motivational framing suggests that collective actions outside the social media sphere occur primarily during Global Climate Strikes, reducing the need for content promoting ongoing engagement.

43 These narratives were shared during walk-along interviews by several activists at the Global Climate Strike organised by FFF Mumbai, 04/03/2023.

Figure 38. Interaction with local school children. FFF Mumbai Global Climate Strike, 04/03/2023. © Fritzi-Marie Titzmann

Her findings partly contradict key results of the Lokniti Report (2019, 62) that document a strong link between social media usage and political participation, in particular because social media usage might make people more enthused or disaffected towards political parties. This indicates a difference in mediatised youth-led climate activism in comparison to broader party-driven and electoral political participation.

For instance, FFF Mumbai has around eight to ten active members but more than 8,000 followers on Instagram. Under these circumstances, the organisers feel that documenting and sharing their activities via social media is an integral part of their activism to ultimately mobilise more people. The Global Climate Strike organised by FFF in Mumbai that I attended as an observing participant began with a collective poster-making session that also involved local school children in Ambedkar Garden in Powai, Mumbai (Fig. 38). Once the walk started along Powai Lake, it seemed as if it was ostensibly about producing good content for social media (Fig. 39). To foster reciprocation, I shared all my videos and photographs with the group as well, and several of them were then circulated through Instagram to reach a larger audience.

Figure 39. Filming and photographing during FFF Mumbai Global Climate Strike, 04/03/2023. © Fritzi-Marie Titzmann

The group consisted of only 17 people, but they chose a strategic spot for their final agitation at Powai Lake Selfie Point, right next to the heavily trafficked Jogeshwari–Vikhroli Link Road during evening rush hour, where many people passing by in buses, auto-rickshaws and cars would notice them (Fig. 40).

Apart from the documentation of local activities and calls for action (strikes, digital strikes during the pandemic, cycle rallies, clean-up drives), the social media content consists of shares (or retweets) of posts by Greta Thunberg, other international climate activists, or Disha Ravi and Sriranjini Raman – both Indian spearhead figures from FFF Karnataka who are very vocal on social media as well as visible representatives for FFF India on a global stage.

The range of issues is wide and includes protest against local development projects or sharing of local grassroots initiatives such as the Save Aarey Movement in Mumbai and Save Aravali Initiative (@savearavali) in Delhi, national concerns such as the environmental damage at Joshimath (Uttarakhand), national environmental and climate policies, and broader global issues such as discourses of climate justice, eco-sisterhood and international political debates on climate change. Overall, the social media content as well as the concerns

Figure 40. Selfie Point, Powai Lake. FFF Mumbai Global Climate Strike, 04/03/2023. © Fritzi-Marie Titzmann

that activists shared with me during interviews were rather localised and very specific to the cities or regions they lived in. The umbrella group FFF India mostly shared and re-tweeted content from FFF's local chapters and rarely produced original content. In Delhi, activists emphasised air pollution, urban infrastructure, cycling and awareness-raising as their main concerns. In Mumbai, urban infrastructure, especially public transport, air pollution and the coastal road project currently under construction, were cited by climate and environmental activists as the main issues. In the context of the coastal road project and the Aarey forest campaign, they expressed concern about the destruction of indigenous livelihoods that depend on the exploited resources, such as the forest-dwelling tribal community in Aarey or the Koli fishing community, whose fishing grounds are threatened by the coastal road.[44]

Following Bowman's proposition to explore activists' future visions, social media provides a rich digital archive to draw from. A digital discussion conducted by FFF Delhi on the occasion of Earth Day in April 2021 illustrates how

44 Personal interview with FFF Mumbai activist, 06/03/2023.

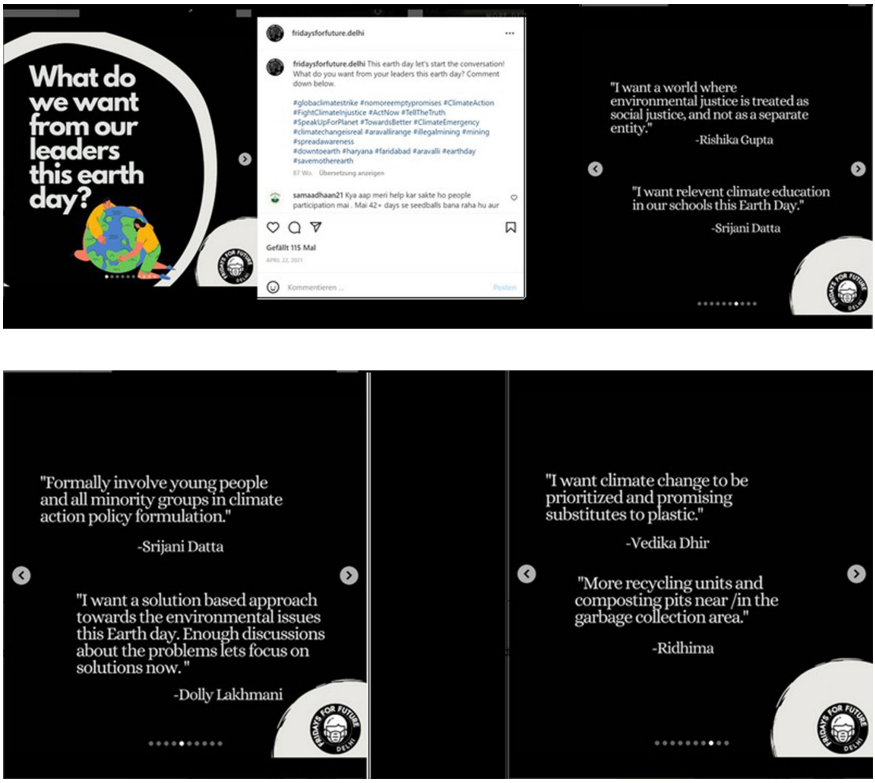

Figure 41. Screenshots from @fridaysforfuture.india (2022).

specific local demands and visions are always intertwined with greater planetary concerns (Fig. 41).

The following quote from a speech given by a high school environmental activist during FFF Mumbai's Climate Action Day exemplifies the interwoven concern for the local, the national and the global and illustrates youth activists' future imaginations:

> *We want to secure our future and why not nurture our future from right now itself?* So many people will tell you many things. They will say, what is climate change? Well, can't you see the change happening around you. Can't you see the temperatures rising? What are you doing about it? And before I like to say that awareness and actually doing climate action is the only way forward that we can continue. I, as a high school student, I hope to start from now so we can prevent any big crisis. We have seen what's been happening in *Joshimath*. We've been seeing what's been happening *all around the world*, all around India, all around *Mumbai*. We saw what's happening in *Aarey*. We saw what's happening everywhere. We've had enough. We've

Figure 42. FFF Mumbai Global Climate Strike, 04/03/2023. © Fritzi-Marie Titzmann

> had enough of all people making promises to us. But can we promise ourselves? (FFF activist, Mumbai, 04/03/2023, my emphasis)

Concern for the future is the central theme of his speech. He combines his call for activism with references to the environmental disaster in Joshimath, Uttarakhand, where torrents of water gushed out of its lower slope in January 2023. Parts of the town subsided; cracks appeared on buildings and roads. Multiple factors, including unplanned construction, over-population, obstruction of the natural flow of water and hydropower activities are being cited as reasons for subsidence in Joshimath, according to news reports (The Hindu Business Line 2023). Joshimath served as a national wake-up call to the ongoing environmental destruction and its climate impact that rapid unplanned development causes across the country. The youth activist does not single out India but embeds his call within broader global developments of rising temperatures and a vague reference to 'what's happening all around the world' but ends again by localising his claims with pointing to the events in Mumbai, in particular in Aarey (Fig. 42).

Negi & Werner (2023) provide a very illustrative account of the 'No Means No' artivist campaign in Kinnaur, a region in the western Indian

Himalayas. Similar to the Mumbai activist's speech, the campaign draws on global repertoires to make local demands. In the Kinnaur context, the artistic representations clearly reflect indigenous ways of understanding the world, but how they are utilised by the youthful activists showcases a creative, or perhaps one might say 'hybrid', perspective on 'cultural identity'. The power of this artivism appears to be rooted in the dynamic fusion of 'traditional' (poetry, songs) and 'contemporary' (rap, graffiti, social media) art forms – a vitality that challenges the very notion of such a division. The pursuit for influence, accessibility and connection thrives on utilising methods inherently 'global'. However, the global stakes are distinctly tied to local concerns (Negi & Werner 2023, 72).

Gendered Visibility in Climate Activism

European studies on FFF emphasise two factors (Wahlström et al., 2019; Moor et al., 2020): first, that the majority of the activists are very young, with little experience in institutional politics or even being below voting age; second, its specific gendered nature, with a relative dominance of young women activists and protest participants. Furthermore, the actual slightly disproportionate participation of young women is reinforced by recurring media images. Previous research has addressed the feminised public image and leadership role of FFF resulting from the hyper-visibility of girls and young women in media coverage (Hayes & O'Neill, 2021; Sorce, 2022). International media coverage foregrounds gendered images of the global climate movement with an extensive focus on female role models, from the iconic Greta Thunberg to other female representatives in different countries, including Disha Ravi as the founder of FFF India. This type of representation is part of a current trend of staging women as icons of a (new) protest culture, but as Günther (2023) notes, this is not without its pitfalls:

> Certain exclusionary narratives along the binary gender logic have persisted to this day. This is reflected in the reporting and particularisation of "female" protest as well as in the marginalisation of certain historical women's movements as a whole. Although feminist activism has recently become en vogue again and is finding its way into debates in the feuilleton, official party politics and everyday life practices, the authoritarian "anti-feminism" backlash – especially in times of crisis – is all the fiercer. This is evident in the media and digital discourse when it comes to activists of the Fridays for Future protests as well as the #metoo movement. (Günther 2023, 201)

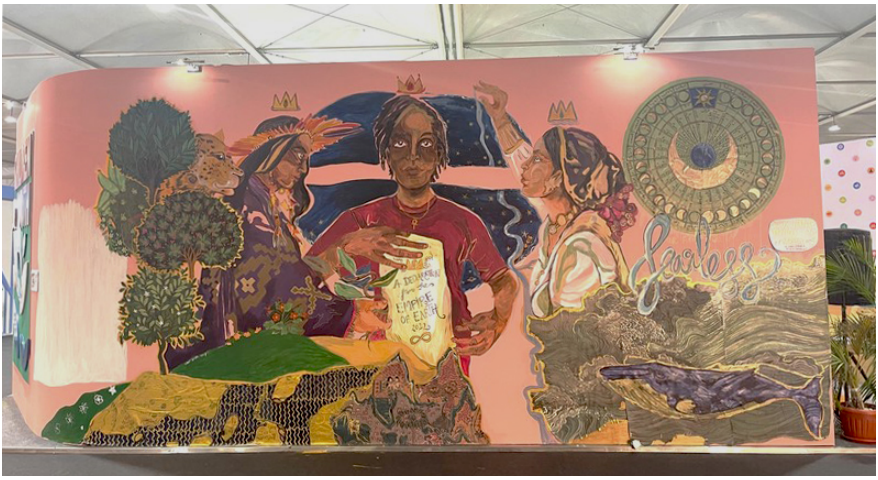

Figure 43. Shilo Shiv Suleman, founder and creative director of Fearless, painted the mural that depicts three young women from the Global South who are vocal in the struggle against climate change. From left to right: **Puyr Tembe**, a campaigner from the Amazon for indigenous tribes; Ugandan climate justice activist **Vanessa Nakate**; Pakistani environmentalist **Ayisha Siddiqa.** Source: @fearlesscollective (November 2022).

The mainstream media framing symbolises Thunberg's key role for the movement, also known as the 'Greta Effect'. Drawing on interviews with young German activists, Giuliana Sorce (2022) finds that gender and age are overemphasised by media reporting and as the two key factors in Thunberg's mobilisation effect, ignoring other aspects of Thunberg's identity – such as class – that youth activists might actually identify with more. Through Thunberg's framing as a young, female, middle-class person with Asperger's syndrome, she emerges as an intersectionally branded leader in the media. Her being middle-class is an important part of the narrative and offers identification in the sense of 'she is one of us'.

Sorce's findings are largely consistent with my findings in the Indian context, both in terms of the overemphasis on age and gender and the patterns of media coverage. As shown above, Google search results reinforce the dominant representation of young female participants and leadership. Prominent youth activists are mostly female, middle-class and relatively privileged in terms of religion, caste and education, as well. The two FFF India representatives at COP 27, Disha Ravi and Sriranjini Raman, in their Instagram accounts regularly share everyday experiences related to their activism but also to friendship, travel and leisure activities. In this way, they similarly appear as 'normal' young people of the middle class and establish an emotional closeness to their followers on social media channels. Against this background, it does not seem

coincidental that FFF India's representatives at the 2022 COP 27 in Egypt were both female.

Keeping with the trend of foregrounding female climate activism, Fearless Collective, as their major project at COP 27, created a mural at the children and youth pavilion in Sharm el-Sheikh. It depicts female leaders from the Global South from three continents, thereby emphasising the intersection of gender and marginalised communities and their disproportionate share of being affected by climate change (see Fig. 43).

Ecofeminism and Political Agency

The basic argument of ecofeminism states that 'in modern capitalist societies, humans is equated with men and nature with woman. Thus, both nature and women are stripped of their creative and life-giving power and treated as objects from which value can be extracted' (Parameswaran 2022: 3). Ecofeminism, as a framework for understanding and responding to the crisis of the Anthropocene, since its beginnings as part of the radical traditions for justice in the United States in the 1970s, aims to repair the 'divide' by stopping the exploitation of nature (and women). Radical ecofeminists of the early movement went so far as to argue that women have always had a more intimate relationship with nature compared to men, calling for a strengthening of these intrinsic bonds and rejecting science and reason as useful tools to combat ecological destruction (Parameswaran 2022: 3). In the Global South, the eco-socialist current has become more popular, and India – with prominent activists such as Vandana Shiva – is at the forefront of a decolonial version of ecofeminism, partially distancing itself from its counterparts in the Global North. Shiva has become known worldwide for her critical writings on biotechnology, in which she rejects Western science because of its inherent violence (Parameswaran 2022, 7). Her recourse to traditional Indian texts to historicise the significance of the current environmental struggle for the long tradition of Indian nature worship has not been spared from criticism by ecofeminist socialists, as it ignores historical, social and economic inequalities (Parameswaran 2002, 7). Nevertheless, few scholars reflect in similar depth on the struggles for knowledge production in comparison to the struggles for material resources. Often, this debate is limited to a form of cultural determinism that reduces epistemic struggles to indigenous/local/traditional knowledge versus Eurocentric/modern/scientific knowledge (Dwivedi 2011, 24).

In a recent publication on ecofeminism and climate change, North American ecofeminist Greta Gaard recounts how environmental and climate activism, from its inception, has often been associated in a culturalist way with essential-

ly 'feminine' characteristics and reproductive capacities, i.e. motherhood and caregiving (Gaard 2015). Even young activists partly reproduced this discourse. These ideas are reinforced through terms such as 'Mother Earth' or 'Mother Nature'. Given the radical ecofeminist standpoint that women have a deeper connection with nature through these traits and abilities per se, a feminised conceptualisation of nature in this simplistic line of thought would lead to feminised protest for nature.

This essentialist view is questioned by contemporary young female activists, who attempt to combine an interest in gender and climate politics. Srijani Datta from YFCI critically engages with the patriarchal interpretation of the woman–nature nexus in a blogpost. She neither completely neglects the ecofeminist framework nor its Indian pioneers. She rather emphasises the need to recognise women's ability to organise, lead and sustain movements:

> The issue here is that we tend to focus so much on the feminine qualities of women which make them apparently closer to nature, we fail to take into account their intimate knowledge of the environment around them. This knowledge ranges from sustainable conservation/ agricultural practices to water management systems or even their ingenious methods of resource conservation. These stereotypes also underplay their ability to be key stakeholders in affecting sustainable practices at the community level. […] While ecofeminism and its various forms are critiqued for a variety of reasons, it's important to acknowledge how increasingly important this movement is. Ecofeminism highlights the differential vulnerability of men and women to climate change. Additionally, it contributes to the rise of ecofeminists who are not just survivors of patriarchy or silent bystanders to ecological exploitation. Women such as Medha Patkar, Archana Soreng, Vandana Shiva, Gaura Devi, Aruna Roy have paved the way for greater involvement of women in the climate change dialogue. (Datta 2020)

Research on other recent women-led protests, such as the 100-day-long sit-in in Shaheen Bagh (see Chapter 2 in this book), emphasises an 'ethics of care' (Bhatia & Gajjala 2020) that appears to be analogous to the 'feminine qualities' espoused by radical ecofeminism. A critical assessment might lead to the conclusion that these female 'ethics of care' speak to the above-discussed, essentialised notion of femininity and romanticise care without reflecting on the problematic linking of (unpaid) care work and femininity. It is a precursor for the contemporary 'female turn' in protest imagery, but ecofeminist theorists such as Gaard (2015) strongly criticise this approach as a re-inscription of gendered labour roles. Furthermore, it does not allow for queer activism to be included, and it forecloses eco-masculinities (Hultman 2017). It can, therefore, be concluded that a certain tension persists between an ecofeminist view that naturalises women's activism for nature and a more encompassing, inclusive

agenda of social and climate justice that most youth-led groups in India embrace today. Nevertheless, early ecofeminist work advanced questions of inclusive ecological justice by foregrounding gender as a central category. This is still acknowledged by contemporary activists, and Vandana Shiva continues to serve as an inspiring 'local' (i.e. Indian) pioneer.

Feminised Protest and Gendered Political Mobilities

Without doubt, climate activism includes a significantly high and visible number of female activists, and the intersection of climate change, gender and power relations is integral to global and local struggles for climate justice. Nevertheless, the feminised and overly young public image of the climate movement does not always do justice to reality. In the limited context of my field research in India, the feminised image of climate activism was not confirmed. For example, the local FFF group in Mumbai was dominated by male participants and truly diverse in terms of the age of participants (ranging from 14 to 78 years). It included college students, young professionals and senior activists with decades of movement experience and political affiliation to the India Greens Party. A young rural activist who cycles around the central hinterland of Maharashtra and conducts workshops in local schools on climate change and its impact on agrarian life, as well as a 14-year-old high school activist with a very active social media profile who recently started his own NGO, also joined the group. In view of this heterogeneous group composition, it seems rather inappropriate to categorise it simply as urban youth activism. Negi and Werner (2023, 65) remarked on the category of 'youth' in the context of their research on the 'No Means No' campaign in Kinnaur, saying that they used the term because the campaign originated from the local youth clubs and the networking of their (male) members, but they observed that age played a lesser role than status (e.g. being a bachelor), and 'youth' extended well into people's thirties. 'Youth', in the context of the intergenerational framework used by contemporary global climate movements, is, therefore, rather a discursive category that emphasises the aspects of responsibility towards future generations and reinforces the accountability of previous generations.

The FFF group in Delhi was similarly male-dominated, and the spokespeople who got in touch with me also identified as male but consisted of mostly young people, from teenagers to twentysomethings. YFCI, with an equally young average membership, has a more even gender split and also focuses explicitly on queer, trans and non-binary identities. A female activist from YFCI correlated the relative underrepresentation of female activists with structural barriers:

> There are, of course, so many barriers to women's participation in social movements specifically. One, because it's seen as a political space. Even in climate strikes, even for our events, […] our parents don't let young girls go to strikes because they're like, oh, it's a political space or it's an unsafe space. […] Sometimes they lie at home and they'll just go for a protest or some event. A lot of my team members lie at their home to come. (YFCI activist, Delhi, personal interview, 02/03/2023)

She further narrated that she left FFF India and later joined YFCI, which pays more attention to intersectional movement building (i.e. a majority of people in the core team identifies as female, and there is an emphasis on collaboration with non-urban groups and stakeholders). She perceived it as a major problem that the male members dominated the group and made sexist jokes, among other things. As a result, female members did not feel that they were in a safe space, and after complaints and conflicts, several left the group. Research on social movements in various South Asian contexts confirms my interlocutor's experience. Even when women do participate in movements, gendered power inequalities can be concealed through what Agarwal (2001) terms 'participatory exclusions'. These dynamics then make necessary what Nayak (1990: 147) describes as 'the struggle within the struggle' of women within the Kerala fishworker movement. The limited mobility that young women in particular experience alters the participatory patterns decisively in comparison to the research findings from European contexts. This reminds us, again, that a locally specific analysis is extremely important despite dealing with a global phenomenon such as youth climate activism.

The YFCI activist stressed that one way to overcome these barriers is forms of gendered solidarity: 'I especially highlight women's work [in my social media engagement], other young women that I really find good' (personal interview, YFCI activist, Delhi, 02/03/2023). In her inventory of Indian ecofeminist struggles, Parameswaran provides a rather hopeful assessment of recent developments in the form and participation patterns of environmental activism:

> There has been a tectonic shift in the strength and assertiveness of the new feminist environmental movements in South Asia. Participants are increasingly from diverse backgrounds and represent diverse interests. The leaders of these movements are often digital natives and use the tools of technology to communicate their desires and goals to a wider audience with ease. (Parameswaran 2022, 10)

After the initial euphoria over the democratic and egalitarian affordances of the internet, the ever-increasing capitalisation of media has been strongly criticised. Jodi Dean describes the current scenario as 'communicative capitalism' (Dean 2021) as communication increasingly transforms into a tool for capitalist accumulation. Parameswaran's assessment still adheres to the inter-

net-euphoria of Castells (2015) and others but disregards the platform capitalism, market mechanisms and pitfalls of self-marketing that determine the logic of social media interaction.

Towards Conclusions

Generally, Indian climate activists primarily address specific local concerns, such as the loss of urban nature or resistance to large infrastructure projects. They also mention indigenous and historical models, such as the *Chipko Andolan* or *Narmada Bachao Andolan*. Furthermore, urban activists increasingly attempt to create links to marginalised communities and advocate for Dalit climate justice and in support of tribal movements such as the *Van Gujjar Tribal Yuva Sanghatan*.

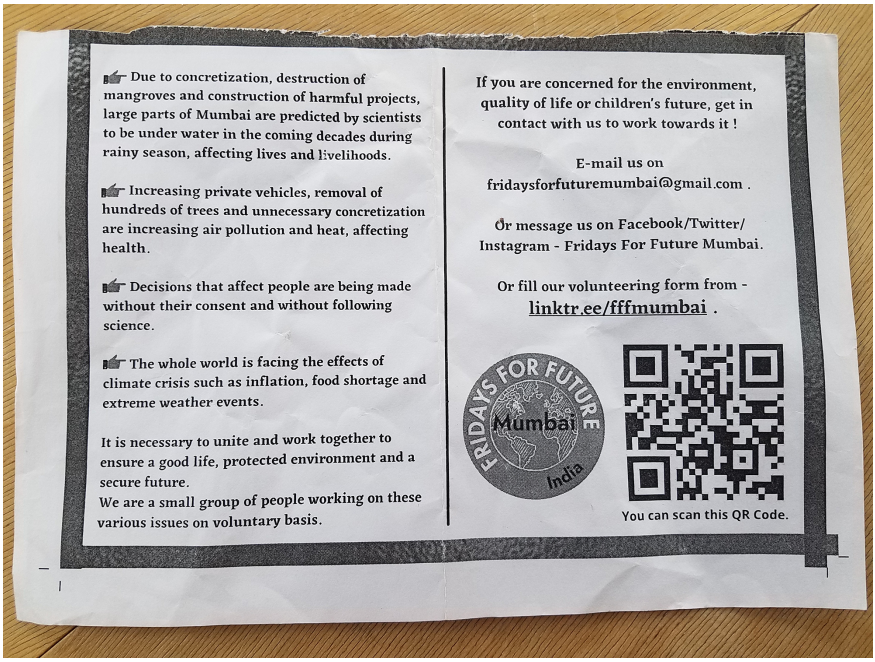

Figure 44. Leaflet by FFF Mumbai, distributed during Global Climate Strike, 04/03/2023. The reverse side contains the same text in Hindi. © Fritzi-Marie Titzmann

They do embed their localised claims within larger frameworks of climate justice and globally shared concerns such as inflation, food shortage and extreme weather events, as stated by FFF Mumbai's leaflet (see Fig. 44), and call for unity and solidarity. Interestingly, the last appeal on the leaflet uses three different

ethical–moral framings to reach people: their concern for the environment, concern for a good quality of life and concern for future generations. The latter plays into the framework of intergenerational justice and the strong normative discourse on a moral injustice put forward by Bleh (2021) and Spaiser et al. (2022). The 'concern for a good quality of life' is quite general, but also appeals to individualistic desires. It could mean a good life for all, but it could also speak to a limited understanding of securing one's own good life. Even from the latter, individualistic understanding emerges a fundamentally universalist appeal. It is precisely this universalism of climate activism that distinguishes it from many other forms of political engagement that are primarily identitarian and address certain groups' needs or aim at particular vote banks. So far, the climate activism discussed in this chapter is still limited by strongly class-based mobilisation, but its 'norm entrepreneurship' (Spaiser et al. 2022) may have the potential to actually function in the sense of a solidarity-based bridging concept (as discussed by Rakopoulos 2016).

In the discourses analysed in this chapter, including those found on social media channels, religious narratives are completely absent, even though earlier ecofeminist movements often activated religious metaphors and discourses (Parameswaran 2022). Other research on Indian social media discourse about environmental issues has emphasised recurring religious references made to the overall reverence in Hinduism for nature elements and certain animals. Tuli & Danish (2021, 160) show how 'unilinear models of economic development and progress, as well as hierarchical and casteist notions in Hinduism continue to shape environmental debates in India'. They further illustrate, with their two case studies on the death of an elephant and the oil and gas leak in Assam, how virality limits Instagram activism by sidelining local voices and privileging short-lived consumer action over systemic change.

While some older Indian activists dismiss youth climate activism as a mere imitation of the European model, Indian youth activists have for years been engaging in a global discussion on climate justice by participating in events such as COP, building and maintaining international networks while advocating for local concerns. Local concerns – like the Save Aarey Movement in Mumbai – in particular have facilitated an alliance of activists that transcends age and gender and has brought together very diverse people. This complicates the understanding and theorisation of climate activism as a 'youth movement' to some extent. Nevertheless, the movement as such understands itself as advocates for the young generation and their future. Pramod Ranjan (2021) writes very enthusiastically about Disha Ravi and youth climate activism in India: 'the new tech-savvy generation, which has broken free from the shackles of religion and caste and which is unwilling to compromise with its civil rights and personal freedoms, can give birth to a new kind of politics'. Interestingly, it is not

ecological or social justice activism but the Hindu Right in India that has gained prominence for being meticulously 'tech-savvy' and entertaining a social media cell.[45] In the same article, Ranjan (2021) questions the Indian perception of environment-related issues as 'harmless', as 'they have nothing to do with religion or caste (though that is not true), do not affect the vote banks of the political parties'. He further states that the Indian middle classes do not fear that participation in such movements might 'hurt the career of their children' and, thus, do not mind them 'getting photographed wearing a T-Shirt emblazoned with slogans or holding placards'. It was only Disha Ravi's arrest in February 2021 that led to a change in perception and a stronger linkage of environment and climate with politics in the Indian public perception. This simultaneously led to greater risk for activists, which, in turn, is reflected in hesitant participation in street protests.

Not only do sceptics criticise youth activism as apolitical but, with the dominance of middle-class activism in the public sphere, criticism of 'full-belly environmentalism' is also growing louder, as are calls for a return to socialist-inspired environmentalism for the poor from prominent actors such as Sunita Narain, Director of the Centre for Science and Environment (Parameswaran 2022, 10). This is partly in line with research on environmental movements in the Global South that sees them primarily as activism by marginalised poor people who want to preserve their environmental resources as a livelihood. It is usually portrayed as a struggle of the poor against the exploitative rich and the capitalism of the Global North (Dwivedi 2001, 15).

Finally, I would like to return to Bowman (2019), who states that young people's politics are different and do not function within traditional binary approaches. All interviewees in my limited sample stressed that they feel the need to depoliticise climate activism and make it fun in order to mobilise more young people to join them. They use a depolitical framing to make protest appear attractive and safe. This is strongly reflected in rhetorical choices by talking about clean-ups instead of protests, announcing poster-making, T-shirt-printing or a Conscious Culture festival in an upper-class shopping mall – activities that feel harmless and apolitical at first sight but can nevertheless provide spaces for experimentation, activism and learning. Similar to FFF activism in Europe, these Indian groups address potential participants both through the language of politics (saving the Earth, saving the future) and the language of lifestyle, for instance exemplified by YFCI's slogan 'Cool kids saving a hot planet' (see Fig. 32). The findings discussed above are related to the

45 The ruling party runs the Bharatiya Janata Party Information Technology Cell. See also Nisaruddin (2021) and Udupa (2018).

current political climate in India, in which people are increasingly afraid to come out into the streets for physical protest.

Furthermore, the promotion of seemingly apolitical activities is closely connected to gendered mobilities. Despite a feminised public image of global youth climate activism, the Indian reality presents barriers to women's participation due to mobility limitations and gendered power hierarchies within the movements. The FFF and YFCI case studies illustrate obstacles as well as strategies for women's inclusion and participation in youth climate movements. In response to this, organisations like YFCI focus on intersectional movement-building and strengthening female leadership. They attempt to focus on bridging the identified gaps in the climate movement and pursue a more inclusionist agenda that stresses gender and alliances with indigenous and marginalised groups and movements and hence, to speak with Nayak's words, reduce the 'struggles within the struggle'.

Youth climate activism in India is still a relatively young phenomenon, and it will be interesting to see its development and impact in the near future. So far, it is still largely limited to being an urban, middle-class phenomenon that often addresses specific urban environmental questions. In terms of expanding the movement, YFCI is involved in an initiative called the Haiyya Youth Climate Resilience Network, which seeks to advance climate activism beyond urban geographies in India, particularly into non-urban regions and small towns. In the future, we will potentially see more synergies between the activities of the urban and rural populations, as well as the middle class and marginalised groups.

5 Conclusion: Forging Solidarity and Collective Remembering through Mediation

The three case studies discussed in the previous chapters illustrate different approaches to the enactment of solidarity within Indian social and protest movements. Visual art and various forms of media prove to be central to the mediation of solidarity, both in terms of communication and mobilisation and for performative staging. Two components of Cammaerts' categorisation are found to be predominant: first, varying forms of activist self-mediation, and second, the mediation of solidarity via digital media by (external) sympathisers. Central but not exclusive to both strategies is social media labour, the fostering of affective ties and the creation of a collective memory of protest and alternative narratives. Social media labour, according to Bhatia and Gajjala, contributes to 'forms of affective exchanges, such as solidarity building, information exchange, and extending support and/or resources both online and offline' (Bhatia & Gajjala 2020, 6296). The creation of a relational digital space where people experience a sense of connection with those protesting on the streets furthers affect circulation and eventually contributes towards higher visibility (Bhatia & Gajjala 2020, 6295f). In all three case studies, the aspects of immediacy and transcending local (physical) spaces also play a major role. The anti-CAA/NRC protest in Shaheen Bagh and the Farmers' Movement benefited immensely from increased visibility through international support, not least through a sympathetic diaspora. The contemporary youth climate movement already stems from a global network and, thus, a global–local nexus is inherent in its media work in particular.

Mediation Strategies

The act of self-mediation, or 'being the media', serves as a common response to the tendency of mainstream media to overlook or stigmatise social movements. An intriguing illustration of this phenomenon is found in the Farmers' Movement's newsletter *Trolley Times,* which demonstrates how protest can be bolstered through media support and the dissemination of counter-narratives and

solidarity messages. *Trolley Times* aimed to challenge mainstream media narratives, educate about the movement's goals and foster emotional connections among protestors and supporters through a diverse multilingual media approach. Over the course of the one-year farmers' protest, the creation and spread of protest-related materials, symbols and dialogues have contributed to the formation of a shared collective memory. It remains to be explored whether this collective memory will permeate the national consciousness and become an integral part of a broader national narrative. Through the sharing of knowledge, grassroots social movements evolve into 'epistemic communities' (Lipschutz 2001), yet the question arises of whether this community will persist beyond the immediate cause. Similar inquiries arise regarding the enduring impact of Shaheen Bagh, as visually documented in the works of Prarthna Singh and Ita Mehrotra.

One aim of this book was to go beyond a textual and visual analysis of the mediated content and to include the activists' and artists' own understanding and framing of their work as performing politics as acts of solidarity, documenting movements and communicating a political standpoint. For instance, Ita Mehrotra characterises her creative approach as capturing narratives that would otherwise remain untold, particularly from the viewpoints of individuals directly involved. She highlights the dominance of overarching narratives controlled by the government and mainstream media, emphasising their significant influence in shaping the current storytelling landscape. Her graphic novel is, thus, both an activist self-mediation and a mediation of solidarity with the primary affected communities. Singh and Mehrotra both frame their intervention as 'witnessing'. On one side, every instance of witnessing involves a form of mediation, primarily the translation of an experience into language for the understanding of those absent. Conversely, every act of mediation incorporates a witnessing aspect, especially when technology serves as a substitute for an absent audience (Frosh & Pinchevski 2009).

The 'digital streets' explored by Gajjala are crucial to all three movements in complementing physical politics. As Gajjala (2019, 115) notes, digital activism embodies a dual nature, serving as both a citizen's media paradigm and a call-out culture. Success in this realm hinges on two key factors: the ability to tap into existing virtual communities and the cultivation of affective publics through interconnected emotions (Gajjala 2019, 116). In an era marked by NGO professionalisation and the increasing appropriation of social issues for corporate marketing, advocacy work has become fiercely competitive. The phenomenon of 'digital street activity' primarily involves the dissemination of information through retweets and circulation, often accompanied by expressions of outrage. This form of activism, characterised by hashtag activism labour, involves the tasks of circulation and curation, differing significantly from citi-

zen media and resembling more professional social media marketing strategies. Here, the dynamics of branding and visibility politics shape digital streets activism within an intensely competitive framework (Gajjala 2019, 117).

The role of social media is extremely central for the youth-led climate movement in India. I have discussed in Chapter 4 how media visibility partly replaces physical activism due to factors of gendered (im)mobilities, fear of repression and a depoliticised framing of the groups. Srijani Datta's (2024) meticulous study of 12 Indian climate action groups on Instagram revealed that, while most youth-led climate action groups adeptly communicate the climate crisis, they tend to underemphasise 'problem attribution' and 'injustice frames', thereby diminishing the political context. These groups face challenges in spotlighting the impact on marginalised communities, including young people and minorities, as observed by Datta (2024) in the discourse of FFF India. Moreover, the infrequent use of motivational framing suggests that collective actions primarily occur during Global Climate Strikes, reducing the necessity for content promoting sustained engagement. Against this backdrop, it is, perhaps, not so surprising that older Indian activists of local grassroots initiatives dismiss youth climate activism as a mere imitation of the European model. Drawing on my findings, I tend to disagree. Aside from young people's stronger embeddedness in global climate justice discourse, local initiatives – like the Save Aarey Movement in Mumbai or the 'No Means No' campaign in Kinnaur discussed by Negi and Werner (2023) – in particular have facilitated an alliance of activists that transcends age and gender and has brought together very diverse people. This adds complexity to the comprehension and theoretical framing of climate activism as primarily a 'youth movement'. However, the movement perceives itself as champions for the younger generation and their future aspirations.

Shared Memory and Cultural Heritage – Role Models and Utopias

By evoking images of 'indigenous' struggles towards a better future, contemporary protest movements produce a certain kind of nostalgia for India's socialist past as well as for historical movements against oppression and exploitation, in contrast to the undemocratic and repressive reality under the current Hindu nationalist regime. Repeatedly-referred-to historical repertoires and figures in Shaheen Bagh included the anti-colonial struggle, reformers in the educational sphere, and revolutionaries and defendants of Indian secularism. We thus find references ranging from 19th-century educator and social reformer Fathima Sheikh to B. R. Ambedkar, Bhagat Singh, and the Indian constitution as a symbol of secularism and democracy. Mahatma Gandhi is less referred to directly but more rhetorically in the adaption of the term *satyagraha* (non-violent

struggle). The climate movement additionally draws on influential socio-ecological movements such as the *Chipko Andolan* and the *Narmada Bachao Andolan.* In their social media discourse and dominant narratives, religious tropes are completely absent, even though earlier ecofeminist movements often activated religious metaphors and discourses. In addition to a historical repertoire similar to the protests in Shaheen Bagh, the Farmers' Movement included Sikh Gurus and warriors in the heroic lineage of the movement. In emphasising the important role of publications for a movement, Navkiran Natt also draws a connection between the Indian Farmers' Movement of 2020–2021 and the early 20th-century Ghadar Party, which revolved around a publication.

Navkiran Natt also contextualises the *Trolley Times* initiative within a nostalgic framework for traditional activism and print media, reminiscent of earlier socialist and unionist movements in the subcontinent. These movements were characterised by anti-capitalist ideals and a commitment to equality and secularism. In line with the notion of unity, numerous comments in *Trolley Times* reflected a deliberate choice to showcase peacefulness, solidarity and non-violence, aiming to present an exemplary model of coexistence. Through interviews and narratives within *Trolley Times,* participants depicted the protest sites as exceptional spaces, resembling almost utopian 'ideal towns' or 'ideal societies', contrasting with the perceived deterioration of Indian democracy.

In the Shaheen Bagh context, my knowledge co-producers made similar observations about the exemplary peacefulness and the strong spirit of community and solidarity. Comparable with the temporary settlements that the protesting farmers set up along the entry points to the Delhi capital region, Shaheen Bagh also consisted of a week-long sit-in with temporary infrastructure for sleeping, food preparation and childcare. In a way, the Farmers' Movement inherited this physical and ideological antithesis to a highly divided society split along the lines of religion, caste, gender and class from its immediate predecessors in Shaheen Bagh.

It is often the experience of the community 'on the ground' that undergoes a utopian articulation 'online'. When this happens, something that functions with bodies in close affective interaction (e.g. the protesting of peasants in their material organisation on the street) can become an ideological spectacle as soon as it enters the mediation of social media. For that reason, recent research has been concerned with the politics of invisibility (Schaflechner & Kramer 2024).[46] This applies in particular to actors from the non-middle class. In my three case studies, however, we can rather speak of a temporal simultaneity

46 I particularly thank Max Kramer for this important comment.

and, thus, of hybrid media activism (Treré 2018), not simply of a successive 'translation' of physical experiences into digital mediation.

Witnessing and preserving historical records also serves as an active response to combat the appropriation of historical narratives by Hindutva forces. These forces attempt to rewrite India's history by erasing the narratives of minority and marginalised communities, thereby envisioning India as a Hindu nation. Through documenting and fostering solidarity, Ita Mehrotra and Prarthna Singh maintain a specific narrative of Shaheen Bagh. This narrative emphasises visual motifs of female empowerment and intergenerational and cross-community support and care while linking gender and resistance as mutually reinforcing elements. Their artistic endeavours and accompanying narratives bear witness to the possibility of alternative modes of coexistence marked by harmony and solidarity, thereby contributing to the creation of new artistic realms through their intervention.

Bridging Religion, Class and Gender

Rakopoulos (2016) defines solidarity as a concept that serves as a bridge, loosely capturing and yet maintaining tension between various practices, social forms and visions for the future. It connects disparate networks of individuals and communities, sometimes encompassing contradictory interpretations. This notion of solidarity as a 'bridge-concept' implies a perceived cohesion that transcends ideological, social and geographical boundaries. It therefore makes sense to ask how the movements under discussion negotiate relevant social constructs such as religion, caste, class and gender, and to what extent they succeed in bridging these differences.

In the discourse in and around *Trolley Times,* people often describe the Farmers' Movement as bringing communities of different religions and occupations together (i.e. farmers and workers), as being trans-regional as well as trans-ideological; and the significant involvement of women is emphasised. The mission statement of *Trolley Times* contains a recognition of existing differences and a vision of unity. A similar rhetoric is used to describe the composition of people that were engaged at Shaheen Bagh and in the anti-CAA/NRC struggle in general. While religion and caste were addressed as divisive factors and active attempts were made to either ignore or, ideally, bridge these differences, class seems to be the most difficult social category to navigate. For instance, Lerche (2021) remarks how class–caste alliances prevailed and partly prevented unity in the peasants' struggles.

I have mainly avoided using the term intersectionality to explore the overlapping identity markers that define belonging and exclusion. As one of my foci

was to highlight a gendered perspective on all three case studies and further illustrate and problematise the 'branding' of female activism, the intersections of gender and religion (Shaheen Bagh), gender and caste (Farmers' Movement), and gender and class (youth climate movement) stand out as striking. They refer, in a way, to an understanding of intersectionality in terms of the feminist idea of complicating the 'double or triple burden' of 'woman'. But, as Nivedita Menon (2015) has discussed in her critique of the concept, intersectionality does not capture the South Asian experience adequately. Most importantly, based on the assumption that the category 'woman' is not stable or homogeneous, caste, race and class are consequently not fixed categories either (Menon 2015, 37). In India, a subtracted understanding of 'woman' never prevailed, which had to be complicated by an intersectional approach. This identity of 'woman' was from the start located within the idea of the nation and within communities of different sorts (Menon 2015, 38). While Crenshaw (1989) originally conceptualised the term intersectionality within in a legal context, Menon argues that the law is most just when it does not recognise multiple identities. Identity categories do not exist 'naturally' but are constituted through political practice. Hence, we do not change their meaning through legal validation (Menon 2015, 40). 'Each identity emerges or rather, is called into being, in particular contexts in such a way that at that moment it is not simply an intersection of two or more identities but an unstable configuration that is more than the sum of its part' (Menon 2015, 40). She adds that the intersection itself is an empty space and not all identities are equally important at all times (Menon 2015, 43). This complexity is reflected in the shifting positionality of my knowledge co-producers in their interactions with the larger movements, with mainstream media and fractured digital publics, or with me as a researcher. It is not for me to decide at which moment which identity is more important. As the connecting theme of this book is solidarity, the 'bridging' and simultaneous recognition of diversity was my primary interest.

Contemporary climate movements have, perhaps, the greatest potential to actually bridge differences through their universalist and non-identitarian appeal. For the Indian context, I discussed how prominent youth activists are mostly female, middle-class and relatively privileged in terms of religion, caste and education. Studies on the worldwide 'Greta effect' have revealed how middleclassness offers identification in the sense of 'she is one of us'. The issue of class is one that was stressed by some young climate activists themselves, as it brings up questions of representation and positionality. A young activist from YFCI precisely talked about the 'gap' in the climate movement that prevents a unified struggle. This divide exists between the local struggles of rural groups, the lower classes, lower castes and Adivasis – some of whom have decades of experience in counter-hegemonic environmental organising – and the global

movements dominated by the urban middle class, such as Fridays For Future. Through the employment of an overall depoliticised framing, middle-class environmental activism is perceived as rather harmless and, thus, is tolerated by the middle-class parents of involved young people. The associated risk for already marginalised groups is, therefore, much higher. Furthermore, the promotion of seemingly apolitical activities is closely connected to gendered mobilities. Despite a feminised public image of global youth climate activism, the Indian reality presents barriers to women's participation due to mobility limitations and gendered power hierarchies within the movements.

These observations hold true for forms of activism that span an involvement over years, as found in youth-led groups of the contemporary Indian climate movement. Shaheen Bagh and the Farmers' Movement propagated a feminised public image as well, presenting women at the forefront of revolutions. In strong contrast, though, their framings are far from depoliticised. The gendered particularity of the Muslim women in Shaheen Bagh leading a protest around the question of who can claim citizenship has additional symbolic value in that it counters structural processes of invisibilising women and not circulating their contributions and voices in political movements and in history in general. In Shaheen Bagh, the strategic use of 'body politics' (Günther 2023) physically placed the protesters in a public space dominated by Hindu men, challenging Hindu patriarchal normative spatiality while protecting the men of their own marginalised community and resisting intra-communal patriarchal structures at the same time.

Caste, class, religion and gender dynamics are inherent in the perspectives and experiences of the artists and activists involved in this study, whom I refer to as knowledge co-producers. In the introduction, I have elaborated on my approach to research ethics and addressed issues related to my positionality as a white female researcher from the Global North. One aspect that facilitated access was my shared middle-class background with the majority of knowledge co-producers. Similarly, Prarthna Singh underscores the significance of collaborating with women from Shaheen Bagh deeply rooted in the social context that gave rise to this protest, given her own privileged caste and class background within Indian society. Most interview partners hailed from a middle-class background, residing in Indian metropolitan cities, and either pursued higher education or were graduates from esteemed Indian universities or institutions in Europe or the USA. I have commented on the exception of a single rural activist present at FFF's Global Climate Strike in Mumbai and pointed towards YFCI's efforts to broaden the scope beyond the urban centres and become more inclusionist (see Chapter 4). Despite a rather high level of personal involvement in this particular research, I was unable to directly engage with the majority of women who participated in the Shaheen Bagh protests or joined the farmers'

protest by driving tractors toward Delhi due to travel restrictions but also due to my own positionality. Instead, I relied on knowledge co-producers with similar class backgrounds to serve as intermediaries, providing access to knowledge beyond conventional academic, journalistic or 'global' narratives. It cannot, therefore, be ruled out that power asymmetries were perpetuated here as well.

In summary, the case studies explored in this book illuminate the diverse strategies employed in three recent Indian social and protest movements to foster solidarity. Through visual art and digital media, activists engage in self-mediation and bridge-building, aiming to counter mainstream narratives and cultivate collective memory.

The Farmers' Movement's *Trolley Times* newsletter exemplifies activist self-mediation, challenging dominant media narratives and fostering emotional connections among participants. Similarly, Ita Mehrotra's and Prarthna Singh's work highlight the importance of collaborating with individuals deeply rooted in specific social contexts to shape narratives authentically. Despite the challenges posed by caste, class and religious differences, movements like the Farmers' Movement and Shaheen Bagh demonstrate efforts to bridge social divides and draw inspiration from historical struggles against oppression. In the realm of climate activism, social media serves as a central platform for mobilisation and knowledge sharing, but challenges exist in effectively addressing political contexts and engaging marginalised communities.

Furthermore, the strategic use of 'body politics' and women's leadership in movements like Shaheen Bagh challenge patriarchal norms and contribute to reshaping political landscapes. In other words, women's bodies are the most radical tool of protest in public space, and all three movements draw or drew on iconic images of protesting women to render their demands visible and, thereby, connect to a global trend that spans the Arab Spring, the Iranian protest under the slogan of 'Jin, Jiyan, Azadi' (Kurdish: 'woman, life, freedom'), and iconic imagery of women confronting police forces in the Global North (Black Lives Matter, Occupy, Climate Movements, etc.).

Overall, these insights underscore the importance of collaboration, inclusivity and nuanced understandings of solidarity in driving meaningful change within any given society. Mediation is facilitated through various channels, but all three case studies provide insights into activist media labour that is antagonistic to the rampant variations of circulating propaganda and hate speech of what Fathima Nizaruddin has called the 'Hindutva ecosystem of hate' (Nizaruddin 2021). In the context of the RePLITO[47] project, we previously explored cir-

47 See the Introduction or the website http://replito.de for more information on the RePLITO project.

culatory practices and contested spaces in India as dimensions of the main theme of living together (Schneider & Titzmann 2022). To conclude the three case studies presented in this book, I utilise the concept of circulation to shed light on the current situation in contemporary India. Against the backdrop of a competitive authoritarian regime, specific networks actively propagate divisive ideologies centred around identity, effectively marginalising certain segments of the population as outgroups. With the rapid dissemination of incendiary, sensationalist and polarising content, the existing channels of circulation, as evidenced in the social and protest movements discussed, also have the potential to generate various forms of alternative proliferation. These proliferations, in turn, offer pathways for fostering frameworks that promote solidarity and peaceful coexistence amidst societal tensions.

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Media and Cultural Studies, Volume 6

In an era marked by rapid media diffusion and globalised social movements, *Mediatised Solidarity* delves into the evolving dimensions of solidarity within Indian social and protest movements. Focused on the period from 2014 to present, it analyses the interplay between media practices, including social media, and solidarity expressions. Through three case studies – Shaheen Bagh, the Indian Farmers' Protest, and contemporary youth climate activism – the book explores how media and visual art shape and are shaped by solidarity and the extent to which shared memories and cultural heritage are used to stage social cohesion.

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