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Emphasizing Colonization in Modern Environmental and Women's Activist

Movements in India and the Future of Ecofeminist Movements for Creating a More

Just and Sustainable Future

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ABSTRACT

This research discusses the extent of colonial acknowledgement in modern women's rights and environmental movements in India. British colonization profoundly altered the ecological landscape and social norms of the societies it affected while leaving behind institutional structures that encouraged and perpetuated discrimination, oppression, and environmental degradation. In the case of India, I illustrate pre-colonial norms surrounding environmental stewardship and women's rights and compare it to post-colonial ideology to make a connection of modern human rights and environmental problems to a colonial past. Today's popular environmental and women's activist movements are analyzed to determine if colonial acknowledgment or a decolonial framework is present within the movements' structures and solution building. I found only 2 out of the 18 movements had any mention of the effects of colonization. Finally, I suggest a non-essentialist updated "Third Wave" Ecofeminism as a possible movement that could be helpful in India due to its intersectional framework, decolonial structure, and it success in many parts of India and, famously, in post-colonial Kenya with the Green Belt Movement.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, India, British Colonization, Women's Rights, Environmentalism, Activist Movements, Intersectionality, Intersectional Feminism, Post-Colonial India, Green Belt Movement

Emphasizing Colonization in Modern Environmental and Women's Activist

Movements in India and the Future of Ecofeminist Movements for Creating a More

Just and Sustainable Future

With extreme environmental degradation and human rights violations, India finds itself at the forefront of both women's rights and environmental issues. With over one billion people and as the second largest country in the world, India has become a global, technological, and cultural force that cannot be ignored by the global community. Therefore, in this increasingly globalized world system, not only will the problems that affect India have consequences worldwide, but other countries facing similar issues in the intersection of social justice and environmental sustainability will look to India as a guide when tackling these problems. India is placed in a unique position where both their gender and environmental problems are increasingly visible and under simultaneously scrutiny in the world's eyes. Particularly, Western nations have not shied away from giving it a reputation of backwards, oppressive, and environmentally disastrous. While undeniable that modern day India has atrocities that need to be addressed and accounted for, this reputation completely overlooks the rich history of environmental stewardship and egalitarianism which characterized much of the country long before Western influence. In addition, writing India off as a hopeless case overlooks the agency of a modern Indian people as they create movements that pick up the pieces from a colonial past, reestablish native cultural identity, and address issues of social and environmental justice.

When analyzing the problems societies face today, particularly to understand inequality with the hope of finding solutions, it is important to understand the historic

formation of social norms and institutions over time. India is not the only country facing issues in regards to resource depletion and human rights; many postcolonial societies in North and South America, Asia, the Middle East, and Africa, struggle with both equal rights for women and environmental conservation. Despite this trend, very few modern activist groups fully address the impact of colonization when creating movements for gender equality or environmental sustainability, particularly in India. Because of the systematic dismantling of native cultural integrity, creating a power hierarchy that promoted inequality, and basing an economic system on the exploitation of resources, colonization is largely to blame for a lot of these modern problems in India and other postcolonial nations in the Global South. The very institutions that perpetuate laws and social norm which have negative consequences on women and the environment are left over from a violent colonial past. Just in the same way that those tackling racism today in America cannot ignore slavery, modern women's rights and environmental groups cannot ignore colonization; modern women's and environmental rights groups in India must have an acknowledgement of colonization in their movements; framework to create more effective change, since colonization largely created the institutions based on inequality and the exploitation of resources that those groups are combating. I argue that an acknowledgement and focus on colonization needs to be an integral part of women and environmental activist movements in India. A recognition and complete addressing of colonization is the crucial piece in these movements' frameworks in order to create sustainable and unified solutions to problems. Movements that either ignore, or acknowledge colonialism in a passive way can only hope to address the symptomatic issues of a larger institutional problem.

While addressing colonization in social and environmental movements is not a novel concept in India, many movements created with colonization in mind are more focused on the negative impacts of globalization, economic consequences, and cultural integrity that bring up women or nature in passing. Very few women or environmental specific movements frame their ideologies and solutions as an attempt to deconstruct colonialism. Those that do are small or regional groups that have not taken root in the larger activist movements. Kenya, as a postcolonial nation, faced and still faces similar issues to India. However, they found great success in their ecofeminist Green Belt Movement and created huge cultural and institutional changes when it came to environmental and women's rights. This movement directly incorporated decolonization in the foundation of its activist work. I argue this type of persistent activism with acknowledgement of colonization made the difference in what began as a small women's environmental movement, similar to many in India, to a country wide political movement that changed institutions.

As a both a Westerner and a citizen of a country where the colonial framework completely dominated the narrative, I don't claim that I have overarching answers to solve India's problems. To do so would be disrespectful to the experiences, agency, and identities of Indian people. First world, or Global North, scholars have a legacy of imposing a Western voice on developing, or Global South, countries, and this is a stance I wish to eschew. With this in mind, I simply offer a suggestion for a movement that, historically, has been largely successful in the Global South for acknowledging the intersections of gender and the environment while critiquing the colonial structure left behind: Ecofeminism. Many popular environmental movements in both India and Kenya

that captured the interest of the global community were Ecofeminist; many also were able to accomplish political, environmental, and human rights changes in a much quicker time frame than many movements today. Famous Ecofeminists like Vandana Shiva, Maria Mies, and Dr. Wangari Maathai who helped shape the ideology acknowledge colonization when directing activist movements. Despite some activist success in India, many of these movements have died out since the 1990s after Ecofeminism was discredited for being gender essentialist. However, I think its unique intersectionality and recognition of colonialism makes it the most effective antidote to a colonial legacy of exploitation, particularly when there have been successful activist movements through Ecofeminism that have changed policy. I suggest a ''Third Wave Ecofeminism'' as an ideal framework for movements in India going forward. This would couple original ideas from Ecofeminism (i.e. oppression of the earth and people are connected, colonization as a major problem, etc.) with an updated framework that eliminates essentialism and accounts for modern social justice ideologies (i.e. gender fluidity, holistic institution changes, intersections of race, class, gender, etc.)

COLONIAL IDEOLOGY, PRACTICE, AND PRE-COLONIAL INDIA

The role of the conqueror is simple: establish and maintain superiority through meticulous and systematic cultural annihilation of the conquered. This means setting up a strict system of dualisms: man v women, industry v nature, logic v emotion, spirit v flesh, always opposing and always establishing one as superior. The idea is that you cannot have anything in common with those you are conquering; if you want total control, dehumanization and traumatizing a people by constant devaluing of their identity is the tactic. A radial swinging of the cultural ideological pendulum, solidifying an extreme ''us

v them" and othering, is necessary to justify the violent acts of the Conquering as a mission to correct the morally baseless Conquered in need of divine intervention. Total control and access to resources is the reward for cultural devastation; the riches of a new world provide wealth and stability for all but they who had native rights to it. Resource and cultural exploitation through pointed assimilation, and creating a system of stratification, left a legacy of inequality and destruction even after colonies were removed. European colonization, therefore, had incredible impact on the modern history of every place it touched by bringing Christianity, language, attitude towards the environment and its treatment, technology, institutions, government entities, and value systems (Abernathy 2001:6). Entire cultures and areas were swallowed up and assimilated into European ways of being, as part of the British empire's "global enclosure movement" and imperialistic system (Abernathy 2001:6). It was systematic in its approach to change cultural norms through pointed psychological attack. The British Empire solidified their assumed superiority through a method of humiliation of indigenous people that fostered an internalization of inferiority, creating devastating effects for both the individual and collective self (Abernathy 2001:12). Subordination was persistently encouraged through the "undermining and reshaping" of indigenous value systems, social and cultural patterns, institutions, and economies (Abernathy 2001:10). What became particularly interesting in colonial takeover was the inevitable connection between and restructuring of gender and the land to reach a goal of imperialism. The British colonialists were aware that what largely made a culture unique was how it treated the land and how it defined social roles. Therefore, gaining control over land and resources became a strategic cultural battle that pitted native ideas of

masculinity and femininity and inherent land value against colonial ideology.

Gender in Pre-colonial and Colonial India

Gender roles were extremely important to English society, transcending social order to become a more tangible moral force illustrating divine order (Rose 1991:15). Women were considered the inherently weaker sex, and the job of men was to defend female sexual and social purity, while keeping women control (Rose 1991:14-6). Women had limited control over or access to property, marriage rights, politics, labor, or education; there was very little opportunity, attention, or value given to women's education outside of domestic affairs (Rose 1991:14-6, 51). While the realm of the feminine was socially regulated to dependence, the masculine social world painted the opposite picture. The public and private spheres were strictly separated, with domestic duties seen as less powerful (Rose 1991:15). Men were to be independent, virile, strong, and rational with respect stemming from economic control (Rose 1991:15). Unlike women, their sex did not determine or limit their potential, as they had rights to pursue politics, property, and education (Rose 1991:14). This ideal of manliness was largely derived from religious doctrine and valued masculinity as the ultimate hierarchal ideal of strength and reason, while simultaneously discouraging female agency as deviant to the natural order (Banerjee 2005:8).

Gender roles brought from England dictated that a true woman should be characterized by weakness, domesticity, docile behavior, and economic dependence on fathers or husbands (Rose 1991:14). These roles that patriarchal England brought to many indigenous lands, including India, were largely inharmonious with social roles and norms of native cultures (Banerjee, 2005:48). Since social roles on the basis of gender

was considered divinely ordained (Rose 1991:11), redefining indigenous ideas of gender, therefore, became a tool of colonization and religious moral justification. The hierarchy that the British brought to India was founded on "ideas of hegemonic masculinity" and "Christian manliness" that was based on physical strength, control, and the idea that women were unequal (Banerjee, 2005:8). Additionally, Christianity and missionaries became a vehicle for colonial justification to protect indigenous women from their "barbaric" men, founding the "civilizing" mission on the basis of gender which created a perfect storm for systematic gender role restructuring in India (Chitnis and Wright 2007:1318). British women in particular, taking part in their definition of feminist crusade, took on the role of "saving" the Indian woman from a culture that did not allow for femininity to be fully realized; to be truly equal, Indian women had to have their honor defended and have the right to be virginal and pure, domestic, and gentle based on Victorian feminine principals (Chitnis and Wright 2007:1319). The British gender "mission" largely played out with colonial men participating in physiological and physical humiliation of native men, by marking them as the "effeminate other", defining masculinity that was not rooted in physical prowess as feminine, and therefore, weak (Banerjee 2005:2). Indian men were considered unable to maintain control since they worshipped Goddesses, allowed too much freedom for women, and had ideologies of masculinity steeped in spirituality (Banerjee 2005:2, 28, 45) This type of masculinity could not be tolerated since it went against ideas of inherent inequality between the sexes. This extended the mission of "saving" indigenous women from the excessive freedom their effeminate men provided. This meant instilling British gender roles by having women work as servants in British homes, sexually exploiting their exotic bodies, or

impregnating them to literally assimilate and take over the culture; all of this served to

solidify the superiority of the British as real men, both able to take care of women, and,

by extension, properly control the lands of India (Banerjee 2005:2, Unger 2004:47-51).

   The more immediate response to gendered colonialist ideology was the emergence of

nationalism tied to a more extreme masculinity to combat the "effeminate other" that

colonialism pushed upon native men. This response saw an increase in protecting the

feminine from the influence of the British by redefining the feminine role as the mother

and caregiver and something that Indian men were capable of controlling (Banerjee

2005:2). The time of the female warrior Goddesses like Kali and Durga, which played a

part in defining femininity, was largely replaced by masculine warriors like Arjuna,

making the feminine sphere largely unable to access the independent Indian nation that

was being restructured as a masculine landscape with emphasis on the new male

(Banerjee 2005:14, 18, 45, 144). Additionally, the immediate backlash of effeminate

humiliation lead to a more machismo definition of masculinity that pervaded India in an

attempt to assert Hindu masculinity. Male violence was increasingly emphasized, and

women's patriotic role became the figurative land and body of Mother India, in need of

protection (Banerjee 2005: 49, 62-4, 158). In addition, women had little room for

patriotism in the intensely masculine landscape without shedding either their newly

defined femininity, or participating as the new docile image of something needed to be

controlled by men (Banerjee 2005:12, 45). As a response to an Indian identity being

labeled as inferior to the British Identity, there was also an emphasis on establishing a

concerted Hindu identity, that tried new ideas of masculine strength with a focus on

historical cultural roots (Banerjee 2005:2-3, 45-48). This lead to a rather "conservative

revival" of traditional practices to combat cultural humiliation and annihilation, which, in

part, could account for the greater emphasis on cultural practices that stressed

stratification and patriarchy, traditionally more isolated to the Northern regions. These

included a stricter caste system and *sati,* widow burning, extreme practices that situated

an Indian cultural landscape as strong and defiant to the cultural practices of the British

empire (Banerjee 2005:48).

The goal of gender restructuring was emphasized in colonial practice, in part, for the

easier control of Indian land and resources; lessening the indigenous ways of knowing

over the land, therefore, removing power over the land, often led to the attack on women,

the perceived keepers of the culture (Unger 2004: 47). Tea, opium, cotton, silk, and wood

were among the early resources the British Empire wanted trade control over (Thomas

2007:164, 209), but instilling large scale agribusiness and industrial land practice was at

odds with a communal land ethic. Particularly, in smaller villages around the colonial

empires, women had the respected place as keepers of the culture, due to their roles as

mothers and the first teachers of children; part of this cultural knowledge was the use and

conservation of the land, and knowledge on growing food, managing resources, and

caring for nature sustainably (Unger 2004:47-8). With women largely in control of land

practice, in order for the British to gain control over resources, women's power had to be

diminished. Interestingly enough, the emphasis on converting native men to Christianity

was a tactic employed to diminish land control by women; due to the higher amount of

control men had in Christianity, particularly over land, they were more likely to accept

the patriarchal religion while women viewed their power as weakening and were more

likely to reject it (Unger 2004:47). Instilling overarching religious practice was largely

used to redefine land and gender practice, due to the complex nature of Indian society when the British came to conquer it. India was structured by a significant number of small tribes that differed in religion, land practice, caste system reliance, and power dynamics for men and women (Chitnis and Wright 2007:1316, 1320). By attempting to restructure India on the basis of unifying religion under Hinduism or Christianity for all of India, it opened the door for the British to criticize and exaggerate the "barbaric actions" of isolated tribes in the North, that were more focused on patriarchy and caste rank, and define the entire country as religiously unsophisticated (Chitnis and Wright 2007:1320-4). This allowed the British to effectively exploit and emphasize the stratification of the more patriarchal caste system on the basis of spreading a more civilized religion (Chitnis and Wright 2007:1319-25), and, as result, have easier access over the land as the general public lost power.

Far from arguing that India was a utopian society of egalitarianism and environmental stewardship before colonial influence, what is left of recorded pre-colonial Indian history, paints an entirely different picture of gender and environmental norms than are seen today, situating colonial practice as a major culprit for changing environmental and gender institutions. Further inspection reveals a clear shift in gender and environmental practice from pre to post-colonization, illuminating the drastic effects of colonization that directly link modern issues to a colonial legacy of changing institutions and social norms. How we understand much of "traditional" Indian pre-colonial practice came from a colonial narrative that rewrote history and included colonial propaganda (Gadgil and Guha 1992:76, Talbot 2001:3). While traditional practices that were emphasized by the British, notably the caste system, was present and a major vehicle of inequality in pre-

colonial India, some have speculated that colonial influence, particularly the removal of Indian kings leaving the upper Brahman class largely responsible for reshaping hierarchical politics, could have led to a greater reliance on "traditional" roles such as the stratified caste system (Talbot 2001:3, 59). Inscriptional evidence suggests that a rigid hierarchical centrality of caste to precolonial Indian culture may not be accurate (Talbot 2001:3). Colonial rule could have influences and solidified caste identity, since it served as a good organizing tool that largely matched a more English sociopolitical structure (Talbot 2001:3).

Scant records exist on the lives of Indian women in pre-colonial times, but what is available, particularly from legal or religious sources, shows that women were not solely relegated to housework and motherhood as what is commonly believed. While it was a rarer occurrence, women owning property in medieval India was not unheard of, particularly since property was communally and ancestrally delegated (Mann 2013:350, Talbot 2001:83). Many women had land grants for temples and received land and property as inheritance or through marriage (Talbot 2001:83-4). Temple inscriptions and endowments reveal that many aristocratic women could bear titles and fund projects in their families honor, signaling at least some control over family finances, which was a right not generally granted in Victorian England (Talbot 2001:83-5). Many aristocratic women exercised political authority in public areas, as made apparent by heroic epithets made in women's honor (Talbot 2001:84). In temples in particular, many women held honored positions as temple keepers, treasurers, poets, folk artists, and mystics (Talbot 2001:84). Additionally, both men and women could achieve enlightenment and be community temple leaders initiating ritual ceremonies (Talbot 2001:84). Since

communities were largely self-sufficient the strict separation between public and private

sphere work did not exist, and men and women could more easily participate in both

home life and work life (Talbot 2001:84). In addition, women had access to education,

which was reinforced by Tantric texts that instructed daughters be equally educated as

sons (Ramaswamy 2016:23, 151). Outside of areas in Northern India, which was more

patriarchal, many women had the freedom to divorce or remarry in pre-colonial India

(Chitnis and Wright 2007:1320). Inscription samples in some parts of India reveal that

marriage was, perhaps, not as oppressive to women and their identity as is traditionally

thought. Ties to the wife's family was extremely important if a woman did get married,

and some inscriptions sampled suggested that up to one third of women in some regions

may not have been married at all (Talbot 2001:83).

Spiritually, women were regarded with much higher esteem than in more patriarchal

Judeo-Christian teachings imported from colonialist philosophy. In addition to the

worship by both men and women of powerful Independent Goddesses like Durga, Kali or

Dependent goddesses Lakshmi, or Parvati, women and female energy was regarded as

equally divine (Ramaswamy 2016:16, 83-4). Creation and the universe relied on the

feminine Shakti, or Prakriti, and the masculine Shiva, or Purusha (Ramaswamy 2016: 9,

52). The two had to be in equal power and this idea was translated to marriage, where

wives were supposed to be the best friend and equal half of the husband, in addition to

being the provider of salvation, or *dharma* (Ramaswamy 2016:14). In Vedic times, the

women's role in the family and household was considered the axis and a proud position,

without the stigma of the domestic as inherently less equal, as was the case in England

(Ramaswamy 2016:14). While arranged marriages were normal, there is evidence

suggesting women could have some control over the choice of husband (Ramaswamy 2016:51). There are records of women hunters and warriors in pre-colonial India and, they are largely attributed with creating both the agricultural system and providing food for local villages with land knowledge (Ramaswamy 2016:xix-xx). Agricultural societies relied on group cohesiveness, so women and men could share in domestic, family, and land work to make sure the community was provided for. Domestic work did not represent a distinction from the public sphere, eliminating the possibility of traditional English gender roles where women remained in the less powerful domestic sphere (Ramaswamy 2016:xvii-xxi, Talbot 2001:84). Some evidence suggests women entering traditional public sphere roles; particularly in higher castes or in positions of nobility, women could be politically active in government serving as leaders, representatives, or heads of village councils, with some being able to have legal or military enforcement rights (Talbot 2001:84-5).

Environmental Practice in Pre-Colonial and Colonial India

Pre-colonial Indian land practice, while regionally and ideologically diverse, for the most part, was founded on communal ownership, an inherent respect for nature, and the belief that humans were part of a larger ecosystem (Gadgil and Guha 1992:4, 15). The emphasis was not on man trying to dominate or control nature, as colonial influence would suggest, but rather cooperate and care for it as a divine and valuable entity (Gadgil and Guha 1992:38). Religious texts centered in nonviolence and coexisting with nature situated the environment as something to be cherished and have a close relationship with, particularly since it provided life (Ghosal 2011:107-8). Acting in harmony with nature benefited self-sufficient communities, who relied on the betterment of the collective, not

the individual (Gadgil and Guha 1992:35, 63, 93). The protection and conservation of

natural resources was at the forefront of ecological knowledge for pre-colonial India,

since natural environments were seen as a source of spiritual guidance as well as material

sustenance (Gadgil and Guha 1992: 25, 82, Ghosal 2011:108). Native peoples were free

to use and preserve the land for survival, ritual, celebration, worship, etc., and nature,

particularly forests, were central to the localized communal lifestyles of many

communities in India (Ghosal 2011:108). While larger economic uses of land occurred,

particularly for the larger monarch systems in India, the level of mass production and

economic valuing of land was not in place, nor did the perception of nature as something

to be used without conservation prevail in precolonial India (Ghosal 2011:108-10).

Indigenous lives and land practice was largely left unrestricted until colonial law forced

many communities to abandon ancient practices of coexisting with nature and made use

of land restricted or illegal for many indigenous peoples (Ghosal 2011). Communally

controlled common spaces protected by peasants were eliminated with the introduction of

commodifying nature and the concept of disrupting natural landscapes with individual

property ownership (Gadgil and Guha 1992:147). Food production for local communities

became increasingly less important, as commodity production for England took over;

family land and local villages were no longer feeding themselves and, instead, had to rely

on purchasing food from larger economic enterprises (Gadgil and Guha 1992:31, 145).

The British empire had such a profound impact on global environment since its

foundation and mission was complete control and access to natural resources, making the

alteration of the environment central to imperialism (Beattie 2012:129-39). Due to the

wide reaching influence of empire expansion, and the subsequent diverse environments

converted for productive use, colonization created environmental changes that had never

before been experienced in human history (Beattie 2012:129-39). In contrast to

communal use, the British Empire depended on a model that took native resources and

processed them for manufactured goods (Beattie 2012:129-39). Biblical philosophy

dictated the belief that land should be used to benefit man and the holding of private

property and goods marked a more civilized society (Beattie 2012:129-39). Therefore,

another justification of the colonial mission was that native people did not properly use

their land, and therefore, needed to be reeducated to increase productivity of land for

mass resource use (Beattie 2012:129-39).

The colonial environmental mission can be seen as restructuring and privatizing

natural environments, that has been freely used, for the most part, into lands that could be

exploited for farming, logging, or manufacturing (Mann 2013:334, 350, 355-6). Perhaps

the most famous example of this was the enactment of the Indian Forest Act of 1865

which legally situated the colonial empire as the protector and controller of Indian forest

land (Mann 2013:355). The goal of this law was to increase the productivity and

economic benefit of forested land through bureaucratically changing local forest practice

for large scale industrial use (Mann 2013:355). The idea was that all uncultivated land,

including forest or jungle areas, were "wastelands" that lacked any inherent or biological

value, and were in need of immediate agricultural or industrial reform (Mann 2013:340)

This transformation from local control to state control criminalized, jailed, and evicted

local peoples if they were found to use the land outside of colonial regulation (including

authentic cultural practice) (Mann 2013:327). In addition, there was an emphasis on

commercial agriculture that introduced large scale water irrigation projects, including the

building of large dams, that drastically altered the hydrology of Indian land and went

against former indigenous irrigation practices that had a far lesser impact on ecosystems

(Mann 2013:322). Habitat and wildlife were negatively impacted by the clearcutting of

forests and the building of dams that changes the natural landscape (Mann 2013:322).

Further, the introduction of large scale game hunting, a popular past-time of the British

elite, as well as the need to eliminate wildlife that interfered with farming, had a profound

impact on the wildlife in many parts of India. Mass business farming and the emphasis on

monoculture production lead to decreasing biodiversity and had profound impacts on

nutrient levels in the soil, leading to healthy soil depletion in India (Mann 2013:332-4).

Colonists were highly critical of many native land practices of agriculture, such as *jhum*,

the small scale slash and burning or turning techniques that provided nutrients to

farmable soil, and banned its use as barbaric (Mann 2013:350). In addition, many women

saw their property rights decrease over their ancestrally inherited forest lands, which was

commonly owned (Mann 2013:350). These projects in economizing the land lead to large

scale deforestation, habitat destruction, famine through monoculture crop disease, and

loss of wildlife biodiversity (Mann 2013:344-6).

   It is important to note that, while beyond the scope of this paper, there were acts of

resistance and agency from Indian men and women during the time of colonialism.

Women organized to create a distinctly Indian nation as mothers, soldiers, nurses, and

politicians in response to colonialism (Banerjee 2005:140) and citizens formed large

scale protests and resistances to the monopolizing Indian Forest Act of 1865 (Gadgil and

Guha 1992:123). Mahatma Gandhi famously led mass protests in an effort to create an

independent India free from British control. There can be a tendency to depict native

people as passive victims, unable to act on their own behalf which diminishes the experiences of an entire people while serving to perpetuate myths that the West is inherently superior. Despite the historical evidence, it paints a picture that Western influence was unanimously well received by locals. While acts of agency and decolonial protest during the colonial period are outside the scope of the paper, it is worth acknowledging the strength, resistance, and organizing power of those in India during this time. They set the framework for modern women and environmental movements and set a precedent for organized acts of resistance today.

MODERN WOMEN AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES IN INDIA

By the time colonial rule left India, institutions were established and restructured to change thousands of years of environmental stewardship and egalitarian gender relationships. By waging war on nature and women, the British Empire was able to promote ideologies of patriarchy and male domination over the earth. With this, I argue, being the main legacies of colonial rule left in India, many of the country's most pressing challenges today relate directly to gender and the environment. Because India has been independent for less than 70 years, there has been little time to come to terms with generations of assimilation, identity crises, the destruction of local institutions, and overall violence. Today, those colonizing countries, for example England, France, Spain, and the United States, are considered "First World" and marked by development, industry, and wealth; while colonized nations, for example India, parts of Africa, and parts of South America, are all considered "Third World" developing nations, often dependent on resource export related economies and globalization practices that benefit the First World who are the architects of this systems (McMichael 2016:6). This

dependence is further perpetuated in the form of debt to First World countries who, after

accumulating wealth from colonial practice, marketed, through globalization, expensive

agricultural or industrial technologies as necessary for success and wealth in developing

nations. The global economic market encourages the purchase of these technologies in

the "developing world" to allow for higher production and resource exports to developed

nations. This only serves to create the "myth of catching up" in developing countries like

India, or the idea that developing nations will be able to someday attain the same level of

wealth and unsustainable resource consumption as developed nations, who were only

able to attain this through exploitative practices and colonization (Mies and Shiva

1993:55). As more and more debt is accumulated, more natural resources must be

depleted to become exports to the First World who created this debt trap in the first place.

Additionally, globalization restricts how resources are used and markets are created that

are not necessarily compatible to the well-being of local individuals.

India, rich in natural resources, depends largely on environmental business and

exports to compete in a globalized market, significantly reducing the limited resource

availability for local populations, and increasing environmental degradation. It is the

world's 15th largest agricultural, fishery, and forestry exporter, with over 52% of its land

available for global farming (International Trade Administration 2016c). India depends

on agribusiness and exports global market goods like rice, cotton, cacao, and fruits,

leaving little control for local farmers over the land or production (International Trade

Administration 2016c). With little availability to local farming practices, India is home to

the largest population of undernourished and hungry in the world with 15.2% of the

population malnourished; India account for 25% of the global malnourished population

(India FoodBanking Network 2016). Additionally, the increased dependency on global

agribusiness farms has increased the dependency of harsh chemical fertilizers and

preference for genetically engineered seeds over indigenous seeds, increasing poverty for

local farmers who have little choice but to purchase these farming technologies to stay

competitive (McMichael 2016:55-6). Globalization rooted in colonial practice uprooted

peasants from land that they needed to survive to make room for agribusiness; this

practice of uprooting local land practices and replacing it with environmentally

degradable practices like GMO monoculture seeds and chemical fertilizers has both

depleted the soil of India at a rapid rate and created a food crisis (Shiva 2008).

Agribusiness, in short, has become as deadly to farmers as it has to natural environments.

Over 100,000 farmers in India have committed suicide for lack of control over their land

and the inability to meet demands of international agribusiness (Mies and Shiva

1993:131, 264).

In addition to agribusiness which pollutes waters with chemicals and takes up land

that could be used for natural biodiversity, logging and fishing has been huge industries

for India (International Trade Administration 2016c). The global demand for fishing and

forestry has caused mass deforestation and freshwater pollution that has led to increased

desertification, erosion, and drought (Reich and Bowonder 1992, Yedla 2006:182-7). The

destruction of forests also leads to higher amounts of CO_2 emissions and air pollution, as

trees are unable to filter out toxins (Yedla 2006:182-7). Mining is also a huge industry in

India, with coal mining accounting for 78% of mining practices (International Trade

Administration 2016a). This is one of the most environmentally degrading forms of

mining with increased air pollution with CO_2, SOX, and NOX emissions, coal fires, acid

rain, clearing trees and habitats, and polluting sediment and water with heavy metal

toxins like arsenic and mercury (GreenPeace 2016). Additionally, it releases methane in

the air which is 64 times more potent than CO2, which also can cause chronic lung

disease in local populations (GreenPeace 2016). There is a large scale reliance in India on

fossil fuels like coal for energy, with 72.3% of the primary energy supply coming from

fossil fuels (United Nations Development Programme 2016a).

Industrialization and growing urbanization is another environmental challenge facing

India that causes serious air, water, and waste management issues. According to a 2015

World Health Organization study, 13 out of the 20 most air polluted cities in the world

are in India (International Trade Administration 2016b). Around 40% of India's industrial

areas produce high levels of pollution, making it one of the largest and highest increasing

air polluters in the world (International Trade Administration 2016b). Suspended air

particulates, smog, SOX, CO2, and NOX gases are all heavy air pollutants that are the

result of industry (Yedla 2006). India ranks 155th out of 178 countries for air pollution,

and recent studies have shown that its environmental quality is behind that of China's, a

country often considered the worst industrial polluter (World Bank 2014). Additionally, it

ranks 130 out of 188 countries for CO2 emissions with 1.7 tonnes per capita being

emitted in recent census data surveys in 2011 (United Nations Development Programme

2016a). In addition, low safety regulations and few emission capture technologies in

industries lead to one of the worst industrial disasters in the world, the Union Carbide

leak in Bhopal India. A deadly air pollutant, methyl isocyanate, leaked into Bhopal

killing 25,000 people, and leaving 150,000 still suffering from pollution related diseases

in conjunction with high rates of infant mortality (Bhopal Medical Appeal 2014).

Additionally, new research has shown that over half a million people die premature

deaths each year due to high levels of industrial air pollutants (Ghude, Chate, Jena et al.

2016). 80% of India's surface water is polluted from industrialization and poor sewage

treatment in cities (Deyl 2015). 40% of India has sanitary waste-water treatment and only

23% of solid waste is processed or treated (International Trade Administration 2016b)

By 2015, India's population exceeded 1.3 billion individuals, making it the second

largest country in the world (World Bank 2016c). It has a land area of 2, 973, 190 square

kilometers and a population density 441 people per square kilometer (World Bank

2016c). Particularly since globalization encourages the export of native resources to be

able to compete in a 21st century market, this large of a local population cannot be

successfully supported by the remaining resources available. The land size is simply too

limited to support everyone in a population this size. This is illustrated by the fact that it

has 2% of the world's land mass, but 18% of the world population, making its natural

resources severely limited and unable to fully support the population, particularly in rural

areas where there is higher resource dependency (Reich and Bowonder 1992,

WorldoMeters 2016). Over 70% of those living in India live in rural areas, and the lack of

significant natural resources forces increased problems with sanitation, clean water,

infant mortality rate, and disease (Reich and Bowonder 1992). Over 21.2% of the

population is living at or below the international poverty line of $1.90 a day (World Bank

2016b). With high levels of poverty, increased hunger, disease, and mortality are

rampant. In India, there is a high burden of disease for leprosy, diarrhea, malaria,

respiratory infection, meningitis, perinatal conditions, and nutritional deficiency; 51% of

women are anemic and 44% of children under 5 are below the healthy weight range due

to malnourishment (India FoodBanking Network 2016, World Health Organization 2014). The infant mortality rate is high at 37.9% (World Bank 2016a) and India has the highest amount of child mortality in the world with an estimated 20% of global child death in 2015 occurring there (Human Rights Law Network 2016a).

A discussion of women's rights in India begins with its obvious connection to the environment and population dynamics. It has long been documented that the more educated women are, the less children they are likely to have, making women's health and rights directly related to population growth and decline (Fitzgerald Reading 2011). More educated women are consistently more empowered, healthy, economically stable, and able to mother healthier children (Fitzgerald Reading 2011). In 2014, many women died or became extremely ill undergoing sterilization procedures in Chhattisgarh, India creating a national uproar to address a lack of family planning access for women (Human Rights Watch 2015). According to the most recent United Nation Contraceptive Study, 45.2% of women do not have access to or use birth control and 36.1% of women have a need or demand for birth control (United Nations 2016). Maternal health is also an issue that faces Indian women. While the maternal mortality rate has decreased in the last 10 years, 20% of preventable deaths related to childbirth and pregnancy each day occur in India (UNICEF 2016c). The largest number of stillbirths worldwide also occur in India with about 572,000 cases each year (UNICEF 2016b). The high child and mother mortality, particularly in rural areas, is largely attributed to little access to health care for pregnant women, little postnatal care, and little education or information available for mothers (UNICEF 2016b).

Despite legalizing abortion in 1971 for qualifying situations, such as the health of the

mother, Indian women still have very little access or control over their reproductive

health. Abortion is stigmatized and, particularly in rural regions where health clinics can

be hours away, most abortions are unsafe. About 2/3rd of abortions are done illegally at

home in unsafe conditions which can lead to death and lifelong health problems for many

Indian women, particularly rural (Chatterjee 2014). Abortion also overtly illustrates

human right's violations against women through gender selective abortions. There is a

high preference for male children in India, particularly in poorer areas, it is clear that

being male is advantageous as he receives a dowry upon marriage and he is better able to

support a family. This reality puts pressure on a woman to have boys, and sometimes she

risks violence or disownment if she doesn't produce a son (Stallard 2016). Recent census

data revealed that there is a widening gap between boys and girls, particularly ages 0-6,

showing selective abortions for girls, especially after first born children (Prabhat, Kesler,

Kumar et al. 2011). With the absence of a boy, about 30% of women in India partake in a

sex-selective abortion (United Nations Population Fund 2012). The sex ratio, overall,

shows that there are around 112 boys born for every 100 girls but this has increased to

120 boys for every 100 girls in regions like Punjab and Gujrat (Stallard 2016, United

Nations Population Fund 2012). Since the 1980's it is estimated that anywhere from 4.2-

12.1 million girls have been victims of sex selective abortion, with 3-6 million deaths

occurring in the 2000s; the large range in number is because poorer and less educated

populations have higher levels of gender selection, making this number harder to report

accurately (Prabhat et al. 2011). However despite discrepancies in numbers, it is still

estimated that 600,000 female fetuses are aborted each year (Xu 2013). Now, there is

about 7.1 million fewer girls aged 0-6 than boys and higher mortality rates in girls aged

0-4 (Prabhat et al. 2011). While female infanticide has decreased in the last decade,

postnatal preference for boys, contributing to higher female child deaths before age 4, can

be seen with higher allocation of resources like food, parental surveillance, health care,

and clothing going to boys (United Nations Population Fund 2012). Additionally, sex

selective abortions have created what is known as the generations of "missing girls",

totaling around 114-120 million women in Asia considered missing due to abortion; the

largest proportion of this total is found to be in India and China, with some estimates

saying 10 million women are missing from India (Stallard 2016, United Nations

Population Fund 2012). Projection studies show that men already outweigh women for

marriageable age for over two generations and by 2030, single men trying to marry will

exceed single women trying to marry by 50-60% (United Nations Population Fund 2012).

In areas of female advancement such as education or economic mobility, women

significantly lag behind men in terms of rights. India ranks a low 135 out of 187 countries

on the Educational Development Index (United Nations Development Programme

2016c). Various census reports reveal that educational attainment for women tends to be

lower with 53.7% of women literate compared to 75.3% of men in the early 2000s

(Census of India 2011). More recent data suggests that female literacy has increased to

63-74.4% in India but still falls behind male literacy at 88.4% (UNICEF 2016a). The

number of girls enrolled in primary education per 100 boys is around 80% and in

secondary education this number drops to 70% (Nair 2010). Because of the high rural

population, it is difficult to say how many women are attending schools. Some census

data studies suggest that only 1/3rd of women in India attend primary and secondary

school (Nair 2010), however other studies say about 81% of women in India attend

primary school, but this number drops significant to 48.7% in high school education

attendance (UNICEF 2016a). Women are closing the education gap in college with

40.5% of PhD students being women and 45.9% of enrolled undergraduates being

women enrolling in male dominated fields like engineering, management, medicine, and

law (CATALYST 2015). Despite these trends in higher education, a large number of

women do not have access to education and women, in general, have less access than

men. On average women attend 3.6 years of school compared to 7.2 years for men

(United Nations Development Programme 2016a). For ages 25 and older, it is estimated

that only 27% of women when compared to 56.6% of men have some level of secondary

or college education (United Nations Development Programme 2016a). Some studies

have shown that because of son preference, parents tend to give education preference to

boys while the labor market tends to reward women for being less educated (Kingdon

2001). In addition, particularly if there is a working mother in the household, housework

and childcare disproportionately falls on female children, preventing enrollment in school

(Kingdon 2001).

Employment and economic advancement is an area that is limited for women today

due to social pressures to work domestically or care for family coupled with

discrimination in the workplace. Women are more likely than men to live in the poorest

household in India, disproportionately increasing problems for women that come with

poverty such as access to education, healthcare, and food (United Nations 2015). A mere

27% of women are in the labor force compared to 79.9% men and female workforce

participation has been declining in the recent decade (Das, Jain-Chandra, Kochhar et al.

2015, United Nations Development Programme 2016a). For those women participating in

the workforce, for a 450 minute work day (roughly 7.5 hours), women only get paid, on

average, for 160 of those minutes when compared to men who receive payment for 360

minutes out of a 390 minute work day (United Nations Development Programme 2016b).

Access to employment is crucial for women because it gives them for financial stability

and prevents them from being trapped in the cycle of poverty and/or dependent on men.

Additionally, studies show that equity in the workplace and access to employment is

crucial for women while providing a country-wide economic benefit of reducing poverty

(Das et al. 2015:5). While laws are in place to ensure economic equality for women, legal

restrictions, weak or unenforced practice, and discriminatory social practices can impede

their rights to inheritance, property, and, in some cases, opening a bank account or freely

pursuing a career (Das et al. 2015:8). Additionally, the kind of jobs that women tend to

have access to are the result of deeply held gender roles and the belief that women to

having too much economic power is dangerous and demeaning to men. The majority of

women work in the "informal" or unskilled sector where wages tend to be low and there

few laws regulating job benefits or security (Das et al. 2015:4, 15, 24-6, Surie 2016).

84% of women in India work in the "informal sector" which includes domestic work and

factory or garment work in which working conditions can be extremely hazardous with

limited rights (Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing 2016). 62.8

percent of women work in farming and agriculture, 20% are employed in industry, and

17% work in service sectors (Surie 2016). In rural areas 88% of women work in the

farming sector, often in unskilled labor or domestic positions (Das et al. 2015:9-12). In

urban areas, where education and income attainment is higher for women, participating in

the workforce can still be difficult. In New Delhi, less than 30% of women went back and

continued to work after having a child, and, due to violence against women particularly in cities, 82% of women across major cities reported that they left work early in order to avoid travelling in the dark (Surie 2016). Women account for only 28% of postsecondary technical or vocational education, generally only taught to be receptionists, work with electronics, and bookbinding (Nair 2010). For skilled professions, women have significantly lower positions of power than men. Only 24% of women are in entry level managerial positions, 21% managers, 19% senior managers, and 14% executive officers (CATALYST 2015). A mere 7.7% of women hold board seats, 2.7% sit as board chairs, and only 12.2% of women have governmental seats in parliament (CATALYST 2015, United Nations Development Programme 2016a). Women with less access to upward mobility or positions of power make it difficult to change law and gendered stereotypes that prevent women from having economic influence, which furthers the cycle of poverty, dependence, and low skilled worked with less rights.

India ranks 96 out of 108 countries for very high risk for women according to OECD'S Social Institution and Gender Index based on discriminatory family code, restricted physical integrity, son bias, restricted resources and assets, and restricted civil liberties (Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) 2016). India's high risk to women is overtly apparent in categories of violence, sexual assault, and relationships with men. Issues with marriage and dowry related violence is a large area of concern for India and child and teen brides (while there are laws prohibiting this) are extremely high with 46% of all marriages in India being early marriages, or taking place before that age 18 (Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) 2016). Fathers traditionally exercise authority over the household and are generally the ones who decide marriages. According to a recent

Pew Survey, only 26% of respondents believed a woman should have the right to freely choose her spouse (Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) 2016). Honor killings, particularly in Northern India, is a serious problem with estimates that over 1000 women are killed each year for marrying outside their caste or being in a relationship without parental consent (Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) 2016). Intimate partner or domestic violence is high in India. One study focusing in Northern India and Punjab found that 75% of women in lower castes were frequently beaten by their husbands, stemming from patriarchal ideals that husbands owned their wives (Jejeebhoy 1998:855). Overall, 40% of women in India have reported physical or emotional violence from their husbands and out of cases taken to court, only 15% had convictions for the perpetrator (Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) 2016). The Demographic and Health Survey reveals that over 50% of people in India believe a man is justified in beating his wife and was acceptable in circumstances such as a wife arguing with her husband (Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) 2016). In cases of divorce or husband death, women, in practice, tend not to receive inheritance or have control over joint land or property; instead inheritance will go to a son or go to the husband's family, where many widows remain dependent for care (Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) 2016). Although outlawed and an ancient practice that rarely occurs, some widows still commit the ritual suicide of *sati,* after a husband's death; although traditionally a free choice of a widow, some cases have documented that inheritance related issues or pressure from a husband's family has forced some women to commit *sati* involuntarily (RT 2009). Dowry violence and death at the hands of a husband's family remains a serious problem in India. If an agreed upon price for a marriage is not met by the bride's family or a

dowry was considered as a means to accumulate more wealth for the husband, women can be set on fire, shot, have acid thrown upon them, and killed in other horrendous ways (Ramakrishnan 2013). It is now estimated that one woman every hour in India is killed over dowry related incidents (Ramakrishnan 2013).

Instances of sexual assault and rape have increased dramatically in the last decade, with India under increased global scrutiny over the extreme amount of violence against women since the 2012 gang rape and murder of a New Delhi university student, and subsequent protests (Harris 2013). Increases in sexual violence have been attributed to women demanding more independence and rights in education, the home, and the workforce, whereby men violently attempt to take back control. Underreporting of rape and sexual assault in India is common due to pressures over family honor and inadequacies of the law to protect survivors, but rape remains the largest crime perpetrated against women in India (Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) 2016). Over 1/3rd of women in India will experience sexual assault or violence in her lifetime according to reports from the early 2000s (United Nations Statistics Division 2015). Some studies suggest that 26 crimes against women of assault and rape are reported every hour (Mallapur 2015). Reporting for sexual assault has increased by 25% in recent years and in 2015 the National Crime Records Bureau received over 130,000 reports (National Crime Records Bureau 2015, Xu 2013); again, due to the difficulty in accurate data collection and the increasing trend in sexual assault, some reports claim this number was closer to 300,000 (Dhawani 2014). About 2.3 million reports of crimes against women were reported in the last decade (Mallapur 2015), but particularly in rural areas of India which have even less access to reporting, this number does not necessarily reflect the

extent of how much violence women face. Conviction for sexual assaults remain low, with an average 24% of cases ending with the perpetrator being punished (Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) 2016). While a few laws have been in place aimed to reduce violence against women since the New Delhi protest, many favor perpetrators and not survivors and are still not adequate or implemented to bring justice to women (Human Rights Law Network 2016b). India is one of the largest hubs for sex trafficking in the world but does not yet met the minimum requirements to prevent sex trafficking and it remains an increasing problem as a destination and transit country for kidnapped women and children (Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) 2016). It is difficult to say how many millions of women are affected by sex and human trafficking but a recent report shows that India has over 18 million people living in modern slavery, a large percentage of which is forced marriage, domestic labor, and sexual slavery (Global Slavery Index 2016).

MODERN MOVEMENTS AND COLONIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

It seems clear that there is a deep connection in modern human rights an environmental atrocities to colonization and a colonial legacy, but to what extent is that nexus being dealt with in today's movements? It is worth emphasizing that there are many incredible movements in India that seek to promote women's rights, equality, and environmental change that have been empowering and effective organizing groups; particularly women's groups in India have been politically active and have taken part in many protests across the country on behalf of equality prior to Independence. This research by no means is intended to devalue the work of these groups, simply to suggest a colonial acknowledgment in movements could be very effective in finding more

solutions, being more sustainable, or reaching larger audiences. In addition, it may serve

to better connect and expand many of these local movements to create a single united

force nation-wide against corrupt acts or ideologies in postcolonial institutions, as was

the case in the Kenyan Green Belt Movement.

The Women's Movement Today

The women's movement in India is complex with millions of women participating in

groups of differing ideologies, goals, political involvement, region, government

dependence, and organizational style (Subramaniam 2004:635). It is difficult to

summarize the whole of the women's movement because of the incredible amount of

variation, but many women's groups today seem largely issue and regionally based with

country wide protests around issues such as sexual assault and violence (especially since

the 2012 Delhi gang rape). The larger Indian women's movement did begin as a response

to colonization and the ideology that Indian women were barbaric and in need of saving

(Moase 2017) Particularly, in the 1970's, a new wave of more racial and self-conscious

feminism emerged in India, and the movement emphasized colonial acknowledgement

and nationalism (Sen 2000:3-4) (interestingly this coincides with when ecofeminism was

emerging as well with similar frameworks). This focus on anti-colonialism and

nationalism in women's movements subsided substantially and is less characteristic in

modern movements due to an initial reliance on a seemingly neutral nation-state and

government but eventual critique and exodus when it was understood the state upheld

colonial patriarchal beliefs (Sen 2000:4-10). Today popular women's initiatives and

feminist movements are focused on education, caste and poverty issues, violence, sexual

abuse and trafficking, and economic mobility (Moase 2017).

I identified 8 women's movements that are active today to analyze what issues they were working on and the extent to which colonization was acknowledged in their framework. My criteria for choosing specific movements were that they were able to be found online, translated to English, were created and established in India and not an international transplant movement (like the World Wildlife Fund), and, finally, were popular as defined by high amounts of listed members and referred to in scholarly works and news sources. I wanted to focus on famous movements because I felt this status would indicate a wider and more united audience across regions and could mean that they were more recognized by larger institutions. Additionally, due to language barriers and the limited resources in the United States to access information about smaller movements, those without web pages, or those not available in international web browsers, the better known movements became the only viable option. I chose these specific 8 movements because they seemed to be the most widely known and popular women's movement in India. Based on available information, only 1 out of the 8 movements seem to acknowledge colonization or decolonization within their frameworks, goals, or solutions. All of the movements are largely issue based and focused on solving a specific modern problem that women in India face, and apply solutions to create change in that specific area. The first is the National Federation of Indian Women, identified as the first "mass women organization" (National Federation of Indian Women 2017). Their main goals are to mobilize women for emancipation, create a socially just country for women and children, and provide food security, secularism, and peace (National Federation of Indian Women 2017). There is no mention of colonization in the materials I had access to. Founded in 1927, the All India Women's Conference

certainly began as a movement tied to politics, independence, and a colonial landscape.

Perhaps one of the most famous movements, today it focuses on the empowerment of

women through education, organizing around fundamental and constitutional rights,

eliminating violence against women, and providing trainings for career and leadership

roles ((AIWC) 2017). While closely tied to politics through its long history, today they

work mainly at the grassroots level and are focusing on female literacy efforts ((AIWC)

2017). These modern initiatives do not appear to have colonial acknowledgement within

the framework. The movement Commit2Change focuses on empowering orphaned,

abandoned, and impoverished girls to gain agency to be change agents within their

communities (Commit2Change 2017). The primary function to create opportunities for

these girls to learn and provide education to the most vulnerable female populations; in

2016 they were able to educate 1,000 girls in 7 orphanages across India (Commit2Change

2017). Colonial acknowledgement was not present.

   The fourth movement, Apne Aap Women Worldwide, is a grassroots movement and

registered charitable trust that seeks to aid women and girls to collectively resist and get

out of the sex industry (Apne Aap 2017). They create "self-empowerment" groups where

these women and girls can access and organize around their political, social, legal, and

economic rights while combating sex trafficking (Apne Aap 2017). Politically, they are

trying to create ways to decriminalize and financially support women stuck in the sex

industry and penalize those who profit from it at the government and policy level (Apne

Aap 2017). Colonial acknowledgement is not included in the mission, goals, or history of

the movement. The movement Sayfty was created in response to the 2012 gang rape of

Jyoti Singh, and while it has a framework including changing patriarchal mindsets from

old traditions and going against institutional failures to protect assault survivors, it does

not explicitly link its work to colonization (Sayfty 2017). It encourages communities to

not be bystanders in violence against women, instills awareness at an early age in schools

about gender equality, educates women and girls about violence and their rights, creates

platforms for survivors to take action and speak out against gender violence, and makes

women's daily lives safer by providing workshops to teach women how to defend

themselves against perpetrators (Sayfty 2017). Women on Wings is a group dedicated to

creating one million jobs for women living in rural India to provide economic stability,

autonomy, and a way to break the cycle of poverty impoverished women (Women on

Wings 2017). It is a group that works with social entrepreneurs and business partners to

create employment for rural Indian women (Women on Wings 2017). Colonial

acknowledgment is not included in the group's framework. The Self Employed Women's

Association is a trade union that seeks to organize mostly poor and self-employed women

to become fully employed where they obtain security, income, food, and some sort of

health and child care (SEWA 2017). It is a marriage of the labor movement and the

women's movement and want to strengthen women's leadership, representation, and

bargaining power (SEWA 2017). While created in the 1970's when movements tended

toward decolonial attitudes, the movement today does not seem to include a decolonial

framework in its goals or solution building.

    While all the aforementioned movements have done incredible work and brought

attention and solutions to the many issues that women face, it seems that while they all

strive to create larger social change, there is not much strategizing around instilling larger

institutional changes through a decolonial lens. With institutions being so shaped by

colonization, I find this interesting, but I suspect this is because these movements are

more focused on grassroots initiatives in specific areas tackling a specific problems and

larger institutional and cultural battles are still being realized and developed at this point.

The final women's movement I found that does address colonialism, the Navdanya

Movement, also happens to be an environmental movement, so it is worth detailing the

status of environmentalism and those activist movements in India first.

The Environmental Movement Today

The environmental movements in India are just as multifaceted and complex as the

women's movements. While the connection to colonization is more widely accepted

historically in environmental movements, particularly since many early protests in India

against the British government had to do with the treatment of forest land, there is a

similar pattern in intense colonial acknowledgement in the 1970's-1980's with this being

less emphasized today. India has a rich history of environmental justice and grassroots

organizing against "locally unwanted land uses" and environmentally degrading

development practices (Williams and Mawdsley 2006:660). The majority of famous

Indian environmentalist movements occurred in the 1970's and 1980's, with

environmental movements being more radical and intertwined in nationalist ideologies

against colonial legacy. The Chipko and Appiko Movements, a grassroots and protesting

movement against government sponsored deforestation, Save Silent Valley, another

grassroots and protesting movement against a hydroelectric project that would have

caused mas deforestation and habitat destruction, Save Narmada, a collective organizing

groups preventing series of dams being built on the Narmada river, all were thriving and

successful environmental activist groups during the late 1900's that were openly against

government and intuitional ecological destruction with acknowledgment of colonial

legacy (Nayak 2015:252-6, Williams and Mawdsley 2006:663, 667). India has more

international branches in environmentalist efforts than is the case for women's

movements, for example, they have Greenpeace, PETA, WWF, LEAD, and international

alliances on climate change through the UN. It seems as those these international

partnerships or sponsored movements are more frequent in India, overall. For this

research, however, I chose only to focus on local environmental initiatives created in

India and led by citizens. I choose popular local movements from several areas since the

modern environmental movement focuses on a range of issues from alternative energy,

overpopulation, sanitation, and habitat restoration. I found 7 movements, only 2 of which,

including again the Navdanya Movement, discusses colonization or include and active

decolonial framework.

The first movement, Aaranyak, aims to ensure biodiversity and wildlife conservation

in India through advocacy work and research (Aaranyak 2017). It is one of the most

active environmental organizations in the North East taking legal action to protect

endangered species, monitoring wildlife crime, and conducting conservation and research

in 28 project sites (Aaranyak 2017). The organization does not include colonial

acknowledgment within its framework. Similar to Aaranyak, the Wildlife Institute of

India serves to conduct research, train, and do outreach programs for communities to

better manage and conserve wildlife and biodiversity (Wildlife Institute of India 2017).

While not a grassroots activist style movement, the WII serves as an educational hub for

conservation in India (Wildlife Institute of India 2017). Despite citing a long history of

environmental degradation as the inspiration for its founding, colonization is not

mentioned in the institute's framework of issues to address. The Environmentalist Foundation of India is an organization of collective group solutions to a variety of topics including green village development. Habitat conservation, animal protection, waste and recycling management, education initiatives, and community empowerment (Environmentalist Foundation of India 2017). The goal is to promote a green society that allows nature to be loved, taken care of, and used wisely (Environmentalist Foundation of India 2017). The movement does not express issues of colonization within its solution building or missions.

INSEDA is a national organization focuses on the promotion and implementation of sustainable and alternative energies in India completing 300,000 biogas installations in rural areas since the 1980s (INSEDA 2017). It works on projects with rural local communities to create "eco-villages", reduce carbon dioxide emissions, and find sustainable energy solutions to India's more vulnerable areas (INSEDA 2017). There is no mention of colonization in the movement's framework or solutions. The International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal, is a grassroots environmental justice advocacy movement comprised of survivors and those affected by the Bhopal Disaster, where poisonous gas pesticides leaked from foreign Union Carbide's factory killing thousands (ICJB 2017). It seeks through partnerships, advocacy work, and protest to remediate the environmental damaged in Bhopal, compensate families who were and still are affected, and prevent governments from allowing these types of disasters from occurring (ICJB 2017). Despite protesting foreign powers, like the United States government and companies, it does not appear to have colonial acknowledgement within the movement framework.

The Kalpavriksh Environmental Action Group is one in which decolonization is in the framework of the movement philosophy. It is a protest, grassroots, activist group that believes that India will only develop meaningfully with social equality and environmental sustainability at the forefront of decision making (Kalpavriksh 2017). It works to find alternatives to frameworks, policies, and processes coming out of institutions and governments on a wide variety of issues from conservation, education, livelihood, food security, to forest management (Kalpavriksh 2017). It is deeply critical and against the colonial legacy and western imperialist attitude towards ecology; instead it seeks to uplift Indian based solutions and traditional cultural practices of earth care-taking in order to combat ecological and social problems in India today (Kalpavriksh 2017). Finally, the Navdanya Movement, which I identify as both a women's and environmental movement, is a planting and soil movement founded by Dr. Vandana Shiva with a decolonial framework (Navdanya 2017). The goal of this movement is to promote traditional and indigenous knowledge to protect biodiversity, spread ecological awareness, empower communities to live in harmony with nature, and provide healthy seeds, foods, and soil rehabilitation to local communities and farmers (Navdanya 2017). The idea is to reconnect Indian citizens, farmers in particular, with food stability and practices that do not leave them dependent on corrupt development practices brought over from the West (Navdanya 2017). It has over 111 seed banks and 650,000 participants working to conserve land and protect biodiversity (Navdanya 2017). Participation regardless of gender, caste, religion, ethnic group, etc. is encouraged and particular emphasis is given to empowering women globally through "Diverse Women for Diversity" to strengthen their grassroots movements under common international platforms (Navdanya 2017).

Specifically, ensuring women's food security and protesting against unstainable and destructive globalization practices is the goal of this section of Navdanya (Navdanya 2017). While all the movements I found showed incredible solutions and work, these two "decolonial" ones seem to have some of the largest audiences and widest impacts on India as a whole. In addition, they are extremely and uniquely intersectional, making connections to human and environmental rights, while gaining international popularity and attention.

The Kenya Example: Green Belt Movement

The Kenyan Green Belt Movement, created and led by Dr. Wangari Maathai, serves as an excellent example of an environmental women's activist movement with colonial acknowledgement in its ideology and solution building, and is continued proof that colonial acknowledgement works, not just in India, for other postcolonial nations. The model of the Green Belt Movement is one that Indian movements could relate to and draw ideas from due to similarities in both countries' histories and modern problems. Despite many differences between Kenya and India, particularly the smaller population size and initial postcolonial autocratic government in Kenya, they share a similar story of colonization and gaining independence from the British government in the mid-1900's; both countries were left with severe environmental degradation and women's rights issues while struggling to redefine themselves as independent nations (Taylor 2013:182). The Green Belt Movement actively went against corrupt governments, born out of colonial legacy, and promoted the destruction of ecosystems and the degradation of human rights (Taylor 2013:182).

Initially, the movement was created by Dr. Maathai as a response to the needs of rural

women saying they did not have access the resources or food they needed because forests
and streams were dying (Green Belt Movement 2017). As many women were poor,
uneducated, and living under patriarchal oppression, they were particularly vulnerable to
environmental degradation and poverty as the primary caretakers of home and family.
The Green Belt Movement began a system that empowered women through community
engagement and education to grow seeds, plant trees, collect and conserve rainwater, and
provide food (Green Belt Movement 2017). Women were given stipends for this
collective action, helping to break the cycle of poverty and dependence on a faulty
system, therefore giving them more agency over their own lives (Green Belt Movement
2017). As the movement developed, Dr. Maathai began to make connections and identify
the roots causes for the hardships of women and the environment; the environmental
problems and disenfranchisement that the women faced were symptoms of corrupt
government and the loss of traditional cultural values of environmental protection and
egalitarian practice (Green Belt Movement 2017). She identified problems in Kenya as
coming from "neo-colonial exploitation", the deliberate destruction of "traditional forms
of self-governance" that did not allow Kenyans "to practice their own form of culture,
religion, traditions, and customs" under colonial rule, and a postcolonial government
filled with African men trained by colonial powers to continue a colonial type
administration (Maathai 1995). Thus, the Green Belt Movement began to provide
education and seminars to communities to inform participants about the connection
between environmental degradation, human rights, development, and a colonial past
(Maathai 1995). These seminars were to" encourage individuals to examine why they
lacked agency to change their political, economic, and environmental circumstances"

(Green Belt Movement 2017). It was impossible for the Green Belt movement to truly combat the loss of biodiversity, destruction of habitats, and the dehumanizing of women without tackling larger institutional issues with an informed public. Dr. Maathai said a peaceful society could only occur when there was an understanding of the deep connection between restoring ecosystems, empowering women, making self-sustainable livelihoods, *and* removing corrupt colonial governments through democracy, thus, they inevitably began tackling the autocratic dictatorship the country had in place (Taylor 2013:184).

   Kenyan President Daniel Arap Moi, who gave unregulated use of forest land to political allies contributing to the already 98% deforested Kenyan landscape during his rule, was brutally against democracy or environmental protection (Taylor 2013:184). Moi attempted to privatize public forests and parks, and when the Green Belt activists protested, many were victims of intense violence and sent to jail (Taylor 2013:184). This marked a shift in the movement when they began to receive global media attention and politically protest government corruption to illustrate the deep connections between human rights, environmental protection, and democracy (Taylor 2013:184-6). This added an active decolonial framework to the movement, acknowledging that colonization had directly contributed and left behind a corrupt and non-transparent government responsible for institutions of environmental degradation and human rights crimes (Taylor 2013:184, 188-90). The level of consciousness raising concerning deforestation and environmental problems and the concerted efforts to reverse it is very unique to Kenya today; government policy, media, and citizens are constantly aware and promoting environmentalism as essential to their country's health and success (Taylor 2013:197).

This movement that connected all these areas successfully brought the problems with colonization, environmental issues, and women's rights to the forefront of conversation and created a more accountable government by making these deeply rooted connection visible in a way that no one had before (Taylor 2013:188-90).

The Green Belt Movement has been a success for many reasons. Since its founding, they have planted over 4.2 million trees in Kenya alone while empowering women through education and activism. In addition, in large part because of their efforts, President Moi left office and Kenya began a democratic transition in 2002 with Dr. Maathai eventually being appointed to Parliament. Institutional norms quickly began shifting with Dr. Maathai spearheading the 2005 Forest Act which is one of the most progressive environmental policies around the world promoting sustainability, greenhouse gas reduction, biodiversity, and meeting human needs (Green Belt Movement 2017). Rural women gained agency through education and activism, continuing the work for human rights and environmental protection all over the world. In addition, women were able to break the cycle of poverty within many of their communities and give themselves healthier food, thriving ecosystems, and remove their dependence on a government to provide for them.

Of course many factors were at play to make the Green Belt Movement such as success, particularly the incredible amount of media attention and majority of citizens sharing similar beliefs and willing to protest; however, I believe the acknowledgement and connection of a colonial past to modern environmental and women's issues were what gave the movement a huge push towards its success. Dr. Maathai and her team tackled the problem from its source, directly challenging corrupt power held over from a

colonial past. Exposing institutional and governmental corruption from their colonial

legacy and countering it with a democratic approach, created a snowball effect in which

the consequences of colonial rule were laid bare to the public. Thus, solutions became

extremely intersectional and did not allow for a government shaped by colonization to

hide from the destruction it caused. Blame was placed on culturally altering British

practices, and this acknowledgement shaped the fight for social justice. Was this colonial

recognition and decolonial framework in the movement the only reason it was more

successful than other environmental and women's activist efforts around the world?

There is no way to say. However, identifying the true intuitional cause of so much

oppression in Kenya and openly accounting for it within the movement was, I think, what

made all the difference. This shows how effective these types of movements can be if

they not only focus on the symptoms, but the underlying causes for such a disease.

CONCLUSION: THE CASE FOR ECOFEMINISM

It can be difficult to understand exactly what a "decolonial" framework would be for

movements in countries like India; certainly combating the colonial legacy is nothing

new to the country, and some women and environmental movements have incorporated

into their frameworks. However, I am a firm believer that something as simple as

identifying a problem honestly is an absolutely necessary step for finding solutions to

institutional problems, and there is room for growth in this area for the movements of

India. A solution cannot be found if there is a blindness to the very existence of a

problem. It benefits stratifying intuitions, postcolonial or not, to encourage a public that is

non-critical, does not openly discuss or identify issues, and blindly accepts hierarchical

power and status quo; this is accomplished through systematically "whitewashing"

history and social issues, symbolically annihilating or co-opting dissenters, and denying

counter narratives outside the dominant norm in education, media, politics, etc. All this

serves to say that I believe a major triumph for social movements in India is, or would be,

the open identification of colonial legacy as a major player in institutionalized

discrimination and injustice. Not allowing it to hide or get lost in social justice

discussions can allow, if nothing else, for more open conversation about what is wrong

and what needs to be done, making it a "decolonial" movement. However, I think India's

"decolonial" framework in modern women and environmental movements can take it a

step further. Colonial practice focused so heavily on gender and resource specifically, and

created institutions founded in exploitative and oppressive means. The basis and

understanding of power shifted to one that was hierarchical and make mass

environmental degradation and extreme patriarchy the norm. Combating this colonial

legacy can come, therefore, in the strategic countering of gender and environmental

understanding from the British to create a more just and sustainable society for women

and nature. This is why I believe ecofeminism can be an incredibly effective large scale

movement for India as a whole since it not only addresses the oppression of nature and

women, but does so, in many countries, with an acknowledgment of colonial traumas and

effects. Visionaries like Dr. Wangari Maathai and Dr. Vandana Shiva have shown the

world what the intersectional ecofeminist movement can accomplish in changing systems

of power and oppression through grassroots activism and education.

The ecofeminist movement began in the late 1970's as a new form of environmental

community organizing and activism led by women. Like the more general feminist

movement, ecofeminism had multifaceted sections and ideologies, the most famous of

which were academic, cultural, spiritual, social, and socialist (Gaard 2011). These

perspectives ranged from subtle to radical but all shared a crucial and unique perspective

of linking the environment and gender. Credited as being two of the leading ecofeminist

thinkers, Dr. Maria Mies and Dr. Vandana Shiva provide in their work an excellent

working definition and description of ecofeminism. Most generally, ecofeminism makes

a link between the oppression of the earth and the oppression of women, recognizing both

as violently exploited and controlled; it seeks to uplift each voice, including that of the

earth, without elimination of a voice (Mies and Shiva 1993:1-20). The argument is that

there is a system in place that favors the white, rich, male, and those from the Global

North and inequality is created through the domination of the earth, women, indigenous

people, etc. (Mies and Shiva 1993:1-20). The goal is to achieve equality for all people,

regardless of race, class, gender, religion, or place of origin, by fighting against the

structures that dominate and exploit (Mies and Shiva 1993:6). It seeks to remove

hierarchical dualisms like male v female, logic v emotion, white v black, nature v

industry, since this creates the dominating superior and removes the possibility of

diversity and cultural equality. In addition, it is extremely critical of displacing people,

expanding corporate rule, the divide between nature and society, exploitation of people

and resources, definitions of success based solely on accumulation of goods, and

devaluing people and nature through "patriarchal capitalism" (Mies and Shiva 1993:33,

55). Ecofeminists understand that in order to heal our earth and society, people need to

co-operate with each other and their environments through love, respect, and giving

inherent value to life (Mies and Shiva 1993:6, 14). Only this way, they argue, can true

diversity and equality can occur where all cultures, peoples, and genders are respected

(Mies and Shiva 1993:6.14). Its attempts to uplift and empower a people to regain social and environmental agency through activism, usually community led grassroots activism focused on changing institutional oppression (Mies and Shiva 1993:13, 303). Specifically as it pertains to colonization, ecofeminism both acknowledges colonization as problematic and is against the colonial legacy as oppressive, dominating, and the creator of systems of power that rely on patriarchy, capitalist exploitation, and the continued degradation of the Global South for resources (i.e. those areas formerly colonized) (Mies and Shiva 1993: 1-20, 56). It wants to uplift other ways of knowing and valuing knowledge that include native cultural and indigenous understandings of egalitarianism and environmental stewardship in postcolonial lands that was said to be discouraged and even lost during colonial rule (Mies and Shiva 1993: 74, 164).

Despite these incredibly relevant, intersectional, and poignant arguments, ecofeminism, in large part because of the spiritual ecofeminist faction, was discredited in the 1990's as being essentialist. The main critique was the association with women as inherently more connected to the earth as vessels of childbearing and nurturing (Gaard 2011). Those prescribing to this form of ecofeminism would view women as superior and created a definition of "womanhood" and femininity based on biological traits and supposed inherent caretaking capabilities (Gaard 2011). Many feminist academics and activists who believed in the basic principles of ecofeminism wanted to distance themselves from the spiritual ideology that worshiped women as the vessels of the moon and Gaia (Gaard 2011). While this concern was valid, discrediting ecofeminism on this basis did exactly what the movement, as a whole, was trying to avoid; it created a way of knowing that was exclusionary and did not allow for open debate with varying voices. In

addition, this has been the reason ecofeminist movements (or intersectional movements with focus on human rights and environmental protection) have not been at the forefront of activist solutions, despite its tackling of two of the largest issues we face today. With ecofeminism being relatively new, it makes sense that there would need to be several waves of thought to make it the most just, inclusive, and effective movement it can be. Feminism, in general, did not develop a more intersectional and inclusive narrative until the more recent 3rd wave. Ecofeminism being dismissed in the 1990's as essentialist, and therefore without value, denied the incredible amount of potential the movement held. Certainly essentialism is problematic, but the portion of the movement that believed in this idea should not have completely dismantled the ecofeminist ideology and all of the great work it accomplished. If a social movement was able to be so easily deconstructed by some members having problematic viewpoints, the feminist movement, as a whole, would have ended based on the stereotypically non-intersectional "white middle class" feminism that plagues the movement today.

While offshoots of the ecofeminism movement persisted, though less visible after the 1990's, currently there is a re-emerging interest in traditional ecofeminism because of its unique intersectionality that includes nature and all groups of people. That being said, because of its emphasis on grassroots activism, its recognition and criticism of colonization, and the focus on both gender and environment, I believe an evolved "3rd wave" ecofeminism would be an incredible addition to popular women's and environmental movements in India, particularly since the famous Dr. Vandana Shiva's soil and farming movement and the Chipko anti-deforestation movement have been successful ecofeminist movements in the country. Ecofeminism could provide the crucial

link in advancing women and environmental rights in India since there would be an understanding that both these areas suffered the same trauma from the same colonial source; thus finding solutions to these problems would be a united front. Working for the advancement for one would automatically go hand in hand with the other, making solutions in these activist areas consistently and unrelentingly putting pressure on the same institutional problems and acts of discrimination. This united fight against the same enemy could allow for increased accountability from government officials running these institutions and the demand for change from these variety of interest groups could make it harder to continue perpetuating the colonial legacy. This "3rd wave" revitalization could eliminate essentialism by accepting more updated ideologies such as gender fluidity and move away from biologically determined ideas of masculinity and femininity. Since India has such a large global impact, the country could pave the way on reimagining what ecofeminism can look like, particularly for those modern day countries still healing from a colonial past and dealing with the added pressure of exploitative globalization practices. While, as a white Westerner, I do not want to privilege my voice to offer solutions or pretend to understand the complexities of what it means to be a woman in India, I do find an incredible amount of hope in this idea of an ecofeminist revitalization, not just for India, but for the world. I believe countering oppression with a stronger force of equality and respect can only forge stronger communities; in India this could mean leaving behind the colonial legacy of destruction and, instead, create a new society, building upon the work of those who came before, founded in empowerment, giving value, and seeing worth for all people and the environment that sustains them.

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