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Orissa: the sea-mouth of danger...

The case of Chilka lake constitutes an important issue since, due to its very close location, it has been open to the sea. It is a brackish water coastal lake in India's Orissa state, south of the mouth of the Mantei River. It is the largest coastal lake in India. But nowadays, there is a big crisis in Chilka. The artificial sea-mouth which was open in 1999-2000 by the Government, probably to promote tourism, has completely destroyed the ecological balance of this lake. About 30 fisherfolks' villages around the new sea-mouth are severely affected by this crisis and the prawn production is decreasing very fast.



Ekta Parishad's flag waving on
Chilka lake

Photo: Simon Williams

Weakened by the human tourism-oriented activity, a natural sea-mouth has again opened in the dike originally protecting the lake. This creates a new big entrance for sea water in the Chilka lake and it creates a very adverse effect on the brackish-water aquaculture. Consequently, Ekta Parishad along with the fisherfolks' forum is planning for a padyatra from 10th to 25th February 2009. The purpose will be to protest against the Government inaction and to raise the voices for the protection of fisherfolks' rights.

Recently, a friend of Ekta Parishad, Ms Akansha Joshi, has produced a film on Chilka issue. If you are interested, you can directly contact her at: akajoshi@gmail.com

New opening in Rajasthan

As we already mentioned few month ago, we have already started to work in Rajasthan. Now we have two official offices. The field office is settled in Bara while the state office is in Jaipur. A team of 35 activists is already dedicating all their efforts to struggle for land rights in this state and train more villagers on non violence issues. The main working area is composed by 5 districts, i.e. Sawai Madhopur, Kota, Bara, Karuli and Dholpur which cover about 150 tribal-dominated villages.

In the next few months, the struggle will be oriented into two directions.

The first one will be to insure a genuine implementation of the new Forest Right Act which has been passed just after Janadesh.

The second issue will be the convention on Jetropha. The previous rajasthani Government had made the decision to convert a very large area for Jetropha cultivation. As everybody may know, Jetropha and other biofuels cultivation constitutes a big problem for small farmers as it takes the land to those who have already not enough of it to live a decent life... But recently, after the Assembly election, the Government of Rajasthan has changed and this is a good opportunity to talk to them and to make them understand well the consequences of such a decision to convert hectares and hectares of land to Jetropha.

By Anaïs & Samuel

Photos: Georg Gusewski

News from Europe and European partners of Ekta Parishad.



Between the choice of advocacy material...



Enthusiastic discussions at meal time...



And all the other important questions...



The reflection has been intensive...

The latest Ekta Europe meeting took place in Switzerland during the 15th and 16th November 2008. We had the pleasure to meet again some of the Europeans who participated in Janadesh 2007 and we were very lucky to have also Rajaji and Jill with us during this meeting. This was the first time we attended a meeting of the European partners of Ekta Parishad and it was a really interesting and nice time with committed friends from all over Europe!

After giving us the news of latest actions in India and events in Europe, we had a discussion about the 2012 project called Jan Mukti. After experiencing Janadesh 2007, it sounds really powerful to imagine 100 000 people mobilized non-violently at the same time, for Land Rights. In order to prepare and support the 2012 event, the members of Ekta Europe then had group works. Some people worked on how to organize large events before and during Jan Mukti 2012, while some people worked on how to ensure media coverage of Ekta Parishad's movement and actions.

Eventually, the various partners of Ekta Parishad in Europe decided to take one person to coordinate the network of Ekta Europe members. We are now eagerly awaiting for the next Ekta Europe meeting, which will probably take place near Paris, at the headquarters of Confédération paysanne: a French union of small farmers, supporting Ekta Parishad too! In the meantime, we are happy to stay informed and to keep a permanent contact with the workers, volunteers, padayatrees... of Ekta Parishad.

Land – the Livelihood: a film on the problem of land in South India

SEZ: Special Economic Zone? Or “Special Exploitation Zone”, as the leader of the Samajwadi Party (literally *Socialist Party*) said.

The film “Land - the Livelihood” is a 29-minut documentary shot by Joseph Bernard from Sight & Sound in Bangalore. It is about the recent land issue in the four South Indian States. The issue of SEZ constitutes one part of the land problems but not only.

This film covers different issues like:

- a) Bhoodan land grabbed by the dominant caste/class people from Dalits by using muscle power and political influences;
- b) Effects of the land acquisition act on Dalits and marginal farmers;
- c) Land privatization and its impact on Dalits and marginal farmers and SEZ.

The land related atrocities on the Dalits are probably as old as the relationship between Dalit and the land. Over the years hundreds of Dalits have been exploited and sometimes even killed for land.

The film 'Land-The Livelihood' shows cases how land is still being grabbed from the Dalits by the upper caste-class people.

The film also explores the problems related to the Government's acquisition of land. And how the draconian land acquisition act 1894 has been misused and again causing a great misery to the poor dalit farmers. Other case studies included in the film talk about the highly controversial SEZ act 2007, issues of land privatization, and people's resistance to defend the livelihood as their right.

The film journeys through the people's struggle and finally their resistance . It concludes with Medha Patkar's message- "Either in Jail or Out on the road shouting slogans, only then the people will get the message."

This film, available in English, Hindi and in the four south Indian languages can be used as an advocacy material.

For more information, you can contact the Centre for Education and Documentation at: cedban@doccentre.net

A Special Film Festival on Ekta Parishad

During the last 15 years, many very good films, documentaries, video news and other audio visuals have been produced on Ekta Parishad's activities and campaigns. Either in Hindi or in English, German, French, Tamil, etc. these films give always a big inspiration not only for Ekta Parishad's activists and members but to everybody as the growing number of conferences using these films shows. These are also a great stimulation for future campaigning.

In this connection, we are going to organize a Film Festival from 10th to 15th January, 2008 in Madurai. An open discussion on the future campaigning focused in *Jan Mukti 2012* will follow.

We have called about 100 key activists to participate in this film festival. We will watch all the films made on Ekta Parishad.

Among the films are:

- ☞ Tu Jinda Hai (You are alive)
- ☞ Is the small still beautiful?
- ☞ Satyagraha in bracket year 1999-2000
- ☞ La marche des Gueux (the march of the deprived)

We have also made a selection of 12 films. The complete set is available for the price of INR 1000/-. If you want to order a set, please contact us.

Satyagraha 2010: when South Asian organisations unify to achieve MDGs...



The land issue is a burning question in the present world, especially in developing countries where people have to struggle every day for their life. In the year 2000, the UN have issued the Millennium Development Goals which aim to suppress the extreme poverty. However, after 8 years of implementation, the MDGs are still far from achievement.

In Ekta Parishad, we believe that the land is the basis of this achievement. Based on our long experience in land struggle, we believe that if every family could own a piece of land, the extreme poverty would be considerably reduced. In India, one third of the population do not own a piece of land despite the fact that about three-fourth of the same population depends on land to live. The same situation can be seen in many other South Asian countries. Of course, in these countries, land reforms have already been tried but there were not enough to insure a genuine reduction of poverty and many people are still landless while they have to work on the land of big landlords. We want to promote an equitable distribution of land in South Asia in order to reduce poverty as well as to give every man and woman strength, self-confidence and dignity. In this regard, Ekta Parishad and its South Asian partners will organise a bus Yatra called "Satyagraha 2010" to create a pro-poor climate in South Asia and to lead the Governments to keep their promise in achieving the Millenium Development Goals.

During 3 months, from January to March 2010, about 70 people (seniors, politicians, dalit leaders, etc.) from Nepal, Sri Lanka, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Bhutan and the Maldives will cross the different South Asian countries to sensitize decision-makers and raise public education on poverty and development related issues.



From Janadesh to Rajasthan... A long story...

Stéphanie Quérité was there... She walked the long way aside the 25,000 landless... She shared their story, their struggle...

It was for her the beginning of a 6-month travel all over India... During 6 months, she shared a bit of this life which is the daily life of Indian farmers... but not only... she also discovered the shining India and learnt many more about this amazing country... Along her travel, she wrote an already very interesting web blog... this latest has been transformed... it let itself being metamorphosed into a book, touchable and transportable, made in recycled paper...

Stéphanie has chosen the way of self-editing... This is the achievement of a long project. But to make this project concrete has unfortunately a cost...

For those who would be interested in supporting her project by buying this 237-page book, please send your name and address, along with a check of 15 Euros to:

Stéphanie Quérité
63, quai Pierre Scize
69005 Lyon, FRANCE

Stéphanie is very sorry, and we are too, that the book is only available in French but all of yours are a part of the story... and you may also have french-speaking friends who would be interested in this marvelous story.

Ekta parishad

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



Change of air...

Janadesh 2007 is shifting... To facilitate the coordination and reduce the costs, we have decided to shift our office to Bhopal. **Please, note the new address.** Of course, as it is necessary, we will keep a small space in Delhi.

Sorry...

We are very sorry and we want to apologize that by mistake we forgot to mention in the last newsletter that CESCO Organics has been supported by Solidarité and the French Ministry.

For 2009, we would like to wish you a
Year of Peace and Solidarity...
Happy New Year!

Portrait: CSRC or a piece of land in the new Democratic Nepal

In the straight line of the South Asian Yatra preparation, we have in our heart to introduce a bit more some of our south asian partners. It was in 1993 that the Community Self Reliant Centre (CSRC) took its present form. Jagat Basnet, its director and founder had been involving himself in a informal NGO for a long time, developing awareness on many issues like health, literacy, etc. among the poor people of its own village. When a funding agency suggested him to register his NGO, he decided to start working in a neighbouring village as well... There, he found that the main problem was the question of land... In Nepal, about 25% people are landless and the rate of absentee landlords is even higher... Here also those who own no land are those who are in the lowest rank of the society... Backward castes have nothing else to live than their hope of having some day a better life... and this is not to let this hope unfulfilled that CSRC has decided to turn its work fully towards the issue of land rights in Nepal... A beneficiary of CSRC witnesses: "Being landless, we have no citizenship certificate, children are denied admission in schools, widows are not given allowances..." The former monarchical Nepalese system was said to be the protector, promoter and bearer of a feudalism system in which big landlords exploited the most backward population. It is said that the Monarchy itself became the source of poverty and inequality in the country. That is why by the will of many popular movements, the 240-year Monarchy ended by forming a new constituency Assembly in June 2008. The new Democratic Nepal was born... Let us hope that the new Government will be willing to work for the poor and that NGOs like CSRC will be given a real place to raise the voice of the most deprived... A board of 7 people has just been nominated by the Prime Minister to form a High Level Land Reform Commission. CSRC has only one seat but this is a beginning of a process of justice. CSRC is going to be part of the South Asian Yatra which will bring in front of the different governments the need of social justice to achieve the eradication of poverty... Hand in hand, Nepal and India walk together towards a fair world!