

## 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



### THE YATRA IN BIHAR

Bihar is a state of Eastern part of India, well-known to be the region of Buddhism and Jainism origins (the city of Bodh-Gaya is a great place of pilgrimage). It is also the state where Jayprakash Narayan was born, a follower of Gandhi and Vinoba Bhave who led the "Bihar movement" against the government corruption in the 70s. Nowadays, Bihar remains as one of the poorest state of India. Its economy is oriented on service sector, but agriculture represents 35% of economic activities.



**Whether or not the landless will get Bhoodan land one day?** In 1951, Vinoba Bhave, a great follower of Gandhi, started the Bhoodan (or land-gift) movement. During 20 years, he travelled throughout India to ask big land-owners to give part of their land to landless people. He collected around 4 million ha of land, among which half of it, are situated in the state of Bihar. But until today, a large part of Bhoodan land is not occupied by the people who were supposed to get it. According to Tribhuvan Babu, from the Bihar Bhoodan Committee, 80% of the Bhoodan land of Bihar has not been distributed yet! He told the Yatris that this situation is due to a lack of political will, and he considers that Jan Satyagraha could be a way to put pressure on the government to solve this issue.

In Chatarpur, in Supaul district, 1700 ha of land was given during the Bhoodan movement, but until now this land has not been distributed and is still occupied by the previous owners. The area counts about 14000 homeless people; the administration is not taking any action to distribute the Bhoodan land. During its journey in Bihar, the Jan Samwad Yatra went in different places where the situation is the same: Bhoodan land is not in the hand of people, and people request the Jan Satyagraha to take their case to the central government.



*A man in Madhurani district, Bihar, April 14th, 2012*

floods. Schemes for Maha Dalits, flood control or land development are supposed to help them, but as they are not implemented properly, the situation is not improving. From this region, 150 people will take part in the March Jan Satyagraha.



*Rally in Jamui district, Bihar, April 20th, 2012*

**The Yatra is facing problems with authorities.** On April 21<sup>st</sup>, the Jan Samwad Yatra participated in a public meeting in Nawada district. While everything was going peacefully, the police interrupted the meeting by cutting the microphones and preventing people from speaking to the assembly. The police also asked their passport to french nationals who were travelling with the Yatra to discover rural India and to learn from the action of Ekta Parishad. Accused of violating their visa conditions because they were in a public meeting, French nationals have been asked to leave Bihar after two days of detention. To the media, police said that they were supporting Maoists and that Ekta Parishad was linked to the Maoist organizations (armed groups called "Naxalites"). To protest against the detention of French people and false allegations, Rajagopal has been on a fast for 6 days. As he explained it to the Medias, this incident "is a conspiracy to frame us as Naxal supporters so that issues of water, forests, land, poverty and migration can be ignored. It is a ploy to destroy all those voices who oppose the current way of development." But for all those reasons, the Jan Samwad Yatra continued its way through Bihar, on the land of great Gandhi followers Vinoba Bhave and Jayprakash Narayan. Why are the government attacking non-violent movements whereas they represent the only alternative to armed groups?

**Homeless and landless Mahadalits.** On the 11<sup>th</sup> of April the Yatra reached Muraliganj, in Madhepura district, where the Mahadalit Sangh had organized a meeting. In Bihar, the poorest and most marginalized dalits (untouchable) communities are called Maha Dalits. In the region of Muraliganj, there are about 80 dalits dominated villages, composed of 35000 families, and among them 95% are landless and homeless. Through the Mahadalit Sangh, they submitted many applications to obtain land, but no action has yet been taken. The Yatra next attended a public meeting organized by in Badaniya village. In this area, Maha Dalits and Adivasis (tribal) are mainly farmers, but they cannot get full-time labor since the area is affected by

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JAN SATYAGRAHA 2012



Public meeting in Nalanda, Bihar, April 22nd, 2012

**Democracy Vs Feudalism.** On April 27<sup>th</sup>, the Yatra reached the village of Mahua, in Vaishali district. During a public meeting, Sunita Devi explained the case of 18 Dalits families who have been cultivating land for 21 years. They got entitlement for this land 5 years ago and cultivate it jointly. But every year, at the time of sowing and harvesting, the local landlords harass these people and try to capture the crops. The families have filled complaints against the landlords, but the police, instead of taking actions against the landlords, are asking money to the complainants.

**Violence against women.** In Shuvhar district, the Yatra met with an organization dealing with the issue of violence against women which is increasing. According to Rina Singh, almost 60% of violent acts against women are due to land disputes, and 25% of divorces take place because of disagreement about property or land. Alcoholism, which is rampant in the region, is a reason of transfer or sale of land and of

increasing violence against women. The organization, called Uthan Sewa Sangathan, has established a help line for women. With the help of this counseling cell, many cases are resolved outside the court on mutual understanding and in a peaceful way.

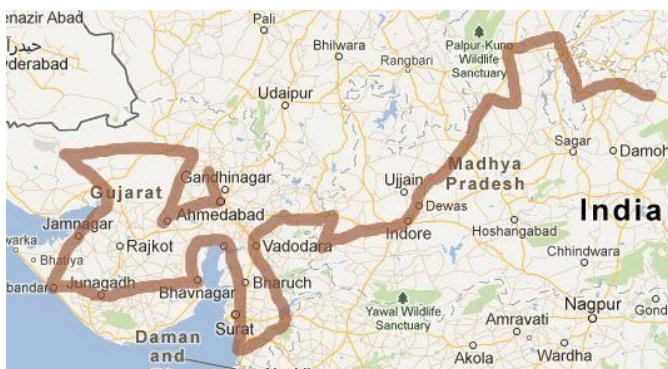
**Migration.** In the district of East Champaran, one of the issues is the large scale migration. 35 to 40% of the people here work as farmer's employees because they are landless. As they get employment only part of the year, they go to work part of the year on the hills of Jammu and Kashmir. To counter the problem, some governmental schemes exist, like the Minimum Employment Act which guarantees 100 days of work per person and per year, but they are not efficient as they are not properly implemented. The government records show only 7 days of employment given in 2010-2011. During the same period, more than 200 000 left the district.



Rally in Patna, Bihar, April 25th, 2012

### JAN SAMWAD YATRA, BEFORE LEAVING BIHAR

- ✓ In 32 days of travel through Bihar, more than 17000 people were reached through 95 programs.
- ✓ 68 organizations pledged their support.
- ✓ 4248 people signed on the letter to the Prime Minister of India.
- ✓ Soil from 36 sites of people's struggles was received.
- ✓ People contributed Rs 22108 towards the Jan Satyagraha Movement.



### ROUTE OF THE YATRA IN JUNE

#### June 1<sup>st</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup>, MADHYA PRADESH :

Panna | Chhattarpur | Tikamgarh | Datia | Shivpuri | Ashoknagar | Guna | Rajgarh | Shajapur | Dewas | Indore | Dhar | Alirajpur | Jhabua

#### June 15<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>st</sup>, GUJARAT :

Dhahod | Panchmahal | Vadodra | Narmada | Tapi | Valsad | Nausari | Surat | Jambushar | Bhavnagar | Amreli | Junagarh | Porbandar | Jamnagar | Kutch | Patan | Surendranagar | Ahmedabad | Mehsana



NEXT MONTH  
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UTTAR PRADESH AND  
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## JOURNALISTS, ACTIVISTS, ARTISTS AND WELL-WISHERS IN KATNI

On May 17<sup>th</sup>, in Katni (Madhya Pradesh), a big programme has been conducted in presence of the Jan Samwad Yatra. On the closing day of the theatre festival, the evening included cultural performances, Maja Koene Awards ceremony, and the delivery of funds raised in Canada.

**Maja Koene Awards 2012.** The Maja Koene Awards, which rewards each year social activists, social journalists and peace activists, have been granted by CESC (Centre for Experiencing Socio-Cultural Interaction). Awardees are inspiration for all those who want justice and peace :

### Mr. Ajay Tiwari

**Correspondent, Rashtriya Sahara, New Delhi**

Mr. Ajay Tiwari is a well-known Hindi journalist using his media's skills to challenge unjust systems, practices in governance and society. In his career as a journalist, he has written widely on various issues related to the lives and trials of poor people across the country. His work has been an encouragement to social activists and movements working with the poor people to have their voice heard among policy makers.

### Mr. Kundanbhai Vyas

**Managing Editor & CEO Janmabhoomi, Mumbai**

Mr. Kundanbhai Vyas is a well-known Gujarati journalist whose work highlighted the issues and concerns of the poor with great consistency. He has energetically supported social activists and social movements in their endeavours to raise the voice of poor and marginalised communities. In his capacity as the Chief Editor of Janmabhoomi group of newspapers, he has ensured that his publications remains sensitive to the cause and needs of the poor and under privileged.

### Kondotty Cultural Union

**Kondotty, Malappuram, Kerala**

Kondotty Cultural Union (KCU) is an exceptionally committed organization adopting innovative social programs and activities to address injustice and poverty in society. KCU has successfully brought together many middle class young people, cutting across communal lines to join the struggles of the poor and deprived communities for a better life.



Laureates of Maja Koene Awards, Katni, April 17<sup>th</sup>.

### Children fund of Khairatkala Chhattisgarh

The children of Khairatkala are an example for children of the world: they have established a children's fund in which they started saving from their daily expenditure. Today this children's fund is up to 165 000 Rs, and they started to grant credits. Under women leadership, they have also organized struggle against alcoholism. Through their initiative, children of Khairatkala have participated to the good development of their village. Now, people from neighboring villages come to Khairatkala to ask how to initiate such projects.

### Koel-Karo Andolan Jharkhand

'Koel-Karo Andolan' is one of the most well-known non-violent peoples' movements in the country. People of Koel-Karo region united and refused to give up their habitat to a huge hydroelectric project. After decades of non-violent struggle and the tragic event of February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2001, when 8 people were killed in police firing during a peaceful demonstration, the project has been declared unviable and cancelled in 2002.

**Theatre festival.** The same evening of the Maja Koene Awards ceremony, was the closing show of the theatre festival. Every year, groups of artists involved in the cultural branch of Ekta Parishad called Ekta Kala Manch, meet for a five days training. Coming from all over India, this is an occasion to discover and share different types of dances, songs and plays, and to work on all these forms of expressions which are strong ways to mobilize and encourage people in their non-violent struggle for justice. On the closing evening, in Katni, each group presented its creation: plays about villagers facing the issue of displacement, traditional Adivasis dances, songs about life in rural areas and people's struggle. Seeing them performing, it is good to know that they will come to the march in October, as their songs, plays, dances and slogans will be a great support for the marchers, and a powerful mean to raise the voice of poor and marginalized communities.



Dancers from Gujarat, Katni, April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2012

**Support from Canada.** On the same evening in Katni, 6000 Dollars were given for Jan Satyagraha. This money comes from 100 people who came together on the 4<sup>th</sup> of May in Toronto, Canada, to support the work of Ekta Parishad and the Jan Satyagraha march. People were very happy and grateful to receive this support.

This evening in Katni showed the great support enjoyed by Ekta Parishad and the march Jan Satyagraha: activists, artists and international well-wishers are standing for the rights to land and livelihood resources.

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

## EKTA PARISHAD AT THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

On May 22nd, 2012, Karima Delli, from the European Green Party, welcomed to the European Parliament representatives of Ekta Parishad and Ekta Europe for a conference on the March Jan Satyagraha. Pascal Durand, spokesperson of the European Green Party, reminded the support of the greens to the march Jan Satyagraha and added that it was necessary to stop the commoditization of lives and resources. This struggle for justice is difficult but not impossible, as the recent conviction of Monsanto in Brazil showed it. Karima Delli, José Bové, Yves Cochet and the president of European Parliament delegation for relations with India, Sir Graham Watson, indicated that European deputies will have to express their view on the EU-India free trade agreement, and that on this occasion, The European Union would have to be the guarantor of food sovereignty and more broadly of the respect of farmers' lives.

Karima Delli finally concluded this conference by reminding that the Greens will stand with the landless next October to:

- ✓ Defend and promote small-scale agriculture firstly producing for local markets, notably through the development of short circuits of marketing, the

protection of peasant seeds, access to land and water, education...

- ✓ (re)introduce physical and diversified food stocks (at local and national levels) to stabilize prices and manage risks in case of emergency and natural disasters.
- ✓ Forbid the speculation on food,
- ✓ Stop industrial cultures and promotion of agro fuels.
- ✓ Stop the phenomenon of land-grabbing.

Finally, European deputies have been invited to sign the solidarity declaration to the march and to sign the letter to the Prime Minister of India. You can do the same by clicking [here](#) !



Küde Meyer (Ekta Europe) and José Bové (European Deputy, Green Party)



Karima Delli (European Deputy, Green Party) and Gauri Kulkarni (Ekta Parishad)

## LAND RIGHTS PROGRESSING ON THE INTERNATIONAL SCENE

On May 11<sup>th</sup>, 2012, the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) and Agriculture Organization of United Nations (FAO) endorsed the *Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security*. These guidelines have been settled through a consultation process including government officials, civil society organizations, private sector representatives, international organizations and academics. Ekta Parishad participated in this process last year. The guidelines give recommendations to governments on how to make laws and administrate land, fisheries and forest rights in order to ensure food security and sustainable development. For example, the guidelines recommend putting in place safeguards, to protect tenure rights of local people from risks that could arise from large-scale land acquisitions. If the guidelines are not restrictive,

they are at least a recognition of the fact that food security and fight against poverty are linked with access to land and livelihood resources, which is an important step to bring a change in the model of development. According to FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva, "Giving poor and vulnerable people secure and equitable rights to access land and other natural resources is a key condition in the fight against hunger and poverty. It is a historic breakthrough that countries have agreed on these first-ever global land tenure guidelines. We now have a shared vision. It's a starting point that will help improve the often dire situation of the hungry and poor". FAO is now developing technical handbooks and proposing help to countries to adapt the guidelines to their own context. More information on the FAO website : [www.fao.org](http://www.fao.org)

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