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## Bihar: the Anger of Kosi River

The situation of National Disaster has been declared by the Prime Minister of India. At the end of August, Kosi river, that takes its source in Nepal and flows to Bihar, has left thousands of people homeless. During the last three centuries, the river has changed its bed several times but since 50 years it did not appear to be so dangerous. With the heavy rains of this year in North Bihar, the river has been worse than ever. About 2.5 million people have been affected in 7 districts of the Nepal Bordering State of Bihar. The districts of Saharsa, Madhepura, Araria, Supaul, Purnia, Kathiar and Bhagalpur have been partly destroyed. Totally, there are about 1,000 villages which have completely disappeared under water and between 5,000 and 10,000 people, according to the local newspapers, could have lost their life or disappeared.

Immediately, Ekta Parishad decided to initiate some relief actions in a first

stage. Five camps have been set up. In Manori, Saharsa District, Ekta Parishad is still trying to



People leaving their destroyed village—photo: [www.bbc.com](http://www.bbc.com)

help about 590 families. In the same way, 1,500 families in Sasaul and 400 families in Seylat, both villages of Saharsa District, and two camps in Madhepura for about 2,500 families. In these villages, more than 50% of people are women with over 250 infants. Consequently, Ekta Parishad has engaged for distribution of dry food and medical services with the kind help of doctors from AIIMS – *All India Institute of Medical Sciences* – specially for pregnant women. The birth of three children in Seylat during this relief action has

brought a bit of light in the darkness of the disaster. Ekta Parishad has also distributed clothes, bed sheets and blankets for those who lost everything in the flood, and toys for small children. Very aware that a relief action is not enough to rebuild a life for someone who suffered such a disaster, Ekta Parishad is planning for a long-term rehabilitation programme, specially for landless and poor to build houses for them and develop agricultural lands. For the whole relief operation, more than 100 activists and volunteers are full time working in that area, as well as two boats have been bought and three ambulances have been hired. Ekta Parishad is associated with few Indian organisations and international agencies for a better coordination in action.

Of course, any financial support is welcome to be able to plan a long-term rehabilitation programme!

# Our Next milestone After Janadesh 2007

Dear Friend

Janadesh 2007, witnessed the historic foot march. The movement had some positive impact. Mainstreaming of the land rights has been a major one. It marked a policy shift in not only recognizing the rights of the marginalized landless but also making a beginning of the policy level changes by constituting "National Land Reform Council" and "Committee on State Agrarian Relations and the Unfinished Task in Land Reforms". Implementation of Forest Rights Act was another positive step taken by the government.

Janadesh had a deep impact on the Satyagrahis (Participants of Janadesh). It boosted their morale and they became confident of leading, initiating communities to solve their problems.

Since October 2007, dialogue process with the Central and State governments is going on regularly to ensure the land and livelihood rights. Now in October 2008 where do we stand? This question naturally comes to all of us. It is necessary to review the whole process and response from the government after Janadesh. Therefore a one day consultation and a public rally is proposed to be organized at Gwalior on October 18-19, 2008. Public rally will be organized on the day of Martyrdom of Janadesh activists. Representative from deprived communities who are struggling for their livelihood, social activists, intellectuals, politicians and journalists will participate in this program. If you are travelling in India, you are also welcome.

Mutual sharing of experiences can help in building our own country strategy for mobilizing people for non-violence and peace.

P.V.Rajagopal

« Jai Jungle aur

Jameen

Yah Ho Janatha

ka Adeen »

« Water, Forest

and Land

Remain in the

hands of

communities »

## The very special Bundelkhand

The Bundelkhand region is one of the rare Indian region to be separated in two states. A part of Bundelkhand belongs to Uttar Pradesh while the other part is managed by Madhya Pradesh administration. But despite of this separation, Bundelkhand forms only one entity with its own traditions. For this reason, some are asking for a separate state of Bundelkhand. Out of this consideration but aware of the potential of youths from this place, Ekta Parishad has organised the first training camp in Orchha. About 141 persons, out of which 126 trainees, gathered in Paryapak Daramshala on September 4th morning. 1 and two French volunteers from Peuples Solidaires attended the camp.

During this first day, after a one-hour introduction by Rajaji and some other relevant persons as the son of the last king of Orchha—a Gandhian follower—youths were divided into 6 groups to share about the difficulties met in their own village. The day has been punctuated by many "Jai Jagat!" and other slogans which have many advantages: to motivate everyone, to teach the philosophy of Ekta Parishad and to bring back the quietness when the debate is too impassioned!

5.30am the next day. Everybody was ready, more awake than us for sure! to walk in the streets of Orchha for a small Yatra. After this, youths were ready to think about the possible solutions to solve the problems discussed on the first day.

In the morning of the third day, we have been with Rajaji to visit two villages which are to be displaced soon because they are situated in what has been defined as a wildlife sanctuary. The youth who have been trained have already a lot on one's plate!

In the same way, a camp has been held in Tilda, Chhattisgarh with 128 youths and in Kota, Rajasthan with 120 participants.



Departure for the mini Yatra during Orchha camp!



Group work in Tilda camp

# Germany: New Janadesh Film

## Special Communiqué!

The new film « Der lange Weg zum eigenen Land » (The long way to a piece of land) is ready! The Premiere has been projected in Zurich on September 6th. This 42-minute documentary has been realised by ProDok with the support of CESCO

For the moment it is only in German language, but an English version should be ready soon!

For more information, please contact Hans-Jürg Pfaff at: [hj.pfaff@prodok-film.ch](mailto:hj.pfaff@prodok-film.ch)

*"An eye for  
an eye  
makes the  
world  
blind"*

*Mahatma  
Gandhi*

## Les Octovales, a new festival on peace and non violence



The French association La Paix en Marche will hold its first festival the first days of October 2008 in Angers, France. This association was newly created after its founder participated in the International Congress on Peace and Non-Violence in Wardha, India, in early 2008. This association wants to promote peace and non violence through different tools: cinema,

concerts, conferences, debates, etc.

This edition of the festival will welcome Rajagopal and Muhammad Yunus, Peace Nobel Prize 2006, and Mr. Anand Gokani, Gandhi's great grandchild.

For more information, please visit the website, in English and French:

<http://lesoctovales.org>

## Terre du Ciel celebrates its 20th anniversary

An exceptional congress organised by Terre du Ciel will be held in November 2008 in Aix-les-Bains, France, on the theme "Spirituality and Society".

This meeting will gather many peace builders mainly from India and France, but also philosophers, professors,

agronomists, etc. who have a big experience in Vietnamese and Chinese traditions. Rajagopal will take part of this congress, as well as Mr. Majid Rhanema, member of UNESCO and former representative of Iran in the UNO.

Meditation, music, dance,

workshops, conferences, debates will be organised to give this congress the colour of peace and of a "fair vision for a fair action" !

For information and inscription, consult [www.terre-du-ciel.fr](http://www.terre-du-ciel.fr)

# Fighting Back: The Power of the Padyatra in Kawardha District, Chhattisgarh



Baiga women carrying babies on their hips— photo: Simon

The primitive Baiga tribal communities of the Bodla area of Kawardha district, Chhattisgarh, have faced a history of unjust treatment at the hands of others. Originating from the Dalai hills, these communities were forced out of the homes they had inhabited for centuries when bauxite mines were permitted in the area. Having been denied compensation or any form of resettlement and rehabilitation package, hundreds of families were forced to relocate in the low-lying areas of Bodla.

With the Forest Rights Act 2006 came renewed hope for these families, as their legal entitlements were finally recognised along with their rights to land ownership documentation for their new settlements. However, non-tribal groups in the Bodla area are reluctant to recognise these rights, and on the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> of July, the four Baiga communities of Bandhatola, Chhidha, Chhuhinala and Amlidih suffered a systematic attack known as *fasal charai* perpetrated by these non-tribal residents. This attack was a violent attempt to displace the Baiga communities from their homes and their agricultural land, characterised by the bringing of herds of animals to the fields to raze the crops to the ground and terrorise the land owners themselves. What's more, strong reports suggest that the leaders of this particular *fasal charai* were well-known members of one of India's most prominent political parties. Distressed Baiga families were calmed by activists and society members as they reached Bodla police station, having witnessed the loss of their livelihoods in a matter of just a few minutes. Having filed their testimonies, along with demands for penal action against the offenders and compensation for the victims to the authorities, Ekta Parishad and the Tribal Welfare Society imposed a ten-day deadline for action from local administration.

With no administrative action forthcoming, more than seven hundred Baiga tribals took to the streets on the 24<sup>th</sup> of July and began a four hour march to the District Magistrate's official residence to demand justice, with Ekta Parishad at their side. I had the pleasure of accompanying them on this padyatra in the blazing midday sun, nearly all walking barefoot on the tarmac, and many of the women carrying babies on their hips. Passers-by stopped to watch this stream of chanting, flag-waving marchers as they snaked through the streets of Bodla, before resting in the shade outside the gates of the Magistrate's office. After a long wait, the Magistrate agreed to meet with a small delegate of victims, along with Ekta Parishad representatives, the District Superintendent of Police and other local administrative figures. Then, addressing the anticipative crowds outside, the Magistrate vowed that an inquest would be held on the 4<sup>th</sup> of August and the grievances of the four affected villages addressed. In a refreshing attitudinal change to the norm where District Magistrates are – unfortunately – concerned, he also appealed to the Baiga communities not to hesitate in raising any additional concerns or difficulties with him, and assured them that justice would be done. In further acknowledgement of the appalling treatment they had suffered, the Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh announced that each Baiga family would receive two hectares of land, and the demarcation process has begun.

Whilst the inquest on the 4<sup>th</sup> of August achieved mixed results, and there have been reactionary protests and roadblocks from the opposing non-tribal group demanding the eviction of Baiga families, the significance of local administrative support for the Bodla Baiga community should not be overlooked. This marks a reassuring and encouraging step in the right direction for the wider battle for adivasi rights in Chhattisgarh and beyond, and the just and equitable response of both the Magistrate and Chief Minister to the Bodla issue should provide hope for the future battles that Ekta Parishad and India's tribal communities will inevitably face. Furthermore, this string of events proves that the power of the padyatra should not be underestimated – even if its marchers are shoeless.

## Ekta parishad

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



### Publications in Hindi

We are glad to inform you that few other newsletters are published in Hindi with the financial support of foreign agencies. Among them, we can give the example of the monthly Newsletter « Janadesh » published by Prasoon Latant, a leader friend of Ekta Parishad. Since Janadesh, he has published 14 issues. In the last issue, he wrote about the campaign for the rights to marginalised; he gave a case study about challenges of land reform in Uttar Pradesh, and refers to Rahul Gandhi's visit to tribal areas and his call upon Baigas to stand for their rights.

The team of Ekta Parishad Bihar also publishes a bi-monthly hindi newsletter called « Bihar Rebuilding Campaign ». The last issue notably was about the campaign for homestead land in Bihar and the need to create pressure on Government.

There are many other initiatives. All permit a maximum of people to access information on land rights, especially for those who do not read in English.

## Portrait: Ravindas women or how they brave traditions

Maner Telpa is a village situated in Patna District. Bihar is one of the Indian states where traditions are the most surviving. There, like almost every where in India, women are not considered as farmers and consequently have to struggle to find a daily job as agricultural labourer. Moreover, they are not allowed to do the full agricultural work. For example, they are not allowed to plough the soil. But a small line of resistance has started in this small quiet village when 26 women have decided, even without the support of the men of the village, to cultivate their own piece of land.

Life was truly difficult to live in the village. PGVS, part of Ekta Parishad, has organised them in a Self Help Group. Chanmooni gives her witness: "We were working for many years as agricultural labourers. One day, we didn't get our wages. So we organised a meeting and formed a group. In 4 years, we saved Rs 3000. with that we took 0.5 acre on lease."

As they did not get any male support at the beginning, only two women took their courage to plough and sow paddy. Nowadays, 26 women work on the field, breaking the taboo saying that women cannot plough a land. Year after year, they have slowly increase their land from 15 to 20 kattas (0.625 acres). In 2007, they harvested 1,080 kg of rice and 320 kg of wheat. This year, they expect even a better

yield if the climate is clement.

Although men still do not want to help them, they have to recognise that their wives do a good work which offers them a good meal, in the area known as the "rice bowl" of Bihar!



Some of the women in their land