

THE TEAM OF
EKTA PARISHAD
WISHES YOU
A HAPPY NEW YEAR,
AND INVITES YOU
TO LIVE WITH IT THIS
CHALLENGING
AND HOPEFUL
YEAR 2012 !

Dear Friends,

The year 2011 has come to an end. I want to take this opportunity to wish all our friends a Happy New Year. For Ekta Parishad and its friends, 2011 was a very demanding year. I am sure 2012 is going to be even more demanding and challenging. The Jansatyagraha Samwaad Yatra preparations took a lot of time. The year was spent in balancing between Training the leadership at every level for Jan Satyagraha 2012, setting up different committees, making contacts from local to international, lobbying with the government. I believe that we have made important progress towards advancing the agenda of peace through justice for the marginalized.

The Samwaad yatra began on 2nd October and we have been moving on the road for the last 80 days covering a distance of about 15000 km. You must have read through our updates, articles, newsletter and updates to be updated with what is happening on the ground. We have witnessed misery, poverty, and celebrations as we moved from state to state. We have seen people resigning to their fate on the one side and people succeeding in their struggles on the other side. We have also seen people creating examples of success that can be replicated by other groups and also by the state. We met many inspiring activists and leaders who are working very hard to bring about change in the lives of marginalized communities. This has been a great learning process at the same time it has been a great humbling process.

I always remember with deep gratitude your contribution in strengthening Ekta Parishad as a social movement in India. We are now broad basing this movement by including many other movements into the forum of Jan Satyagraha 2012. We have a deep realization that in isolation, none of us are going to create an impact. As a result we feel it is important to cut across ideologies and sectors to find like-minded people and act together. In a few days time, we are going to enter into 2012. The most challenging things are going to happen in 2012. We have another 65000 km to travel to reach Gwalior. There are 100s of struggles that we are going to visit and build greater solidarity. We have also the real



The Samwaad Yatra team in Goa, November 2011

walk of 100,000 people waiting in front of us.

It is very difficult to make a statement now whether this year is going to be historic in providing justice to the marginalized community but I am sure that this will be a very successful year in terms of promoting a social movement based on the philosophy of non-violence and justice. Needless to say how much we look forward to the support of each one of you. Your support and solidarity will take us a long way.

Rajagopal P.V.

JAN SAMWAD YATRA, BEFORE LEAVING GOA

Before going to Maharashtra, the yatra spent 3 days in Goa. As a result of tourism, fast urbanization and mining, this small state is losing its indigenous people (Adivasis constitute about 8% of the population) and its environment is badly affected. Social problems like alcoholism, drug addiction, mafias, land grabbing are growing at a very fast rate and destroying Goa. Poor people and environment are left out in the planning of the government. During a meeting with members of India Against Corruption, the major social and economic problems in Goa have been evoked. Land disputes are numerous as there is no land ceiling in Goa, as the land records of the government are based on an improper survey of 1972, and as common property land is given to powerful people and their relatives. Mining is a big activity in Goa, which often leads to evictions and pollution. About 375 illegal mining concerns are working in the state. Agriculture is badly affected because land is used for tourism, urbanization and mining. Now, with the diminishing cultivation, 95 % of food grains and vegetables come from outside.

As tourism became the main source of income in the coastal area, small fishermen have disappeared. They turned to tourism (shops, guides, bike operators, wine shops, house rental etc). During the last day of the Yatra in Goa, an "Interactive Session on Comprehensive Land Water Forest Reforms" was held at the International Centre. Representatives of Civil Society organizations and social activists from different parts of Goa expressed their concern on the present development process adopted by the government. In his speech, Rajagopal mentioned that the fast industrialization and infrastructure developments have displaced the poor from their natural resources where land is their dignity, security and identity. Therefore, the struggle is against the powerful lobby and it has to be in a non-violent way and should show the strength of the young and poor. He added that if this continues, it is time to put a board saying "Goa for Sale". He urged all the organizations and activists to come together to save land, water and forest resources.

« Well being of the last for the well being of all.»

On the road with the Jan Samvad Yatra, a year-long route through India

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THE YATRA IN MAHARASHTRA

Maharashtra is a large and populous state. It is very urbanized, and counts the largest city of the country, Mumbai. There are many important social reformers in Maharashtra who fought for the liberation of the oppressed, like Bhim Rao Ambedkar, who gave voice to the dalit community, or Vinobha Bhave and his land reform movement. Here the yatris noticed that dalit groups are more organized in Maharashtra compared to other states of India.



Nuclear plant and fishermen. The third day of the yatra in Maharashtra, the team went to the village of [Nata](#), affected by the nuclear power plant project of Areva in Jaitapur. This project encounters big resistance because of security reasons (the power plant would be implemented on a seismic area!), and because it would lead to the eviction of inhabitants. In Nata, on the coastal line of the Arabian Sea, the entire village makes a decent living through fishing, and even generates employment for 2000 people from Nepal and the South of India. As in other villages affected by the project, protests are carried on, with sometimes tragic consequences: during a protest one month ago, one person got killed and six were wounded by the police. But villagers are not ready to give up their right over land and water. An interesting question came up in the discussion: land can be measured to determine a compensation, but how the government or companies can calculate a compensation for the fishing communities? For them, the sea is their land.



In a fishermen village, Ratnagiri district

Vinobha Bhave. In Raigarh district, [Gagode](#) is the village where Acharya Vinobha Bhave was born. Vinobha was the spiritual disciple of Mahatma Gandhi, and was selected as the first satyagrahi by Mahatma Gandhi during the freedom struggle. Vinobha Bhave led the land-gift movement. He walked across India for 14 years asking for land that can be given to the landless and deprived communities. He thought that the problem of landlessness needs to be solved not through the power of the gun or through the power of law, but through the power of compassion. He received about 4,3 million hectares of land. He also fought against cow-slaughter because he believed the cow is the backbone of Indian agriculture. Destroying the cow would introduce tractors and chemical fertilizer in agriculture and would kill the soil forever. He is an inspiration for many people in India and as a result, preserving his birth place was important for people who believed in his philosophy. Because of a dam that was coming up in this area, this memorial was acquired by the government. Lo-

cal people had to struggle a long time to save the land and the building of Vinobha Bhave. India has already given up much of what Gandhi wanted India to be. Now there are systematic efforts to get rid of their memorials so that we can forget them completely.



Gandhi and Vinobha Bhave

Slums and skyscrapers. Raigarh and Thane are districts close to the city of [Mumbai](#), with a substantial population of Adivasis. It took no time for the yatris to realize that the villages of these districts will be totally eaten up by the city of Mumbai as it is expanding very fast. There are many projects coming up in this area: a new airport, the Mumbai corridor, the Mumbai-Ahmedabad super highway, dams for water supplying, etc. Mumbai is already standing on Adivasi land, and surrounding Adivasi villages are slowly becoming slums in front of skyscrapers. While the five stars hotels of Mumbai consume too much water for their toilets and their swimming pools, people are lining up with buckets for drinking water in many villages across Thane and Raigarh. While the local struggles are very strong, the leaders of the struggles understand that they are up against a formidable set of global forces that resists all efforts to conserve local resources for local consumption.

Sweepers and cleaners in Mumbai. Mr Ramesh Heralkar, retired as a sweeper, explained to the yatris the problems faced by sweepers and cleaners in [Mumbai](#). There are close to 400,000 in the city. They were settled in different parts of Mumbai by the British and were provided small housing units. These units have not been maintained and most of them are in an inhabitable condition now. Mr. Ramesh told us that their eligibility to stay in these houses is subject to their continued employment as sweepers and cleaners. Upon retirement, their jobs are given to their children. If their sons or daughters refuse to take up the job as a cleaner or sweeper, they will have to vacate their house. People's need for housing in a city where it is very difficult to find a house is being used to arm-twist them to continue working as sweepers and cleaners. In other government departments, children of workers do not face this restriction as they are allowed to take up other jobs in

THE TEAM OF THE JAN SAMVAD YATRA SPENT ALMOST ONE MONTH IN MAHARASHTRA, MEETING RURAL AND URBAN DEPRIVED COMMUNITIES

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NEXT MONTH

IN THE NEWSLETTER :
FOCUS ON
CHHATTISGARH
AND ORISSA

TO FOLLOW THE JAN SAMWAD YATRA :

► ASK FOR
WEEKLY UPDATES AT
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► VISIT FACEBOOK
PAGES OF RAJAGOPAL
PV, EKTA PARISHAD
AND JAN SATYAGRAHA

the government while retaining their government provided accommodation. Baba Saheb Ambedkar asked dalits to move out of villages into cities as he saw it as a way to come out of their hereditary professions, but this dream seems to have been defeated as most sweepers and cleaners are engaged in the same job for 4-5 generations now. A number of social workers have carried out research and executed projects in the name of sweepers and built their own careers, but the conditions of sweepers have not improved. They are eager to take leadership for their issue and advocate for their rights.

Resettlement and rehabilitation. In the district of [Nandurbar](#), 7600 families from 32 villages were displaced by the Sardar Sarovar Dam. This case shows that the government does not understand the difference between resettlement and rehabilitation. The most progressive response from the government is to give land in return for the land that is acquired. But this does not ensure rehabilitation of the Adivasi. People's culture, social relations, agricultural practices are all closely tied to their land. When they are resettled their entire life takes a hit. For instance, when Adivasis who live deep inside the forests in the mountains were resettled, their traditional agricultural practices had to be completely abandoned. In the mountains they were used to organic farming but when they were resettled in the



Adivasi woman speaking during a public meeting in Nandurbar district

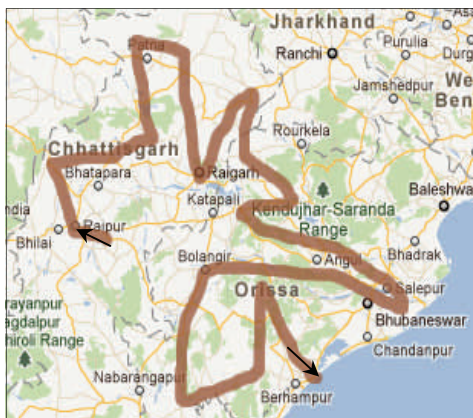
Dalit farmers of Osmanabad. A public meeting was organized in the village of Gajwada in [Osmanabad](#) district by Campaign for Human Rights and Land Rights Movement. Campaign for Human Rights began its work on the issue of untouchability and atrocities against dalits. An example of these atrocities is the story of 2 Dalit brothers who committed suicide pub-

lically because the land they were cultivating was grazed by the powerful sections of the community. Their crops were destroyed.



Public meeting in Gajwada village, Osmanabad
Campaign for Human Rights works in 1000 villages in 6 districts. It works with the framework of existing laws and policies and tries to get the pro-poor laws and policies properly implemented. In 2004, CHR gave a call to farmers in the Marathwada region to reclaim Gairan lands. Gairan lands are patches of land reserved for grazing. 50 000 farmers reclaimed 1 lakh hectares in response to the call given by CHR. The farmers are waging 3 struggles simultaneously: increasing the productivity of their land, claiming for land to the government and fighting with the people from powerful sections of the community who are resisting the land distribution to the marginalized sections of society.

Farmers in the debt-trap. In the district of [Yavatmal](#), the suicide rate among farmers is very high. For various reasons, farmers are suffering from huge debt loads : purchase of alcohol, reduction of their parcels of land as they sell small portions to face unexpected expenses, low selling price of cotton, etc. Apparition of GMO is also a reason to the indebtedness of farmers. Initially affordable, the price of GM seeds went sky high once most farmers switched to GM cotton. Furthermore, The retailer of cotton seeds are also the purchaser of cotton bales in most cases : they sell the seeds on credit to the farmers under contract that the cotton will be sold to them, and then compel the farmers to recover their loans when the market price for cotton is low. Another reason that explains the very difficult situation of farmers is the switch from mix-crop to single-crop farming. Traditionally farmers used to first produce for their family's consumption and sell the surplus for meeting their other needs. Now they just produce one or two products as cotton or soya (which is not part of the local diet), to sell it on the market.



ROUTE OF THE YATRA IN JANUARY

January 1st to 18th, CHHATTISGARH :

Raipur | Mahasamund | Kawardha | Bilaspur | Korba | Korla | Surguja | Raigarh | Jashpur |

January 19th to 31st, Orissa :

Sundergarh | Deogarh | Jharsuguda | Sambalpur | Nuapada | Bolangir | Kalahandi | Rayagada | Kandhamal | Ganjam |

« Well being of the last for the well being of all »

JANADESH 2007— FOR A FISTFUL OF LAND

In the newsletter of November, we announced that the documentary made by Quepo about the March Janadesh 2007 was online (you can see it in English, Spanish and Catalan at this address: www.quepo.org).

This month we recommend another movie about Janadesh that is viewable in French and English. « Janadesh 2007 - For a fistful of land », made by Sébastien Saugues, bring us in the heart of the march, give a voice to many marchers and Ekta Parishad's activists, and bring a lot of information

that complete other documentaries on Janadesh. See it in one click : janadesh-2007-for-a-fistful-of-land !



SOUTH ASIA ALLIANCE FOR LAND RIGHTS



South Asia Social Forum (SASF) was held from November 18th to 22nd at Dhaka University, Bangladesh. South Asia Peace Alliance (SAPA) and Ekta Parishad organized a seminar during this event on November 21st on “Mainstreaming Land & Livelihood Rights in South Asia”. The seminar was attended by 26 participants from Bangladesh, Pakistan and India. The seminar had three speakers: Mr. Shamsul Huda from ALRD, Bangladesh Mr. Ran Singh Parmar, Ekta Parishad, India and Zulfiqar Shah, The Institute For Social Movements, Pakistan.

This seminar was an occasion to present the situation of land Rights in different countries of South Asia, and to share experience. Ran Singh Parmar (Ekta Parishad) spoke about the Jan Samwad Yatra and the March Jan Satyagraha 2012. Mr. Zulfikar Shah (Institute For Social Movements, Pakistan)

made presentation on the situation of land rights in Pakistan and he also shared the experience of organizing Land rights march in Pakistan taking inspiration from the March Janadesh 2007. Mr. Shamsul Huda (Association for Land Reform and Development ALRD, Bangladesh) also gave his views on the land rights issue and highlighted the need to forge unity from the struggle groups in South Asia.

This idea that unity was needed was shared by the participants and it has been proposed to form a network to create a platform for joint action. Soon after the seminar, 20 participants met to work out how to work together. The decision has been taken to form the South Asia Alliance for Land rights (SAAL) to carry forward the struggle for land rights as collectively. Following resolution was passed by all present people, and has been endorsed later by other organizations who were not present in the meeting but showed their solidarity.

Resolution of the SASF Seminar Participants of “Mainstreaming Land & Livelihood Rights in South Asia” to Form “South Asia Alliance for Landrights”(SAAL)



We the participants of “Mainstreaming Land & Livelihood Rights in South Asia” held on Nov 21, 2011 deliberated on the land issue in South Asia. We express our deep concern over apathy and non-implementation of the land reform agenda in South Asia as promised from time to time.

Land is the most important natural resource for livelihood of the majority people in South Asia. We express our concern over increased conflict over this as well as other natural resources. Peace in South Asia can only come through justice.

Since the issue of Land is a common issue in South Asia, we consider that talking of Land and Livelihood Rights now is important. There is thus a need to mainstream this agenda by mobilizing people and mounting pressure on the Government to carry out the unfinished task of land Reforms,

We unanimously express solidarity with the non-violent direct action “Jansatyagraha 2012” Global movement for land rights by Ekta Parishad, India and extend full support to it.

Further, to take forward Land Rights agenda in all South Asia to its logical end we all undersigned have taken decision to form “South Asia Alliance for Land Rights” (SAAL).

We call upon on the groups, organizations working on the land and livelihood rights in South Asia to come together and join this movement.



SEE THE DOCUMENTARY
« JANADESH 2007 –
FOR A FISTFUL
OF SOIL »
Click [here](#)

CREATION OF AN
ALLIANCE FOR LAND
RIGHTS IN SOUTH ASIA