

# Civil society's power

in the fight against free trade agreements



## framing the research

### the 'double gap'



A 'geographic and thematic empirical gap' characterises the literature on activism against free trade agreements in that scholars overlook civil society actors from Asia and mobilisations centred on food-related claims.

### the analysis



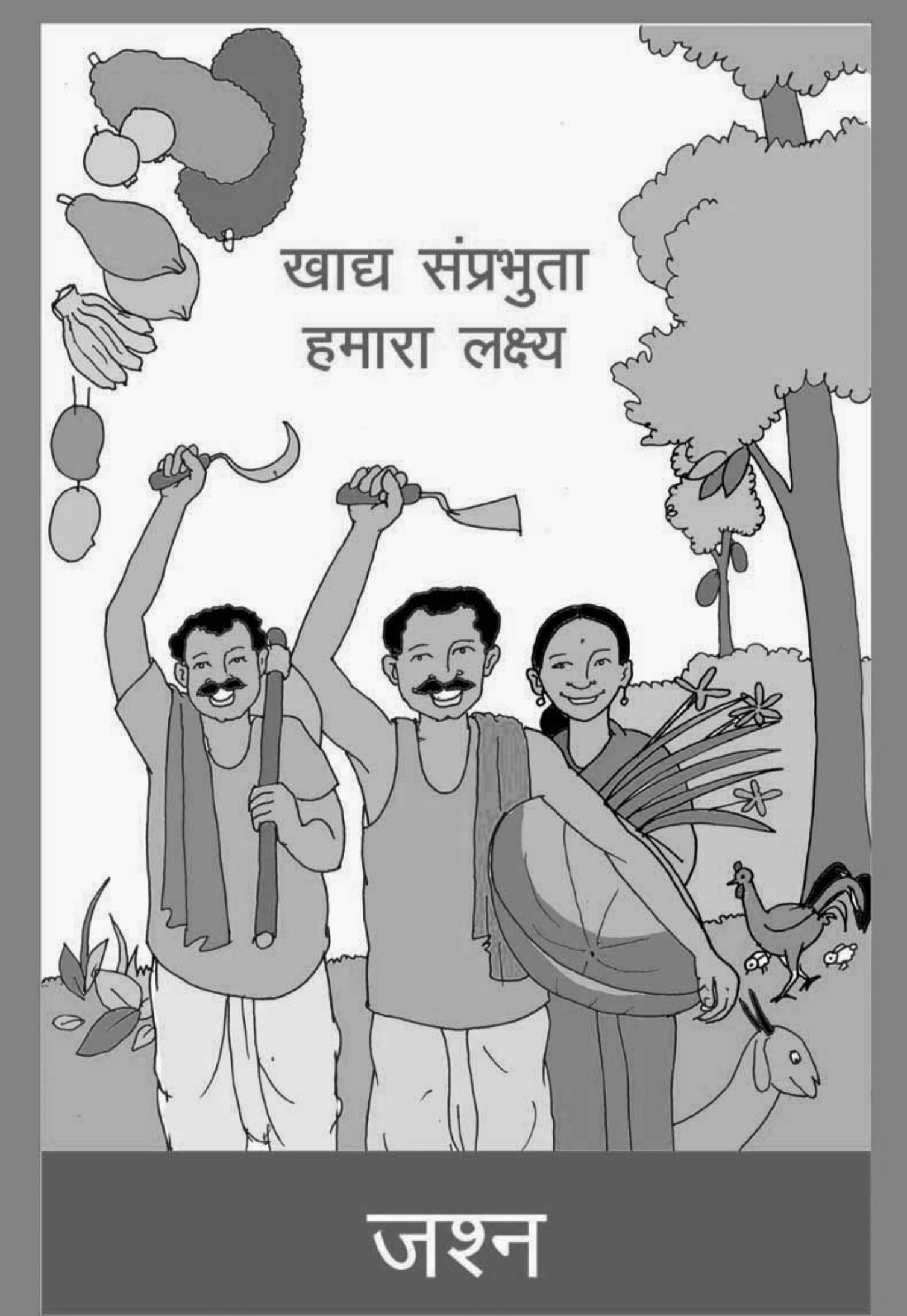
Activists' 'power' is articulated in the three dimensions of 'discursive practices' (Fairclough 2003; del Felice 2014).

- 'Ways of acting' are actions against free trade agreements.
- 'Ways of representing' are discourses on regional trade.
- 'Ways of being' are identities shaped through discourses.

### the method

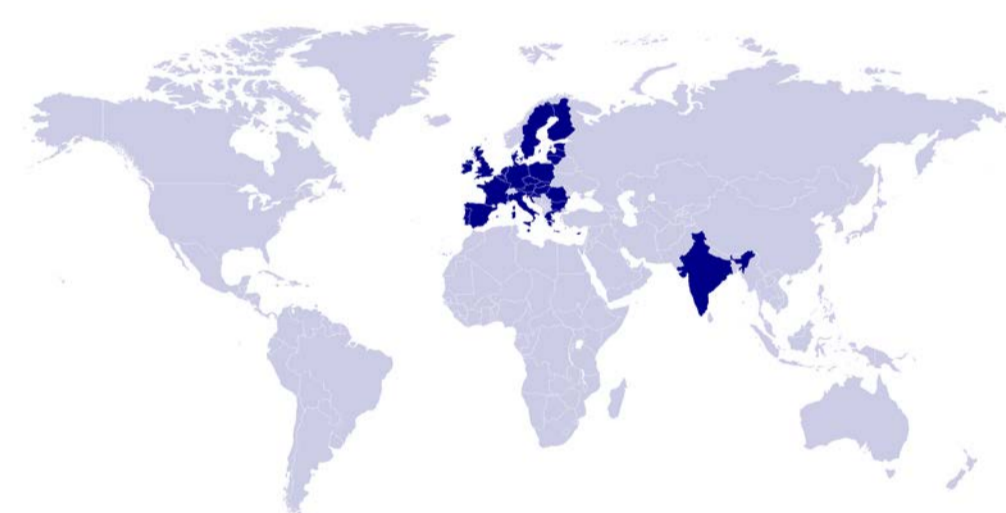


A **qualitative discourse analysis** was carried out on 10 civil society's open statements (2008-2017) and 16 interviews with Indian activists (2018).



## setting the stage

### the agreements



India and the European Union have been conducting negotiating rounds for a **Bilateral Trade & Investment Agreement** (2007 - 2013).



India and 15 Asian and Oceanian countries have been conducting negotiating rounds for a **Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership** (2013 - ...).

### the protagonists



**La Via Campesina** is a farmers' movement including 182 organisations from 81 countries around the world.



The **Right to Food Campaign** is a national coalition committed to the realisation of the right to food in India.



The **Forum against FTAs** is a network of civil society actors defending people's interests in India's trade agreements.



## analysing the discursive practices



Activists are denied access to formal negotiating arenas and technical information but convey their claims from **outer spaces** of mobilisation through common declarations and posters.



Activists adopt a **counter-discourse** highlighting that free trade agreements are detrimental to food and nutrition concerns, and asking for a 're-empowerment' of the Indian state through the preservation of its 'food sovereignty' and 'policy space.'



Activists present themselves as spokespersons for a diverse and strong Indian **civil society** and ask for better inclusion in free trade agreement negotiations. They argue **India** should adopt a more assertive stance at the negotiating table and foreign **companies** should not endanger its political sovereignty.

