

## INDIA

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## Jan Satyagraha News

FEBRUARY 2009

## Chhattisgarh: on the way to 2012...

It was a sunny morning. After a long night in the train, we reached Rajnandgaon station, in the State of Chhattisgarh, the "rice bowl of India"... Tchandra and Julien, two of the three French young men who had ridden their cycle from France to India to discover the country and learn more about farmers' life in India were also with us. It was on February 1st, 2009. Four days had been well planned to understand a little bit more the life and struggles of one of the most tribal part of the sub-continent.

In November 2000, the State of Chhattisgarh was carved out from those of Madhya Pradesh. The reason evoked is different according to whom you ask. Some will say it was to give a bigger opportunity to the tribal communities to get their rights by creating a smaller State and mainly inhabited by those people. Some others will speak about the increasing ability of industries to exploit natural resources that are abundant in that State. Reading stories of Adivasis – for instance, you can read "Truth Force" by Helena Drakakis, in association with Ekta Parishad – and seeing Raipur, the State capital, which is believed to be the most polluted city in India due to industrialisation, we would believe the second point of view rather than the first one. We well know how big industries like Jindal or other steel companies have taken land from people who had only this asset to live a decent life. Even the Government by creating natural reserves and sanctuaries has chased tribes from forest where they were finding their livelihood. That is why Ekta Parishad has taken an active part in that region of the globe and trained tribal leaders to take action...

As a result of those actions, we have been to the village of Bokarabahar, the village led by one of the youngest and most active tribal leaders, Shikari Baiga. The Baiga tribe has known many difficulties. In some villages, tribal men have even been killed by Forest Department

officers. The land where they had been living for generations were suddenly confiscated by the Government but the villagers from Bokarabahar with the help of Ekta Parishad decided to take back their land by occupying them... At the end, villagers won and nowadays, even if all their land and livelihood problems are not all solved, they can at least live in their own village, their own houses... Their victory has given the confidence and strength to 27 other Baiga villages to take the same action. All of them are already willing to participate in the next padyatra, Jansatyagraha 2012, motivated by Rajagopal and their young leader Shikari.



Young Baiga girls attending Ekta Parishad's meeting in Bokarabahar.

Chhattisgarh is inhabited by about 15 tribes. Baiga is one of them with about 130 000 families but there are also several other small tribes – Dhamwar: 30 000 families, Sauta. 4 500 families, Birhor: 2 700 families, Mahto. 1 500 families, Pando. 7 000 families – which are double exploited on one side by the more influential tribes like Gond tribe in the southern part of the State and on the other side by the industrialisation and the Forest Department. To motivate the one who are suffering from the greed of the most powerful, Rajagopal and Ekta Parishad activists have organised different meetings with tribal people in Mohala (district Rajnandgaon), Bokarabahar (district Kawardha), Chantapara (district Kota) and Mahasamund (district Mahasamund). People have been informed and motivated to join the big mobilisation for Jansatyagraha 2012. In the same time, Rajagopal has met with the Collector of Mahasamund district who had immediately called the forest and police officers to tell them that 15 000 pattas – land titles – would be given soon to landless...

By Benjamin Peyrot des  
Gachons,  
Peuples Solidaires

## Belem: Feedback on World Social Forum



### Indigenous people

The World Social Forum took place from January 27th to February 1st, 2009 in Belem, in the State of Para in Brazil. The Amazonian issues have been leading this edition which, after a very festive opening march despite torrential rain, started with a “Panamazonian” day. The representatives of Indians from Amazonia have presented the different social, environmental, economical and cultural issues of Brazil and its neighbor States that share the world patrimony which is the forest. A big Amazonian people’s campaign has been launched at that occasion during this day.

Among the big themes discussed during the Forum, we can mention: the regulation of capitalism and finance sector in regard of the financial crisis; the abolition of the South countries’ debt; the social and environmental impact of agrofuel; the links between science and democracy; the European and American migration policies; the impact of mass distribution on the workers from the South; agro-ecology as an agricultural model to be promoted.

We will also remember the very big crowd (130 000 people), the youth’s participation, particularly young Brazilians. We would probably regret the too little participation from Asia and Africa because of huge travel costs.

We can also notice the remarkable coming of 5 Presidents on the fringes of the Forum: during a big debate animated by Candido Grzybowski, the director of IBASE, the organization co-organizing the WSF, Presidents Lula (Brazil), Chavez (Venezuela), Morales (Bolivia), Lugo (Paraguay) and Correa (Equator) presented themselves as the children of social movements and of the World Social Forum.

In the occasion of the forum, Peuples Solidaires had invited Ekta Parishad, in the person of Ramesh Sharma, to join the delegation of CRID members (French network of international solidarity organizations) and their partners. Ekta Parishad was also able to delegate three other representatives: Ran Singh, Yogendra and Manjulla, to come to Belem. Together we have shared the same “galley”: a boat rented by CRID and which has welcome 250 people during one week, for most of them accommodated in a dormitory. A good way to create links between volunteers, workers and partners.

That collective dynamic has allowed organizing some field visits on the eve of the forum. The four representatives of Ekta Parishad and Benjamin from Peuples Solidaires have participated in a visit to a “quilombolas” community on the other side of the river. Quilombolos are the descendants of the black slaves who escaped from West Indian plantations during the 19th Century. We have had very interesting discussions about the collective land in these communities, the question of indigenous rights, development models in Brazil and the question of forest preservation. More generally, the participation of Ekta Parishad delegation has been very appreciated by the member organizations of CRID, particularly Yogendra who gave a lot of inspiration to the participants.

During the entire forum, the representatives of Ekta Parishad have had the opportunity to discuss with different farmers movements also present in Belem (particularly with Via Campesina and the MST) and to announce the march of 2012.

On January 31st, Ramesh has participated in the workshop on “the different struggles for the access to land” organised by Peuples Solidaires with the participation of ActionAid, MS Zambia and the MST. The debate has permitted a deep sharing on the experiences of mobilisation in the different continents. Ramesh, Louis Campana and Christophe Grigri (Gandhi International) have taken the advantage of this workshop to present their initiative: a two-month tour in Latin America to present the march of 2012 and they have made raise some similar and simultaneous initiatives.

Our friends are today on the road and they will not miss the opportunity to share with us their experience in Latin America.



Workshop on land access

# America: a tour to strengthen our links

In order to prepare the big march of 2012, Ramesh Sharma has been invited by the organisation Gandhi International to participate in a tour on the American continent. It is to strengthen the already existing links and to create a platform of non violent movements. Issues are worldwide: injustices and abuses from ultra-liberal systems have to be denounced and fought with the strength of conversion of non violent action. It is thus important to set up everywhere, on every continent, various actions in accordance with the local life conditions. In 2012, it is thanks to a simultaneous and solidarity action that the landless' action would be able to find a genuine answer.

A small Ekta Parishad's team - Ramesh C. Sharma, Ransingh Parmar, Manju Dung Dung and Yogendra Parikh – has participated in the 9<sup>th</sup> World Social Forum in Belem, Brasil, at the very end of this month of January. During 5 days, they have had the opportunity to strengthen the links with several French organisations that have already shown a great interest in supporting Jansatyagraha 2012. Three Brazilian movements working with landless people, indigenous and poor people directly threatened by mining industries have expressed the will to organise a foot march in different places in Brazil.

After the WSF, Ramesh has continued his route to Paraguay with Louis Campana and Christophe Grigri. They not only met with the President of Paraguay but also some representatives of SERPAJ (El Servicio de Paz y Justicia) and of the organisation OLT (Organisation for Land Struggle). They got the opportunity to learn more about land problems occurring in that country by participating in or seeing several non violent actions going on.

- Visit to landless families who are victims of big Brazilian landlords (“brasiguayos”) having taken their land. There are 109 000 hectares available for 10 000 families and 10 big Brazilian landlords are growing transgenic soya on 200 000 hectares while in the same time, there are 20 000 landless families. Legal actions started by some farmers had a very limited success; land encroachment by landlords happens very freely, without any protective actions in favour of small farmers.
- Visit of the community in El Triunfo, district Rapatriacion. There, 160 landless families have been settled for 8 years on a land owned by a big Paraguayan landowner (most probably, this land has been acquired at the dictatorial time, when the State was illegally redistributing land to a few privileged individuals close to the power. Most of them were army men.). Following the orders of the legal body, paramilitaries on behalf of the big landlord have interfered very violently on the night between February 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> – the eve of Ramesh, Louis and Christophe's visit – to evict these families, burn out their houses and kill their animals.

During a protocol visit, Mr. Pereira, vice-chairman of the Legislative Assembly, has indicated that their objective is a land reform and the resistance to the big landlords' land domination, but he is aware of the difficulty to implement this programme given the strength and power of multinational companies and the lobbying groups on their side. Similarly, Ramon Corvalan from SERPAJ talked about the fact of “caudillo” in Paraguay. It means that decisions are taken at the top by the leader who does not redistribute the information. People have thus got used to obey blindly to the authorities. This does not help to take initiatives and to resist. Paraguay is presently in a transitional stage that, according to Ramon Corvalan, announces the end of the traditional agricultural system and also the end of a certain form of political management.

The team has continued the way of this first part of their American tour by going to Bolivia where they have met with the Bolivian President as well. (Let us note that Rajagopal had also met with the Bolivian Ambassador in France. Linkages with Bolivia could thus be reinforced.)

Then to Argentina. As elsewhere, the land problem is well real. Ramesh, Louis and Christophe have talk to the local representatives of SERPAJ and local communities about the land problem happening on the indigenous territory. This land legally belongs to the University of La Plata which has inherited it from a big company. Negotiations are going on. The University wants to give back only 700 hectares to the indigenous communities out of 6 000 hectares they are claiming. The territory has been historically inhabited by these tribes. Whereas the indigenes seem to be the only ones maintaining the biodiversity of these huge forests, these latest are already illegally exploited (wood and paper industries). The forest is destroyed to be replaced by pines and eucalyptus plantations. These monocultures are extremely harmful for the earth and for the environment of the inhabitants. There are thousands of hectares.

In the village of Monte Carlo where there are many big paper factories, a women's group who did not bear anymore the situation of exploitation and poverty initiated a 4-day fast to protest against their husbands' bosses.

The tour will continue till the end of March to meet farmers and leaders from Chile, Mexico, Colombia, Costa Rica, etc.



## Bhopal: reinforcing women's leadership

Conscious that there are gaps in women's leadership in some parts of Madhya Pradesh (M.P.)—particularly in Chambal valley which is one of the biggest region of M.P. with the less village women leaders - Ekta Mahila Manch activists have met during 2 days in Bhopal office to design a manual on women's leadership. This will be used to promote women as leaders at all levels through trainings. Priti and Rajkali, both from M.P., have been given the national responsibility of Ekta Mahila Manch. Let us remind that women's empowerment is one of the driving force behind Ekta Parishad...

## EP delegates met with Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh

(by Anil Gupta)

Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh Mr. Shivraj Singh Chouhan gave strong attention over the issues raised by Ekta Parishad and promised to take action immediately. He directed to Mr. Niraj Vashisth (CM's Secretary) for active role to solve the issues raised by Ekta Parishad. Chief Minister also promised to see the possibility to set up the Land Commission and district level task force to solve the land related problems of deprived communities in Madhya Pradesh.

EP delegates discussed on Land and livelihood issues with the Chief Minister in Madhya Pradesh, submitted 11-point letters for immediate action like review the status of implementation of Recognition of Forest Rights Act, 2006; provide the entitlement to the possessed tribal families over the land of Animal Reproductive Centre, Gandhi in Balaghat district, allot the land of Madhya Pradesh Government to the tribal landless families in Kerala (It should be noted that there are 500 acre land of M.P. Government in Vaynad district of Kerala state), dropped the illegal criminal cases which were charged against the social activists, set up a inquiry committee to inquiry the status of Bhoodan Land and Agriculture land of Cooperative societies in Madhya Pradesh.

Rajaji appreciated the coordination work of Dr. Ajay Mehata (President of Nayidisha) and Mr. Anil Gupta (An activist of Ekta Parishad) between Ekta Parishad and State Government towards the interest of marginalized community. Seven member delegates of Ekta Parishad led by Shri Rajagopal P.V (President of Ekta Parishad) met with Honourable Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh on 9<sup>th</sup> February at CM residence in Bhopal.

## APPEAL FOR SUPPORT, SOLIDARITY & PARTICIPATION FOR BIHAR PADYATRA

The river Kosi that rises in the Himalayan foothills in Nepal enters Bihar at Kusaha village and flows through the districts of Supaul, Saharsa and Araria before flowing into the Ganges near Kathiar. On the 9<sup>th</sup> of August 2008 the eastern embankment at Kusaha collapsed and the river poured flood waters into large tracts into four districts [Supaul, Saharsa, Madhepura and Araria] in north Bihar. This was one of the worst floods in decades taking a death toll of thousands of human and animal life.

Even now there are no realistic government figures on how many lost their lives. Locals claim over thousands are still missing or dead and the heavy loss of domestic cattle has nearly wiped out the supplementary income and livelihood system of the area.

There are no indications of the government's seriousness or urgency to tackle the perpetual flood situation in various parts of north Bihar with any long term policy mission.

From the 26<sup>th</sup> of August, after distress calls from EP workers and associate organisations in Saharsa, three senior co-ordinators and three field workers reached Saharsa. The forward team reached three villages that were not inundated. A Rapid Appraisal survey of about 2000 families

was done at these locations.

Two camps reached by road [Sasul and Manori in Sonbarsa Block] and one accessed by boat [Silet in Saur Block] were set up.

With the emergency relief phase over by end November 2008 when most agencies and organisations were withdrawing from the area, EP-PGVS with Oxfam Novib support is placed to continue for the next 18 months to ensure rehabilitation and relocation work. And to this end it has begun organising flood affected communities in 77 villages for dialogue and direct peoples' action to press the State to deliver compensation and rehab as their right to livelihood and survival.

At the present time the embankment repair is not complete and many media and officials report indicate that the work done may not be of the quality required to make the area totally secure from any further breaches of the embankment in the next monsoon season this year.

Keeping the huge success of the *Jan Sunwai* as a result of massive public response it was decided to conduct this 'Kosi Satyagraha Padyatra' covering 145 kilometres over 15 days touching about 150 villages to continue the peoples' awareness building and mass mobilisation with the objectives of:

- \* Continuing to build pressure through peoples' organisation for delivering compensation and rehabilitation package as provided for in the "Kosi Flood Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Policy" as promised by

the State Government.

- \* Ensure distribution of compensation to those who lost the tools of small trade and occupation/profession as identified through the "Damage Assessment Survey" conducted by the organisation.
- \* Maintain continuity of the campaign for early restoration of all essential services especially health services and Public Distribution System.
- \* Provide a sense of security by strengthening organisational presence in the area by promoting the formation of Disaster Management Committees and Emergency Grain Banks in vulnerable villages.

The Padyatra is a direct opportunity to network with other organisations to initiate an advocacy campaign for review of existing flood/disaster relief & rehab policies of the State, and recommend changes that will ensure proper and adequate benefits for affected people.

To achieve any of the above the organisation is building a strong and active grassroots base through a cadre building and peoples' action processes. This will be backed up with an upward directed advocacy for policy changes at the State and National level.

Your presence in solidarity among the people during this padyatra (foot march) and dharna (sit-in) even for a short while, if not the whole period, will go a long way in providing tremendous hope and strength to the affected communities who in spite of their fear and insecurity, are so willing to rise and demand their rights.

## Ekta parishad

International Coordination

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



## Bihar Padyatra Route Chart

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Date	First Stop	Night Stay	Block and District	Km
20.02.09	Kr.Sasindra college, Birpur	Orientation workshop	Vasantpur, Supaul Dt.	00
21.02.09	Vasantpur	Hridayanagar prathmic vidyalaya	Vasantpur, Supaul Dt.	09
22.02.09	Sitapur	Balua Madhya vidyalaya	Chhatapur, Supaul Dt.	10
23.02.09	Chapin	Bhimpur Madhya vidyalaya	Chhatapur, Supaul Dt.	11
24.02.09	Udhampur	Bhagwatnagar Hariharpur Madhya vidyalaya	Chhatapur, Supaul Dt.	12
25.02.09	Rajwara	Chhatapur Dharmshala	Chhatapur, Supaul Dt.	12
26.02.09	Koria Patti	Jadia Uch vidyalaya	Triweniganj, Supaul Dt.	15
27.02.09	Tikulia Hat	Kumar khand uch vidyalaya	Kumarkhand, Madhepura Dt.	14
28.02.09	Rahata	Mirganj(Muraliganj) K.P.college	Muraliganj, Madhepura Dt.	11
01.03.09	Bhatkhora Bazar	Jitapur	Muraliganj, Madhepura Dt.	12
02.03.09	Beldaur nahar	Rashbihari uch vidyalaya Madhepura	Madhepura, Madhepura Dt.	10
03.03.09	Mathahi	Savaila Prathmic vidyalaya	Savaila, Madhepura Dt.	09
04.03.09	Tiry	Baidyanathpur manohar uch vidyalaya	Baidyanathpur, Saharsa Dt.	10
05.03.09	Baidyanathpur	Patel Maidan Saharsa	Saharsa, Saharsa Dt.	10
06.03.09	Saharsa	Jamghat		

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## Portrait: Ekta Parishad, who is who?

We feel it is sometimes useful to remind who is who... especially at that time when some changes are occurring!

Consequently, here are the contact of whom you shall ask in regard of your question.

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