

On the road with the Jan Samvad Yatra, a year-long route through India

Promoting non-violence and Rights to land & livelihood | Mobilizing for the March Jan Satyagraha 2012 | October 2011 - September 2012



JAN SAMWAD YATRA, BEFORE LEAVING JHARKHAND



In villages, messages are written on the walls of houses. This one is announcing « Jan Satyagraha 2012, from Gwalior to Delhi ». Jharkhand, February 15th 2012..

- ✓ in 21 days, the yatra covered 3247 k.m. across 19 districts.
- ✓ 140 people's organizations announced their intention to participate in Jan Satyagraha 2012.
- ✓ 2056 people signed on the appeal to the Prime Minister.
- ✓ 5357 people were directly reached through the 62 programmes organized during the yatra.
- ✓ The local villages contributed Rs 26570.00 and 3 quintals of grain for the march of October.

THE YATRA IN ODISHA

Odisha, called « Orissa » till November 2011, is a State lying on the East coast of India. The subsoil of Odisha has an important part of coal, iron, bauxite and chromite resources of the country, and numerous companies invest there to exploit these resources. But villages are opposing, with sometimes great results, as the rejection from the Ministry of environment of the mining project of Vedanta in 2010.



A risk of extinction? The village of Kenduri is where the Pahadi Bhuia, a primitive tribe is living. 17 iron sponge plants are already established in this region, and now the government is trying to acquire 6000 acres of land to open iron mines. This project would displace as many as 100,000 people and 62 villages. Singrai Mundai, a tribal leader, is warning the experts that thirty years of iron extraction could lead to the complete decimation of a tribe that has been living in this region for hundreds (maybe thousands) of years.

There are two cultures that are standing opposite currently : firstly, the culture of those who worship land, forests, rivers, mountains and animals as God, and secondly, the culture of those who perceive all these things as means to make profits and who see the resource grabs and the displacement of tribals from their homeland, as a legitimate part of business. If they wish to fight resource-grabbing, people need to become strong by standing united. That is why the yatris hope that people will join the Jan Satyagraha march.

Mo Jami Mo Diha. Encouraged by several NGOs and movements including Ekta Parishad, the government of Odisha launched in 2007 the campaign Mo Jami Mo Diha (My Land - My homestead). The objective of this campaign is to confirm and protect the rights to land of people from poor communities, mainly from Adivasis and Dalits communities, and to restore lost lands to the newly landless. During the public meeting in the district of Kalahandi, inhabitants explained that they had received land titles for homestead land, but that the demarcation of the land had not been done. As a consequence, they have titles but not physical possession. Land rights is not the only problem for the large number of Dalits living here, they are also being denied entry into Hindu temples in the coastal region.



March in the district of Kalahandi, Odisha, January 27th, 2012

Standing united. During the meeting in Kalahandi, Rajagopal explained that the aim of the Jan Samwad Yatra is to pass an urgent message, which is that we need to act together immediately to ensure that the implementation of all the laws that have been made for the protection and benefit of the poor and disadvantaged are carried out; and to oppose laws and rules that work against people's rights.

The fishermen of Chilka lake. The Samwad Yatra went to meet fishermen of Chilka lake whose situation is getting worse each day. In the village of Khurda, inhabitants recounted the numerous problems that they face regarding violence of corrupt groups, high levels of homelessness, (which includes 60% of marginal fishermen), or the fact that the surface of the lake is reducing at an alarming rate. During this time, the lake development authority is

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

THE JAN SAMWAD
YATRA SPENT 21 DAYS
IN ODISHA

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spending hundreds thousands of rupees every year to develop tourism... In the village of Baridpar, 2000 families are depending on fishery and prawn culture. But, for the past 5 years, new people are starting prawn culture by grabbing parts of the lake, which they have demarcated by setting up boundaries. As these people are using a lot of chemicals, traditional methods of prawn culture are becoming extinct. Today, 147 villages of fisher folks around the Chilka lake are facing difficulties to ensure their livelihood.

Still struggling against POSCO. Repeatedly, inhabitants of Jagatsinghpur district are struggling against a project of POSCO (see the newsletter of May-June 2011). For this project, the government would give 1200 ha of forestland to the South-Korean company to build a steel complex. The majority of these lands are cultivated for several generations, and many families have made applications to get land titles. They are fulfilling the conditions defined by the Forest Rights Act to obtain land. But their applications haven't been considered in spite of long wait times. POSCO's muscle men are harassing the farmers. 1200 cases have been registered against members of the village committee and about 50 people have been sent to jail on false charges. Some of them are still there. An interesting question that was raised



Public meeting in Dinkiya, a village struggling against the project of POSCO, Odisha, February 10th, 2012.

during a public meeting in Dinkiya was how will Posco offer more employment for the thousands of people who are self-reliant on agriculture? By taking their land, will Posco be able to give all these people jobs? Since 2006, villagers take turns to check that no agent of the company or a mafia comes into the village. They would like to see their struggle against POSCO highlighted on the international level, and they promised to take part in Jan Satyagraha next October.



POSCO project in Odisha :
a tribunal has just suspended the environment clearance of the company.
A breathing space for the villagers !

JAN SAMWAD YATRA, BEFORE LEAVING ODISHA



February 13th, last day in Odisha for the yatra.

- ✓ 2620 km were covered in 21 days.
- ✓ 102 people's organizations announced their intention to participate in Jan Satyagraha 2012.
- ✓ 3047 people signed on the appeal to the Prime Minister for a National Land Reform Law.
- ✓ 14000 people were directly reached through the various programs organized during the yatra (5 rallies, 19 public meetings, 22 public hearings, 9 conferences and 12 Press meets)
- ✓ Local people contributed Rs 21224 for Jan Satyagraha 2012.
- ✓ Soil from 44 sites of people's struggles was received.

THE YATRA IN WEST-BENGAL

West-Bengal, bordered by Nepal, Buthan, Bangladesh and several Indian states, is well-known for its capital Kolkata (formerly Calcutta), its production of tea in Darjeeling. Ekta Parishad is not directly working in this state, but the few days spent there have been an occasion for the yartis to learn more about the issues of poor and marginalized communities of this state, and to meet several groups struggling for a better life.



A project to support. Near Malda, the Bishunpur Palli Mangal Samity started a school for boys and girls, which give an education based on Gandhian principles. Their objective now is to enlarge the boarding school. The situation in the region is very difficult, especially because of drought, which is leading to food insecurity. Many families depend on agriculture for their livelihood. As a consequence, children are often compelled to work to support their family, as

beedie rollers (beedies are small Indian cigarettes). Because of this situation, the Bishunpur Palli Mangal Samity aims to develop the system of boarding school as it makes school more accessible to pupils who otherwise have to walk 10 km each way. Also it would ensure that children would have enough to eat. The land to build the new premises is already available. Now the funds have to be raised. The cost is 10 million rupees (about 150,000 Euros) and as

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**NEXT MONTH
IN THE NEWSLETTER :
FOCUS ON
NORTH-EASTERN
STATES**

for teachers, there is only one teacher for every one hundred students. The NGO would be happy to welcome international volunteers to support them in their new projects and to give English lessons. To contact the NGO : tarakbpm@gmail.com



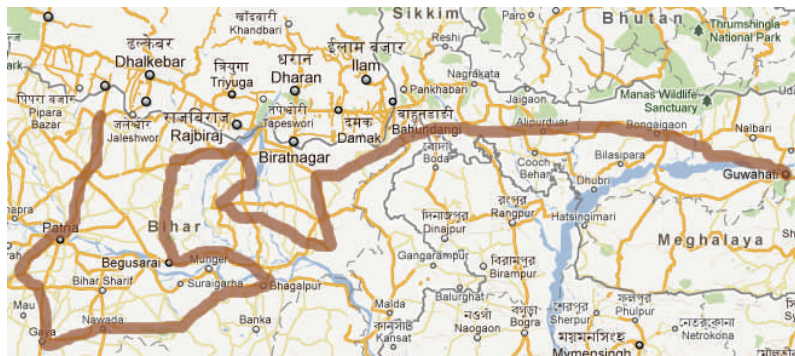
Visit of the water purification unit, Randhamali, West-Bengal, March 10th, 2012.

purify and sell the water. These women and their families are the first to take advantage to this activity, as they can now have potable drinking water. The community can also take advantage of this because the self-help group sells one liter of water for Rs 1 while it is sold at Rs 10 in shops. From a problem that was affecting their daily life, these women have turned it into an opportunity to improve the conditions of life for themselves and the community.

On the border, in a flood prone area. On March 11th, the yatra went to a village next to the border with Bangladesh, on the bank of the river Thalla. It was not easy to access the village because it is required that each person give identity proof to the military guards at the border. The villagers settled there after their former village had been destroyed by flood 15 years ago. With cultivated rice fields and beautiful landscape, one cannot believe the difficulties endured by the inhabitants. They don't have any titles for the land that they occupy, and the village is flooded every year, forcing them to migrate to Delhi or somewhere else for several months each year. It is difficult to imagine what it means to live in such conditions, and it is difficult to understand why these people are still living in these conditions. All that would be needed is for the state to provide a piece of land in a safer area.

From a problem to an opportunity. The village of Randhamali lies in the middle of tea gardens. The yatris met the women of a self-help group, which had been launched 6 months before through an activity of water purification. This activity came from the fact that the water of the well was unfit for consumption. They gathered the necessary funds (Rs 200,000 of their own contributions and a loan of Rs 50,000) to buy the materials, and then started to

ROUTE OF THE YATRA IN APRIL



April 1st to 5th, ASSAM :
Guwahati | Barpeta | Bongaigaon

April 6th to 30th, BIHAR :
Araria | Purnia | Katihar | Saharsa |
Madhepura | Bhaptiahi | Ghoghardiha |
Biraul | Rosera | Begusarai | Kha-
garia | Bhagalpur | Jamui | Nawada |
Gaya | Jahanabad | Paliganj | Patna |
Mahua | Muzaffarpur | Sitamarhi

TO FOLLOW THE
JAN SAMWAD YATRA :

► VISIT WEBSITES :
www.jansatyagraha.org
www.ektaparishad.com

► VISIT FACEBOOK
PAGES OF RAJAGOPAL
PV, EKTA PARISHAD
AND JAN SATYAGRAHA

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

FARMERS AND ACTIVISTS

As farmers in France, we harvest eatable algae and grapes for the production of wine. We are also activists, involved in the struggle against GMOs. We dig out GMO plants and try to block cooperatives and ports, which take delivery of GMO soya from Brazil. Through these actions we want to sensitize all the consumers and raise the issue of GMOs in public places and in courts. We also collect funds – through the selling of tee-shirts, books and through concerts – in order to pay the trials and lawyers of the future accused activists.

We have been informed of the struggle of Ekta Parishad by Peoples Solidaires, a French NGO, and as we often travel to India, we decided to participate to

the Jan Samwad Yatra for one week, in the northern part of Orissa and in Jharkhand. We met there a welcoming, dynamic and efficient team, in which each person is managing different tasks. With them, we visited cities, villages, and schools, which often included dances and songs. We support this struggle, because it is unfair to deprive the farmers of their land, and we hope that we brought a little support by being present. We will continue to follow events from France, and we wish that the movement to succeed. For us, it has all the elements for success. Jai Jagat !!!

Fanny and Sébastien

YATRA : AN ART OF CREATING LINKS

Two weeks in Delhi, thirty hours of train and I arrive on the Yatra in Ranchi, Jharkhand. It's the beginning of a long series of meetings, sometimes short, sometimes endless. But it's also the opportunity to discover a reality otherwise unseen. Hours of journey, long meetings and songs inviting to join the struggle are the daily reference points in the Yatra ; everything else is uncertainty and surprises. After fifteen days of a nomadic life, I began to discover the specific issues of the three states of Jharkhand, West Bengal and Assam. Language, landscapes, climate and food change along the way, as well as the problems reported by the people that we met. Mining, illegal appropriation of land by powerful people and multinationals, dams projects and deforestation are some of the issues discussed in the meetings with local people. Everything we see and what we hear directly or indirectly is connected to the land issue.

Creating links, that is mainly what the Yatra is doing. It links people, it links people's problems into issues.

It links different social institutions. This is the strength of this tour all over India that brings local organizations into network and thus creates the

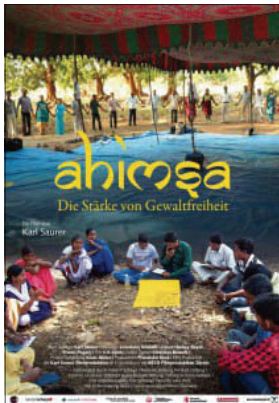
space for people to claim their rights. But before inviting them, they are inviting us, and we are the local peoples' guests in every place that we stop. Looking at the way we have been welcomed in each village, creating good relationships seems to be a tradition, maybe an art. The welcome in Assam is unforgettable: it includes flower necklaces, songs until we reach the meeting place, people washing our feet and prostrating themselves in front of the newcomers. It is difficult to find a better start to create links.



Journey with the Jan Samwad Yatra, March 2012

Flavien Renaud

FILM : AHIMSA, THE STRENGTH OF NON-VIOLENCE



After a tenacious, non-violent struggle, the villagers of Sannai in Madhya Pradesh, India, obtain their rights for land and water. The exemplary story of these tribal people shows the fascinating strength inherent in the principle of Ahimsa: non-violence. In a society, where corruption and caste conflicts undermine democratic rights, the Adivasi are supported by activists of the Gandhian Forum for Solidarity: "Ekta Parishad". We see how its founder P.V. Rajagopal was inspired by his experiences with terroristic rebels during the Seventies. He convinced them to lay down their weapons and non-violent methods for their claims.

To this day, he and activists from the Forum train young people in non-violence when struggling for a dignified and sustainable social change.

See the film in Swiss cinemas and European festival. To get information and order DVDs, contact Karl Saurer at karl.saurer@bluewin.ch or the production at info@reckfilm.ch.

A JOURNEY IN THE HEART OF INDIA

From the 9th to the 31st of March, Ekta Parishad and Tamadi, its French rural tourism partner, has led a trip called the « Heart of India ». The name of the tour comes from the fact that the route is located right in the centre of India, in the State of Madhya Pradesh, but maybe also because it aims to go into the heart of Adivasis' lives. It was a 22 days voyage composed of different places with historical and cultural landmarks in Gwalior, Orchha, and Sanchi. The

program was to explore the farmers' lives as well. Living in the villages helped the group to understand the housing, the cooking and the conditions of village life. The warm welcome was appreciated by the travelers. Being in contact with Adivasis helped people to become aware of the landless issue and also to support financially some local development projects. In one village they will build a community hall for meetings, in another they start an economic activity based on curcuma production. This rural tourism gives the opportunity for people to connect to each other, and in the process there is more convergence between two worlds. The travelers left feeling that this village experience is an opportunity to revive values that have been lost in modern and western life. These values include community life, conservation of water and energy resources, and spontaneous hospitality.



Gwalior's Fort

Nathalie Joulain



**AHIMSA, A FILM
TO UNDERSTAND
HOW EKTA PARISHAD
PROMOTES
NON-VIOLENT ACTION**