

On the road with the Jan Samwad 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



THE YATRA IN NORTH-EAST



The North-Eastern states of India are Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, and Sikkim. Connected to the mainland India, by a narrow corridor in West Bengal, North-East India presents some distinguished aspects, especially regarding ethnics, cultures and languages. It faces, since the Independence, the violence of separatists groups and armed forces. Adivasi (tribals) population is very important, representing from 20 to 94 % of the total population in the various the states. They mainly live in the hills covering two third of the North-Eastern states. Agriculture is the main livelihood resources of inhabitants. The Jan Samwad Yatra spent 25 days in North-East, mainly in Assam but with visits in Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Meghalaya. It was a chance to witness the problems faced by people of North-East, but also their attachment to culture and their desire of peace.



Dams of North-East. Dams are already numerous in North-Eastern states, and no less than 150 new projects are put forward, among which 11 are currently under construction. This matter came up several times during gatherings, meetings and visits organized in the framework of the Jan Samwad Yatra. Many people are involved in non-violent struggles against these dam projects because of their various consequences: displacement of population, droughts, floods, destruction of biodiversity... But partisans of big dams are opposing the idea that electricity is a necessity for development. The biggest project under construction is the Lower Subansiri dam, on the Brahmaputra River. Since 2001, groups are struggling peacefully to block the project and to enforce the fact it would endanger the biodiversity of the valley and the Adivasi population living there. According to experts, the current project presents great risks for local population as it is built on a highly seismic area and because it will provoke droughts as the rate of flow suggests it. Can we really speak about "development" when we produce electricity while endangering people and ruining farming regions?

perity to poverty.

Planting trees. On March 17th, the yatra was joined by Bakul, who would accompany the yatri during few days. Bakul is completely dedicated to the task he has set to himself: planting hundreds of thousands of trees in Assam. Bakul founded the Amar Bonanee, an organization which aims environment conservation and tree plantation, and he never travels without few saplings to plant. His action gains popularity as he leads people to plant trees themselves. This action has begun in 1996. In that year, Bakul prepared 3000 saplings and distributed them around him during Bihu, a big celebration in Assam. Years after years, this initiative has become a new tradition: people still celebrate Bihu with songs and dances during 5 days, but the last day they now celebrate "Gos Bihu" ("gos" means "tree") by planting trees. Inspired by Bakul's action, it has been decided to plant trees during the march Jan Satyagraha in October. And, as Bakul does, let us dream big: what about planting 100 000 trees, as a symbol of the 100 000 marchers?

In the tea gardens. There are in Assam more than 1000 tea gardens, in which 7 millions of people are working, mostly descendants of laborers brought in Assamees plantations more than 100 years ago by the British. After all this time, basic infrastructures haven't been installed, and laborers live in very difficult conditions, as their life expectancy of 50 years-old is reflecting it. In Tejpur, Nubaa Barlaa, from "All Adivasis Students Association" of Assam, explained that many of the tea garden's laborers of the region come from Santhal and Uraon tribes of Jharkhand, but that the state of Assam is not giving them their tribal status. In the plantation of Samaguri, laborers



Meeting with a group blocking the road to the Subansiri dam. They are camping here since December 27th. Ghagar, Assam, March 20th, 2012.

Floods. The village of Patmapur Narainpur, in Lakhimpur district, was prosperous thanks to fertile lands. But since the construction of a dam on the Turpand River in Arunachal Pradesh (a state on the North of Assam), the situation has changed. During the monsoon, the dam is sometimes opened, without any notice to the population, and provokes floods which kill human beings and cattle, and increase the soil salinity. In few years, Patmapur Narainpur village, along with 20 neighboring villages, went from pros-



Tea garden in Assam, March 2012

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

THE JAN SAMWAD YATRA SPENT 25 DAYS IN SOME OF THE NORTH-EASTERN STATES OF INDIA : ASSAM, ARUNACHAL PRADESH, NAGALAND, MANIPUR, MEGHALAYA

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are sitting on protest. Indeed, when their families were brought from Gumla district to work here 120 years back, a written agreement with the tea garden owners has put aside 100 acres of land for the laborers to settle their home and make cultivation. But now that the lease of the company expired, the Assam Tea Limited wants to take this land. There are 80 families, who were living there for 5 generations, who are in process of displacement.

Deforestation in Bodoland. Bodoland is a region in the North of Assam, mostly inhabited by Bodo Adivasis. A visit in a forest allowed the yatri to realize the extent of deforestation. There are women who collect fire wood, and who are brutally chased by forest guards. However, their activity looks innocent compared to the exploitation of wood organized by different groups. This has begun in the nineties, when armed groups which were struggling for independence of Bodoland were selling wood to live and

buy weapons. After the agreements were signed with the central Government, which give administrative autonomy to Bodoland, mafia groups pursued the exploitation of wood. This is why one can see large areas cleared of trees here and there in the middle of the forest.

Special Security Act. Since the 80s, in the “disturbed areas” of North-Eastern states of India (and in Jammu and Kashmir since 1990), a Special Security Act is implemented, which gives special powers to armed forces and protects them from legal proceedings. This act is particularly problematic in Manipur, a state at the border of Burma. For many people, this act is seen as a tool of oppression and discrimination, as the armed forces kill hundreds of people each year. This act, which was supposed to fight violence, looks like a factor of increasing violence in the state. That is why many citizens of Manipur are asking for the repeal of this act. Irom Sharmila Chanthur is on fast since 12 years to raise this demand. Social activists, met during a meeting in Thoubal district on March 27th, also claimed for the withdrawal of armed forces, especially now that there is some political stability in Manipur. According to them, it could be a good strategy in the present circumstances to encourage civil society organizations working in the path of non-violence, as they could bring peace and prosperity. It looks more accurate to promote peace using non-violence tool rather than guns.



During a meeting in Jorhat, Assam, March 25th, 2012

Texts based on the reports of Ramesh Sharma and Altaï de Saint Albin

JAN SAMWAD YATRA, BEFORE LEAVING NORTH-EAST

- ✓ The yatra travelled 3200 km in North-East.
- ✓ 38 programmes took place, in which 4200 people participated.
- ✓ 16 press meet were conducted.
- ✓ 87 civil society organizations pledged their support.
- ✓ 1721 people signed the letter to the Prime Minister.
- ✓ 18000 Rupees were collected.
- ✓ Soil from 32 places of people’s struggle was received.



The yatra team in Manipur. March 28th, 2012

ROUTE OF THE YATRA IN MAY

May 1st to 7th, BIHAR :

Motihari | Bagaha | Gopalganj | Patna | Buxar

May 8th to 10th, UTTAR PRADESH :

Varanasi | Bhadohi | Mirzapur

May 11th to 31st, MADHYA PRADESH :

Rewa | Sidhi | Shahdol | Umaria | Satna | Katni | Jabalpur | Dindori | Mandla | Balaghat | Seoni | Chhindwara | Betul | Hoshangabad | Raisen | Bhopal | Vidisha | Sagar | Damoh



**NEXT MONTH
IN THE NEWSLETTER :
FOCUS ON
BIHAR**

**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

CYCLING TO JAN SATYAGRAHA

Since April 1st, Céline and Philippe set off. Leaving Alpes on bicycle, they aim to reach India in 6 months to join the march Jan Satyagraha 2012. On their blog, Céline and Philippe explained their objective, "linking territories to globalize solidarity": "In India, as everywhere else on Earth, resources and common goods are grabbed by investors with the assent of states. Beyond the pleasure of travelling, the objective is to spread the values of the movement *Ekta Parishad* and thus to help to promote at our level a globalization of solidarity." They share their adventure on a blog (in French): velovivant.eklablog.com.



Céline and Philippe, first step of their trip in Albertville, France, April 2012

A TOUR IN FRANCE WITH PEUPLES SOLIDAIRES

Peuples Solidaire (PSO), a peoples association in France, has been supporting Ekta Parishad, especially Ekta Mahila Manch (the women wing) for the last three years. In 2011, they also launched an "[urgent appeal](#)" (letter campaign to the Prime Minister of India and French deputies) to support the Jan Samwad Yatra. PSo invited me as a representative of Ekta Parishad to speak to their local groups in different cities of France. Thus, from March 13th to April 3rd, PSo groups had planned conferences, lectures with students, interviews... The local groups gave me a warm welcome and were very much motivated and inspired in people's campaign for land rights organized by Ekta Parishad. They asked a lot of questions about land distribution, caste system, GM seeds, attitude of politicians, etc. The group members were concerned about multinational and corporate farming companies entering in the field of agriculture all over the world. According to them, small farmers in France are facing difficulties in sustaining their farms as a result of the corporate policies of the government. The subsidy the European Union is giving, benefits large farms while the small ones face difficulties even in meeting production costs. Every group agreed on reviving small farms and promoting organic agriculture.

In schools, even though the students were new to land rights or people's movements, they showed much interest in the situation of women in India, caste and marriage system. In every city, I could make a visit to the "Artisans du Monde" sales outlets that promotes fair trade in both farm and rural artisanal products across the globe. I could meet few farmers and visit a milk cooperative in Morlaix and a producer's cooperative in Tours, where the small

farmers get fair prices for their products. It was very interesting to find that, some of the groups had tie up with small producers for all household needs of the neighborhood. There is also a system of buying or leasing land by a group who can afford and then giving it to youth for cultivation. I could also meet Parliamentarians, Green Party Candidates and Mayor of cities. PSo had arranged interviews with several journalists in Paris and other places.



Lillykutty with French students, France, March 2012

The visits were successful in terms of motivating and creating a sense of awareness among the French Nationals, about the necessity of people's non violent movements against land grabbing and for land redistribution to the poor and building of women leadership. The PSo groups expressed their solidarity and support to the actions in India. They have planned many marches from May 2012 onwards. I express my gratitude to the team of PSo, especially Antoine, Benjamin and Agathe, and also to the local groups who hosted me during my visit. Jai Jagat !

Lillykutty V.S.

Jan Satyagraha 2012. it's all around the world and all over the year...
 Burkina-Faso non-violence forum exhibition India Afghanistan
 Togo Cameroon France Germany United-Kingdom
 Mauritania event meeting concert film
 Spain march festival Switzerland Palestine
 forest solidarity Guinea Belgium
 water Benin
 globe
Click on the globe to find an action and join the movement !



FOLLOW
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 CYCLING FROM
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 JAN SATYAGRAHA
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