### EKTA PARISHAD

In this Issue...

#### INDIA

Special Jharkhand

Environmental issues

### INTERNATIONAL

Solidarity-based Tourism in Madhya Pradesh

News from Ekta Canada

### AND ALSO

Planning of Rajagopal

Calendar of the next foot marches and youth camps

# Jan Satyagraha News

IANUARY 2010

# **| Solidarity-based Tourism** | in Madhya Pradesh



The year 2010 begins for Ekta Parishad with a new partnership around a project of ecotourism.

This collaboration was born from the meeting between Rajagopal, president of Ekta Parishad and the Tamadi team, in the past October at Brussels and then at Nantes.

TAMADI is a non-profit association, under French law, which serves people from Belgium, France and Mali. The objective of the association is to "promote, arouse, and facilitate the initiatives in favor of a responsible and associative tourism based in solidarity". Its approach focuses on working with local associated partners who are independent, self sufficient and involved in social changes actions. Tamadi, set up in 2005, already has tours to rural areas in Mali, Madagascar, Turkey and in the Western Sahara.

In India, from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 31<sup>st</sup> of January,

EP activists coming from different villages of Madhya Pradesh will participate in a training pointly organized by Véronique Dave, administrator of Tamadi and EP. This training aims to prepare the guides and the families who will preceive the travelers.

Through this tour, Tamadi and EP would like to create a space to share the cultures, different human stories, to make possible some reciprocal wonderment. Moreover, this project will create a supplementary income resource that will enable the villagers to invest in new community programs for the amelioration of their living conditions.

On the 5<sup>th</sup> of February, the 7 first travelers will arrive and inaugurate the 22-day tour to meet several communities and share their daily life. They will live according to the pace of the ashrams, training centers of Ekta Parishad, discover their economic activities and will exchange with the activists.

We wish them a very beautiful meeting!

For further information about Tamadi www.tamadi.org

## **News from Ekta Canada!**

The solidarity organization, Ekta Canada, has been reinvigorated thanks to the efforts of Jill Carr-Harris and Paul Schwartzentruber. Jill and Paul spoke about Ekta Parishad to several gatherings this winter: at Quaker House in Toronto to a group of activists, to a graduate class in Popular Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education and at a panel on Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Day. She and Paul have also been meeting with interested parties to discuss the possibilities of solidarity. There is now a new website <a href="http://ektacanada.weebly.com">http://ektacanada.weebly.com</a> as well as a Facebook page (Ekta Parishad-Canada) and a Google discussion group (<a href="http://groups.google.com/group/ekta-canada">http://groups.google.com/group/ekta-canada</a>). There are also plans to develop an educational exchange and placement program for Canadians to train in nonviolence in India with Ekta Parishad. More on that soon!



# **Environmental Issues**

# Communities struggling for the protection of their ecosystem

EKTA PARISHAD is seriously involved in raising issues of "Food & Climate Security" at local, national and international level. The activists of Ekta Parishad carried out a unique exercise in order to express the grassroots, community perspectives on the climate crisis. The Baigachak (Chhattisgarh), Narmada Valley (Madhya Pradesh) and Chilka Banks (Orissa) were identified for exploring the level of crisis, its impact on human life and livelihood pattern and finally to discover what coping mechanism the community groups are adopting in the face of the climate crisis.

Interestingly, most of the communities are very much aware of the seriousness of climate crisis and they are trying to re-invent their indigenous technological knowledge to protect their own ecosystem. They were also trying to raise their voices against structural loopholes which are instrumental for widening the climate crisis; like the laws and policies related with land, forest and water are not yet deliberated with the people's perspective and not even given rights and/or ownership of conservation & utilization to the community. On the other, their own indigenous and traditional knowledge are not properly protected and/or institutionalized by the State, which adversely affected their conservational practice like 'shifting' cultivation. On the one hand, shifting cultivation has proved to have a very scientific base as a forest regeneration system that is also helpful for maining the biodiversity. However, long ago the whole practice of shifting cultivation was legally banned by State. Interestingly, about 1.2 million acres of forest land were diverted in recent years for industrial and mining purposes which caused a very adverse impact on ecology and human being.

The findings of this study were presented at the UNFCC (Copenhagen) during the Climate Change Convention (December 2009) by Ramesh Sharma, Shradha Kashyap and Arun Kumar. A "Community Charter on Climate Crisis" has been formally submitted to many governmental and international agencies for their consideration. These issues got attention of many researchers, social scientists and media as well.

Ekta Parishad is trying to continue the focus on these very basic issues where without honoring the community voices, one can not save this planet.

Ramesh Sharma



### **Bhopal: National Conference** on Food and Climate Security submitted to the Prime Minister.

National Conference on Food and Climate tered about this document. Security was held in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh. More than 200 representatives of 110 different NGOs and institutions coming from 16 states of India participated in this 2day event organized by Ekta Parishad and the Mahatma Gandhi Seva Ashram.

The Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, Mr. Shivraj Singh Chouhan was present to inaugurate the opening of this very important conference and said that the recommendations received from the convention would be implemented by his government as soon as possible.

Previously, during the month of December, many conferences at state level have been held in order to prepare reports about the situation in every state. These reports were presented at the conference and suggestions from the audience have been made regarding the actions which have to be imple-

More over, some weeks ago, a Community Charter on climate crisis supported by Ekta Parishad and signed by different indigenous

communities across India (Baigas, Bhils, Bhilalas, Chakhesang Nagas, ...), has been

For the moment, no commentaries from the On the past 26th and 27th of December a central Government could have been regis-

**Elodie Kergresse** 



From left to right: Hemanthakkar: from Shanti Sadhana Ashram, Assam; Aditi Kapoor: from the Climate Change Action Network, Delhi; Govinda-I charya: Swadeshi ideologue; Shivraj Singh Chouhan: Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh; Rajendra Singh: received the Ramon Magsaysay Award for I community leadership in 2001 for his pioneering I work in water management in Rajasthan; Rajagopal: president of Ekta Parishad, Madhya Pradesh. You are in India and you want to join a non violent footmarch to support landless people? Join us!

Date

Place

From the 4th to the 6th of February

Raisen, MP

From the 16th to the 19th of Februa-

Atary, Gaya, Bihar

From the 21st to the 25th of Februa-

Saharsa, Bihar

# Jharkhand: wealth's which impoverish

### General context of the villages supported by Ekta Parishad

Ekta Parishad has been working in 10 districts out of 24 in the State of Jharkhand since 2001 through the local organization Newasawera Vikaskendra (New Morning Development Center) established in 1997 by Mr. Birender. This organization works on different social issues such as women's empowerment, Mutual Help Group (MHG), education, health, and of course, on the land issue, with populations of tribals and lower castes.

In this State, situated in the East of India, the tribal people represent 27% of the total population and the scheduled castes, 11%. There are 33 different tribal communities.

### Water available... So ...?

The first resources for that population are agriculture (mainly rice, wheat and vegetables) and forest products (roots, fruits, leaves, honey, etc). Unfortunately, these resources are not sufficient to assure their livelihood for many reasons. The main one is the irrigation system.

According to the figures of the Government, 7% of the lands are equipped by irrigation systems but, the figures established by a group of local organizations insist that only 3% of the lands are properly irrigated. In Jharkhand, water is available. There are plenty of rivers but poor infrastructure. In consequence, for most of the farmers, the crops depend on the quality of the monsoon. This year, Jharkhand has been affected by droughts. In the district of Palamu, 4 people died from hunger this year.

As a result, in most of the villages, people have to emigrate looking for job in order to assure incomes for their families. The men go to other villages, other cities or other States in order to work for big landlords or in the sector of construction. Some people emigrate for few months according to the season, others do not return to their village for years.

### Access to the land

The first acts about land rights in India have been implemented in Jharkhand.

 In 1855, the Santhal Parganas Tenancy Act, implemented after a rebellion of the Santhal communities against the oppression of the Mahajans and other non-Santhal settlers. This act recognizes the ancestral lands of the Santhal communities as their legal property.

In 1908, the Chota Nagpur Tenancy
Act amends and consolidates "certain
enactments relating to the law of
Landlord and Tenant and settlement
of rents in Chota Nagpur"

Besides these two acts currently in force, since the independence of India, 6.5 millions of people have been displaced in Jharkhand due to the implementation of industrial plants, military camps, national parks, construction of dams, railway lines, mining extractions, etc. A big challenge for Ekta Parishad is the effective implementation of these acts and their respect by the Government and the Companies.

# Mining extraction and industries in Jharkhand (1)

India and especially the State of Jharkhand, has vast tracts of territory overlying massive, rich - and some entirely untapped - deposits of minerals like coal, iron, bauxite, manganese and chromites. However these minerals lie under the same lands that hold most of India's biologically diverse forest and water systems. In addition, it is the poorest and most marginalized people who occupy these lands.

The post independence era witnessed a rapid growth in heavy industries and subsequent urbanization. To cater to the energy need, coal based power stations were installed.



These human activities triggered a series of environmental disasters: deforestation, land degradation due to mining and the soil erosion,

change of the land use patterns, pollution in ambient air in industrial and mining areas, deterioration of regional water regime, climatic change, habitat destruction of the wild life, etc.

Land degradation is one of the major effects that this mining industry brings and it not only affects the environment biodiversity and ecosystem but also the livelihood of the people in the area in the sense that this degradation temporarily or permanently affects the productivity of the land. Land degradation has reached alarming proportions due to

the over exploitation and mismanagement of the natural resources.

# Access to the government social schemes

In India, the Government has implemented social schemes to struggle against poverty and hunger.

In the villages, people are mainly talking about the access of three of these systems: the Ration Card, the BPL card (Below Poverty Line) and the Job Guarantee Card.

The India's Public Distribution System (PDS) is a project that targets the poor based on specific eligibility criteria for Ration Card designation based on income, geography and asset ownership.

People, who applied for and got the Ration Card, have access to 4 items: wheat, rice, sugar and kerosene at lower prices than the market. Depending on the criteria, the clients purchase at different prices fixed by the state government. For example, people from the middle class will get one unit of rice for 2 or 3 rupees (0.03 and 0.045 euros) less than the market value meanwhile a person who lives below the poverty line will get the same for 3 rupees. The quantity of products available for each person is monthly rationed and the purchases are registered in the card.

The BPL card is delivered according to criteria more specific to poverty. With this card, people have access not only to the PDS shops but also to many other public social schemes at lower prices such as hospital, social pensions, or other needed items of the daily life. The PDS shops are privately run. In some States, a shop can be managed by a group of persons as it is the case in Jharkhand. For instance this allows to a group of women living in the rural area with very low incomes, to open a PDS shop which has at least two advantages. First, they can supply all the community in its basic needs and second, they can create for themselves a new activity generating extra incomes. In a first step, the one responsible for a shop has to deposit an amount of money as a guarantee, then, the Government supplies the shop. The purchased goods must be paid for by the owner within two weeks or one month, according to their contract.

The third card claimed by the villagers is the Job Guarantee Card.

This card is delivered under the Mahatma

Jharkhand J

Act (NREGA) which aims at enhancing the live- testimonies from people of different States been provided by Mr. Pran Ranjan from Socilihood security of people in rural areas by report that most of them get less than the ety for Promotion of Wastelands Developguaranteeing hundred days of wage- "guarantee" 100 days of work. employment per year for the people who volunteer to do unskilled manual work, mainly in

**Elodie Kergresse** 

Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee the construction sector. Unfortunately, many (1) The information about mining issues has ment (SPWD) in Ranchi, Jharkhand. pranranian@rediffmail.com.



# Field visits in the villages supported by Ekta Parishad in the North of Jharkhand

For five days, I had the chance to travel through the magnificent landscape of Jharkhand, accompanying the Ekta Parishad team to meet the villagers living in this region.

below castes, I had a snapshot of their daily ment. to survive and make their rights recognized.

former nomads living from hunting and the few had electricity. things like soil pots. But, at this present time, and roads to access to the villages. labourers.

This situation is mainly due to 3 different motorbike but then, huge gaps on single path the lack of access to the land, the lack of infra- of vehicles. Thirty four families from the San- they can work only between 30 and 50 days structures and the access to the public social thal tribal communities are living on 24 acres per year because the offer is not sufficient to schemes.

### Access to the land

for all the communities I visited. Many people yet agreed to the demands of the villagers. have been displaced due to industrialization and mining, and very often without proper compensation and rehabilitation. In addition to that, after independence, tribal communities of this region received title deeds from the Government but since then, the communities have grown while the area of their land has not. In consequence, the land is used for the houses and there is none left or very little year, 4 pregnant women died because they Ekta Parishad has been working for several for farming. In this sense there is not enough to assure their own food consumption.

### Lack of infrastructure

As explained above, due to the lack of irrigation systems, most of the crops depend on the quality of the monsoon. Realizing that the food consumption of these communities mainly depends on their crops, and that the Besides the obvious poverty situation in which

monsoon is more and more irregular, this the communities we visited are living, very tribal communities, scheduled castes or other der to obtain these facilities from the Govern- money in exchange for these cards.

Some communities we visited were farmers or drinking water in their own village and very ment, and 100 Ration Cards have been

states and generating extra income as day walking. Abandoning the main road, it is possible to continue for one kilometer by bike or only could gather 5.000 rupees (76 euros). problems that the villages have in common: to this village stop the progression of all kind of this forest area. A simple bridge could solve provide the "guaranteed" 100-days of work. the problem of access and would facilitate the daily life of those families but despite the sup- Due to all these difficulties, the situation in The lack of access to land is the major issue port of Ekta Parishad, the Government has not these communities is alarming.



explained that due to this, last by the school.

could not reach the hospital on time.

### Access to the public social schemes

The Government has implemented social programs in order to combat poverty and assure food security for the Indian people. Unfortunately the access to these facilities for the isolated villages can be very difficult.

Initially, we observed people in the rural areas critical situation is one of the priorities of the few people have the BPL and the Ration cards. living in very simple conditions but later we activities of Ekta Parishad. So, some of the They explained us that officials told them they learned their reality is significantly more com- villages could have been equipped by wells were not fulfilling the conditions to obtain plex. Sitting and chatting with the villagers and diesel pumps and in parallel, Ekta those facilities. They also affirmed that some and several groups of women, all belonging to Parishad is multiplying the satyagrahas in or- of the officials are corrupt and had asked for

In the village of Chinpur, one MHG (Mutual life and of all the difficulties they have to face Moreover, no one of the communities we Help Group) consisting of 10 women members visited was equipped with sanitary installa- had been able to open a PDS shop two years tions; some of them did not have access to ago after long negotiations with the Governgranted. Because of the serious drought that forest. Others were craftspeople making Another serious issue is the lack of bridges affected this area, the Government had at first provided the goods to supply the shop withnone of these people can survive without emi- To reach the village named Gairahi, near the out any charges. Within 3 months, however, grating to other neighbor villages, cities or city of Bagodar, there was only one possibility: this MHG will need 40.000 rupees (608 euros) to keep this shop open. For the moment, they

Regarding the Job Guarantee Card, the villagers who are in possession of it, explained that

Still in Chinpur, the conditions are dramatic There is a similar situation in and have very serious consequences, particuthe village of Padariya Tand. larly on the development of the children. In On the lane leading to the that village, the children under 5 years old market, the school and par- have only 2 meals per day consisting of plain ticularly to the hospital, a sig- rice, sometimes accompanied by few vegetanificant trench filled by water bles. At 5 years of age, the children who blocks the way. The women study, have one meal more per day provided

> years with these communities trying to empower them through many actions. In each village we visited, the women supported by EP have created an MHG. Some schools have been constructed as well as irrigation systems. At the same time, the activists of Ekta Parishad organize many workshops and satyagrahas in order to motivate and empower the villagers and to give them sufficient strength

Jharkhand J

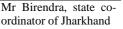
and knowledge to struggle for their rights.

and cannot be solved without cooperation and graha 2012 is needed. solidarity among them. This has to be generated at national and international level to have a real power and a hope to get proper

and sustainable changes. This is exactly the The causes of the daily difficulties faced by way in which Ekta Parishad is working. This is these communities, are very deep and serious also the reason an action such as Jansatya-

**Elodie Kergresse** 







The villagers keep some rice in pot to prepare JS 2012

# Visit at Birhotanda Budhachach

In the North of Jharkhand, no far from the border of Bihar, an Adivasi community lives in the of Giridith. Accompanied by Jharkhand Ekta Parishad, we visited them.

products and the hunt. Due to the industrialiat home to take care of the daily housework. zation and nationalizations of the land, they have to settle. To facilitate this process, the Forest way of life Government gave them in 1971 title deed for The Birhor community contin-32 acres of land. At that time they were 15 ues to live from the forest families. Today, they are 32 families which products and the hunt. represent 211 persons, but they are still living in 32 acres.



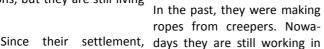
available for agriculture. They mainly cultivate rice, wheat and vegetables but their crops are We could also appreciate their technique of not sufficient to feed the whole village.



traditional made of wood and dried honey.

leaves. The village does not benefit from sani- Other source of livelihood from the forest is epnsvk@gmail.com get electricity within one month.

Thirty five out of the 42 children in the village little village of Birhotanda Budhachach, district go to school. They are the only persons who can read and write in the community. Due to the difficult economic situation of the community, after 14 years old they stop studying to This village has been established in 1955. Be- work and generate income for their family. fore, this tribal community named Birhor was The young boys go to work as cowboys or nomad. They were used to live from the forest tractor drivers meanwhile the young girls stay



the Birhor changed their this activity but using plastic bags. They go to way of living little by little. the nearby villages to collect the bags. The They had to learn how to price of the rope will depend on the number cultivate the land. A very of bag they used to make it, knowing that they little part of their land is count 4 rupees (0,06 euros) per bag.

rabbit hunting during a demonstration in the village with a little chicken. They only use a The Government also ha- filet to catch it. For one rabbit, 3 persons are bilitated some houses but needed. Then, they will sell the game to the a better life for those children! not enough for all the vil- market between 200 and 300 rupees (3 and For further information about this project, lagers, so 10 families live in 4.50 euros). They also hunt some birds used please contact Mr. Birendra at the following habitat for their own consumption and they collect a d d r e s s e s :

tary installations. Some electricity poles have the medicinal plants. In each village of this been installed some weeks ago and they will region, and particularly in the Birhor communities, there is always at least one person with

a very specific knowing on the different plants, flowers, fruits and leaves coming from the forest area. They explained us that they can prevent the snakes coming into the village, interring at its entry a certain kind of plant. They can also cure fever, cold, cuts, cough, ... This traditional medicine is often the only health care system they use. They also sell different medicine plants in the market.

For 10 years, Ekta Parishad is supporting them in different areas as the agricultural work, advocacy, construction of well, livelihood and also education.

Particularly, a new project from the Newasawera Vikaskendra organization is to build a school in the village with an educational program based on the special needs of the community. The children will not only learn how to read, write and count but they will also study the traditional medicine, the agriculture, ...



The construction of the school is in stand-by for the moment because of the lack of subventions. Your support is needed to assure

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**Elodie Kergresse** 

Youth Camps February 2010	
14-16	Gaya, Bihar
18-21	Goharty, Assam

# Where is Rajagopal?

FEBRUARY 2010		
1-3	Bhopal (MP), International Conference towards a Non Violent Economy	
4-10	Raisen (MP), Youth camp and padyatra	
11-12	(MP), Field visit in the villages	
18-25	Assam, Youth camp and Conference	
25-28	Arunachal Pradesh, field visits	

# Portrait: Kasturi and Saroj, Indian women activists

Kasturi and Saroj are two of the women activists of Ekta Parishad (EP). They know each other for a long time since they grew up in nearby villages. They tell us their story, explaining how they became part of Ekta Parishad.



### Kasturi

I was born and grew up in Jobalpur district, Madhya Pradesh (MP), in a village of 2,000 families named Bachaya. I went to school until 8<sup>th</sup>

Standard and got married very young, at 13 years old. I never lived with my husband because the dowry was too important for my family to be able to afford it, so I stayed at my parents' home. A couple of years later I went to a meeting with young people organized by Rajagopal and on that occasion I began to realize some things.

In the village, my family belonged to the upper class. I used to see many tribals coming at home to work as servants. After this meeting, I began to ask them questions about their conditions of living and I felt concern by their situation. Then I decided to join a training, also organized by Ekta Parishad, and I learnt how to work with people, how to motivate them, how to develop leadership, how to lead a discussion with the Government officers. From this moment, I decided to leave my home to go to the villages and apply what I had learnt. I was 17. In 1995. I went to China to attend a Conference about the conditions of women. We were women coming from a lot of different countries but all struggling for our rights. Back to India, I became responsible for the programs in the Satna district MP, which represents 68 villages. First I was very worried to take such responsibility and also very shy about speaking in front of lots of people, but EP supported me. One year ago, I joined Ekta Mahila Manch, the

women's part of EP (see newsletter of October rights.

padyatras, rallies, and meetings, to get better After that, all my life changed.

1996, I began to work with the 65 families liv- children in a school. So, I left my village. It was little villages on 1,000 acres. Only 2 or 3 fami- the systems of communication that we have ones moved there because of the construction were very sad. of a dam in their own village nearby that one. To go to this village in Chhattisgarh was for me The inhabitants, who are farmers, started to like a shock... Before that, I had never heard cultivate the land but at first, the crops were about non-vegetarian food or the caste system not enough for their needs so they have had to because I had always been kept at home. I also go outside the village to work. We began to discovered the Chhattisgarhi language, and was have access to basic facilities. With local mate- lost. So, I called Rajagopal, I explained him the rial, they constructed a dam in order to irrigate situation and asked to move to another village. their land and have running water. They now He answered me that if it was to hard maybe I have wells, hand pumps, electricity and a should go back home. But it was not possible; I school. Also, some of the families could get really wanted to be a social worker and he told their pattas (title deed). This village, supported me "so try again", and I stayed in the village. provements in living conditions.

stay in the villages. They do not want to go to the city because the life there is not good. A few people have emigrated. They leave to earn money, and then they go back to the village.



### Saroj

I come from the village of Balhi, nearby the village where Kasturi was. Sixty five families were living there. I am the youngest of 6 broth-

09). We meet once a month to discuss ers and sisters and I got married at 11 years old women's issues in the villages and we set up but 3 months later, my husband died so like programs focused on the improvement of live- Kasturi, I never lived with him. In my village, my lihood through the organization of Mutual Help family also was in a quite good economic situa-Groups which also contribute to raise solidarity tion. In my community, there were many rebetween the women to struggle for their strictions especially for the girls. For instance it was not allowed for us to leave the village and The main part of my work is to mobilize people for that reason it was a very difficult choice and my wish now is to keep struggling with the when I decided to go to Damoh at 17 years old

support of Ekta Parishad, to keep organizing to follow a training organized by Ekta Parishad.

At the end of the training, I was chosen to go to The village of Sanaï is our model village. In a village in Chhattisgarh to take care of small ing there, almost all Adivasi. It is divided in 3 difficult because at that time, there were not lies really come from this village, all the other now so I could not talk with my family and they

mobilize people and little by little, they could not able to understand anything. I was feeling

by Ekta Parishad, has had very positive results After this first experience, I went to the village struggling. We are now working in the same of Umariya but my father would not agree so I way with others in order to get the same im- moved again to a block nearer my family. This block was gathering 10 villages. When I start to In that area, people prefer to have land and work in this area, it was very difficult to get the attention of people. My work was focused on the children education but also on women, particularly on the issue of remarriage. In that area, the widows were not allowed to get remarried so I was trying to change this habit. And they told me" and what about you?" So I got remarried in 1993 with a man I chose and we have now 4 children.

> Today, I am regional coordinator of Ekta Parishad in the region of Baghelkand which represents 6 districts. I enjoyed my work even if I do not have a lot of time for my children. I am also part of Ekta Mahila Manch and we are thinking now of how to develop the movement in order to make the women more aware about their rights, to develop their self-esteem and leadership, to make them proud to be women.

> > **Elodie Kergresse**



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