



# Ekta Parishad Newsletter



MARCH/APRIL 2013 - ON THE CUSP TO A NEW INDIAN LANDRIGHT POLICY

IN THIS ISSUE

## Dear Friends, Activists and Supporters of Ekta Parishad

Six months has elapsed since the signing of the Ten Point Agenda following the Jan Satyagraha on October 11<sup>th</sup>, 2012 in Agra. A new land reform policy in India is now at a crucial stage of finalization. A law on shelter land is in the process of being drafted -one of the first of its kind in India, and this may provide as many as forty million homeless people with housing and small housing plots. In addition several meetings and gatherings have taken place that are developing advisories for the different state governments, as a way to press them to implement those laws that favour restoration, and distribution of land to the poor and marginalized. About 70 percent of the agreement is now realized.

One of the important national consultations just in advance of the 6 months deadline, was when Ekta Parishad organized a two-day meet on land rights on the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> of March at Vishwa Yuvak Kendra, a national youth center in Delhi. One hundred and twenty participants from twelve states debated different aspects of the national land policy and the shelter land legislation as a way to ensure that these would address sufficiently the rights of disposed groups including adivasis, dalits, women, and nomadic people. Many of

the suggestions and recommendations subsequently were incorporated into the documents.

The completion of six months was officially called on April 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> when Ekta Parishad and the National Alliance for Dalit Land Rights (NADLR) held a **People's Parliament** with four thousand people at Jantar Mantar (near Parliament) in New Delhi and reviewed the progress of the Indian Government on the Land Reform Agenda. This was an extraordinary coming together of different social movements on the land agenda. The National Alliance of Dalit Land Rights wanted to use this occasion not only to remind the Government to fulfil its commitment of the unfinished work on the Ten Point Agreement, but also to launch a massive country-wide campaign in the next six months in 300 districts across the country.

What was significant about the People's Parliament is that it connected what has been traditionally opposing groups and movements having different ideologies with the larger interest of poor people -whether dalits or adivasis, or other oppressed groups. This is significant in light of the forthcoming national election in the spring of 2014. The slogan "Nahi Zameen toh Nahi Vote" - First Land

## Lessons from Senegal

### International Women's Day 2013

### Filmmaker Karl Saurer about «Ahimsa»

### Karim Award for Rajagopal PV

then Vote; No Land No Vote is a way to bring land issues to the elections.

International support to press the Government on its six month promise for delivering the first round on land reform to the poor and marginalized was carried out in a virtual Satyagraha in which 5000 people from India and around the world supported this [online petition and place their missed calls](#). This depicts an increasing global awareness for the land struggle of the poor in India and elsewhere. We are very grateful for the help and the support, all the involved people showed to us. See a statement about the campaign by Rajagopal [here](#).

Now, let's continue to fight and hope for landless and homeless people getting land and livelihood resources, so that it can be said that last October's march of 60,000 people was not only a historical achievement, but a watershed in the history of poverty alleviation in India.

Jai Jagat! Ekta Parishad

## Lessons from Senegal

By Jill Carr-Harris

Recently a group of us from India made a trip to Senegal in French West Africa and we made a lot of observations about the society that we thought useful to record. Few people know much about this small African state of 12 million people (1.2 crore). It is a coastal country on the most western peninsula of Africa (closest point to the Americas) and has a vibrant tourism industry still dominated by the French seekers of sun and beach life. It is one of those countries that has two or more large port cities doing commerce on behalf of the many other land-locked inland African states primarily linking them with trading partners in countries of the Middle East, China and France.

On first glimpse in Dakar, the capital city, it seems, that People are very physically conscious, whether in terms of women and their colourful array of clothing or the visible sportsmanship of the male population. Football seems to be the main preoccupation of the youth and like cricket fields in India you see football fields in many localities. This shows the immense energy of the youth that if used constructively is a powerful force for building society.

A second interesting observation is the deep sense of family-based culture particularly around eating. All members eat from one plate. There is no hierarchy in so far as who gets the food first. Men, women and children eat together. It is basically a rice and fish eating society, at least for the communities along the seacoast.

A third observation was the muted piety in the society. The fact that a large portion of the male population prays five times a day and the soft Moslem traditions are found in the home and the society may have been a reason why alcohol and smoking are almost non-existent. This was a very heartening discovery for those of us from India. The lesson from Senegal is, that community development does not have to be derailed by liquor merchants and governments seeking tax collection from liquor sales.

Dakar also has the infamous Gore Island -just off its coast—on which there was a holding center for people who in a short period of time went from farmers or hunters to slaves in the Americas. This three-century long slave trade between the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries carried out the sale of more than 15 million African people who were sold as slaves (not to forget the 6 million others who died en route) and many passed through this maritime station of Gore Island. As one walked around the island seeing the pretty batik paintings and ebony statues, one could not help but feel a deep sense of cries coming from the places that were marked by various monuments and memorabilia. This was a genocide of another kind.

Although one can say coming from India that this was the doings of the colonial European powers in their avarice to make money; one would have to add that it was vitiated by the tribal chiefs who sold their own people. In effect like other mass genocides and forms of slavery, it is a blot on the whole of the human race.

This experience enhanced the respect we had for our hosts in Senegal who were by in large working to save the rights of people over their community land. Senegal like many other countries in Africa has eighty percent community land holdings, something we have lost in India -except in a few places. In other words if you want a piece of land, you simply ask for it. You can use it and give it to your children and you have the land rights over the property but you cannot sell it. It is also possible for the government to appropriate it back for “public purpose” and for the community to ask for it back. In return for sale, the community or government gives you an indemnity worth the cost of your house and investment in moveable property and not for the land.

This is what is at the base of the present controversy. The pressure from private businesses to get long-term land leases is forcing the government to find all sorts of legal and illegal methods to get land plots. Various communities are reacting. One of the biggest groups of private investors vying for land is in bio-fuel producers. As Senegal is a semi-arid area, it does not have the capacity to grow fruit and plantation crops except in the southern belt of Casamance. It has a lot of land

that has been used traditionally by cattle herders, and the growing of traditional food crops like maize and millets; and now this land is being staked out for growing fuel crops. With the high price of oil, this has indeed become a lucrative business. In one of the cases explored by the group was in the Senegal river basin, and this was an Italian venture along with a Senegalese partner has created a company which has amassed land for fuel plantations. There is a question of land transfers in terms of how legal loopholes are being used, in this case “land being appropriated for public utilities” when in fact the government is releasing it to private parties for biofuels.

In another case of Bambylore in the suburbs of Dakar, it was clear that the pressure on these peri-urban areas are being used for real estate and the compulsion to create housing has been pushing the Executive to set up legal entities to justify land transfer. The result however is that there is housing colony being created for army personal.

As a foreign team of eleven made up of friends from India, Nepal, France, Colombia, Nigeria and Burkina Faso, we were able to hear the local Senegalese grievances from the communities in advance of their National Land Commission that is being set up to look at the legal conflicts between state and community land laws. Within this body, there is a strong group wanting market-led land reform and the CSOs are pressing equally hard for community-based land reform. The foreign group clarified some of the issues of community-based land reform based on their own country experiences.

From an Indian perspective, community-based land reform has been weak because of the gradual privatization of land resources, and the increasing use of land for industry and infrastructure. Being in a country like Senegal with so much community land was an interesting case to study. There are ongoing efforts in India about the role of the village governments in the survey and settlement of land and distribution. This aims at giving people greater local control over their water, forest and land so that they can build up local livelihoods and are able to hold onto their resources in the face of→

increasing privatization. Although the land is individually owned for the most part, at least the local community and institutions are to play a bigger role. In contrast the Senegal situation provided many lessons on community institutions and gave many insights into how to advance the community-based land reform agenda.



## International Women's Day 2013

Women-in-Action (formerly the Ekta Mahila Manch) is the formation of women leaders in Ekta Parishad that get together from time to time. Working primarily at the state level there were many engaged women in International Women's Day 2013 on the 8th of March. Two hundred women gathered on the 6th of March in Tilda, Chhattisgarh organised by Pryog, an affiliate of Ekta Parishad to felicitate the new women recruits. On the 8th of March 1100 mostly tribal women came together in the District of Dhar outside of Indore. On the same day there were 10 district meetings in celebration in Bundelkhand and Baglekhand. In Joura Ashram 300 women got together to felicitate 10 courageous women. Also in Didori district in Mahakaushal, there was a women's meet of over 1000 persons.

Since 2001 the women's wing has been fighting through non-violent means especially for the rights of oppressed women on their natural resources, for gender equality, sovereignty and justice for women especially in rural societies. Through the tasks of women's equitable rights on land and livelihood, education in the field, political participation of women in village councils, mutual help groups for women, a development of economic independence of women in villages and many other actions, women activists fight for a social, political and economical empowerment of women.

The process of emancipation of women especially in rural societies is strongly related to Ekta Parishad's central task of a land rights reform: seventy percent of agricultural labourers in India today are women. Closing the gender gap between men and women

in agriculture could lift 100-150 Million people on earth out of hunger. The recognition of a separate right for women over land is therefore a very crucial point in the struggle for social justice and poverty reduction: In the rural areas of today's India it is mostly women who are responsible for their family's food security. They provide for the family and a sustaining livelihood. Therefore the relation to their land is

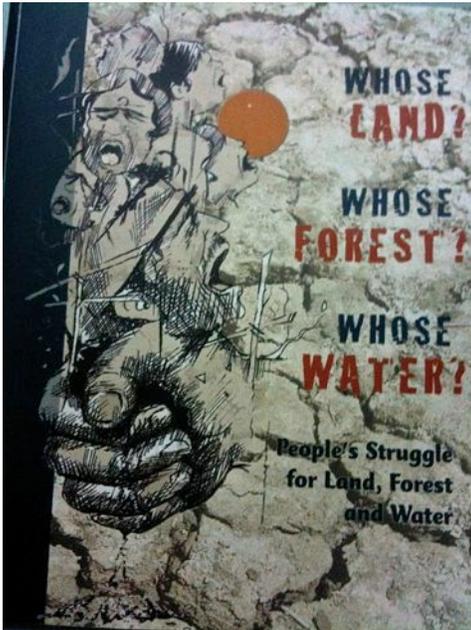
mostly stronger than the one of the men. A large number of women in India are farmers today. In many regions the men migrate to the cities or to other parts of the country for employment, while the women stay back to take care of the land. This years Women's day has been an opportunity within Ekta Parishad's working area to strengthen the awareness of 'feminisation of agriculture' to a broader public. It has to be considered in all the efforts for a new land rights in India, which are taking place right now. This is especially the case for the Land Reform Task Force, which involves land reform activists and members of the Indian government and which is in process of drafting a new land law on the right to homestead land, which is set to be approved in the next Revenue Minister's meeting on the 6th of April. While women rights were not explicit in the ten points of the National Land Reform Agreement it has been included in the annexures. In the National Land Reform Policy there is many references to gender equality.

For further informations on women's landrights, Ekta Mahila Manch and the International Women's Day read the [Interview](#) with Shivani Chaudhry, Associate Director of Housing and Land Rights Network (HLRN) and member of the Land Reform Task Force on [landportal.org](http://landportal.org), or check out [ektaparishad.com](http://ektaparishad.com) and [ektaeurope.org](http://ektaeurope.org).



## Stories of Landstruggles

Already for decades, Ekta Parishad is involved and supervising landstruggles all over India. In our newest publication «Whose Land? Whose Forest? Whose Water? People's Struggle for Land, Forest and Water», produced together with «Praxis - Institute for Participatory Practices» and published by Mahatma Gandhi Sewa Ashram we provide a wide overview of this struggles stories from 22 Indian States on more than hundred pages. Included in the publication on over 100 pages is a report on the Jan Satyagraha in October 2012, the agreement on land reforms between the Ministry of Rural Development and Jan Satyagraha and annexures with suggested agendas for action to secure access of land to the poor and action for ensuring effective implementation of the pesa (recognition of power of Gram Sabha over land matters) and the forest right act.



Mahatma Gandhi Sewa Ashram (ed.): *Whose Land? Whose Forest? Whose Water? People's Struggle for Land, Forest and Water*, Delhi 2012.

You can order a copy here:  
<mailto:delhi@ektaparishad.com>

## «Ahimsa»

### Interview with the Swiss Filmmaker Karl Saurer about his journey with his documentary through India.

*Q. Karl Saurer, for the last two months you travelled with your documentary «Ahimsa - The Strength of Non-Violence» through India. What is the movie all about?*

A. There are three main topics woven together in the film: a tenacious, non-violent struggle of Adivasi villagers of Sannai in Madhya Pradesh to obtain their rights for land and water. Secondly, a study on Rajagopal in the Seventies that was inspired by Vinoba Bhave, in converting violent groups into non-violent groups; and, thirdly, an experience of an Ekta Parishad' youth camp in which social activists empower young people to take up struggle non-violently.

*Q. Your film is very close to the Tasks of Ekta Parishad and especially Rajagopal. Your own position doesn't seem to differ from one of the main protagonists in your film. It seems to be more a pamphlet for nonviolence than a journalistic analysis of the topic. Do you see yourself as a filmmaker and a political activist at the same time?*

A. I did not attempt at all to make a journalistic analysis of the broad and complex concept of Ahimsa with this film or of the organization of Ekta Parishad. This film is an independent co-production between me and the Swiss Filmproduction Company Reck Film Zurich. In cooperation with an Indian team, responsible for camerawork and sound, I wanted to show the exemplary struggle of one tribal village in Central India to a broader public. These villagers reacted with non-violent means to governmental and private violence: displacements, burning of crops, harassments and other cruelties. They improved their life situation and perspectives persistently with non-violent methods.

They follow this path since many years in daily practice, in real life, and not just on the level of ideas, ideology and

rhetorical speech. In line with my understanding of documentary filmmaking, I attempted to give these people a voice, a face and respect. In addition, I wanted to show how this process is inspired and supported by social activists that are associated with Ekta Parishad. This movement is training people for a long time to stand up and fight for their rights and help them to empower themselves with non-violent means.

*Q. Can a film itself change the political and social awareness of people?*

A. A film can show certain realities, thereby informing people and enhancing their consciousness. If it succeeds in stimulating reflections and raising empathy, it can at best contribute to a broader social awareness. Through audiovisual means, you can bring a public into more immediate contact with some facets of reality, of a cosmos little known or unknown to them. Sometimes you can thus offer views, which enable the spectators to link their own life experiences to the ones seen and expressed in the film. Every change in society needs a motivating inspiration.

*Q. What was your motivation, to travel with your film through India?*

A. After numerous positive reactions and fruitful discussions in Europe following the screenings of Ahimsa I was keen to find out how the documentary would be received in India - first, by the protagonists it portrays but of course also by a public of both a rural and urban India. The film wants to contribute, inspire and facilitate open discussions about empowerment and possibilities of non-violent actions in our present days.

*Q. You showed your movie in a lot of different places in India and to very diverse audiences. Can you pick up some examples and tell us about your impressions of these audiences?*

A. The vast variety of audiences and their responses were revealing:

Adivasi villagers were sitting outdoor at nighttime, motivated by the film to continue with their struggles with even more unity.

Young criminals in an urban youth prison watched the film seriously →



and spoke about the necessity for more films dealing about the hardships of rural life in India.

Pupils of schools for slum kids expressed an appreciation for their life situation when comparing it to the difficult one of the tribal people.

Members of the paramilitary Wardha Home Guard debated on Republic Day passionately about how to fight widespread corruption.

A lot of College and university students were deeply impressed by the non-violent actions and the results achieved thereby, while a few were opting for more violent means due to violent contexts and structures of certain political situations. It became obvious, that there is considerable anger among young male students and that it would be essential to transform this into constructive political activity.

Teachers, who are training classes, students of audiovisual curricula and Social Sciences, specific colleges empowering women - all offered differentiated feedbacks and sensitive observations regarding the visual qualities of the film and reflected about the role of the media too, which are in their eyes predominantly concentrating on violent aspects of reality.

In the Public screenings in urban situations, people confessed, how unaware they are about the hardship faced by co-citizens in certain rural areas.

*Q. How did you organize the screenings?*

A. They were organized by one of my cameramen - Pravin Pagare - and by seven well-embedded Ekta Parishad activists in northern, central and southern India. Respecting local rituals of presentations, we always attempted to give only brief introductions and

refrained from explanations before screenings. Sometimes, it took some encouragement to reach an open interaction with the audiences after the screening. Exchange and discussion were a constant goal and this often proved to be very stimulating.

*Q. Did you have to establish certain techniques to find an approach to certain audiences?*

A. While the film is easily accessible for people understanding Hindi and/or English, some audiences in South India speaking Malayalam or Tamil had certain difficulties to understand the language. But because this film embodies not only an audible, but a visual message as well, it was able to reach out in spite of language barriers. Sometimes we had brief translations before, in between or after the screenings in the respective local language. For the month of February, my wife and collaborator Elena joined me for the presentations, which facilitated to address in particular female audiences.

*Q. You made a film about a very specific Indian issue as a Swiss filmmaker. Is there a universal or global message in «Ahimsa»?*

A. The reactions received upon screenings in many countries made the global importance of Ahimsa more than evident. The message of Ahimsa implies a truth valid beyond national or cultural borders.

*Q. You visited a lot of different places in India during this tour. Where do you personally see the most urgent tasks for Ekta Parishad in India in the near future?*

A. Let me answer this on different levels: First, it is urgent that the road map for an effective land reform, set up in Agra in October 2012 in response to the Jan Satyagraha, will be implemented satisfactorily and in due time.

Second, people living in bigger cities or in areas not affected by these challenges and perhaps unaware of the conditions of the tribal and landless or downtrodden populations, need to be informed and sensitized, so as to strengthen democratic support for the process of any betterment.

To reach these goals, it would be helpful to improve skills with modern media, encouraging high quality productions, professional distribution and dissemination, aiming at all segments of society. This will complement the still valuable traditional methods.

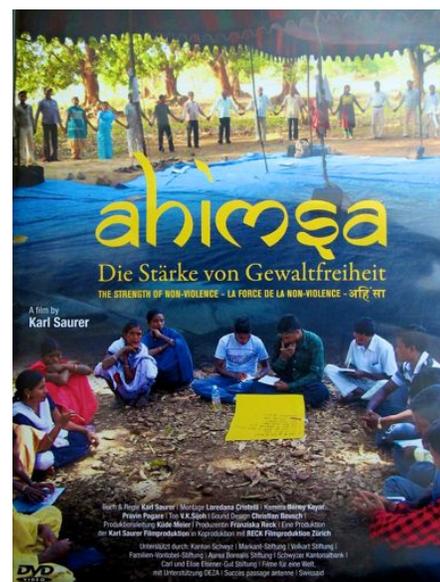
Third, as witnessed by me, in India a paternalistic and authoritarian style of rhetoric and teaching unfortunately is still widespread. Therefore a true, open and participatory dialogue needs more emphasis: an attitude, which invites, appreciates and respects the input of the other, giving him or her a due space.

And finally, Ahimsa, as the Hindi expression for non-violence, needs to be lived, made real and concrete in all aspects of daily life within the movement of Ekta Parishad and their supporters. I believe, that a culture of true respect and real dialogue in relationships on a symmetrical basis has to be improved.

*Ahimsa - The strength of non-violence/Die Stärke der Gewaltfreiheit/La force de la non-violence*

CH 2012 66' by Karl Saurer

<http://www.artfilm.ch/ahimsa.php>



## Karim Award for Rajagopal PV

On the 16th of February 2013 the President of Ekta Parishad, Rajagopal PV was selected for the N.A. Karim Award for outstanding Public Service at Kanakakkunnu Palace in Trivandrum, Kerala. Rajagopal received the award in recognition of his lifelong work and in seeking livelihood rights and dignity for the marginalized and excluded people and the award drew attention to his nurturing thousands of rural youth for social actions in Kerala and across the country. The jury admitted, the Janadesh & Jan Satyagraha mass campaigns for the land rights of Adivasis and Dalits of India promoted communal harmony and social justice.

The Award has been instituted by the Vakkom Moulavi Foundation Trust (VMFT) and was presented for the first time in 2012. The Foundation, named after the Keralian Muslim freedom fighter Vakkom Moulavi, is a centre for excellence for learning and research, and a forum which addresses the social, economic, intellectual, cultural, educational, spiritual and philosophical problems of the people. It is a vehicle for disseminating and using advances in science and technology for the benefit of society, and is a training centre and an instrument for promoting social justice and understanding and harmony among people.

The Award was presented by Shri M. Hamid Ansari, Vice-President of India. In his lecture, the Vice-President cited the words of the father of the Indian Constitution Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, which the former Dalit Freedom Fighter spoke out in the Constituent Assembly before the implementation of the Constitution: "On the 26th January 1950, we are going

*to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality. In politics we will be recognising the principle of one man one vote and one vote one value. In our social and economic life, we shall by reason of our social and economic structure, continue to deny the principle of one man one value. How long shall we continue to live this life of contradictions? How long shall we continue to deny equality in our social and economic life? If we continue to deny it for long, we will do so only by putting our political democracy in peril."* Mr. Ansari acknowledged, that today, poverty, inequality and unemployment remain the major obstacles for the Indian development aspirations: „In spite of the gains of the last six decades, 29.8% of the population or 354.60 million people were estimated to be living below the poverty line in 2009-2010. On the other hand, the top 10% of the income groups earned 33% of the income.“ The Vice President opined that while India pursue its primary goal of rapid and inclusive economic growth and development, the Indian society will also have to give equal importance to the sustainability of the development process, particularly the conservation of the national environment and natural resources, for the sake of Indian future generations. The task is momentous given the size of the Indian population and the complexity of issues. The Vice-President said, that this cannot be left to the government alone. It would require a consistent national endeavour involving all stakeholders - the governments, civil Society, NGOs, corporate sector, and above all, every citizen: "The examples set by Vakkom Moulavi, Rajagopal PV and the Vakkom Moulavi Foundation show us the way", he said.

## Theatre in CESC on the „Impact of 10 points in the life of Landless“

From the 24th February to 5th March 2013 Ekta Parishad has organized a theatre workshop in association with CESC Madurai on the theme of "Impact of 10 points in the life of Landless". This is a follow up of Jan Satyagraha 2012 to take the 10 points of the agreement (finalized between the Minister of Rural Development and Rajagopal) back to the villages in order to make people aware, that the central government is trying to formulate their policies on land distribution to the landless and poor. It is important to inform the village communities what we has been

achieved through the Jan Satyagraha 2012 action. Their understanding

will be a big help on the way towards the implementation of the decisions made in the agreement. For these ten days theatre artists and social activists participated in this play production process and on the final day presented the drama to a group of villagers. Participants of the theatre workshop came from Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Bihar, Jharkhand, Chathisgarh, South India, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.

### Editorial

Ekta Parishad International Coordination  
Gandhi Bhawan, Shyamla Hills

Bhopal, 462002  
Phone 07554223821 / 07552661800

Website : [ektaparishad.com](http://ektaparishad.com)

Email : [info@ektaparishad.com](mailto:info@ektaparishad.com)

Questions or commentaries ?  
[newsletter@ektaparishad.com](mailto:newsletter@ektaparishad.com)

