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Jansatyagraha News

MAY 2009

Kerala: The widows of Wayanad

During the last 10 years, the district of Wayanad, located in the north-east of Kerala has been the place of an alarming social situation. Since the year 2000, besides all the resources of the states - rice, coffee, tapioca, tea, pepper and ginger- peasants have been facing a hard economic position that lead them to suicide.

Due to the drop of prices of the main agricultural crops, the farmers could not recover anymore their production expenses. To face this difficult situation, they have had to contract additional loans at nationalized bank, local banks and/or private money lenders. In addition to that, diseases and/or not favourable climate conditions as drought, heavy rains and storms which occurred during the last ten years in this region, condemned the possibility of the farmers to pay off the loans and drove them to indebtedness.

The result is 1200 peasant suicides in Wayanad district and the same number of widows.

The consequences of these dramas for these women are disastrous. They have to fight alone financial problems like to assume the debts after their husband's death with often, harassment from the money lenders, to assume the daily life expenditure alone, they do not have or very few financial assistances,... Moreover, this can create family disorganisation and distortion with a negative attitude of society toward themselves. In consequences, most of them suffer from depression, social phobia, insecure feelings and hopeless future.

In this context, Ekta Parishad in collaboration with different partners decided to involve itself conducting among others, several conventions for bankrupt peasants, focusing on the situation of the widows of the peasants who had committed suicide, as well as other peasants who were facing the banks through repossession problems.

Projects for the economic recuperation of the widows of Wayanad are in process to facilitate the emotional and social recuperation of these women.

Europe! Less money for armament, more money for solidarity

On the occasion of the European parliamentary elections, the French organization Frères des Hommes invites you to send the message « Europe: less money for armament, more money for solidarity » to European Parliamentary Candidates.

*"In Europe, many citizens bemoan the fact that every day the **Union distances itself more and more from its founding ideals of solidarity**. All the more reason why our social instabilities, worsened by the economic crisis, continue to spread.*

*In Africa, Asia and Latin America, other citizens, of an ever rising number, are subjected on a daily basis to the violent and aggressive situations that lead to poverty and hunger, all while waiting for the day when **the abolition of poverty will finally take the place of the international arms race.***

We are waiting for European groups and political leaders to recognize the scale and legitimacy of these democratic goals.

*Keeping in mind the commitment to the reduction of poverty signed by all the states as part of the Millennium Development Goals, we ask that **the European Union take part in strategic planning advocated for by the UN for a progressive disarmament for the abolition of poverty and for sustainable and solidarity development.***

*In light of the European year for the struggle against poverty in 2010, we are submitting for public and parliamentary discussion **the Option 10%, which invites member states of the Union to reduce their arms spending by 10% to finance the struggle against poverty in Europe and throughout the world.***"

SIGN THE PETITION ONLINE: http://www.fdh.org/Europe-Moins-d-argent-pour-les_1051.html?lang=en



A meeting of National Council of Ekta Parishad was called in Tilda (Chhattisgarh) for discussion and decisions on many organizational issues and future campaigning with focus on Jan Satyagraha 2012. Presently, National Council is represented by 12 tribal/ dalit representatives of 8 States.

Some key points discussed during the meeting are :

- The National Council members unanimously agreed on declaration of Jan Satyagraha in 2012; and given call for 100000 representatives of deprived community for non violent direct action.
- The Council also declare year 2009-10 for strengthening community resource base and organizing community consultation for claiming their land & livelihood rights.
- The council members felt for organizing series of leadership building camps all across the States in the year 2010-11. They targeted to build a strong leadership base of 5000 young community leaders.
- The Council also unanimously agreed for organizing a long foot march from 2nd October 2011 to 24th September 2012 and walking through 15 States across the country.

There is new organizational structure proposed by President and National Convener approved by National Council is as presented on the next page.

- National President, National Convenor and Council Members have authorize a National Core Committee (Rajagopal Ji, Ran Singh Ji, Ramesh Bhai) for taking organizational, financial and other urgent decisions and informed National Council members for due confirmation.
- National Council also declare national office in Bhopal and International Coordination office in Delhi.
- There is an agreement on organizing at least 30% financial resources as a community contribution for these campaign and actions.
- There is also agreement for positioning National and State Council Members in lead role in all actions and decisions.
- The group members felt for re-modeling of rural centers as a Learning Centers is required and also there is need to re-shape these centers as a Livelihood Model for community learning.
- The National Council Members are unanimously agreed to take a lead role during demonstration on 2nd October 2009 in Delhi. When we are planning to submit a Memorandum for implementation of National Land Reforms Policy.
- The Council members also felt to take lead role in State demonstrations and actions and encourage other State Council members for increasing level of their participation.

A Tribal Parliament has also planned in March 2010 with the intention of initiating a new culture of Tribal Politics. The Council members felt that there is need for creating a strong tribal leadership base in the country. This could be link with various indigenous rights movements across the world.

National Council

President – Rajagopal P V

National Convener – Ran Singh Parmar

Council Members

Madhya Pradesh – Narmada Bahen, Rajelal Sahariya

Chhattisgarh – Chandrawati Korva, Shikari Baiga

Orissa- Chandrakala Das, Nicolas Barla

Jharkhand – Firoza Khatun, Budhawa Bhagat

Bihar – Jagtaran Devi, Saryu Mahto

Kerala – Raghavan

Tamil Nadu – Laxmi



Resource Management

D K Jha, Ramesh Sharma

International Coordination

Ramesh Sharma

Support Units

Ekta Mahila Manch (Priti Tiwari)

Ekta Kala Manch (Gauri Kulkarni)

Livelihood Management (Nirbhay Singh)

Take a note in your diary!

Gandhi International, with the support of Ekta Parishad, will organise a congress in India in January 2010... This congress will gather several Peace Nobel Prizes and non-violent leaders (among the expected characters are the Dalai Lama, Mohammed Yunus, etc.)

In addition of discussing about the questions “Is a Gandhian non-violent economy possible?” and “How can the deprived and the poor get back their essential rights and dignity?”, the congress will give the opportunity to create an international committee in order to:

- ✓ To act as a spokesperson on behalf of the poor and the deprived in front of public authorities and media.
- ✓ To think, to advise and to propose orientations and non-violent worldwide actions.
- ✓ To check that measures promised by states in favour of the poor and excluded are correctly implemented.

It will also be the occasion to mobilize people and increase the communication about Jansatyagraha 2012 and larger about a “Big World Festival of the Deprived towards their Rights” that could be held on October 2nd, 2012.

A similar congress will be held in July 2010 in Lyon, France, with the support of “Dialogues en Humanité”.



Dhalabali: Living on the Edge

By Ivan, Action Village India

Since the February 2003 Orissa yatra, Action Village India, at the request of Rajagopal PV, has supported Ekta Parishad's work in Orissa. Since April 2005, we have supported the activists who are organising and supporting fishing communities on Chilka Lake.

Chilka, which in the monsoon has an area of 1100 sq km, is in reality a large lagoon as it has an opening to the sea which makes the water brackish. Ekta Parishad is working with struggling fishing communities in 28 villages whose livelihoods have been devastated by a range of factors. For example, in recent years there has been an expansion in prawn cultivation which has restricted the area where fishing can take place. Similarly, the government of Orissa has expanded a bird sanctuary leading to the same consequences. However, the greatest problem for these communities was the opening of a new sea mouth for the lake in 1999 by the Chilka Development Authority. This was done because the old 'natural' sea mouth near the northern end of the lake was silting up as was the lake itself. However, the impact on these 28 villages around the two sea mouths has been disastrous. The flow of water past the villages has changed as has the salinity level. These changes in the ecology of the lake have combined to reduce fish populations and consequently devastated incomes.

In February 2009 Action Village India's Coordinator and three supporters spent five days on the lake with Ekta Parishad's activists. Our first afternoon was spent at a meeting of women from fishing communities in Sorana where we also paid our respects at the memorial to the five martyrs who were shot dead by police on the lake whilst destroying illegal prawn nets.

We then visited other villages and the new sea mouth where we saw the erosion that is taking place along the lake and the evidence that it is gradually shifting north. One visit that stands out in the memory was

the journey across the lake to Dhalabali, a village of 500 families of the Noila fishing community. They all live in bamboo and coconut thatch huts on the sand dunes separating the lake from the Bay of Bengal. They traditionally fish from small boats in the Bay of Bengal, so this site near the new sea mouth is ideal for them, though very dangerous in the face of cyclones which regularly sweep over this coast.

The village has no electricity, no school; no health services and very little 'sweet water' and what water is available is found in very shallow pits dug on the edge of the village. Some of AVI's grant has been used to buy concrete rings to stabilise the pits where people bathe as well as collect drinking water. The reason why this village has no services is that this is Forestry Department land, so the people have no right to live here unless they can claim for homestead



land under the Forest Rights Act, 2007.

During our tour of the village we were taken to a school run by an Ekta volunteer. We stepped into one of the larger huts and sat in one room. We heard that the nearest school is across the lake and as people do not have enough money to pay for small boats to ferry the children across, none of the children go to school. In response to demands from the parents, Ekta decided to support a village school. A family offered their home as a school, but on the condition that when they came back from fishing they could have it back and the school would have to decamp under the nearest tree.

After our meeting, the children were allowed out of the small windowless back room, they raced past us, faces full of joy and excitement all clutching their exercise books, maybe 40 children being taught in two rooms no bigger than 20' by 8'. Community leaders told us that they would build the walls and do all the labouring to build a school, if someone would fund the

bamboo poles and the thatched roof. Later we agreed to this request and at the same time, the Ekta activists will be seeking to get these neglected children their right to education under the Government of India's Sarva Shikshan Abhiyan (Education for All) programme.

During the visit, we heard time and time again of violent clashes, between villages in the struggle for survival on the lake. Disputes over access to the lake between villages, between prawn 'mafias' and fishing communities, between traditional fishing communities and outsiders. In this environment, Ekta Parishad's non-violent approach stands out and the dedication of its activists as they support the traditional fishing communities in the face of external threats to their very existence is inspirational.

At the end of our visit we were told of two recent Ekta Parishad actions which had increased their standing in the area. Firstly they had organised people in a successful protest against the proposals by the Chilka Development Authority for a dolphin sanctuary for the Irrawaddy dolphins. The other success was to broker peace between Gabakunda and another village over access to the lake. Both villages were arming themselves with guns and home made bombs. The police were stationed in the area but could not stop the rising tension, but over a period of time, Ekta managed to broker a peace deal.

Working with these traditional fishing communities to ensure that their needs are taken into account when decisions are being made on the development of the lake is a big task. Action Village India supports programmes in six states of India and this is undoubtedly one of the toughest areas and we can only feel admiration for those who are working in such difficult conditions.



Photos: Michael Willis (AVI)

Ekta parishad

International Coordination

Ekta Parishad

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



When the time has come...

There is a year already that I am pleased to write and share with you this monthly newsletter...

But time has come for me to say Goodbye! From the next issue onwards, Elodie will take care of the newsletter and international communication/networking!

We are very happy to welcome her in Bhopal and wish her all the best...

I would like to thank all those, in India and from abroad, who encouraged me in my job and made it a wonderful experience!

Jai Jagat!

Stéphanie

Portrait: South-South Solidarity Movement

By Sandeep Chachra sendsandeep@gmail.com
www.southsolidarityforum.org



South - South Peoples Solidarity is a platform of progressive social organizations, movements and individuals from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and Latin America striving for a world of peace, security, equality, dignity and human-centered sustainable development. It aims at furthering exchanges of information and experience among its members, promoting joint researches on people's alternatives to neo-liberal globalization and facilitating networking for joint actions and progress on alternatives.

The platform is open to all progressive organizations, movements and individuals from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and Latin America for strengthening South-South people's solidarity in the common struggle for justice, peace, security, national independence and peoples' sovereignty, democracy and social progress, for a better world for all.

About South-South

1950s and 60s were decades marked by fierce struggles for national independence, a sense of prevailing unity across liberated nations and dispossessed people. Struggles rapidly surged forward, dealing body blows to colonialism, and a hope for new future prevailed symbolized by Bandung "on the Birth of a new Asia and new Africa". In Bandung period the liberated states from global south witnessed implementation of auto-centric development processes aimed at development and reduction of polarization.

In these decades, as many waves of solidarity of south were shaping and forming, the cross currents of neo-liberal project and neocolonialism also gathered force. While liberated countries moved forward in pursuance of autonomous development policies on the one side, the neo-liberal ideas were being propelled by neocolonial interests far and wide into the national mindsets and regional spaces. By the early 1980s the idea of solidarity got overtaken by the idea of free markets, corporate freedoms, trade agreements and trading blocks and minimal states. Through skillful maneuvers of multilateral institutions, corporations and the state, elites took full control over the world once again - over processes of further extraction and accumulation,

The agenda of marginalised and excluded have never been centre-staged in these processes. If in retrospect, if we were to evaluate all the efforts of building southern solidarity, perhaps what got jettisoned most in the south-south alliance was the agenda of addressing authentic democratisation and social progress for the marginalised and excluded millions. While leaders transited from summit to summit, people went from misery to misery.

The liberating potential of solidarity of south for the poor and oppressed has not gone beyond deconstruction of colonies, and dismantling of apartheid. It has not changed the substance and basic nature of exclusions and marginalization. The project of solidarity remains an incomplete one, and as yet with its potential intact to realize justice, peace, security, national independence and peoples' sovereignty, democracy and social progress, for a better world for all.

Transformative Need of South South Peoples Solidarity

People's demands for change have been growing. Nevertheless, while domination and exploitation are being expanded, intensified and globalized, the struggle of their victims is still fragmented and even divided at all levels. Thus, there is an urgent need for renewed solidarity and unity of the people of the South in the struggle for a better world.

"We say you don't fight racism with racism," once said the late Fred Hampton. "We're gonna fight racism with solidarity. There is no other way to fight neocolonialism too. It is not solely a project of states, but rather is a collective project of peoples. Embodiment of Solidarity is in the spirit of people and the spirit of the collective. A stronger push for change, from the margins of polity by the affected peoples themselves is much needed, as is a stronger expression of politics from other than solely institutional means.

South South Peoples Solidarity is therefore a historical necessity. 21st century cannot be a remake of the injustice and exploitation of the 20th . At this time of crisis of global economy, conflicts, contradictions and inequity, it is imperative that peoples struggles to be able to finally assert their autonomy, claim and force the anti people powers and forces to conform to their peoples exigencies. This is the need and the hope. The means of change are far greater now than in the last century, and the alternatives are in nearer in our sight

In solidarity lies the strength of oppressed people.