

## Included in this issue

### INDIA

Granting the ants of  
peace and non  
violence

Tamil Nadu:  
Welcome in CESC  
Organics

### INTERNATIONAL

Canada: Janadesh  
2007, where land  
means life

### AT A GLANCE

Ramesh in Latin  
America

Tamil Nadu: a Jeep  
Yatra for Forest  
Rights

Tamil Nadu: Land  
Rights 2009

### AND ALSO

Many thanks...

Portrait: the "eco-  
model" village of  
Kadiyan Kaadu



## Granting the « ants of peace and non violence »



Some persons are worth to be granted for their valuable work to make the world a bit better... Many persons in fact try to do so but many of them work as a small ant, quiet, discrete but very efficient... and sometimes, it is necessary to put these small efficient ants on the stage so the whole world can still hope that "another world is possible" and join the same struggle!

That is why for the third time, on November 1<sup>st</sup>, Ekta Parishad, through the Centre for Experiencing Socio-Cultural Interaction (CESCI), decided to grant the Maja Koene Award\* to four valuable activists. The Maja Koene Award is divided into different purposes. While some receive the Maja Koene Social Activist Award, some other receive the Maja Koene Peace Award or the Maja Koene Journalism Award but everyone works in the same direction: to bring justice in the world through peace and non violence.

This year CESC has decided to give this award to:

☞ **SHRI BAHADUR**, a social activist who surrendered his arms in 1972 during the mass surrender of Dacoits in Chambal Valley. After the surrender he not only lived a very honourable and peaceful life but also worked as a social activist to bring about justice and peace in the Chambal region. His participation and substantial contribution in the Janadesh 2007 process was highly appreciated.

☞ **GANDHI 2008 INTERNATIONAL**, a young organisation based in France whose contribution and achievements in the field of peace and non-violence is admirable. Its efforts to spread the message of peace and non-violence around the world through effective documentation and networking are also remarkable. This group has done a great service in documenting the non-violent peoples' struggle actions in India and presenting it with a right perspective to western audience.

☞ **MAHILA THRIFT & CREDIT CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETY**, the women's group of Sanali village, is a model for many women's groups in India. Their efforts in terms of organising themselves as a very powerful group and initiating not only economic activities but also dialogue with the Government has brought them recognition in the eyes of many in Gujarat and other parts of the country.

☞ **Mr ARUN** of DEEPAM TV from Sri Lanka, who is a young upcoming and capable journalist with deep commitment to ethics in his chosen profession. His contribution in the field of positive reporting to spread the message of peace and his commitment to promote peace and harmony through media reporting in a region that is rife with complicated conflict situations have been highly appreciated in any quarters.

With a colourful ceremony, Ekta Parishad wanted to wish to all of them the best in their future work and encourage them to continue to inspire everybody in the way of peace and non violence.

\*The name of this award has been given in reference to Maja Koene who created CESC and through this contributed remarkably to the promotion of peace and the well-being of the poor of India.

## Tamil Nadu: Welcome in CESCO Organics

By Elise,  
From Frères des Hommes

The inauguration of the new Centre for Experiencing Socio-Cultural Interaction, *CESCI Organics*, has been held on November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2008 in a small village of Nagapattinam district, P.R.Puram. This training centre comes to achieve a rehabilitation process of the economic capacities of the most vulnerable tsunami-affected people. Indeed, after this disaster Ekta Parishad wanted to be involved in two dynamics; first in the relief phase, for instance through supportive actions to farmers by helping them to desalinise their ponds but also and before all in a logic of rehabilitation by considering the mistakes done before tsunami. During Green Revolution that pushed to intensively use chemicals, land became less and less fertile and tsunami completed the ravaging task by making land saline. In a will of sustainable rehabilitation Ekta Parishad consequently decided to support farmers by offering them some trainings in organic farming. This has the double advantage to respect environment and to be very less expensive in terms of inputs.

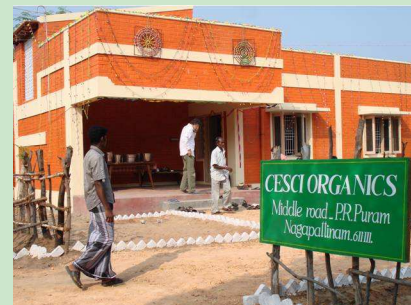
To organize these farmers' groups has been successful in 4 Panchayats in which Ekta Parishad's teams intervened and the idea of forming youth groups came up.

Always with the idea of a sustainable and intelligent development, to mobilize youths around the question of the problems of their communities and of the valorisation of their leadership capacities has been a big bet for Ekta Parishad that has been fruitful with some village cleaning actions and organisation of evening classes for the youngest. The building of this training centre was though a part of this process of economic improvement for local people but in addition with a political dimension for instance with the struggle for landless' rights who are many in Tamil Nadu.

The inauguration of this centre was held under the protection of Mahatma Gandhi with a first ceremony during which one has, as a token gesture, cut the ribbon that closed the entrance of the building. Then, one has put candles and gifts in front of Gandhi's picture. Afterwards a first drama about health issues was performed in tamil by a group of young actors from Madurai. The ceremony of Maja Koene Awards followed. It grants militant actions and activists. This year, the awarded activists were from India, Sri Lanka and France. At the end of this day, after some tea and biscuits, another drama was performed in tamil about problems of alcohol. It was a day that we hope placed the centre under good auspices for a future full of promises for the support towards local people to struggle for their rights and for their ability to live with dignity on their own land.

**« To be a human  
being, it is precisely  
to be responsible.  
It is to feel by  
putting ones stone  
that one can  
contribute to build  
the world.»**

**Antoine de St-  
Exupéry**



# India's Janadesh 2007: in a place where land means life, the landless rural poor march for justice

*Skye Hohmann is a Canadian journalist and photographer, and friend of Ekta Parishad. In October 2007, as about 250 Westerners, she participated in Janadesh. She has just published a book from which you can read here some extracts.*

Protest marches are no rare occurrence in India. [...] Would Janadesh 2007 be any different, I wondered, as my feet joined the march? [...] "Land to the tiller" was promised to the "scheduled" (officially recognized) tribes and castes at Independence. Sixty years later, most of the country has yet to achieve land reform. Rapid urbanization, industrialization, and globalization have only added to the pressures on the rural poor. For many of the marchers, Janadesh 2007 represents a brave attempt to gain what their parents and grandparents were promised: arable land to support each family, fast-track courts to resolve land disputes, and a "single-window" system to replace the bewildering, time-consuming, and expensive maze of bureaucracy that currently oversees processing of land transactions.



[...] Gulabia Devi walks proudly under her green and white flag, matching the slow pace of the woman ahead of her. [...] One day out of Gwalior, and Devi already looks tired. Her spotless sari is nearly threadbare, her sandals already worn thin. Despite this, she is determined. [...] Like more than one-third of India's population, Devi is landless. At home, she works as an agricultural laborer for 20 rupees a day (about 50 U.S. cents), half the legal minimum wage. [...] Devi knows that land is her best hope of security, but she is skeptical. "The government never helps me," she says. "I vote for the political parties, but those parties never help me."

[...]

Ekta Parishad believes that land reforms, rather than industrialization, are the answer to India's chronic underemployment and poverty, particularly among Dalits and adivasis. [Jill] Carr-Harris gestures at the land around the highway. Though the monsoon season has only just ended, dun-colored fields stretch dustily to the horizon. "Even in areas like this," she says, "having land means they will be able to feed themselves for three months of the year. In more fertile areas they will be able to produce enough crops for six months of food."

[...]

Marchers walk in groups of a thousand, well-organized with their own water trucks and tricycle rickshaws blaring Bolly-wood-influenced protest songs from loudspeakers. [...] On the road, Machu Manji walks and talks quickly. His urgency is understandable. In his native state of Bihar, tensions between landlords and the landless run high. "There are a lot of people in my group, the ladies whose husbands have been killed over the issue of the land," he explains, pointing toward the group from Bihar. [...]

The genius of Gandhi's long march lies perhaps not in the marching itself, nor in the number of participants, but in the sheer length of the padyatra. On October 28th, after 26 days on the road, 20,000 marchers walk quietly into India's capital and make camp in a dusty, barren fairground. Unexpected by the government and residents, it seems as if everyone has anticipated their giving up somewhere along the way. [...] On October 29 we awaken to locked gates, with 1,500 police standing outside, armed with riot sticks and bamboo shields.

[...] Over loudspeakers group leaders and activists announce their resolve: "Give us land or give us jail!"

In the end, the government is forced to make a choice. With elections on the way and thousands of articulate activists growing steadily thirstier in the locked fairground, the Rural Development Minister announces a decision to fast-track a land reform policy. The demands of Janadesh 2007 have been met, without reservation.

# At a Glance...

## LATIN AMERICA

Ramesh Sharma will leave to Latin America at the end of January. After participating in the World Social Forum, Ramesh will travel around the continent through Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Mexico, etc. to share the experience of Ekta Parishad on Peace, Non Violence and Land Struggle. A 2-month schedule is being planned.

From January 28th, 2009 to February 18th, about ten tamil tribal leaders and ten members of Ekta Parishad Tamil Nadu will go from Kanyakumari to Chennai. This *Jeep Yatra* will aim to claim for a genuine implementation of the Forest Rights Act and of the 5th Schedule of the Indian Constitution in favour of the tribals in Tamil Nadu.

## JEEP YATRA ON FOREST ACT

This Yatra will cross almost 15 towns of Tamil Nadu where some tribes are settled and do not get the rights they should be entitled. The route will go from sea to mountains (crossing small towns like Ooty, Kotagiri and Yercaud) along which Ekta Parishad will organise public meetings to raise awareness about the Forest Act and Tribal Rights. Reaching Chennai on February 18th, the 20 *yatrees* will address their agenda to the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu and make the Government work for more justice in this state!

## LAND RIGHTS 2009 IN TAMIL NADU

Two major events are going to be organised in Tamil Nadu about Land Rights.  
Regional Land Consultations: 2 RLC will be held with 150 attendants each, one in Madurai on March 18th, 2009 and one in Nagapattinam on March 28th.  
State Convention: About 450 youths, social activists, research scholars, NGOs, Government officials are expected to join this meeting in Chennai on April 9th, 2009.  
All these consultations will aim to pressurize the State Government to truly implement land rights in Tamil Nadu.



## Ekta parishad

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



### Many thanks...

We would really thank two special groups who have recently visited us to better understand the work of Ekta Parishad through CESCO and SAPA activities, and who have offered their valuable contribution to support the struggle carried out for the well-being of all...

About 20 members of Quakers from the USA, Japan and Korea have shared a full morning with Rajagopal and the members of the South Asia Peace Alliance (SAPA). After watching a film on Janadesh, they have attentively listened to Ramprakash's witness who simply gave them a better understanding of the living conditions of landless and small farmers in India. They also enjoyed the dance performance of the most famous Ekta Parishad dancer, Gauri!

Another group of 18 Swiss have visited some projects led by CESCO, in Tamil Nadu.

To share these experiences and works with groups from different backgrounds and different horizons is a real chance to spread the message of peace and non violence all over the world and keep the hope of a friendly world!

## Portrait: welcome in the « eco-model » village of Kadiyan Kaadu

The bus drops us 3 kilometers before the village. No fencing, no lock on the doors, everything seems so quiet... We enter what we could call the "eco-model" village of Kadiyan Kaadu. The team of Ekta Parishad Tamil Nadu is now well known there, as its farmers benefited of EP's tsunami rehabilitation programme, particularly in terms of support to organic farming. But long before the tsunami, some farmers – leaders of the village had decided to turn themselves to organic farming and the protection of their environment. While some years back farmers have been tempted to use chemicals, Mr Somasundaram, the chosen leader of the village says how happy he is to get back to natural way of farming. He proclaims: "I will not take chemical fertilizer even if it is given free of cost". And his 11-year-old grand-son already shows a great interest in organics. Let talk to him and he will explain you the best recipe to make a perfect vermicompost!

Mr C. Rajasekar is another leader of the village. For about 35 years, he has been sharing his time between his organic land and his bees... Even for his water pump, he makes his own biofuel from his *Calophyllum* trees... And when you talk to him about his hamlet, he explains you that it has not always been so friendly but when he came back there, after 15 years of service in Indian Air Force, he noted that there was some problem of alcoholism and tobacco. People did not interact. Consequently, he decided to organize social programs to put everybody together... Some common values and interests started to grow in the village. That is how, despite the tsunami wave entered the village at about 3 feet high, the solidarity between villagers have permitted

them to overpass the trauma. The support of many NGOs have also given them more confidence.

Nowadays, the hamlet of Kadiyan Kaadu is resolutely turned to ecological and friendly values, and could be a very good model for many other Indian villages... Its villagers are proud to tell you that there is no need to put locks on their house door and that women can walk alone at any time without fear even in the middle of the night...

