EKTA PARISHAD NEWS
February 2012

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 Chhattisgarh

During the Jan SamwadYatra in Chhattisgarh...

- ✓ Distance of 2550 km across 14 districts was covered in 21 days.
- ✓ 46 people's organizations announced their intention to participate in Jan Satyagraha 2012.
- ✓ 3876 people signed on the appeal to the Prime Minister for a National Land Reform Law.
- ✓ 15 000 people were directly reached through the various programmes organized.
- ✓ The local villages contributed Rs 27 000 and 10 quintals of grain towards the Jan Satyagraha 2012.
- ✓ 15 000 people from Chhattisgarh will participate in Jan Satyagraha 2012
- ✓ Ramesh Sharma said that after this journey in Chhattisgarh, preparations have begun for the creation of an empowered group of social organizations and dialogue with the government through the elected representatives.
- ✓ Rajagopal P.V. declared that the twin points of tribal self-rule and effective implementation of Forest Rights Act would be the focus of Jan Satyagraha 2012.

The Yatra in Jharkhand

Previously part of Bihar, Jharkhand was formed in 2000. It was created after many years of struggle to give Adivasis (who represent about 28% of the population) a state where their culture and way of life would be more respected. Laws in favor of Adivasis – for example the Chota Nagpur Act, PESA, Forest Rights Act - were supposed to fulfill this hope. But Jharkhand is also a state rich in natural resources which caught the interest of the companies and the state, and here as elsewhere, Adivasis are facing the constant threat of eviction.

Report on the Jan Samwad Yatra in Orissa on the next newsletter

Living next to the mine. When extraction of uranium started in Kharbani in 2005, inhabitants of village were due to be displaced. However no compensation has yet been offered for the land they have lost and they still reside in the homes. The village is not safe anymore: cracks are appearing in the walls and stones rain down on the village after explosions in the mine. Health problems are increasing too, most notably skin diseases, affecting both the villagers and their livestock and the two ponds they were using are now polluted beyond safe use.

Karo river

The struggle of Koel Karo. In 1955, the government began a survey of the rivers Koel and Karo with aim of constructing hydro-electric power stations on both. The consequences of the projects would be devastating for the local community. 250 villages faced being totally submerged and 16,000 families displaced from their land. When they learnt about the plans the inhabitants of the threatened area organized themselves and formed Koal Karo Jan Sangathan, a non-violent People's Movement to protest against the project. Their main action would be one of non-cooperation. They wanted to ensure that those workers involved in the construction of the dams and the paramilitary forces brought in to protect them, would not use resources such as land and water and local shops refused to sell them anything. They also dug up parts of the road which passed through their land and began to cultivate it as well as setting up barriers to control who entered their land. This great example of non-violent struggle took a tragic turn in 2011 when, during a peaceful demonstration in Tapkara, eight people were killed by the police. A few months later the government decided to stop the projects. While the communities around the Koel and Karo rivers still live in fear of them re-starting, they are ready to protest again if necessary.

Meeting with inhabitants of Koel Karo region

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

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Tribal laws and state laws. In Jharkhand a number of laws have been adopted to protect the land and the way of life of the Adivasi communities. The Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act of 1908 for example, says that farm land of Adivasis can't be sold or transferred to non-Adivasis. This law is still in force, but it is often in conflict with other laws which are given the priority such as the Land Acquisition Act of 1984 which allows the government to acquire private land for public purpose. In the struggle between tribal land laws and state laws, the first step must be to make tribal people aware of these laws that are meant to protect them so that they can claim their rights for land, water and forest.

Naya Sawera Vikas Kendra (NSVK). In Jharkhand, the Samwad Yatra was warmly welcomed by the organization Naya Sawera Vikas Kendra. NSVK works with marginalized communities to help improve their well-being through a sustained increase in agricultural production. The project focus' on 10 villages of the region of Palkot (Gumla district), mainly inhabited by Adivasis and Dalits, and aims to ensure food security, promote environmentally sustainable livelihoods and substantially increase the income of people by March 2013. To achieve these goals, NSVK work on a wide variety of activities. The construction of new irrigation wells is one good example. Associations of farmers have been formed along with micro-credit schemes to help with the financing their work. Many famers have also been trained in organic farming methods as well as the use of pesticides, vermi-composting and techniques for efficient rice cultivation. Another key objective of the centre is to make women recognized as agents of economic and social growth, through access to economic rights and participation in decision making. Several programmes have been established especially for women, providing financial support forentrepreneurs and the creation of kitchen gardens. Of all the results of these different activities, the social workers of Naya Sawera Vikas Kendra highlight the fact that women are now united, and have a platform to voice their concerns about alcoholism and naxalism.

Plantation by women self-help group

Construction of an irrigation well, Rokedega

Displacement by the government. Near the village of Peto, the government has begun a process ofsecuring over 20 000 hectares of land on which to build a dam and begin new mining operations. This would destroy 26 villages and displace 200 000 people. The community here have been cultivating this land for generations, enough time to be the rightful owners according to law. Yet still the government refuses to deliver them land titles. As part of their compensation plan the government proposes to provide land over 40 km away from their ancestral homes, for which people would get land titles valid for 12 years. Threats are frequently made by the government in order to force people to sell their land. Some land has already been acquired, bought for 800 Rupees per hectare from the villagers and sold for 2600 Rupees per hectare to the private companies. A number of protesters have been jailed but according to local newspapers, the majority of the population approves the project.

Route of the Yatra in March

March 1st to 4th, Jharkhand : Ranchi |

6th to 11th, West Bengal :
Siguri | Murshidabad | Malda | Jalpaiguri | Coochbehar |

12th to 24th, Assam :
Halakura | Gauripur | Gita Satra | Sipajhar | Tezpur | Gohpur | Itanagar (Arunachal Pradesh) | North Lakhimpur | Moridhal Dibrughar TInsukia | Sivasagar | Jorhat |

26th to29th, Manipur : Imphal | Thoubal | Jiribam

30rd : Assam : Silchar

31st, Megalaya : Shillong

To follow the Jan Samwad Yatra :

▸ Vistit websites :
www.jansatyagraha.org
www.ektaparishad.com

▸ Visit Facebook pages of Rajagopal PV, Ekta Parishad and Jan Satyagraha

EKTA PARISHAD NEWS

NON-VIOLENT MOVEMENT TO ENSURE PEOPLE'S RIGHTS TO LIVELIHOOD RESOURCES February 2012

PEOPLE START TO STRUGGLE IN SILWANI

Public meeting, Silwani, Feb. 6th 2012

In October 2011 Ekta Parishad started work in Silwani in the Raisen district of Madhya Pradesh. The village held its first public meeting on February 6th this year, attended by several hundred people, almost all landless Adivasis. As case studies in the area are not finished yet, the meeting focused less on claims to officials and more on organizing and moilizing support in the region. Ekta activist Rakesh Dixit opened the meeting by explaining few points that are necessary to develop the struggle. Rakesh said that each village would need an organization and platform for people to express their problems. He went on to suggest that it is very important that people don't forget that the officials and elected persons are at the service of people, not to the contrary. Participants were then invited to come and explain their problems to the assembly. Santosh, an Adivasi Gond from Narayanpur, explained that for 25 years his family have been cultivating 3 acres of land but have no land titles. Until now he was not aware that he could ask for them. Other people came to explain that they had land titles but not the corresponding land as the administration refused to demarcate it. Participants also talked about the employment guarantee scheme (NREGA), a government programme that guaranties 100 days of work per year in rural areas. In Silwani, 50% of the Adivasis who worked in the framework of this program have not yet received their salary. Officials listened and promised to do something. Then, a committee has been formed, composed of 21 persons representing their respective village. Each is in charge of collecting the grievances of people of their village. Among the committee members, 3 have been designed to be in the executive committee: a president, a secretary and a treasurer. The Adivasis of Silwani are ready to struggle.

CAMPAIN FOR AWAKENING PEOPLE

"We are asking for our rights; not alms from anyone" was one of the many slogans the 500 villagers chanted as they walked to Bhudni Tehsil head quarters, Sehor district, Madhya Pradesh (MP) on 27th Feb. This was day 18 of a padyatra (foot march) covering 47 villages in 31 Gram Panchayats. Similar marches and sit-in (dharnas) were held in 187 villages in 3 districts of the state (Raisen, Betul, Mandla). The campaigns were intended to create an awakening among the people about their land and livelihood rights and to bring about socio-economic changes in their lives. All the 234 villages were new working areas for Ekta Parishad and the response from the local communities was very enthusiastic. The President and Members of the Gram Panchayat attended meetings in each village which allowed people to explain their grievances. Among them were widespread unemployment, the difficulties obtaining ration cards and the lack of basic facilities like housing, electricity and schools. 80 to 90 people attended each Yatra culminating at the Tehsil head quarter where a dharna and public meeting took place. In total 1500 people participated in the different actions and 375 petitions on land and livelihood issues were submitted to the Special District Magistrate who promised they would be resolved soon. By sensitizing people on their rights and mobilizing them for the march Jan Satyagraha in October these padyatra's has made a great impact in this new area.

Yatra, February 27th, 2012

MADHYA PRADESH : EKTA PARISHAD STARTS TO WORK IN NEW REGIONS

10 - 17 May 2012 , MJVS Center, Katni, Madhya Pradesh

Theatre Festival

& Maya Koene Awards delivering

on the final day,
in presence of the Jan Samwad Yatra team

You will be most welcome !

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