

EKTA PARISHAD

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# Jan Satyagraha News

JANUARY 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 jointly organized by Véronique Dave, administrator of Tamadi and EP. This training aims to prepare the guides and the families who will receive 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](http://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 <http://ektacanada.weebly.com> as well as a Facebook page (Ekta Parishad-Canada) and a Google discussion group (<http://groups.google.com/group/ekta-canada>). 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 conservation 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 maintaining 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

On the past 26th and 27th of December a National Conference on Food and Climate 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 2-day 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 implemented.

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, Bhillalas, Chakhesang Nagas, ...), has been submitted to the Prime Minister.

For the moment, no commentaries from the central Government could have been registered about this document.

Elodie Kergresse



From left to right: Hemanthakkar: from Shanti Sadhana Ashram, Assam; Aditi Kapoor : from the Climate Change Action Network, Delhi; Govindacharya: Swadeshi ideologue; Shivraj Singh Chouhan: Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh; Rajendra Singh: received the Ramon Magsaysay Award for community leadership in 2001 for his pioneering 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 foot-march** 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 February	Atary, Gaya, Bihar
From the 21st to the 25th of February	Saharsa, Bihar





and knowledge to struggle for their rights. The causes of the daily difficulties faced by these communities, are very deep and serious and cannot be solved without cooperation and 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 way in which Ekta Parishad is working. This is also the reason an action such as Jansatyagraha 2012 is needed.

Elodie Kergresse



Mr Birendra, state coordinator of Jharkhand



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 little village of Birhotanda Budhachach, district of Giridith. Accompanied by Jharkhand Ekta Parishad, we visited them.*

This village has been established in 1955. Before, this tribal community named Birhor was nomad. They were used to live from the forest products and the hunt. Due to the industrialization and nationalizations of the land, they have to settle. To facilitate this process, the Government gave them in 1971 title deed for 32 acres of land. At that time they were 15 families. Today, they are 32 families which represent 211 persons, but they are still living in 32 acres.



Since their settlement, the Birhor changed their way of living little by little. They had to learn how to cultivate the land. A very little part of their land is available for agriculture. They mainly cultivate rice, wheat and vegetables but their crops are not sufficient to feed the whole village.



The Government also habilitated some houses but not enough for all the villagers, so 10 families live in the traditional habitat made of wood and dried leaves. The village does not benefit from sanitary installations. Some electricity poles have been installed some weeks ago and they will get electricity within one month.

Thirty five out of the 42 children in the village 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 work and generate income for their family. The young boys go to work as cowboys or tractor drivers meanwhile the young girls stay at home to take care of the daily housework.

### Forest way of life

The Birhor community continues to live from the forest products and the hunt.



In the past, they were making ropes from creepers. Nowadays they are still working in this activity but using plastic bags. They go to the nearby villages to collect the bags. The price of the rope will depend on the number of bag they used to make it, knowing that they count 4 rupees (0,06 euros) per bag.

We could also appreciate their technique of rabbit hunting during a demonstration in the village with a little chicken. They only use a filet to catch it. For one rabbit, 3 persons are needed. Then, they will sell the game to the market between 200 and 300 rupees (3 and 4.50 euros). They also hunt some birds used for their own consumption and they collect honey.

Other source of livelihood from the forest is the medicinal plants. In each village of this 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

a better life for those children! For further information about this project, please contact Mr. Birendra at the following addresses: [nayasawera\\_vikaskendra@rediffmail.com](mailto:nayasawera_vikaskendra@rediffmail.com) or [epnsvk@gmail.com](mailto:epnsvk@gmail.com)

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

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 09). We meet once a month to discuss women's issues in the villages and we set up programs focused on the improvement of livelihood through the organization of Mutual Help Groups which also contribute to raise solidarity between the women to struggle for their rights.

The main part of my work is to mobilize people and my wish now is to keep struggling with the

support of Ekta Parishad, to keep organizing padyatras, rallies, and meetings, to get better results.

The village of Sanaï is our model village. In 1996, I began to work with the 65 families living there, almost all Adivasi. It is divided in 3 little villages on 1,000 acres. Only 2 or 3 families really come from this village, all the other ones moved there because of the construction of a dam in their own village nearby that one. The inhabitants, who are farmers, started to cultivate the land but at first, the crops were not enough for their needs so they have had to go outside the village to work. We began to mobilize people and little by little, they could have access to basic facilities. With local material, they constructed a dam in order to irrigate their land and have running water. They now have wells, hand pumps, electricity and a school. Also, some of the families could get their pattas (title deed). This village, supported by Ekta Parishad, has had very positive results struggling. We are now working in the same way with others in order to get the same improvements in living conditions.

In that area, people prefer to have land and 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 brothers and sisters and I got married at 11 years old but 3 months later, my husband died so like Kasturi, I never lived with him. In my village, my family also was in a quite good economic situation. In my community, there were many restrictions especially for the girls. For instance it was not allowed for us to leave the village and for that reason it was a very difficult choice when I decided to go to Damoh at 17 years old

to follow a training organized by Ekta Parishad. After that, all my life changed.

At the end of the training, I was chosen to go to a village in Chhattisgarh to take care of small children in a school. So, I left my village. It was difficult because at that time, there were not the systems of communication that we have now so I could not talk with my family and they were very sad.

To go to this village in Chhattisgarh was for me like a shock... Before that, I had never heard about non-vegetarian food or the caste system because I had always been kept at home. I also discovered the Chhattisgarhi language, and was not able to understand anything. I was feeling lost. So, I called Rajagopal, I explained him the situation and asked to move to another village. He answered me that if it was too hard maybe I should go back home. But it was not possible; I really wanted to be a social worker and he told me "so try again", and I stayed in the village.

After this first experience, I went to the village of Umariya but my father would not agree so I moved again to a block nearer my family. This block was gathering 10 villages. When I start to 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



## Ekta parishad

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