



MEETING OF THE TEAM OF THE JAN SAMWAD YATRA WITH MINISTERS, AN INTERESTING PATH FOR LAND RIGHTS STRUGGLE

### Meeting with the Minister of Rural Development and the Minister of Agriculture



On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of January, 2012, the National Rural Development Minister, Jairam Ramesh, and the Minister of State for Agriculture, Charan Das Mahant discussed the issues of land rights with members of Ekta Parishad's Sawad Yatra along with 200 other people for three hours near Raipur at the Pryog Ashram in Tilda. The leaders of Ekta Parishad who have been traveling for the past three months in southern India in an effort to cover a planned 350-district, cross-country tour within one year, briefed the Ministers on examples of good land and agricultural practices of local people that they had witnessed on their travels. They also elaborated other struggles of other marginalized groups such as fisher-folks, urban poor and the transgender community in Karnataka as well. Rajagopal argued for a comprehensive land reforms policy that would prevent the transfer of land and resources from the community to the corporate houses and he supported a process that would transfer land and other resources to the marginalized communities. He suggested that there were many things that could be done in the interest of the poor within the available legal framework provided there is a political will.

Among the various other presentations that were made for the Rural Development Minister on the critical situation of landlessness, the District Magistrate of Warangal in Andhra Pradesh, an affected area, gave a strong message that if the administration has the volition, there is a great deal that can be delivered by government in responding to marginalized communities on the need for land and livelihood resources for basic food security. The Minister was also informed about Jan Satyagraha 2012 in which 100,000 people are going to walk to Delhi in lieu of the fact that the government has not acted on the promises made during the Janadesh 2007 march.

After listening to all the presentations, the Minister informed the audience of the concern that he had on the land issues raised by people, and he was disappointed that the National Land Reforms Council had not yet met; so he was meaning to make it happen as soon as he could get a time from the Prime Minister. Of the slate of recommendations for land reform, he was looking at low-risk and easy to implement committee recommendations such as housing plots for the homeless, bhoodan land (land reserved to scheduled castes and tribes) distribution and fast-track courts. He was also confident significant progress can be made before 2nd October 2012. He felt that violation of acts for indigenous people like PESA (acts which recognizes the traditional community rights of Adivasis over local natural resources) were a prime reason why the indigenous people were losing their forest-land resources even in scheduled areas. He expressed the importance of surveying for tribal customary rights and the dispensation of all forest offences against tribal people.

The Minister indicated that the broad-framework of land reform must cohere with the process of globalization and urbanization which the government will not challenge. He has hopes that the pending Land Acquisition Bill is more radical in comparison to the previous one as a strong component of rehabilitation and resettlement is incorporated into it. He appreciated however that it did not work in the interests of farmers and farm labourers. The Minister concluded by accepting that armed struggle needs to be contained primarily with political and developmental inputs that are backed by military action.

The Agriculture Minister made a short presentation. He appreciated the work of Ekta Parishad and many other like-minded non-violent organizations and said that he would keep reminding the Rural Development Minister of his commitments.

The Agriculture Minister made a short presentation. He appreciated the work of Ekta Parishad and many other like-minded non-violent organizations and said that he would keep reminding the Rural Development Minister of his commitments.

### JAN SAMWAD YATRA, BEFORE LEAVING MAHARASHTRA

Few figures after 29 days in Maharashtra :

- ✓ More than 22,000 people were reached through 8 rallies, 38 public meetings, 9 public hearings and 8 street meetings.
- ✓ Soil from 26 sites of people's struggles was received.
- ✓ 120 organizations pledged their support.
- ✓ 1432 people signed on the letter to the Prime Minister of India.
- ✓ People contributed Rs17,758 towards the Jan Satyagraha Movement.



Rally of women for rights to land and housing, Aurangabad, December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2011

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

### AN INVITATION TO PARTNER WITH SOCIAL WORKERS

I am on the road since 2nd October. I began in Kanyakumari and crossed 8 states before arriving in Odisha. This yatra is called Jan Samvaad yatra and the issue we are working on is poverty eradication through land distribution to landless poor as well as preventing the corporate onslaught on farmers, adivasis, dalits, fisherfolks, urban poor, women etc by taking away their resources in the name of development. So on one hand we want to prevent the takeover and on the other hand we want to convince the government to give land and resources to the poor and marginalized communities. You know this is not an easy task. I am writing this letter to seek your support.

Traveling through 100s of villages I understand that people are seeking small financial support for small economic activities. In one village a women's group was asking for 10,000 Rupees for starting a basket weaving unit. In another village they want to collect and sell minor forest produce and their requirement was 10,000 Rupees. In one village the adivasis have got title for the land they were cultivating for many years. As they have the title they want to invest some money to develop their land. I have always thought that these are all small demands but will make a big change in their lives. If people who have money can think of supporting one activity, there can be hundreds of action across the country changing the life of millions. I want you to help me in establishing this rural-urban connection. People with initiatives on one side and people with resources on the other can together fight poverty. The second area is in terms of providing support to rural social workers who are putting their life into changing their society. They are doing at a great personal cost to their lives and the lives of their families and sometimes great risk to their lives. Our experience shows that political parties are present in villages at the time of election but only the social workers are always present in order to help the community to sort out their problems vis-a-vis the government. My dream is to see 100s of such workers spread in rural India to help the marginalized communities. What they need is a scholarship of 3000 Rs a month. Can we encourage middle and upper-middle class people of our cities to take responsibility for one such social worker. The third area is that ignorance of poor people gets exploited at various levels. You will see them standing in front of offices or police stations or judicial courts with folded hands and they do not understand why they are being punished or why they are being made to spend their hard earned money to pay the lawyer or the officials. This is time for us to look for lawyers in bigger cities who will devote part of their time and through them identify local lawyers at district level to find a solution to this problem.

We do not consider wealth as a crime or wealthy people as criminals. We appreciate wealthy people for their entrepreneurial qualities. We do not think everyone can become a social worker and becoming a social worker is not the only way to work for creating a more just and peaceful world. Just as Gandhiji was supported by several wealthy people in the freedom struggle he was leading, so also wealthy people of today can partner with social workers in creating a better world. This is an open invitation to partner with social worker in this project.

*Rajagopal P.V.*

### THE YATRA IN CHHATTISGARH

Chhattisgarh is a state of central India, which was part of Madhya Pradesh until 2000. 80% of the population of Chhattisgarh lives in rural area and mainly depends on agriculture and small industries based on agriculture for their livelihood. Power and steel sectors are also important sectors of activity in the state.



**With the Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh.** The Yatra met with the Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh Dr Raman Singh on January 5<sup>th</sup>, and spoke with him about the issues of regularization under FRA. He promised to strengthen the campaign and advocacy for the issuance of permanent settlements (permanent entitlement) in favor of eligible claimants.

**“New Raipur” Project.** In **Baihar**, a village near Raipur, villagers are fighting against the ‘New Raipur’ project of the State. During a public meeting organized by Chhattisgarh Yuvak Samaj Sevi Sanstha, Mr Rajendra Jangde, a local farmer informed the yatri that this plan is intended to acquire the land from 123 villages between National Highway 43 and National Highway 6. In Baihar Panchayat, 4400 hectares of private and 2700 hectares of community land have been acquired by this project. They lost their entire graveyard and gauchar land (village grazing land) in



**RAJAGOPAL P.V.  
INVITES PEOPLE  
TO PARTNER  
WITH SOCIAL WORKERS**

**THE SAMVAD YATRA  
SPENT 21 DAYS IN  
CHHATTISGARH**

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

Promoting non-violence and Rights to land & livelihood | Mobilizing for the March Jan Satyagraha 2012 | October 2011 - September 2012



**NEXT MONTH  
IN THE NEWSLETTER :**  
FOCUS ON  
ORISSA AND  
JHARKHAND

**TO FOLLOW THE  
JAN SAMWAD YATRA :**

► VISIT WEBSITES :  
[www.jansatyagraha.org](http://www.jansatyagraha.org)  
[www.ektaparishad.com](http://www.ektaparishad.com)

► VISIT FACEBOOK  
PAGES OF RAJAGOPAL  
PV, EKTA PARISHAD  
AND JAN SATYAGRAHA

these brutal processes of land acquisition. In 2002, the State put a ban on land transactions, but it has forcefully grabbed the land. The compensation paid is very much less compared with the selling price of land. Mr Amrtlal Joshi, a senior activist of this movement explained that this process of urban expansion is destroying the rural livelihood fabric.

**Unanswered claims.** In [Gariyabad](#), many applications have been filled to get land under the Forest Rights Act (FRA), but no answer is given to the applicants. On December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2011, the International Human Rights Day, a rally was organized there. As Mr Gopinath, a senior coordinator of Ekta Parishad, explained it, 1400 applications were given to Sub-Divisional level after this rally, but local officials didn't give any answer until now. In the village of Hardi, 25 villagers have occupied 80 acres of land over last 17 years and have also applied for land under FRA, and waiting for their land entitlements. In Jedar, people have filed 80 claims over last 2 years but local officials have not allowed Forest Rights Committee to play its role. Mr Khemsingh from Paragaon, who is heading



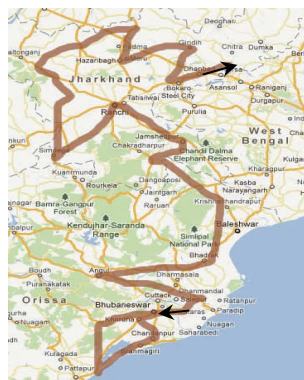
*Adivasis in Gariyabad*

**Have you heard of Khairatkala ?** (by Rajagopal P.V.) Khairatkala is a small village in Mahasamund district. It is about 60 km away from the district head quarters and borders Orissa. Population of the village will be about 2000 and 90% of them are adivasis. Life-line of this village is the women's group who made history by fighting successfully against the liquor shop and getting it closed. Inspired by their success, the next village also fought against the liquor shops. Though change in Khairatkala began with the struggle against liquor shop, their struggle in life continued. They decided to create a grain bank to help people when they are in difficulty. Within a period of 9 years they have a huge paddy bank and rice bank. People who need support can access this bank and borrow grain for a small interest. Because of this bank, migration has come down in a big way as peo-

ple can get grain whenever they are in difficulty. At the moment the paddy bank has a reserve of 80 quintals and the rice bank has a reserve of 15 quintals of rice. They also have a cash bank with a reserve of Rs 200,000. For a small village, this is quite big to handle. This is becoming an example for many other villages and we hope this will spread like wildfire. Looking at the parents the children also wanted to start their own bank. They began by pooling together small change that they used to get as gift on festivals and special occasions. You should not be surprised if I tell you that the children's bank has about Rs 164,000. Occasionally they lend this money and make an additional profit to their bank. This time during my visit to the village, these were the children who took a lead role in organizing the entire program. When I left the village in the evening, they left me with an important question. How can we use this money effectively to create meaningful employment for the village? I am wondering whether we can use this money to create some cottage industries like candy making, chalk making that will bring employment and increased income to the village. Behind this very interesting experiment is a couple Suruj Behan and Hanumanth Nag Bhai. Hanumanth Bhai works with the children and Suruj Behan works with the women. They are now looking for new ideas on proper utilization of their fund and in replicating their model. If somebody is interested in volunteering for this project, it will be welcome. Such a person should have the capacity to build with people's ideas rather than importing ideas. Anybody interested in visiting this place or make suggestions may do so. There is a similar experiment happening in and around Kadavur village in Madurai. There the children are using theater to collect funds and from these funds they have created their own bank. These funds are used to support those children who do not have the resources to buy books. An organization called CESC based on Kadavur is supporting them.



*Children of Khairatkala*



### ROUTE OF THE YATRA IN FEBRUARY

#### February 1<sup>st</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup>, ORISSA :

Khordha | Nayagarh | Ganjam | Puri | Khordha | Bhubaneswar | Jagatsinghpur | Kendrapara | Dhenkanal | Angul | Kounjhar | Bhadrak | Mayurbhanj

#### February 14<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup>, Jharkhand :

Chaibasa | Jamshedpur | Ranchi | Khunti | Simdega | Gumla | Lohardagga | Latehaar | Palamu | Chatra | Koderma | Hazaribagh | Giridih | Bokaro | Dhanbad | Jamtara

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

## WALKING IN FRANCE TO SUPPORT LANDLESS FARMERS OF INDIA

Since the Janadesh 2007, the association *Peuples Solidaires DESC 33\** promotes the struggle of landless farmers and forest dwellers of India and supports their way of action, which is carried out in non-violent marches. Since March 2011, a march throughout parks of the region of Bordeaux (South West of France) has been organized by the association every five weeks. Each one, lasting two hours, is an occasion to talk about the struggles of Indian farmers. The march is followed by an interaction during in which more presentations of the Jan Samwad Yatra are provided. The Jan Satyagraha march is also exhibited on an Indian map to enthuse people to join. These marches consist of

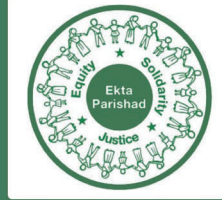


20 to 40 persons, which are an opportunity for rich and fascinating exchange. In May, it is planned to show the Campana film "The March of the Despised" in an alternative cinema of the city. The association is already thinking about organizing a special march that would take place on September 30<sup>st</sup>, 2012, and for which it expects a large mobilization. We are convinced that the struggle that is being led in India is an exemplary one ; it is fighting the same causes that, at a global level, are violating fundamental human rights. The same mechanisms are operating in Brazil, in Madagascar...and in France too, even if the context is different. Solidarity knows no borders !Jai Jagat !

You can contact the group at : [peupleso.desc33@laposte.net](mailto:peupleso.desc33@laposte.net)

*\*Peuples Solidaires DESC33 is an association created in 2008 on the imitative of activists of international solidarity, member of the federation Peuples Solidaires. It brings its support to collectives struggling for the respect of rights, and more particularly of economic, social and cultural rights.*

DISCOVER ALL SOLIDARITY ACTIONS AROUND THE WORLD : [ektaeurope.org](http://ektaeurope.org)



## A NEW PATH : KASTURBA GANDHI ASHRAM FOR ADIVASI GIRLS

As I leave Sheopur behind, rushing to catch the 4:30 bus to Gwalior, a cloud of dust follows the autorickshaw. The 6 hour bus ride through the Madhya Pradesh (M.P.) jungle lies ahead. My heart and head are filled with the impressions of the last 10 days spent at Kasturba Gandhi Ashram School for girls.[...] Retirement has led me to my own meandering path. Learning more about nonviolent education through Ekta Parishad has brought me from the Ottawa Valley to India.[...] Ekta Parishad has a long history of village work in western M.P. and I am curious how the focus on rights over land, water and forests of the disadvantaged communities links to the education of the adivasi girl child.[...] When Rajagopal suggested I visit a tribal residential school, I felt an inner alarm. My students in Canada participated in commemorative art project (Project of Heart) that raised awareness about the atrocities of the residential school system imposed by the Canadian government from the 1920's to the 1970's on the Inuit, Metis and First Nations peoples. The present Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Canada carries the victims' experiences of physical, psychological and sexual abuse and neglect. I am reassured when I arrive at the school housed in a large compound with trees, open uneven space in the centre of which the 'open-air classrooms' are situated. Around the perimeter there are several buildings - a meeting room for local leaders, grain storage, a kitchen, dormitories, latrines, the administrator's home.

The ashram school in Sheopur is a boarding school for 100 girls from villages in the district of Morena. The majority is Sahariya but there are a few Bhil and Bilala students as well. Ekta Parishad's reputation for supporting the tribals on land issues has built a firm foundation of confidence among the parents. They are willing to send their daughters to the Ashram school because they know the girls are cared for 'as if they were in a family' and their culture is honored. Evenings brought village musicians who were joined by the watchman Gangaram, to play the drum and harmonium. The girls danced and sang - older girls teaching younger ones the intricate hand movement in a shawl dance. I was re-

mindful of the Golden Lake Pow Wow, and the beautiful regalia and swirling fringed shawls closer to home.

All the girls here are dropouts from village schools that boast imaginary attendance often so that the government food allotments will find their way to undeserving and probably empty pockets. Arriving at the age of 11 or 12, the government gives support for Grades 6, 7 and 8. Challenges include child marriage (several of the girls are married at 14) and poverty - girls earn meager wages for the family but they are desperately needed. The literacy rate in Madhya Pradesh is 62%, but only 47% in Sheopur. The literacy rate drops to 22% among women, and 9% among tribals. The parents of the girls at Kasturba Gandhi Ashram had never attended school, but were able to 'make their mark.' Ekta Parishad considers literacy a tool to liberation - understanding that an oral society can easily fall to exploitation by those who use the written word for their advantage.

Our week together was spent in exchange and developing relationships through art lessons, teacher workshops to encourage co-operative learning (vs. rote learning) and English games. Interviews with the students were inspiring. Vinoda, who is 14, worries about her widowed mother who supports 6 children. She wants to be a teacher and compliments her teachers at the ashram hoping that her education will help her family. When I asked her what she is proud about as a Sahariya, she smiles shyly - "We are a people that knows how to live with little and be satisfied." She can live in a dark and crowded dorm with all of her possessions in a small metal trunk attending the open classroom from 8:00 until 5:00 - and also with great hopes in her heart.

*Kathrin Winkler*

*Kathrin Winkler is a retired teacher from Canada. Together with her husband, she is traveling India and supporting Ekta Parishad.*

