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Jan Satyagraha News

OCTOBRE 2009



Words from Rajagopal, President of Ekta Parishad ...

Dear All,

Jai Jagat (Victory of World)

As you are aware, historical declarations have been made by the Central Government after Janadesh 2007, among them the constitution of the 'National Land Reform Council' headed by Honorable Prime Minister of India and also the set up of the 'National Land Reform Committee' headed by Honorable Rural Development Minister, Government of India. The basic agenda of these two institutions has been to re-frame Land Reforms policies and practices in favor of marginalized communities in India. The draft of the National Land Reform Policy has been submitted to Honorable Prime Minister by the National Land Reform Committee in January 2009, but the Central Government did not declare the National Land Reform Policy yet. We continue to witness land grabbing from the hands of tribal people and farmers to the industrialists and corporate houses, but there is no initiative of land distribution to the landless people. This situation emphasizes a serious structural discrimination against the marginalized communities. The **Forest Rights Recognition Act** was also implemented after Janadesh 2007 but tribal people are not getting the rights over the possessed forest land because of the lack of concrete policy guidelines to implement this act. That is why this historical act became only a Government declaration.

We know that success can not be achieved without decisive people's movement. Therefore Ekta Parishad and its allies have decided together to start a "Satyagraha" before the Parliament on the 'Janadesh Day' October 29, 2009. Three thousands "Satyagrahi" coming from all over India, are joining this Satyagraha. It is still time to join us.

In solidarity,

Solidairement
RAJAGOPAL P.V.

President - Ekta Parishad



CESCI (Centre for Experiencing Socio-Cultural Interaction) is a resource and an alternative education centre in Madurai, South India. This conceptual design of having individuals and groups from Europe sharing experiences with activists from India in an effort to build solidarity and friendship was designed by Rajagopal and Maja Koene for uplifting oppressed and marginalized people.

One of the important working areas of CESCI is working on children's activities in the surrounding villages. The underlying ideas of this program are the following:

- Comprehensive education of children builds values and character.
- Children's education includes health education and environmental awareness.
- Broadening and supporting their learning processes will help develop good behaviour, responsibility, long term goals and creativity.

Holistic educational practice includes love of nature, non-violence, understanding of community and dedication for village development.

The long-term aspiration of this program is therefore to foster a new generation of committed youth that is knowledgeable, politically aware and able to handle their villages' problems.

In this way, here are some examples of the activities run out with the children:

The Evening Centres

Supplementary educational activities have been made available to children from the neighbouring villages in the form of evening centres since 2005. Each evening the centre is open from Monday to Saturday for two hours (6 p.m. to 8 p.m.). One hour is dedicated to homework, reading and writing activities; half-hour of specific activities organised according to a weekly schedule (such as story telling, painting, games, science, theatre or other outdoor activities), and the session is closed by an all Indian and Gandhian prayer lasting fifteen minutes. The remaining time is used for discussion and planning within the group.

"Kutti" Doctors Program

Each village has five to six children, aged from 11 to 13, called "kutti doctors" (kid doctors). Every three months, they come to CESCI to take one-day training about good health and hygiene. Then they are in charge of training their peers in the evening centres. They are given a basic first aid/hygiene kit (with soap, balm, comb, but no tablets) and are asked to monitor the health of other children and if necessary, to inform parents about their possible ill-health.

Moreover, the villages are visited by a children's doctor every six month to fully monitor children's health, growth and nutrition.

Skills education for adolescents

Every year, all the girls between 14 and 16 years old from the villages participate to a one-day session about health and education, particularly to motivate and raise self-confidence to continue their education to college. Some recent cases have demonstrated that even though the parents traditionally have not considered further education for their children, there seems to be a growing appreciation of the importance of continuing education.



Newsletter

"Sinthennaimalar" or "Thinking Flower" is the name of the newsletter edited by a group of twenty leader students between 14 and 17 years old. This newsletter is published every two months. The students collect information from their villages and the editorial team selects the articles to be published. The newsletter is delivered to the evening centres, the Panchayat offices and the schools with the aim of distributing it to the communities in the six villages.

School Visit

Every two months, the volunteers visit the schools of the villages in order to discuss with the teachers children's behaviour, their health problems, and so forth. The teachers are also usually invited for the special days and programs. These visits help to maintain a good relationship between the teachers and the children which is conducive to a better educative environment.

Seeds Distribution

This is a yearly activity which takes place in July. This year more than 200 children attended this important event in all the villages. Seeds of different varieties were distributed to the children who have carefully planted these seeds, cultivated and harvested the fruits after three months of patient work. Some produce was used for personal consumption and some for sale. This activity is vital to raising environmental awareness and healthy/organic food consumption and trade.

For further information about the whole activities of CESCI:
Email: cescimadurai@gmail.com, web: www.cesci.ch



India – Mexico: an example of international solidarity



Simultaneous actions in India and Mexico have been organized to celebrate the 140th anniversary of the birth of Mahatma Gandhi and the International Day of Non Violence and at the sametime to commemorate the tragedy of Tlatelolco, Mexico in 1968.

Through performances, artistic presentations and musical participations in both countries remembered the gandhian practice as a way to overcome conflicts. A minute of silence was used for local authorities in Mexico to inaugurate an “eternal flame” at the Gandhi’s monument.

On the 2nd of October the two groups of Sabarmati Gandhi Ashram in Ahmedabad in India and the participants at the Gandhi Monument in the Chapultepec Park, Mexico were connected through the internet. The objective of this joint initiative was to promote Ahimsa (non-violence) on an international scale.



Photo: www.aztlan.org.mx

There is a unique project of constructing a program for schools on non-violence through art “Ahimsa through Art” in which children, youth, and representatives of different organizations participated and this was carried out in Jamalpur (India) and Tepito area (Mexico) for the fourth season.

This event have been organized by Ora World Mandala, World Theatre for Reconciliation through Art in partnership with Gujarat Vidyapeeth, University founded by Mahatma Gandhi in 1920 and the University Cultural Center Tlatelolco, UNAM (National Autonomous University of Mexico), in collaboration with Sabarmati Gandhi Ashram, SAPA South Asia Peace Alliance, WEC Women Empowerment Corporation and The Embassy of India in Mexico.

Also in Ahmedabad (India), 3.000 children woke up in the early morning to participate in the activities with songs, peace games, treasure hunt, music, while in Mexico a similar grouping was gathered. They also had the opportunity of video conferencing through internet enabling them to see each other and sing devotional songs such as Gandhi’s famous tune known as “Radhu pati Ragav Raja Ram” and other songs such as “We’ll shall overcome”.



Ekta Parishad invite you to discover the new website dedicated to the SAHARIA community living in the Chambal Valley in the North-West part of Madhya Pradesh.

A way to discover this community with an artistic eye, especially through marvelous pictures of the villages. Website created by Neva and Jacky Gotthilf, professionals in visual arts.

<http://neva.gotthilf.free.fr/saharia>
http://neva.gotthilf.free.fr/saharia_english

With a simple click!

Discover the video of the **interview of Rajagopal**, president of Ekta Parishad, made by Mr. Jean-Joseph Boillot in Paris on the 13rd of Octobre 2009 (in French and English).

http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xatp9j_rajagopal-ekta-parishad-a-paris_news

Land... Finished agenda!

One of the most damaging issues in relation to human lives is the acquisition of agricultural land. In the last 8 years, about 43,000 acres of agricultural land has been acquired for industrial purposes (18). The displacement levels reach such alarming proportions that the existence of whole villages simply gets diluted. For instance, the Jindal Steel & Power Ltd provides as its address as village Patrapalli in Raigarh district. This was once a flourishing agriculture based villages that today no longer exists and is situated inside the industrial compound. Not a single house remains.

Similar stories can be found in numerous villages in the state. The land is acquired by the governmental agencies as a way to promote industrial development. The State Industrial Development Corporation is one of the official bodies that acquire lands from private persons at rates below market value. Most of these people from whom the land has been acquired are economically very poor with little capacity to do anything else besides agriculture and whose options are limited.

The pattern generally followed is that land is provided to the private enterprises with the agreement of government officers. Once an industry becomes operational on that land the

agricultural land in the adjoining area is rendered useless because uncontrolled pollutants are discharged by the industry. The land is then bought over by the industrialists at rates well below market value and the poor agriculturists have no option but to sell and move away.

"In the last 8 years, about 43,000 acres of agricultural land has been acquired for industrial purposes."

A striking illustration of this can be seen from the fact that the Minister for Environment Mr. Ganeshram Bhagat in a written answer to a query in the Legislative Assembly of the state stated that *crops in about 14,000 acres of land have been damaged due to sponge iron units in the adjoining areas in just one block of the Raipur district*. Many such examples can be found spread all over the state. In such a situation it becomes very difficult to admit that the industrialization is a process, which is really leading the state of Chhattisgarh on a path to development or that corporations are paying the slightest attention to their social responsibility.

A further illustration can be seen from the fact that Minister for Environment Mr. Ganeshram Bhagat on 2nd of March 2005 in an answer to a

query in the Legislative Assembly of the state provided the information that *out 48 functional sponge iron units in the state about 33 have not obtained the statutory clearance from the Pollution Control Board and that all such industries need to do lot to get to the minimum emission levels legally permitted*. Even when the law demands that necessary clearances are obtained, this is circumvented through misrepresentation, concealment, and other such fraudulent practices.

A very striking illustration of cooption in this case is that the no-objection certificate from the democratically elected village and local administrative bodies called the panchayats were obtained by the Jindal Thermal Power Plant for its power plant in village Tamnar (19). The members of the body in a signature campaign have stated that they are very much disturbed by the land acquisition for the said plant and that the no-objection certificate has been obtained fraudulently.

Extract from "From Rice Bowl to Industrial Grazing Lands, voices from the villages after industrialization", Ramesh Chandra Sharma Sheeba Choudhry

18 Ansuni Awaj by Ramesh Sharma (unpublished report, Ekta Parishad)

19 Socio Economic Dislocation in Raigarh by Leonor Gilmfrab (unpublished report)



For a better general comprehension about **the land issues in India**, do not hesitate to listen in podcast to the Madeleine Mukamabano's radio emission, "Place des Peuples" on France Culture (18th of October - in French)

Interviewed: Mrs. Mira Kamdar, senior fellow at the World Policy Institute of New York and author of *Planet India: the turbulent rise of the largest democracy and the future of our world* and **Mr. Jean-Joseph Boillot**, economic counselor for the Research Center in International Economic (CEPII) and co-president of the Euro-India Economic and Business Group (EIEBG).

http://radiofrance-podcast.net/podcast09/rss_11207.xml

Youth camp in Jharkhand: the will to change the world

Last September, 93 young people came from 14 different districts of Jharkhand to participate in a 3-day state level youth camp in Tiril Ranchi. This training was organized by Ekta Parishad and Sajha Manch (movement gathering 20 local organizations). Rajagopal, president of Ekta Parishad and A.K. Singh, from SPAR (Society for Participatory Action and Reflection) were leading the training sessions.

During a three-day camp, the young people were not only sharing rooms and food but also were volunteering to be involved in a struggle for a better life in Jharkhand. This gave them the opportunity to think all together about effective non violent action.

Rajagopal opened the training with a presentation of the state situation and insisted on the importance of youth mobilization. He gave the following comments:

“When India got freedom, Gandhi said that organizing self-reliant villages was the way to build the economy of a new India. You all know what happened in the last sixty years... In the name of development, multinational companies are snatching land from poor people, the forests are dwindling and people have to change their way of life. Development without taking social issues into account is a threat for all human beings. Who cares? The decrease of the forest area also means that the water level goes down causing concern for local people. All facilities like roads, water, and markets are being provided to the cities and yet the villages are not receiving these inputs. So it is necessary to struggle with unity and equality and to build at the state and national level a non-violent movement which will enforce our rights over natural resources and take advantage of the Government’s benefits as well.”



The first day focused on the challenges in Jarkhand state. The youths were divided into 7 groups, and the issues of corruption, land and water problems, misuse of the natural resources, displacement, drought, lack of health facilities,

were named as important issues. At the end Rajagopal concluded that these problems or challenges require that we struggle against these problems with a big organization like Ekta Parishad. It is the only way because the problems are also big.”

The second part of the training went on to focus on how youth can be made aware of their power and how they can use it

effectively. This was explained by a very simple figure. In the Indian society, 60% of people are poor, 30% belong to the middle classes and 10% to the rich class. Imagine what would happen if all the farmers of the country were to go on strike, then it would be visible how all the top class families depend on the poor’s wealth. According to the Government, all facilities like schools, health centers, ration shops or police stations are working yet the Government does not seem to know that lots of people are deprived from these facilities, and so this is why the struggle is so important.

**“We can change
the country by
creating a public
movement.”
Rajagopal P.V.**

On the last day, 93 youths have been divided in 3 groups that were designed to get input on a future plan. Some of the following suggestions were made:

- Capacity building of the cadres through training camps.
- Publicity of the organization’s benefits in rural areas through Sajha Manch.
- 10 leaders of each village will be chosen to become active members.
- Organization of meetings and training camps for leaders and youth at panchayat and block level.
- Foot march and sit-in will be organized in front of the government’s offices.

To close this 3-day training, Rajagopal mentioned: “We get much knowledge from the camp. We have to be ready for non-violence movements as the padyatra in Jharkhand in 2011 and the Jansatyagraha in 2012 as well. Fifteen thousand people (3 camps of 5.000 each) from Jharkhand are expected to participate in Jansatyagraha 2012. We can change the country by creating a public movement.”

Elodie Kergresse

Source: “State Level Youth Training and Sharamdaan Camp” report – Sept, 2009

Ekta Mahila Manch

The Women wing of Ekta Parishad

Ekta Mahila Manch (EMM) is the women's wing of Ekta Parishad which works to ensure the rights of oppressed people concerning the natural resources for their livelihood and survival. Ekta Parishad is a Gandhian mass organization present in 13 states in India: Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Bihar, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat. EMM was established on 21st of June 2001 at the CESC Centre, Madurai, Tamil Nadu. As a wing of Ekta Parishad, EMM struggles for the women's rights in the ideas of equality, solidarity and justice through non-violent ways. It exists in all the States and places where Ekta Parishad is working.

Vision
"To establish an equal, just and nonviolent society through women leadership and participation."

Mission
To support the struggle of the women for their dignity, rights, empowerment and leadership to build a society based on values as non-violence and independence and to ensure their rights and their control on natural resources for their livelihood.

Objectives

- To ensure for the women the equality for the land rights and the livelihood resources.
- To support the economic independence of women.
- To advocate for rules and regulations in favor of women and to ensure their implementation.
- To fight against all sorts of oppression of women in the society.

To ensure social, political and economic empowerment of women in the society.

Strategies

- To organize the oppressed, downtrodden and poor women and men and educating them about their rights.
- To build institutions in the village units sensitizing the population on women issues.
- To ensure the participation of women in the village units.
- To organize Mutual Help Groups (MHGs) based on economy to develop the women's economic empowerment.
- To build cadre of women youth.
- To develop the women leadership so that they can lead non violent struggle for their rights.
- To build networks of organizations and institutions on women issues.

- To diffuse in the government administrations and the Medias the situation on women rights.

To ensure dialogue, struggle and constructive activities in the process of non violent struggle for women's rights.

Strength and Reach of EMM

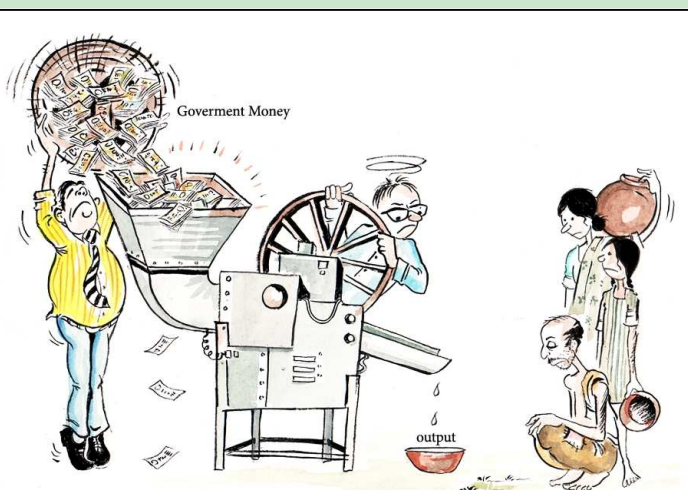
- EMM is present in 13 states of India.
- EMM counts 65.000 members all over India.
- EMM has organized more than 1.000 Mutual Help Groups in the country based on economic activities supporting the livelihood of families.
- The women groups are cultivating around ten thousands acres of government land for their livelihood. Now under the "Forest Act, 2006", the process has started to get legal rights on this land.
- The women groups have succeeded in establishing some new villages for the displaced people after the set up of various government projects.
- Hundreds of women have shown leadership skills in non violent struggles for their rights.

The women leaders emerging from the process of this Gandhian struggle have provided leadership in the political processes and in different democratic institutions of the country.

For further information, please contact Priti Tiwari, national coordinator of EMM: tpriti1@gmail.com

"We are half of the world, we should get half of the land"

"It is our struggle, it is our leadership"



Ekta parishad

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