

National Consultation on Land Rights

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EKTA PARISHAD

National Consultation on Land Rights

Ekta Parishad



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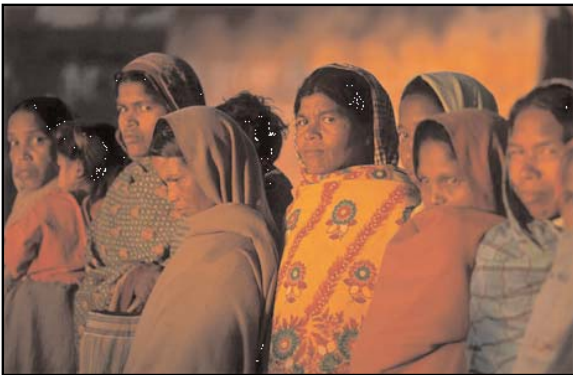
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“

Sir, whenever I hear of a great palace rising in any great city of India, be it in British India or be it in India which is ruled by our great chiefs, I become jealous at once, and say, “Oh, it is the money that has come from the agriculturists.”

Over seventy-five per cent of the population are agriculturists and Mr. Higginbotham told us last night in his own felicitous language, that they are the men who grow two blades of grass in the place of one. But there cannot be much spirit of self-government about us, if we take away or allow others to take away from them almost the whole of the results of their labour. Our salvation can only come through the farmer. Neither the lawyers, nor the doctors, nor the rich landlords are going to secure it... ”



Famous Speeches Of Gandhiji

**Banaras Hindu University Speech
February 4, 1916**

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Ekta Parishad is a Gandhian organisation. It works towards community based governance (gram swaraj), local self-reliance (gram swawlamban) and responsible government (Jawabdehi Sarkar). To achieve this, Ekta Parishad has organised people into two complimentary streams: firstly, it brings people together to struggle for their rights (taking action only when dialogue has proven impossible); and secondly, it develops community-based economic systems that enable local self-sufficiency so that dependence on welfare and dysfunctional government programs is lessened. In working towards this vision, Ekta Parishad has taken up a land rights campaign to assist poor people in gaining control over their livelihood resources. The land campaign is geared towards both acquiring and properly managing these resources.

With this in view Ekta Parishad is now working in more than 60 districts, in eight states touching 4000 villages with more than 50 lakh population. By gaining control over certain natural resources these unemployed people are given another opportunity to support themselves. Ekta Parishad concentrates in effort in remote where the mainstay livelihood is farming.

Ekta Parishad's mission has been to empower the youth with an intention of a pro-poor model of development especially keeping the most marginalized communities of the society in mind. Ekta Parishad has succeeded in its land rights campaign in Madhya Pradesh in India, setting up a state-wide Task Force, in the distribution of over 150,000 land plots, in the dropping of 64,000 cases against the tribal people and in halting forest eviction.

It has also constituted a Task Force in Chhattisgarh and working on land distribution Orissa, Tamilnadu and Kerala. Parishad promotes self-reliant



Force in Chhattisgarh and working on land distribution Orissa, Tamilnadu and Kerala. Parishad promotes self-reliant

Ekta Parishad has been arguing the case for land reforms that Five Year plans are clearly no longer able to address comprehensively the current challenge and global scenario.

arguing the case for land livelihood security and broader resources. Land reforms that Five Year plans are clearly no longer able to address comprehensively the current challenge and global scenario.

New Vision of Land Reforms

Reforms can no longer remain within the realm of pro-will have to ensure community like land, water and forests. rate and private industry seduced violence and distress. three decades Ekta Parishad presses the case for a 'National Land Authority'. This case has been built up through recording the feelings and observations of a diverse set of people from grassroots affected persons (communities) to intellectuals, academicians and concerned people in the political milieu. This has been done through grassroots "Public Hearings" (Jan Sunwai's), Assembly of the Deprived (Vanchito Ka Sansad), consultations and seminars.

remain within the realm of pro-will have to ensure community like land, water and forests. rate and private industry seduced violence and distress. three decades Ekta Parishad presses the case for a

At this Consultation we would like to thus focus on:

- * Reducing the number of landless poor through immediate land regularization and distribution including identification of surplus and ceiling land to ensure livelihood security.
- * Guaranteeing land rights to the marginalized poor i.e. scheduled caste and tribes, women and minorities, respecting the principles of social equity, empowerment and inclusion.
- * Pressurising government to reformulate development policies/programs in a manner wherein access, use and ownership of land become central to poverty reduction & development.

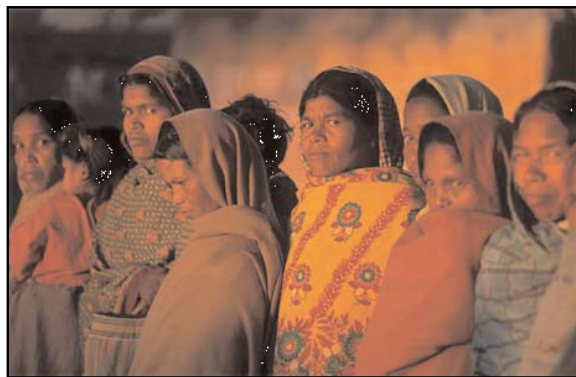
It is time now to broad base this debate at national forum for raising the urgency of land reform in India. It is hoped through this consultation to bring out a 'Document of Concern' and a joint field based strategy to empower poor and deprived communities.

The National Consultation is also supported by the Poorest Areas Civil Society (PACS) Programme.



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Proceedings...



Rajgopal, PV President, Ekta Parishad

“If we are speaking about food security, there is no way other than redistribution of land. Let us re-look the land issue: there is no denying that industry brings a lot of jobs. However, while it may bring 1000 jobs, at least another 10000 are lost, like it is happening in Orissa. Thus industrialization is largely a myth. Then they say: ‘Why are you opposing industry?’

Is there any other way than land redistribution to eradicate poverty? Where are you going to accommodate so many people other than the agriculture and farming sector?

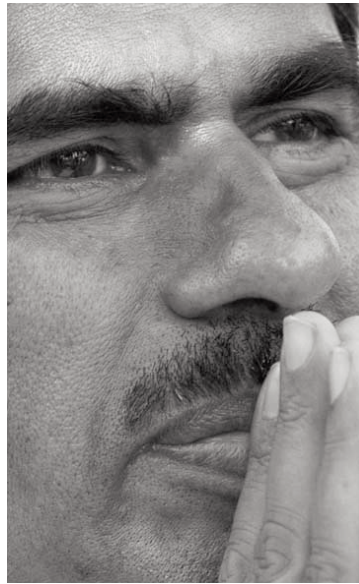
Not Enough Land? First let’s talk of re-distributing land, then talk of ‘enough land’. And there’s enough land for industry, is it, to set up their mega-SEZ’s and special economic zones?

Let’s revisit why there is land ceiling in India. Let’s reconsider land ceiling.

Non resident Indians have huge and huge tracts of land lying vacant while they live out their lives in the comfort of their homes in the West and elsewhere. NRI-owned land in A.P, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra is lying vacant. Give it to some farmer- let one farmer atleast have some livelihood opportunity...

25% of Bokaro land can be given back to farmers. Even Malanpur in MP is another example of how land in the name of industry just lies in the possession of industry while thousands of rural families denied land to eke out a living either migrate or work as menials.

How do we get this message



across to the policy makers? Land is no more a state subject. The state says ‘so many Central Acts (Land, Mining...) have to be considered before we can act, and thus effectively hides behind this veil of bureaucracy. We have to have appropriate preparation and a position and then move ahead with determination.

The Revenue Department is another matter- the long chain of corrupt, inefficient chain of decision making and bureaucratic obfuscation needs to be changed. Some mechanism needs to be developed to change this situation, which has survived since Independence.

In the context of globalisation, when the poor were deprived of their lands and multinational companies were gifted with lands by governments land reforms had become a serious issue, said P. V. Rajagopal, President, Ekta Parishad. Rajagopal recalled that land distribution among the masses was seen as a means to contain poverty in the country in the early phase of the Five Year Plans. In the present context, contract farming and corporate farming had

become popular.

He said it would be possible to eradicate poverty, contain migration, unemployment, growth of slums and naxalism through land reforms. Consistent efforts made by Ekta Parishad had led to the formation of Land Reforms Task Force in Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh.

There was also need for formation of a Land Commission in every State, as in Bihar, as there were no records to show how much land was available for distribution, he said.

There’s another consideration which we need to give serious thought to: can People Power and Moral Power change this situation? Time has now come to put relentless pressure on the state, because people are now very tired of these ongoing problems.

Take the National Land Authority. We want the National Land Authority to:

- * Provide a clear picture of land utilization in India and update state land records

- * Identify available land for redistribution with the help of State government and its concerned departments

- * Strengthen various pro-poor laws related to land and livelihood resources like the Land Ceiling Act, Panchyat Extension in Scheduled Area, Tenancy Act etc.

The authority will basically be a body that will tell us how much land is there and how much land can be given out (to the landless and the marginalized). This, in combination with institutions like gram nyayalaya’s will help clear the picture to a large extent and allow us to correctly determine land availability and access in our



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villages. We also need to see how the government frames the National Land Authority – its tenure, jurisdiction, powers et al.

Ideally, there should be fast track courts to resolve land issues and a single window system for information dissemination and clearing of land-related issues. You have it for industry, don't you, so why do we hesitate to have a similar framework for resolving land issues in our country?

In summation, I will reiterate that:

* We need to emphasise an effective mechanism to deal with land issues in our country.

* We need to consider how do we put together the moral and people's force to force the government of the day to act decisively in favour of the landless and the marginalised.

* Is there really not enough land? We need to convince the state that there is more than enough land to account for all the landless people in this country, and diversion of land (in the name of waste land, for example) for industry must come to an end immediately. * We need to also highlight issues that impact on people's lives that may not be directly related to land.

A Discussion Paper **'Towards A People's Land Policy'**, produced by Centre for Communication and Development Studies, Pune, with support from the Poorest Areas Civil Society (PACS) Programme, for Ekta Parishad, was released by Shri Nilotpal Basu, CPI

(M); Ms. Kiran Sharma, Programme Director, PACS; Shri Ashok Gopal of Infochange and Shri PV Rajgopalan of Ekta Parishad.

Ashok Gopal Infochange, Pune

"The purpose of this discussion paper is to bring land back into the agenda of developmental issues and put forth our argument in a compact, comprehensive form so as to effectively influence policy. The effort has been to incorporate all views and present them together. We realised that a lot of people have received land but they are not doing anything on it. Thus, the land rights movement has to think of both creation and agitation.

There was also a realization, during the making of this discussion paper, about the non viability of small plot agriculture. We can debate this further amongst us, but it was certainly an interesting pointer to the larger issue of land rights in India. Another interesting issue was fast track courts in India. It would be worth while for us to think awhile that where there is rampant illiteracy in large parts of the country and land laws being what they are – complicated and esoteric- can we find fast track solutions in this complicated milieu? A milieu which is designed to ruin the life of a poor person...These issues were not covered in the book, however, because information on these was either very sketchy or not available at all.

Nilotpal Basu, CPI (M)

Basu pointed out that the agrarian revolution is central to

his party's coming into being. He said that in the older days, the Mahalwari system, the ryotwari system and the Zamindari system of rent collection were the only systems of collecting rent from land or settling land-related issues. Fifty percent of alienation of land occurred under the Mahalwari system of collecting land rent.

This was also a major cause of the agrarian unrest that later fueled the peasant revolts in India. For, he said, the sepoys were actually peasants in uniform, and this was why the exploitative rent collection system prevalent in the British times – and earlier – played a major role in the revolt of 1857.

He said that the new economic policy pursued under the dictates of IMF and World Bank was opening up Indian agriculture to the exploitation of MNCs.

These policies are making profound changes in the agrarian situation and accentuating the crisis in agriculture. India is moving fast towards severe food shortage and starvation deaths. The per capita availability of food grains has declined and reached a low level unprecedented in the last five decades. Unemployment is growing fast. Poverty is spreading to newer sections and areas. Number of workdays and



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wages of agricultural workers are declining. He said that the struggle for land is a political struggle and not merely an economic one.

As such, those opposing land reforms are a political force and have to be met politically. Many state governments are reversing the land reform process by relaxing the earlier land ceiling and tenancy laws. These governments have started giving away thousands of hectares of land either on sale or on lease at throw-away prices to multinational companies and domestic industry.



Instead of vesting forest land to adivasis who cultivate it, the Central government had issued a circular calling for forcible eviction of lakhs of adivasis from the land. Many state governments have started evicting tribals.

As part of the globalisation policies, the government has reduced public investments in irrigation, power, science and technology, infrastructure, public education, public health and in many other important areas, thereby making rural development in the interest of the masses impossible.

Sections of rural poor are being marginalised. The increasing migration of agricultural labourers, poor and middle peasants from rural areas is causing serious social and economic problems. The deliberate dismantling of the public distribution system has increased the burden of agricultural workers and poor peasants.

These included the implementation of land reform measures, distribution of surplus land, waste land etc, a ban on all evictions of tenants and share croppers, fixation of fair rent, restoration of land to the tribals grabbed by moneylenders and others, issuance of pattas to all the landless who are in possession of revenue or forest lands, struggle against the process of the reversal of land reform measures and preparation and updating of land records.

Tribals and other landless peasants are being evicted from forest land in many states. Similarly, some state governments are handing over waste land to big business or MNCs in the name of development, while in some states, landlords and land mafias are forcefully occupying land possessed by the poor. Determined and focused effort is needed to build public opinion against such measures.

Land cultivated by tribals for decades together should be permanently vested with them and pattas should be issued. Appropriate amendments in the Forest Act, 1980, are also necessary to provide pattas to those peasants who are cultivating forest land. Unfortunately, today people in rural India are actually purchasing and consuming less food grain per capita today than they were in 1991. Large sections of rural India are starving or on the brink of star-

vation. The government seems oblivious to the agrarian crisis facing the country. Farmers are not only producing less, they are also consuming less. Unemployment levels have risen drastically. And since farmers' purchasing power has dropped drastically, they are consuming much less than they did a decade ago.

Loss of purchasing power is reflected in the fact that large sections of rural India are starving. In 1991, people were consuming 178 kilograms of food grain per head. In 2002, they were consuming 155 kilograms per head. These figures are equivalent to what people were purchasing between 1937 and 1942, at the height of the British Raj, though the levels went down further during the Second World War.

According to National Sample Survey (NSS) data, five years ago (in 2000) more than one-third of the rural population of three states had a daily intake of less than 1,800 calories. Today, according to the latest NSS figures, eight states fall in this category. Half our rural population, or 350 million people, are below the average food energy intake of sub-Saharan Africa. But despite the country facing its worst drought in 15 years, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government went ahead and exported a record 17 million tonnes of food grain.

In the last four years, production of food grains has come down way below the population growth rate. If food grain absorption had been maintained at the 1991 level of 178 kg per head, the internal demand would have been 26 million tonnes higher than it is today. In China, the intake per head is 325 kg, in Mexico 375 kg, in Europe 750 kg, and in the US it is 850 kg. We are at



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the lowest levels possible.

The Planning Commission is giving us an unrealistic estimate of only 27% below the poverty line, by applying a poverty line that is far too low. The price index adopted in 1973-74 was Rs 49 and this covered fuel and housing and other expenditure. What would be required today is Rs 570, but the Planning Commission continues to use the figure of Rs 328, which is false.

Whenever countries have been forced to export their agricultural produce, as has happened to colonies in the past, the food grain production of the country has been affected. This is because agriculture is not like any other area. It is crucially dependent on land, which is its primary resource.

Countries that are colder are unable to produce a wide range of goods and are therefore dependent on the produce of tropical countries. These countries want access to our land in order to maintain their own standards of living. Seventy per cent of the goods in any supermarket in North America are imported from other parts of the world. The living standards of people in these countries depend on cheaply made products from around the world.

Agriculture represents much more to India than a mere slice of economic pie – it is the very lifeblood of the country, the source of livelihood for 115 million farming families and 70 per cent of the country's population. With annual growth in manufacturing and in services each topping 11 per cent, agriculture's 2.3 per cent growth rate lags stubbornly behind the 4 per cent target India must hit if it is to push overall growth – now at 9.2 per cent – into double digits.

While farmers struggle, agricultural production cannot meet demand. Rising food prices are fuelling inflation, causing real suffering among the 850 million Indians who struggle to live on less than \$2 per day. One of the ironies of democratic India is that it is the poor who vote. The current government has many reasons for placing agriculture at the centre of the new budget.

India, long one of the most productive agricultural regions of the world, could not meet its basic need for food grains during the early years of the nation's independence. The Green Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s dramatically improved yields in India. With considerable national pride, India boasted that it had achieved not only self-sufficiency in food grains, but had become a grain-exporting nation. In 2006, however, for the first time since the Green Revolution, and in part because of changes in agricultural policy, India had to import wheat. India will again have to import food grains in 2007.

He added that the situation on land is not the same across the country. For example, while the population density in India is 323 persons/sq. km., it is 906 persons/sq. km. in West Bengal. Bengal has 3% of the total cultivable land in the country, but despite this, it accounts for 22% of all land redistributed to the landless and the marginalized in the country. Nevertheless, about 1,74,000 acres are still left to be redistributed.

Land by itself is not adequate—you need other resources to bring change in the quality of life of a rural peasant. For example, water is one. It is a commonly owned asset but since the peasant has no ownership to it, the poor has no

access to it. In Bengal, we have managed to increase total cultivable land under irrigation from 28% in 1977 to 77% today. We have succeeded in doing so by linking the two issues- land and water.

In the end, there are a few thoughts I would like to share with all of you:

- We must discuss how to design an effective delivery mechanism so that inputs can be accessed by the poor farmer (water, electricity, fertilizers...)
- These are all subject to Central



Government policies. These resources are dominated by, or are in alignment with, international finance capital.

- According to a recent study, 45% of indebtedness of Punjab's farmers is because of their inclination for expensive, high horsepower tractors and similar farm machinery!
- The forest area in W. Bengal was 9% in 1977, which rose to 13% in 2007, which was largely possible only because of people's participation.



SEZ's today are a law unto themselves- earlier, the land holding limit of a single product SEZ was 250 hectares and 1000 hectares for a multi product SEZ. Today, the upper limit has been increased to an astonishing 5000 hectares. Where will all this land come from? At the cost of the poor, of course. The rehabilitation policy is also very simple for industry- just give money to the peasants and ask them to go home! There's no rehabilitation involved.

However, resistance from landed sections and from State governments, whether overt or covert, as prevented the implementation of any substantial land reform measures.



We have to have raise the issue of plugging loopholes in the land ceiling legislation and the distribution of surplus land, including land caught in litigation, following the models of West Bengal and Kerala. We must also demand the distribution of waste, Bhoodan, evacuee and fallow lands to the landless free of cost.

Hence, problems related to land such as concentration, tenancy rights, access to the landless etc still continue to challenge India. The criticality of the issue, in fact, may be gauged from the fact that

notwithstanding the decline in the share of agriculture to the GDP, nearly 58% of India's population is still dependant on agriculture for livelihood. More than half of this percentage (nearly 63%), however, owns smallholdings of less than 1 hectare while the large parcels of 10 hectares of land or more are in the hands of less than 2%. The absolute landless and the near landless (those owning up to .2 ha of land) account for as much as 43% of the total peasant households (Figures as brought out by the National Institute for Rural Development, Hyderabad. The Report itself is based on National Sample Survey data of 1999).

Bhakta Das

"The problem of land is an age old problem. In fact, the organised struggle for land rights goes back as far as 1929, when the Bihar Pradesh Kisan Sabha was founded under the leadership of Communist Party of India (CPI) leader Swami Sahajanand Saraswati. "Land to the tiller" was a popular slogan of the Kisan Sabha, which forged strong ties with middle-level peasants and some upper-caste groups as well.

History is being repeated in our struggle.

Giving the example of Kalahandi, he said that while the piteous small and marginal farmers and landless agricultural labourers starve and wait endlessly for the rice they produce on the lands owned by absentee-landlords, the harvest finds it way to procurement centres.

Kalahandi, in fact, is an area of foodgrain "surplus", contributing a fourth of Orissa's share to the procurement agen-

cies. In 1993-94, Kalahandi provided 24,000 tonnes of rice. The next year, in 1994-95, rice procurement was a little less at 22,000 tonnes. And in 1995-96, procurement shot up to 37,700 tonnes.

The paradox of plenty, unfortunately, is not only confined to Kalahandi. India too is faced with the Kalahandi syndrome - food stocks piling up to unmanageable levels at a time when more than 320 million hungry and poor do not have the means to purchase it. With 87 per cent of the population living below the poverty line, the struggle to eke out a living is an onerous task. More so, considering that the abundant resources, including land and forests, are owned by the "gauntiya", the feudal landlords.

For the poor, human bondage and surviving on the charities of the moneylenders, is perhaps an inescapable route. The innocent, simple and illiterate tribals end up borrowing money at the time of distress only to find themselves slipping deeper and deeper into debt. Although the moneylenders vehemently deny, the annual rate of interest comes to about 460 per cent!

Niyamgiri Hills is one of the most important biodiversity hotspot in the Eastern Ghats of Orissa. The top of this hill is proposed to be mined by Vedanta Alumina Ltd, a subsidiary of Sterlite India Ltd for Bauxite, which will be used for their 1 million tonne alumina refinery to be set up in Lanjigarh, a Schedule V area.

Niyamgiri Hills, named after the Niyamraja, the main deity of the Donagria Kondhs, are one of last untouched wildernesses of Orissa. Rising to a height of more than four thousand feet, it is the source of



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Vamshadhara river as well as major tributaries of Nagaveli rivers. Niyamgiris form a distinct phyto-geographical zone because of its height and its highly precipitous topography. It has some of the most pristine forests in Orissa. Niyamgiri flora is of 'great phyto-geographical importance' as the hilltops harbor high altitude plants with Himalayan/North Indian and Nilgiri/South Indian elements.

Preliminary studies show that it has approximately 50 species of important medicinal plants, about 20 species of wild ornamental plants, and more than 10 species of wild relatives of crop plants such as sugarcane (protected under the International Undertaking on Plant Genetic Resources (Rome, 23 November 1983).

Niyamgiri hills are home to a number of vulnerable wildlife species including tiger, leopards, elephant, sloth bear, pangolin, palm civet, giant squirrel, mouse deer and sambhar, etc, most of which are in the IUCN red list of endangered species. It is also a part of migration corridor of elephants between forests of Kondhmals and of Kalahandi/Koraput. Niyamgiri hills are also home for rare birds like Hill Myna and Hornbill and are one of the few habitats in Orissa for the King Cobra. Recently, the Golden Gecko has been discovered for the first time in Orissa from the Niyamgiri hill which happens to be the only known habitat in the state.

The Golden gecko (*Callodactylodes aureus*) is of special interest to world herpetologists as it represents one of two known genus *Callodactylodes*, who are considered as Gondwanan relics. This gecko is one of the rarest lizards of India, endemic to Eastern Ghats and is found in

only one another site in AP. Due to its extremely rare status, this lizard is classified in the Schedule I to the Wildlife Protection Act. In addition this a species of large termite hill gecko (*Hemidactylus subtriadrus*) share the same habitat. This again is the first record of this species from Orissa.

During a brief herpetological survey of three days a green Pit viper was found which could be a new species or sub species of pit viper from India, since this could not be matched with existing pit viper records of India. The Travancore wolf snake which was last reported from Orissa by the British herpetologists in pre-independence era, has also been rediscovered from here recently. A species of skunk which was hitherto unreported in any published literature could be a new report.

In view of its ecological importance, Niyamgiri hill was declared as nature conservation / game sanctuary by the erstwhile King of Kalahandi and was proposed as a Wild Life Sanctuary in the working plan of Kalahandi Forest Division. The State Wildlife organization has also proposed to declare this area as South Orissa Elephant Reserve as mentioned in the vide memo no. 4643/3WL (Cons) 34/04 dated 20.08.2004.

The ecological importance of the Niyamgiri forests has been recognized even by an expert team. The Central Empowered Committee set up by the Supreme Court of India had sent a Fact Finding Expert Team to carry out an inspection who in their report dated 14.1.2005 also expressed their concern over the mining and recommended for alternate option of sourcing bauxite ore. To quote their report: "Any mining in this area is bound to destroy the biodiversity....

Under these circumstances, alternative sources of ore should be explored for the Project." The proposed factory will only give employment to about 280 people while displacing thousands and when the livelihood of atleast people depends on the flora and fauna of the eco-system prevalent there. The rehabilitation process is but an indication of the brutal use of muscle and political power of the state and private industry.

The Union Ministry for Environment and Forests has come under the scanner with the Central



Empowered Committee demanding an explanation for grant of environment clearance to a bauxite refinery project to be set up in Kalahandi district of Orissa. Even though more than 700 hectares of forest would be destroyed in this mining and refinery project by Vedanta Alumina Ltd, forest clearance -- required under MoEF guidelines -- was not seen as a pre-requisite.

In what is being seen as a contradiction of its own guidelines, the MoEF has already granted environment clearance, as required under the Environment Protection Act, for



the refinery on September 22, 2004. This environment clearance was granted without the required forest clearance even though the refinery project includes over 58 hectares of village forest land.

However, that's not all. What is even more surprising is that this environment clearance for the refinery was granted without taking into account the mining area that will be spread over 680-odd hectares of Niyomgiri Forests in Kalahandi district.

Under MoEF guidelines for implementation of the Forest Conservation Act, work on non-



forestry use of forest land. However, with a fact-finding committee appointed by the CEC reporting that work for the refinery is already under way, a letter has been shot off to the Ministry on March 2.

"The State Government as well as Vedanta Aluminium Ltd. are of the view that mining from the proposed forest area is an integral part of the project without which the project cannot be viable. It is therefore seen that the environmental clearance has been accorded under wrong premise that no forest land is involved," says

the CEC's letter to the MoEF.

The Niyomgiri hills in Kalahandi district, where mining would be carried out, are dotted with dense quality sal, anogeisus latifolia and bauhinia species as noted by the fact-finding committee. The Niyomgiri Forests, as they are called, are also the source of many small rivulets that not only converge to form the Bansidhara river but are also used by local farmers to cultivate the paddy fields.

"The Niyomgiri area is very rich from the bio-diversity point of view. There is a proposal to declare this area as a sanctuary. It has also come to our knowledge that the State Government has made a proposal to include this area in the proposed new elephant reserve. Any mining in this area is bound to destroy the bio-diversity and affect the availability of water for local people," says Ritwick Dutta, advocate for the three applicants -- Prafulla Samantra, Academic for Mountain Environics and Wildlife Society of Orissa. The three applicants brought the case before the CEC a few months ago.

However, it is not the environmental aspect alone but the fact-finding team, as also activists, mention violations of Schedule V of the Constitution. According to the report, for construction of pillars for the conveyor belts the company has acquired village land from tribals in Jaganathpur village.

"There seems to be an attempt to intimidate the local population. It appears that the project proponents would like people to believe that there is no tribal population living on the hills. But there is a primitive tribe living there that would be extinguished if the project comes through. They are in a

helpless position as their traditional land rights have not been settled. What are they going to do?" says environmentalist Shruti Devi, who visited the area recently.

The fact-finding report also notes that "the rehabilitation package for the displaced persons given by the user agency is not in the interest of sustainable livelihood of the local communities".

A large number of tribals are holding prayer meetings in Orissa' Lanjigarh area to scuttle 874 million dollar aluminum refinery being set up by Britain's Vedanta Resources Plc. Tribals say that after the coming of Vedanta, they are facing a lot of problems. They call the factory owners as "thieves" and say that "they are trying to take away our natural resources. Earlier, we used to depend on the forest produce. Due to Vedanta, forest is being destroyed and we are losing our livelihood". The tribals also claimed that mining in the nearby Niyamgiri Hills would displace a large number of them and destroy the fragile eco-system of the region. Praying to their God 'Niyam', they have taken an oath to protect the Niyamgiri Hills, which they believe is the latter's abode.

The tribals are fighting to save the jungles and the land. We will continue our agitation in the coming days. We will be blocking the roads, stopping the vehicles of Vedanta," warned Bhakta Das, the President of the 'Green Kalahandi'. 'Green Kalahandi' a voluntary organisation is supporting their cause.

Legal disputes have stalled the project, but Vedanta officials say they are confident about commissioning it by December, 2006.



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Vedanta signed an agreement with the Orissa Government in 2004 to set up the aluminum refinery in the bauxite-rich Lanjigarh, which falls within the jurisdiction of the state's underdeveloped Kalahandi District and is home to Dongaria Kondh tribe. The state government has recommended giving the mining rights to the company to extract the bauxite required to make alumina, but this has prompted environmentalist groups to move the court.

In April 2007, 20,000 people participated in a padyatra there to highlight the plight of the indigenous people living there for generations. I think it is time we expanded our struggle to include the advocacy for a pro-poor development policy, based on respecting the local people's consensus on any industrial or developmental project, and not based solely on blind development.

The **JANADESH 2007** website was formally launched by Shri Kuldeep Nayyar and Ms Kiran Sharma, Programme Director, PACS, New Delhi.

Kiran Sharma
Programme Director,
Poorest Areas Civil
Society (PACS)
Programme,
New Delhi.

"How do we connect the PACS Programme to the Ekta Parishad mandate is what excites me. I feel that there is a need to rev up this movement, and I want to reassure Rajaji that PACS is a-100% commit-

ted to this issue.

Also, there is a difference between politics and being political; we need to be political.

I look forward to the Janadesh movement as it unfolds across the country in the coming months.

Professor Praveen Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

"Today, Navin Patnaik, Chief Minister of Orissa and Narendra Modi, Chief Minister of Gujarat, are considered to be the most 'progressive' Chief Ministers in India, and we are unfortunately saddled with them. Their industrial policies are destroying hundreds and thousands of lives in the name of development, and we are able to do little to stem the process.

I have heard heart-rending stories of people deposing over land issues in Jharkhand, the poor in their hundreds gathered from diverse parts of the state to share experiences of the daily grind they have to endure to just subsist on the margins of physical survival. They had few embellishments by way of caste or class labels, but they were part of a growing tide of political assertion by the poor, now intent as never before on securing their rights under the law of the land.

There is now a growing nation-wide network of people and organizations which have stepped up their efforts in the context of the land and related acute scarcity conditions afflicting large parts of the country.

Here are a few pointers I would like to share briefly with

the distinguished gathering:

- Those who are our guardians are also our own destroyers...

- The myth that small landholders are NOT productive is simply not on...

- Absentee landlordism is a major issue. People who have moved away from their land-why are they still today holding thousands and thousands of acres of land in their name, left barren and unproductive? Why not give it to a poor rural family which can at least eke out a living tilling the land?

- Land must not be viewed in isolation from water and other similar inputs.



Thinking of only land per se, is, not to put too fine a point, almost idiotic. We need to develop a synergistic and wholistic thinking on land issues.

- The land issue is organically connected to the larger macro economic regime. Unless we confront questions like global financial implications and Acts like the Seed Bill and genetically modified foods, we will not succeed. The struggle against the neo-liberal economic order is a must if other entitlements are to flow (to people).

Older laws focused on how

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to nurture and maintain a subjective society, and these laws still continue to hold sway in our judicial system. How will we make progress on land and land-related issues under these archaic and obsolete legal Acts?

In the course of the last five years (1998-2003), the population of the Republic of India has been sliding down towards sharply lowered levels of per capita foodgrains absorption, levels so low in particular years that they have not been seen for the last half century. Between the early 1990s when economic reforms began, and



absorption of foodgrains per head has come down from 178 kg to 155 kg. Such low absorption levels were last seen in the initial years of World War II — from where they had fallen further still. Again, after some recovery, the very first few years after Independence half-a-century ago and the food crisis of the mid-1960s, are comparable to present average absorption levels. Thus, in 2000-01, the average Indian family of four members were absorbing 93 kg less of foodgrains compared to a mere four years earlier — a massive and unprecedented drop, entailing a fall in average daily intake by

64 gm per head, or a fall in calorie intake by 250 calories from foodgrains (which accounts for 65 to 70 percent of the food budget of the poor). Since the richest one-sixth to one-fifth of the population, mainly urban, has been improving and diversifying diets, the nutritional decline for the poorer three-fifths of the population, mainly rural, has been much greater than the average fall indicates.

Last year's severe drought, despite very low output, galvanised efforts to implement food-for-work in the drought-hit areas, and therefore resulted in somewhat improved availability per head compared to 2000-01, though it remained lower than the 159 kg level of the previous year, 2001-02, which had registered the highest foodgrains output ever seen of 212 million tonnes. Nevertheless, the average annual foodgrains absorption taking all three years ending in 2002-03 is only 154 kg per head, an inadequate level given the large inequality in its distribution. Over four-fifths of the total fall in the 1990s, has taken place in the last five years alone, from 174 kg in the three years ending in 1998 to 155 kg taking the average of the two pre-drought years. This steep and unprecedented fall in foodgrains absorption in the last five years has entailed a sharp increase in the numbers of people in hunger, particularly in rural areas, and for very many it has meant starvation.

The average downward movement in turn is the outcome of divergent trends — foodgrains absorption is rising fast for the mainly urban well-to-do, and is either the same or falling faster than the average for the bulk of the mainly rural population. Look at these figures: the per capita growth between 1994-95 till today has

been, on an average, around 40%; this very growth rate has been an abysmal 5% in rural India (of agriculture dependent population).

The per capita availability of food grains has gone down for the first time since Independence. On an average, the per capita cereal consumption on a Chinese is twice that of an Indian!

In the end, land is thus linked to:

- Related resources
- The larger gender question (like patta's in the name of women household members), and...
- The larger macro economic environment prevalent in the country.

Kuldeep Nayyar, Rajya Sabha member, senior journalist and columnist

“We know that India inherited a semi-feudal agrarian system. The ownership and control of land was highly concentrated in a few landlords and intermediaries whose main intention was to extract maximum rent, either in cash or kind, from tenants. As a result, agricultural productivity suffered and oppression of tenants resulted in a progressive deterioration of their plight.

When Jai Prakash Narayan was about to pass away, he called me to Patna (around the time of the Emergency). He said that whatever has happened (in terms of land issues) is not good- all these 'isms'- capitalism, imperialism, communism- are for the welfare of man and should never be allowed to



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overtake man. He said "Let's decide what we must do..."

However, after all these discussions, I feel that:

- All of us seem to be stuck in some kind of thinking rut and are not able to radicalise our ideas, society or ourselves.

- The British did not leave- we made them quit because, as Lord Mountbatten once confided to Kuldeep Nayyar when he was a journalist: "We couldn't keep the country together". Such was the fervour of our ideas and actions...

- I once told the Chinese during a visit to China that they were succeeding because they were following Gandhi and not Mao, because it was Gandhi who said "Cut your needs".

- Today, I find small pockets of protests and defiance. What worries me is that some of us are part of this establishment. So this movement on land reforms keeps getting stalled.

- Are we convinced that land is for the tiller? We must now think of a new commission or a committee to redistribute surplus land, which must also think of some kind of a pool of land from which people can avail services (like loans, etc.) by mortgaging it as collateral.

- Let's develop our villages- today, our growth is in only one direction, which is growth at any cost! Look at the irony- a Left-supported Government at the Centre using the police to suppress the rural peasant who is demanding justice and his right to live as he pleases.

- Always think of that lonely individual on the ground

in some Indian village, barely eking a living from land that is possibly not even his. Because he really matters...think of how much his quality of life has improved by your actions. Like Gandhiji used to say: "I will give you a talisman. Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test. Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man whom you may have seen, and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he gain anything by it? Will it restore him to a control over his own life and destiny? In other words, will it lead to swaraj for the hungry and spiritually starving millions? Then you will find your doubts and yourself melting away."

That message of Bapu no longer resonates in our ears as we settle down to the business of government. Gandhiji was against State intervention, even in matters of swadeshi and self-reliance. But let that debate pass. For our purposes, we know for a fact that control over life and destiny by the poor is often constrained by State intervention, rather than its lack.

- Power, money, party and self-promotion are the priorities of 90% of parliamentarians. Unbelievable quantities of tax payers money is spent on their comfort and well-being. Where is the nation building? Why are we so far-removed from the grim realities of our rural population?

The new vision of land reform we are here to discuss should also think of a new vision of new economic order. Let us pool our resources- let people like Rajaji, Medha (Patkar) and Aruna (Roy) string themselves like pearls in a necklace to change things the way they believe them to be...A

new vision of land reforms should also think of values-change man in totality.

Manish Gunjam, former MLA, Dantewada (Chhatisgarh)

"The TATA steel plant is planned on 2,000+ hectares of tribal land belonging to 10 villages in Lohandiguda block, near the Chitrakot waterfall on Indravati river. The agreement for the plant was signed



between the Chhatisgarh Govt & Tata in June 2005 - precisely the month when Salwa Judum was formed - labelled a "people's movement against the Naxalites" but actually a police sponsored terror militia forcing the evacuation of one tribal village after another, with refugees pressurized to join SJ.

The Salwa Judum is far from the spontaneous uprising of tribals against Maoists that it is claimed to be. It is an organized, state managed enterprise. The main cadre of Salwa Judum are comprised of Special Police Officers who are being paid and armed by the

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state, at a rate that is standard in counter insurgency operations across the country. The Salwa Judum has led to the forcible displacement of people with police and administrative connivance. According to official estimates, approximately 15,000 people from 420 villages are living as refugees in temporary camps. People have left behind their cattle and most of their household goods. The entire area is being cleared of inhabitants even as new roads are being built and more police and para-military forces are being sent.



In many places regular economic activities like weekly haats have stopped.

When Salwa Judum meetings are called, people from neighbouring villages are asked to be present. Heavy security forces accompany the meetings.

Villages that refuse to participate face repeated attacks by the combined forces of Salwa Judum, the district force and the paramilitary Naga battalion, which is stationed in the area. In addition, there are separate raids by the Naga Battalion. These raids result in

looting, arson and killings in many instances. In some villages, the raids continue till the entire village is cleared and people have moved to camps while in other cases, only old people, women and children are left. Many villages are coming to camps to avoid these attacks in the first place.

Once in camps, people have no choice but to support the Salwa Judum. Some of them are forced to participate in attacks against members of their own and neighbouring villages. It is frightening to note the collapse of civil administration in many parts of Dantewada District.

Salwa Judum members search people's belongings and control the flow of transport. They enforce an economic blockade on villages that resist coming to camps. They also try to force civil officials to follow their dictat.

FIRs registering the looting, burning, beatings/torture by Salwa Judum mobs and the security forces are not recorded. The intention seems to be to terrorise people into leaving their villages. Killings are hard to corroborate. The only killings that are officially recorded are those by Maoists. The Salwa Judum has created a situation where violence has escalated.

The Salwa Judum does have support among certain sections of local society. The leadership comprises of non-advansi immigrant settlers from other parts of India, sarpanches and traditional leaders whose power has been threatened by the Maoists, powerful local politicians and their network of supporters. Both the local Congress and the BJP are supporting the Salwa Judum together.

Village defence committees

are being created, SPOs are being trained and armed, and the entire society is becoming militant and lawless.

Although Chhattisgarh is claimed to be a tribal state, advansi society and culture is being actively destroyed. People, for whom the earth of their village is sacred, are being forcibly removed from it, and the whole social fabric is being torn.

Villagers have declared an all-out struggle against land acquisition by Tata Steel Plant in Chhattisgarh's Bastar region on the lines of Nandigram and Kaling Nagar. Under the proposed project, 5,500 acre land in 10 villages has to be acquired affecting 1,750 tribals and other families.

Tata had agreed to provide Rs one lakh per acre for double-crop land, Rs 75,000 per acre for single-crop land and Rs 50,000 per acre for barren land.

Villagers who will be affected by the proposed project now say that no government official would be allowed to enter the village, let alone starting the process of land acquisition. They say that acquisition will be possible only over their dead bodies. Mockery is being made of the Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act, which provides special rights to villages and panchayats in SC areas, in the state. The Bastar Collector was carrying out the process keeping all rules aside on the directions of the state government.

The Gram Sabhas -- on July 20, 2006, and August 3, 2006, -- had agreed to provide land for the Tata project on the condition that the Tata Rehabilitation Committee will fulfill 13-point programme presented to the government.



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When no action was taken for seven months, the gram sabhas met in February 2007 and decided not to grant approval for land acquisition.

In the old days, when the burden of tax became unbearable, the adivasi moved to the forests and made it his home. Today, he has nowhere to go. The multinationals (like IFFCO, ESSAR & TATA) are now looking at these areas like vultures. The tribals are linked to their land like fish to water.

The so-called rehabilitation plans of these companies exists only on paper and the Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act has become a joke - no Governor has ever used his powers under this Act. The local administrative machinery is working for these companies openly and flouting all rules and procedures.

Gram Sabha's are being organized for these companies by using para-military forces to coerce people. Whenever a Gram Sabha is sought to be held to ratify 'permission' by a village to hand over its land to the state, section 144 is declared and a kind of undeclared curfew is imposed on the village. Then the para-military forces go from house to house, drag the people to the panchayat Bhawan, force them to sign the already-prepared document authorizing the state to take over their land, and then sent back with a dire warning not to talk about the episode to anyone.

The entire gram sabha proceeding is documented by a government employee and thus framed accordingly. If these companies succeed, then the identity of these tribals will be lost forever.

I have already spelled out

the terror being used as a weapon by the Salwa Judum (SJ). They were ostensibly set up to fight the naxal violence, but are now being used to terrorise people and forcibly empty villages in the name of 'clearing' them of naxal presence. People have been uprooted in their hundreds of thousands and are being forced to live in camps in inhuman conditions they are not used to.

The adivasi is a creature of the forest-the forest is all he ever had, and he does not know how to live in cities, camps or cramped concrete buildings. The old and the young are dying slowly of disease and lack of decent livelihood opportunities. Those who have had the courage to stay behind only go to their village in the night, because they are otherwise killed by the security forces or the salwa judum as naxals.

A few weeks ago, a Bengali trader was shot dead in front of his shop over the price of a banyan (cotton vest). The people who killed him were part of the SJ, but the FIR report said the trader was shot by 'unknown assailants'. This is how the indigenous people of my state today live in their villages.

SESSION 2

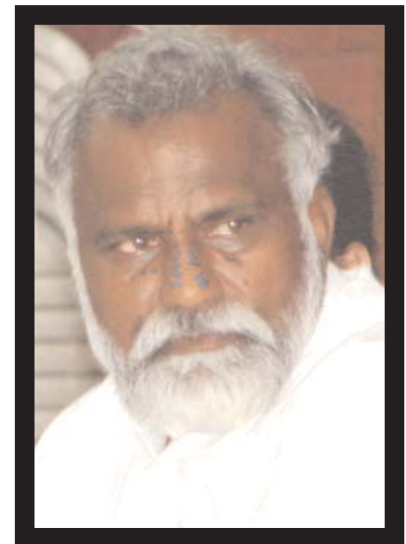
Shri Eknath Maharashtra

"Land is power. And flowing from it are issues like migration, wages, social status, livelihoods and socio-economic power. So much so that most political power flows from land-most, if not all, our political leaders today are either hugely landed or belong to landed fam-

ilies. While some attempt was made at land reforms through the Ceiling Act, they did not really succeed. If land reforms are to take root today, then the country's land policy should radically change.

Surplus land should be redistributed, and for that to happen, we should discuss strategies to influence government policy at the highest levels.

Advocacy for land reform should include the following aspects:



- Mass mobilization, and
- Active advocacy

Ran Singh Parmar, National Convener, Ekta Parishad.

"When people do not even have land, what to talk of livelihoods? What of the rights of people who do not even have a shred of land to call their own? For example, we know for a fact that the forest department is

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making all-out efforts to push people out of national parks and sanctuaries. The forest officials are making villagers life difficult by restricting their activities and pressurizing people to leave their villages. People are being told that they have no option but to move out.

- Forest department officials commit brutal atrocities on the men, women, and children of our village for taking control over their land. We also know what the resettlement plans of the government are worth:



hundreds of people who have been 'resettled' are today facing a severe crisis of livelihood. Many are forced to sell head-loads of firewood for their survival. They are on brink of starvation and destitution. Many other simply leave and migrate, only to lead even more miserable lives in cities and towns.

- Thus land reform should be discussed at the state level, since it differs from region to region. The landlord of yesterday is the politician of today, and this politician is now giving away lands belonging to the poor to industry. How many

politicians do we know of who have willingly parted with their huge land holdings?

- No politician is losing his land; no state-level leader who is thinking of the poor has yet emerged to talk of-let alone give direction to - land reforms in any state. We need to put pressure on the government together.

- The National Land Authority should not be autonomous but there should be a cabinet committee monitoring it and overseeing its processes. We should also decide what kind of industry should have access to what kind of land, for what purposes and for how long?

- There is no denying the fact that the biggest land lord in the country is the government- how this 'landlord' behaves has a bearing on the country's land reform process and its land laws. Thus, the arbitrary powers vested with departments like forest and revenue should be taken away from these departments and vested with the National Land Authority.

- The process of arbitration should also be made a part of the National Land Authority, just as the National Land Authority should also examine aspects like how to establish community rights over forest lands.

Bharat Dogra, Journalist

"Our earlier effort was to make landless people into farmers; today, our farmers are turning into landless peasants again. This is the irony of land reforms in India....

Ever since Independence, we

have managed, at the most, to redistribute only 2-3% of our surplus land amongst the landless and the marginalized, while nations like South Korea, Taiwan, China and Japan have redistributed more than 20-30% of their land. Thus, not only has the land reform process in India miserably failed, but we still do not know how many Dalits, adivasis and other landless marginalised groups are being given possession of this land.

There is no denying that land redistribution will lead to better agricultural productivity and better livelihoods for the poor farmer. We can land either as an essential asset for the country to achieve economic growth and social equity, or it could be used as a tool in the hands of a few to hijack a country's economic independence and subvert its social processes.

During the two centuries of British colonization, India had experienced the latter reality. During colonialism, India's traditional land ownership and land use patterns were changed to ease acquisition of land at low prices by British entrepreneurs for mines, plantations etc. The introduction of the institution of private property de-legitimized community ownership systems of tribal societies.

Moreover, with the introduction of the land tax under the Permanent Settlement Act 1793, the British popularized the zamindari system at the cost of the jajmani relationship that the landless shared with the land owning class. By no means a just system, the latter at least ensured the material security of those without land.

Owing to these developments, at Independence, India inherited a semi-feudal agrari-



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an system. The ownership and control of land was highly concentrated with a few landlords and intermediaries, whose main intention was to extract maximum rent, either in cash or kind, from tenants. Under this arrangement, the share-cropper or the tenant farmer had little economic motivation to develop farmland for increased production.

Naturally, a cultivator who did not have security of tenure, and was required to pay a high proportion of output in rents, was less likely to invest in land improvements. At the same time, neither was the landlord particularly concerned about improving the economic condition of the cultivators. As a result, agricultural productivity suffered and oppression of tenants resulted in a progressive deterioration of their plight.

In the years immediately following India's Independence, we did look at the problem of land with a pressing urgency. In fact, the national objective of poverty abolition envisaged simultaneous progress on two fronts, high productivity and equitable distribution. The first few five-year plans allocated substantial budgetary amounts for the implementation of land reforms. A degree of success was even registered in certain regions and states, and especially in areas like the abolition of intermediaries, protection to tenants, rationalization of different tenure systems and the imposition of ceiling on land holdings. Fifty-four years down the line, however, a number of problems are still far from satisfactorily resolved.

However, most indicators show that inequalities have increased, rather than decreased. The number of landless labor has gone up and the top ten percent monopolizes more land now than in 1951.

Meanwhile, the issue of land reforms has over the years, either unconsciously faded from public mind or deliberately been glossed over. Vested interests of the landed elite and their powerful nexus with the political-bureaucratic system have blocked meaningful land reforms and /or their earnest implementation.

The oppressed have either been co-opted with some benefits, or further subjugated. As a result, we are today at a juncture where land, mostly for the urban, educated elite, and who also happens to be the powerful decision-maker, has become more a matter for housing, investment and infra-structure building. In the bargain, the existence of land as a basis of livelihood – for subsistence, survival, social justice and human dignity has largely been lost. More land has been taken away from people than given to them in the name of land reforms. What more proof do we need than the huge tracts of land being given to industry in the name of SEZs, free trade zones, corporate farming and the like. When 90% of our people do not have access to a day's decent meal, how can we have the arrogance of snatching away their lands?

Why should people be displaced because of wild life sanctuaries, or that mining necessarily destroy the natural environment? There is need for us to stop displacement of people from their land for petty political gains by our political parties.

We also need to challenge the coming of big industry, and all this needs to be done through well-researched documentation and studies. After all, there are 2.5-crore families without land in our country- we need to find at least 5-crore acres of land for them, and land

being given away at throwaway prices to industry flies in the face of the argument that not enough land is available in the country for all the landless!

I also propose that the National Land Authority should also address the issue of rehabilitation, displacement and absentee landlordism – all these reforms should come through an Act of Parliament, and we should not accept a weak authority in any way, an authority that has no teeth and does not have legal powers to enforce its agenda or punish the malingerers or the guilty.



With an estimated provision of Rs. 50,000 crore for a period of seven years, the Jawahar Lal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) is the single largest central government initiative in the urban sector. The Mission expects that these will be used leverage additional resources for financing urban development.

The primary objective of the JNNURM is to create economically productive, efficient, equitable and responsive cities. In line with this objective, the Mission focuses on: Integrated development of infrastructure services, securing linkages



between asset creation and maintenance for long-run project sustainability, accelerating the flow of investment into urban infrastructure services, planned development of cities including the peri-urban areas, outgrowths, and urban corridors, renewal and re-development of inner city areas and universalization of urban services, so as to ensure their availability to the urban poor.

The JNNURM will function under the overall guidance and supervision of a National Steering Group (NSG) and at the state level, the JNNURM



will be co-ordinated by the State Level Steering Committees to be headed by the Chief Ministers. The State Level Committees will be supported by nodal agencies who will invite project proposals, appraise them, and manage and monitor the JNNURM.

The JNNURM is designed to support : Water supply including setting up of desalination plants; Sewerage and sanitation; Solid waste management including hospital waste management; Construction and improvement of drains and storm-water drainage system; Road network; Urban transport; Construction and development of bus and truck termi-

nals; Development of heritage areas; Preservation of water bodies; Integrated development of slums, i.e. housing and development of infrastructure in slum settlements; Provision of basic services to the urban poor ; and Street lighting.

JNURM Reform Agenda requires State Governments and cities seeking assistance to undertake mandatory and optional reforms including effective implementation of decentralization initiatives as envisaged in the Constitution (seventy – fourth) Amendment Act, 1992, Repeal of Urban Land (Ceiling and Regulation) Act, 1976, Reforms of Rent Control laws, by balancing the interests of landlords and tenants, Rationalisation of stamp duty to bring it down to no more than 5 per cent within seven years, Enactment of a public disclosure law, Enactment of a community participation law, so as to institutionalize citizens' participation in local decision making and Association of elected municipalities with the city planning function and financial as well as tax related reforms.

The JNNURM expects that proper application of the reform agenda combined with effective implementation of its programmes and projects will lead to: Universal access to a minimum level of services; Establishment of city-wide frameworks for planning and governance; Modern and transparent budgeting, accounting, and financial management system at municipal levels; Financial sustainability for municipalities and other service delivery institutions; Introduction of e-governance in the core functions of municipal governments; and Transparency and accountability in urban service delivery and management.

With all this being said, it is imperative that we advocate for the repeal of the Land Ceiling Act in toto, because even the latest NSSO survey has shown that poverty has gone up in every sector except agriculture.

We should also advocate for land being brought totally under the purview of panchayats.

PT John Kerala

“Land reforms have become a travesty my state of Kerala. Let me give you an example- all cash crops in Kerala are exempt from land reform; only crops being cultivated by the poor for their livelihood on their land are being targeted by the government under its so-called land reform programme. The government never touches the rich person's land, because they grow only cash crops and are powerful, politically and economically.

Companies like TATA Tea and Assam Brooke own excess land (TATA has got 30,00 acres of land from the erstwhile royal family in the state, but now hold – illegally- 1.74-lakh acres. Assam Brooke of Calcutta also holds huge excess land and despite the Supreme Court order in 2001, nothing has been done.

The Tea Act of 1941 explicitly says that if a company abandons any land being used for its plantations, the government should take over the land and the welfare of the employees becomes its responsibility, but, as usual, nothing is ever done.

The Assam Tea Company has closed 18 such tea estates in Kerela, as it has in states like



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West Bengal (Darjeeling) and The Nilgiris (Tamil Nadu). But nothing has even been done for the people who have been abandoned by these companies.

The most discernible trend in the past few decades, indeed, has been the marked shift in the cropping pattern towards less labour-intensive crops. In food-deficit Kerala, the area under paddy fell drastically by over five lakh hectares (from eight lakh hectares) in the past two decades.

Although over 60 per cent of the land that went out of paddy cultivation continued to be used for agriculture, the preference was to grow coconut, rubber, arecanut or crops such as banana, tapioca and vegetables. Now, farmers are turning increasingly to quick-profit cultivation of exotic varieties such as vanilla, horticulture and medicinal plants, which have markets outside India.

But, despite the fall in agricultural production and agricultural employment as a result of land reforms, until recently there had been no attempt to undermine the reform measures. For over two decades after the 1970s, farmers and farm workers were, however, living with a new set of problems, of low profits from the fragmented land and lack of employment. Land ceiling was imposed on household landholdings.

The ceiling varied with the size of the household and did not exceed 25 standard acres (10 ha), the maximum that the largest family could own. However, the Kerala Land Reforms Act, 1963, exempted certain kinds of land from the ceiling limit, including plantations and private forests. Thus, those cultivating plantation crops such as rubber, tea, cof-

fee, cocoa, cardamom, cinnamon and so on were not bound by the limit.

In a farce on land reforms, the land ceiling Act is applicable only to paddy and coconut crops, NOT cash crops like spices, cardamom, cloves, betel nuts, etc.

In the face of such an anomaly, we need to put in place a pro-poor Act, for a total change is needed in the way land is looked at in these states, especially Kerala. Corporate farming is killing traditional farming systems and traditional farmers, as also being a threat to food security and food sovereignty in the state for the poor.

Roma

“The land reform movement may have disappeared from the political agenda of most political parties in India, but work continues at the ground level, largely because of the women-led leadership.

However, we must face the fact that migration is becoming a serious issue because of issues related to land degradation and decreasing productivity, and the women left behind to look after their homes and cattle have to look for work to sustain themselves and their dependents, often either very young children or the old and the infirm.

They are also paid very little by way of daily wages, because of the exploitative nature of the market and land owners combined. Thus, the issue of minimum wages for women, along with rising anger against the prevalent patriarchal family and decision-making system and land being always in the name of the male member of

the family, is growing. We have to learn from countries like Cuba and Venezuela on agrarian reforms, who have traveled miles ahead of us despite we making all the noise about land reforms and the welfare of the common man...

With 40%-50% of land bogged down in legal dispute in courts across the country, the time has now come for a new type of politics of land in India—a coming together of various movements across the country on a single platform to pressurize the government of the day to wake up and finally act!”



Ramdas Athwale, MLA & President, Republican Party of India (RPI).

“A lot is said on poverty in our country, but little ever gets done by way of concrete action.

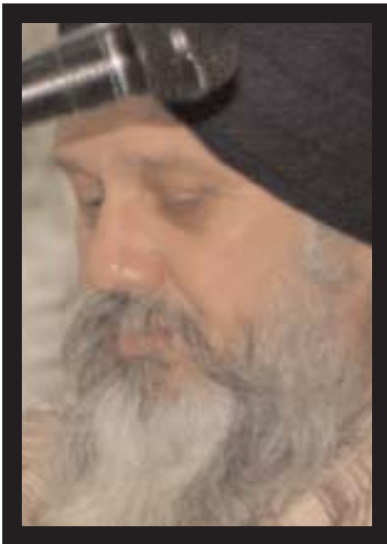
I believe that surplus land in the country should get redistributed amongst the marginalised and the landless @ of 5-acres per person. Also, the Land Ceiling Act should also be modified appropriately.



I also believe that people from any caste who are landless should be given possession of land”.

Jagjit Singh Punjab

“Land owners make the struggle for land into a struggle between castes. Take the case of land issues in Punjab as an example: Large parts of rural Punjab remain dependent on agriculture and the majority of Dalits remain landless...



They are always, thus, at the mercy of upper caste landlords. The major problem in the rural areas, however, is land and indebtedness.

According to Professor Manjit Singh, who heads the Ambedkar Centre at Panjab University, “Dalits form nearly 33 per cent of the rural population, but own only 2.3 per cent of land. Also, our studies show that at least 58 per cent of Dalit households are caught in debt traps; we estimate a total debt amounting to at least Rs.1,906 crores.”

Manjit Singh points to

research conducted across five districts by a scholar in the Sociology Department of Panjab University. It showed that 97 per cent of the agricultural labourers were from S.Cs and work participation was as low as 28.8 per cent. At least 20 per cent of the surveyed villagers agreed to work as “attached” labourers, which is half a step away from bondage.

Studies have shown that although the spate of suicides in the past decade is commonly referred to as “farmer suicides”, at least 30 per cent of the victims were landless labourers.

To nobody's surprise, the majority of landless Dalits are teetering on the edge and are just as vulnerable. It is not uncommon to hear retorts like “When you don't even own a patch of land to relieve yourself in, how can you raise your voice against the dominant castes?”.

If a landless person has cattle, he needs land to bring fodder from. If he is willing to work, he will need a field to work in. Socio-economic boycott is an ever-present threat. Sometimes, announcements are made from Gurudwara's that labourers in a particular area cannot go to the fields to relieve themselves or go the local village pond to fetch water.

Woe betide anyone who dares to do so. How will a person survive in the summer heat if he has to go to work in a field all day and has nowhere to go to for drinking water for himself and his family?

If a person does not own land in Punjab, he will not get bail if he is booked in a false case. NRIs, in the other hand, own huge tracts of land in Punjab that more often than not, lies barren and uncultivat-

ed. Meanwhile, the landless are often harassed by their landlords and/or tenants by notices to leave their land.

In fact, in a very sad observation, the landless are often called *kamin* by the local population there”.



DAY 2

Land Reforms: Questions Around Judicial Action - An Open Forum for Ideas

A committee of Ekta Parishad functionaries, media and other like-minded organizations and individuals should be set up to monitor land distribution.

But land redistribution will, on its own, only not help (example of the Bhoodan Andolan is there is for everyone to learn from). Where and how much land is available, the quality of land and how much does the government need for its purposes, we should be in a position to tell the government, and not wait for the government to show us the way.

We need to make this redistributed land productive, too. Lets us recruit a 'land army' that will improve the quality and productivity of land and make it an asset to the family dependent on it for its livelihood. This will also help check unemployment and help prevent wasteful expenditure on unemployment dole that the government would otherwise have to undertake.

Next, we need to take care of irrigation facilities available on this (redistributed) land. Small irrigation systems work very well, and we need to explore these options.

The next step is selling the produce in the market or mandi's. This process, the most critical one in the entire operation, needs to be free of middlemen, and the farmer should get the best possible support price for his produce.

What do we need to do fur-

ther? We need to ensure that there be some legal provisions or safeguards in place that will ensure that redistributed land is not sold off again. And even if they can sell this land, to whom can they sell their land, and on what conditions? This also has implications for corporate farming in our country, which is quietly but surely eating up all cultivable land in our country, either legally or by influencing the state to do so in the name of development and economic growth.

We also need to reexamine the role of panchayati raj institutions and their role in land redistribution, especially in checking misuse.

The National Farmers Commission needs also to be revisited because of its implication on agriculture research in India. M S Swaminathan, who has been asked to head the National Commission on Farmers by the Union Agriculture Ministry, expects the commission to be formally constituted by this month-end. Swaminathan, who is known as the 'father of the Green Revolution in India', had said that a broad reference for the commission to "study the problems of farmers" would generalise the issue, and it would be better to study specific issues and come up with suggestions.

The NCF's recommendatory suggestions could help in a big way in reversing the situation. The commission had first recommended an immediate restoration of Rs.500 as an advance bonus that the state government had withdrawn from the cotton growers; and as long term measures, it has suggested formation of a price-stabilisation fund, a complete relook at the credit policies, protection measures in terms of hike in import duty, and so forth. The

NCF has prepared four voluminous reports so far and the last report is to be submitted in October with a draft national policy for farmers. The NCF apart, a few other study committees have mapped the complex problems with great pain, but the sum total of all that exercise is zero. The governments at the state and centre aren't unduly disturbed or keen to act decisively. Why? Is that because there aren't any elections now? Or is it because there are no opposition parties to corner the governments on the issues?



Or is it also because the media are making no noise, as they do over the other flimsy issues? Amidst the brouhaha, the rage among farmers is growing, the distress deepening and the hope sinking.

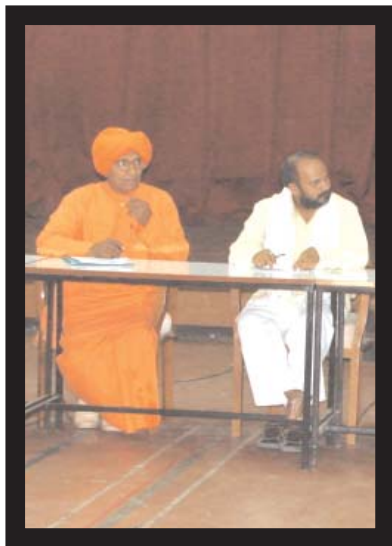
The crisis, in the meanwhile, is spreading. In Marathwada, a region similar to Vidarbha, cotton and soybean farmers are dying at an equally alarming pace. In western Maharashtra, onion farmers are in trouble; to a large extent, the great dairy business has also taken a stick. Tens of farming families in Vidarbha aren't sure whether they would be able to cultivate



their land next year.

Do we really need a land watch forum? Similarly, we need to have a Farmer Policy instead of an Agriculture policy. We should also think about the need to monitor local circumstantial resources- like an investment package- along with land that takes care of all other inputs that the farmer may need to make his land productive.

Agencies/donors like DFID, ADB and the World Bank also need to be approached to make their policies more farmer



friendly and rooted in reality. They also need to be sensitized to the fact that aberrations like farmers suicides happen

because of a deeper malaise in the system - because of excessive exploitation by politicians, landlords, nature and the local administrative machinery. Do we need agriculture that only competes with multinationals and corporate farming? As far as judicial action is concerned, we need to take concrete action that forces the state to take cognizance and react accordingly. We must be able to force the state to act. Also, concrete action, on specific issues like PESA or the environment, should result in PILs & court action that highlights the issue. There is much scope

for various issues to be included. While the action is largely symbolic, it does highlight the issue, even though alliances may be difficult. The timing of raising various demands also is critical, since it again spotlights the issue (like during the Assemble session).

Article 39 of the Constitution says that no government policy be made that alienates people from their rights. However, it is not binding on the government (like other rights like Right to Education, Right to Life, etc.).

Article 39 Certain principles of policy to be followed by the State

The State shall, in particular, direct its policy towards securing -

(a) that the citizen, men and women equally, have the right to an adequate means of livelihood;

(b) that the ownership and control of the material resources of the community are so distributed as best to subserve the common good;

(c) that the operation of the economic system does not result in the concentration of wealth and means of production to the common detriment;

(d) that there is equal pay for equal work for both men and women;

(e) that the health and strength of workers, men and women, and the tender age of children are not abused and that citizens are not forced by economic necessity to enter avocations unsuited to their age or strength;

(f) that children are given opportunities and facilities to develop in a healthy manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity and that childhood and youth are protected against exploitation and against moral and material abandonment.

While land and agriculture are state issues, international trade is a Central issue, and

thus the Centre is equally responsible for consequences arising from land issue like displacement of people, farmer suicides and distress migration.

“Withdrawal of institutional credit is not an appropriate phrase”, and MS Swaminathan says that the despicable standard of living and dearth of livelihood opportunities of tribals because of their inability to sell or transfer their land; they should be allowed to put their land up as collateral and thus be able to avail of credit and other institutional extension programme being offered by the government and other agencies. We need to look at all policies in totality since the government usually functions in isolation.

If the National Housing Policy statement say that there is scope for an investment of Rs 55,000-crore (in forex) in the country given the housing shortage, then have we ever stopped to think whose lands these houses are going to be built on?

The National Land Authority should genuinely listen to people and their land issues and not be run by a select few. Similarly, the Farmers Commission should listen to the people and not to its officials and office bearers. Otherwise it may result in increased feuding between people in villages instead of resolving land-related issues.

We need to prioritize our intervention: land of our villages for our villages, water of our villages for our villages only, and a village policy for our villages only- nobody - and nobody- should be allowed to meddle with these. These belong to our people in our villages, and any intervention or change should only be with



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their consent, not a top-down decision of which they are not party to.

Look at how our departments function, and how mutual jealousies and turf wars wage at the expense of people who have nothing to do with them: Madhya Pradesh has 48-lakh hectares of land that is under the jurisdiction of the forest department and not the revenue department. When the Supreme Court was approached by Ekta Parishad, it was referred to the Empowered Committee, which is nothing but a clique of environmentalists, and they decreed that there will be no hearing on issues related to forest lands. So, going to the courts has its advantages and disadvantages as well...

So, what we need to consider is whether we can win over more people, have a larger constituency to support us- that should be considered. And how to do an effective 'halla bol' (hue and cry agitation) that will make the government and its various departments wake up, listen to us and ultimately influence policy at the highest levels.

Rajendra Singh ('Waterman') Rajasthan.

"Dharti ke pet ka pani and uske ped aab hamare nahin hain, jo pahle hamare the (the water in the bowels of the Earth and its trees are no longer ours as they once were..."), despite the fact that our right to these resources is institutionalized in the Constitution of India.

We may win a legal battle for some relief, but we usually do

not reach where we want to reach. The legal battle does not help in that process for very long, for the obstacles and the processes are very long drawn and cumbersome. The law makers are those who we elect and send, and they also don't hesitate to break the law when it comes to their self interest and greed.

How many reforms have we had, but what has happened? Whenever a government policy document is ready for consideration, they will add that one sentence that will make the value of the document/ policy valueless and a futile exercise. The government say that because the community driven decentralized water management model does not have the security of the people's rights as its central concern, we must have the PPP model instead! What is the PPP? Where water ownership, operation, built and transfer of water-related assets belong to private parties! My question is where does the consumer stand, particularly the poor? Decades of promises from governments to provide free services have not worked anywhere. The policy itself has provided a barrier to the provision of services. Free services in fact disempower communities and destroy their leverage. It is fundamentally a "top down", centralist approach. It is inherently dependent on a remote bureaucracy. It is not only naive but dangerous because it destroys all local initiative.

Instead of large dams and water privatization, which expropriate resources from local communities, our movements are calling for more decentralized and community-based forms of water harvesting and management. Grassroots movements and NGOs across India have shown community water harvesting and management to be a viable way of

ensuring water security. This vision of water is part of a larger alternative development vision that calls for community control over land, forest, and water to prioritize meeting basic needs over corporate profits.

What does the government mean by equitable distribution is very simple - divide the water available in a dam by the cultivable command area of the project. Ensuring that every farmer gets that much in proportion to his/her landholding is what is meant by equitable distribution. Equity here is



being talked about only in the context of water stored in irrigation dams - rest of water resources including groundwater are out of the ambit. Further, even here, it is the landed farmers, those in the command area who are counted.

Thus, the landless, and those out of command - making up an overwhelming number of people - are left out. Among the most controversial functions is developing a framework for trading in water entitlements, determine the distribution of entitlements between various users, so that these entitle-



ments can then be "transferred, bartered, bought or sold on annual or seasonal basis within a market system". Is this what we want?

The new order has given away our life away to builders-water, air and jungle. We are scattered now as people working on various issues: while one of us is a specialist in forests, another is a specialist on water issues, while yet another is a specialist on land issues. We do not see things in totality. We must now say "we are fighting together for life", instead of fighting our own battles alone

or separately. For



remember one truth: even if you win to get a piece of land what will you do without water, fertilizers and access? Other laws on water, fertilizers and roads will not allow you to do anything...

Today, sadly, we do find anger, outrage and public outcry against atrocities and infringement of our rights anywhere. Where has all the passion and emotion gone? Do we no longer feel anything against ourselves and fellow human beings? Let us go to the people in our villages and small remote communities and invite them to join our movement.

Merely focusing on issues will scatter us- our fight, our struggle and our wining should rise above issues and look at things holistically, and then come together as one force.

I see this Janadesh as my fight..."

JOINT ACTION / JUDICIAL ACTION

- Forest documents are contradictory to revenue documents. Leased lands are another issue because plantation lands are not considered agriculture lands. Most plantations are closing and the right of land ownership should go to the workers because the land is leased. So a larger discussion needs to be initiated on these issues.

We need to approach the Supreme Court if necessary and simultaneously we should think of distributed land going to the most needy beneficiaries. For example, we have this bizarre anomaly that in the state of Kerela, the Government of Madhya Pradesh actually owns 500-acres of land! Why should this land not go to the widows of suicide farmers instead?

- Companies like the Dalmia's own large tracts of land in Kerela. However, the factory has been lying closed since the last 20-odd years and the land lying vacant. Similarly, Tata Coffee owns a mind-boggling 1-lakh-and 6000-acres of land for its coffee plantations in Coorg (Karnataka), but how has it come into owning such huge tracts of prime agriculture land for coffee production?

Janadesh should bring together these linkages on a common platform, so that all our issues, which vary from region to region, are highlighted.

- Somebody should stand up for the people. There should be a national level support group of eminent lawyers to press forward these cases and seek relief for the landless and the marginalized through court action & PIL's, if necessary.

- There should be a mapping of land character and groups involved in land struggle, and a national-level meeting of such groups organised.

- Leave the shape and scope of the andolan (agitation) to the people.

- But the andolan should be all-inclusive- all groups whose identity is now threatened should be made a part of this national-level consultation/meeting.

- The participation and nurturing of women leadership in Janadesh should be made a must. The women participants should also be actively urged- and supported- to articulate elaborately on their issues to people who are decision- and policy-makers at the highest levels, instead of mere sloganeering during Janadesh. Also, these women should have a Dalit, muslim or an unorganized sector background, which again speaks volumes of their arduous journey.

- Litigation has its own risk, because lawyers can change their stand as the wind blows! For example, there are today instances wherein people filing PIL's have been fined Rs 10,000! A more preferable route would be to approach commissions like the women's commis-



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sion, for example, or the human rights commission, for redress. Courts should, thus, be our last resort, not our first.

- The state process of Janadesh should have participation by various advocacy groups, dalits and others representing marginalized & landless communities.

- There should be a joint group in this state process, which both encourages other groups to come together on a united platform and gives them an open forum.

- Issues should go to people's court instead of legal courts. It should be a action group that really shakes things up at the community level!

- Most land in Tamil Nadu, for example, is in the hands of politicians, film stars and similar landed classes. The Chief Minister, Karunanidhi, by announcing that every farmer will get 2-acres of land, has actually only legalized land already in the clutches of encroachers.

This is because the landless and the farmers do not have any land. Now those who hold land illegally will be able to legalise their illegal holdings.

- There is a tribal community in Tamil Nadu which does not even have land for the burial of their dead!

- Land given in the name of women should have the condition that the title can also be transferred to her daughter, etc. In any circumstances, the title should not revert to the male member of the family, since it will be self-defeating then.

- The National Land Authority should have at least 40-50% women members as it

panelists.

- There is a need to involve the courts at the district level and link them to our issues, something that we have not yet addressed in our campaign plans. We have yet to develop a mechanism for this at the district level, and we can perhaps make a start by identifying and involving sensitive lawyers to our cause, and interacting with them on a regular basis.

- In terms of support systems, we need to link jan andolans with the judiciary and our political systems (like MPs & MLAs) and even make them electoral issues.

- We need to look at tribal reforms from the angle of women, and especially make an effort at soliciting their inputs, experiences and hurdles on issues like agrarian reforms and labour relations.

- Even the much-touted NREGA scheme needs to be looked at from our point-of-view. Just because the scheme offers job guarantee does not mean that we no longer need to look at agrarian reforms.

After all, unless our villagers have their own piece of land to work on, they will continue to be exploited by the landlords, and the system in general. After all, all work under the scheme stops during the agricultural cycle just to make cheap labour available to the landlords for sowing, tilling and harvesting.

- We must also understand that farmer suicides are taking place not so much because of lack of food but because of financial distress brought on by capital intensive farming and the resultant debt.

- Carbon credit is another booming business for many

corporates: just plant quick growing trees, and then, after 'buying' carbon credit because you have helped save so much CO2 from ruining the atmosphere further, you are free to do whatever you like.

- Let us think in terms of a Joint Collective Action Forum

- We must insist on networking and analysis of the country's land laws so as to draw up a knowledgeable and focused advocacy action plan and be able to influence decision making in government better.



- Let us also work towards strengthening our PRI system and giving them a voice in the decision making process that cannot be muffled or influenced in any way.

Swami Agnivesh

"I was watching the recent tamasha that the 1857 revolt celebrations have become. It seems that all such movements have become a joke in this country, whether it is the 1857 revolt or Gandhiji's Dandi yatra

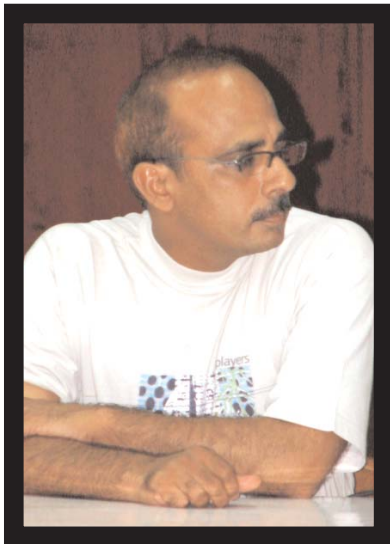
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(march). Look at the sheer waste- the government not only ensured a comfortable yatra for all the participating public, but pulled out all the stops in ensuring that everything went as planned- from helicopters and ambulances to food and water points every few yards along the road, and the entire government machinery making merry at the tax payers expense.

There was absolute disconnect with the common man during the entire course of the celebrations. So on one hand the government 'celebrates' the Dandi march, and on the other



issues a diktat the same day asking people not to buy salt made by our tribals because it does not contain iodine!

The Gwalior Janadesh march should be made into a janata (public) march, with people joining us on the way as they feel, showing solidarity with our cause. After all, we are coming out against the triumph of capitalism (of which our government is increasing becoming a part of). Because capitalism stands on private ownership, and globalization rests on privatization of resources. In

fact, sometimes it shows even more zeal than the industry it is supporting!

The challenge is global capitalism, which is privatizing our air, water and land!

Livelihoods of those who are involved in non-agricultural occupations are not even taken into account. It is appalling to note our government's manipulation in reducing its responsibility of rehabilitating people who have no titles to land and or whose own homes have been completely left out of the list of displaced people.

Sons and daughters who are to receive compensation are left out, or those entitled to compensation to a piece of land are disregarded by the government and their claim to land dismissed on any arbitrary pretext. Widows and adult daughters are shown as dependent and excluded from plot allotments.

While very little land for land is given to people in return of agricultural land, the few allotments are made show complete callousness of the government – either the land being given in lieu of agricultural land taken over by the government is already marked by the government for afforestation activities, in some cases, land which has been declared barren as per government records has been given away to people as agricultural land!

And they are lucky if the land they receive is not 100-km from their original place of residence, a place where they have lived for generations. The need now is of a political movement, not party. No kisan (farmer) movement is active today in our polity; all have either just frittered away or have co-opted with mainstream political parties. The farmers have to be given leadership. In

fact, we should tell the farmers "don't commit suicide; instead, be ready to die of hunger and starvation instead". These farmers, under our stewardship, can start a true Satyagraha. It is extremely sad that our representatives have no time for the very people who send them there in the first place. Instead, once in the Parliament or the State Assembly, they waster precious resources debating frivolous issues, and have no ear for the real issues of this country.

Which State Assembly or the Parliament runs its session honestly and sincerely?"

PV Rajagopalan, President, Ekta Parishad

"I think I should share with the gathered audience the progress we have made in Ekta Parishad in garnering support to Janadesh. Muzafarpur in Bihar is the constituency of the Rural Development Minister. Journalists and activists were able to corner him on the issue of land reform and Janadesh during his last visit to the constituency.

You may remember that the Rural Development Minister of India was deputed by the Prime Minister to talk to Ekta Parishad in October 2006. In his statement to the media in Muzafarpur he said that all the issues related to Janadesh will be solved before October 2007.

Lokendra Bhai and Basanth Bhai are designing a strong strategy to mobilize public opinion in Muzafarpur around Jandadesh and keep pressurizing the minister on this particular issue.

I have written a letter to Ms. Sonia Gandhi president of Indian national Congress Party.



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Her party is in power in India at the moment. The Human Resource Development Minister, Arjun Singh, who is very senior member of the congress party, has written a letter to Ms. Sonia Gandhi requesting her to find some time to talk to Ekta Parishad on issues related to Janadesh. We are waiting for her response.

I had two rounds of meetings with the former Chief Justice of India, P.N.Bhagawati. He is a very progressive person and in general agrees with the idea that the natural resources should be made available to the poor people of the country to fight poverty and deprivation.

We have provided him with sufficient documents to take up the issues with the Prime Minister and convince him about the importance of National Land Authority, fast track courts and a single window system to deal with land and livelihood problems. I hope the discussion between Justice Bhagawathi and the Prime Minister will create a climate for future dialogue between Ekta Parishad and the authorities.

Mr. SN Subba Rao, a senior Gandhian, met the Prime Minister on the 21st of April, 2007, to draw his attention to Janadesh and related issues.

A letter was also sent to the Prime Minister by the Vice President of the European Parliament, requesting him to look in to all the issues raised by Janadesh process.

The President of India will be visiting the European Parliament soon. The Vice President of the European Parliament, Mr. Onesta, is going to place matters related to Janadesh to the President as well. Having done so much in

the field of lobbying and knowing that we are moving closer to Janadesh 2007, I thought I should seek your support in shaping our advocacy work in such a way that we are able to create the expected impact. I am sure your experience in this field will help us to move ahead.

We have also been progressing state level action. The land commission and Ekta Parishad are collaborating well in the state of Bihar. In Orissa, the Chief Secretary has agreed to clear the backlog related to land through village level meetings.

At the NGO meeting in Hyderabad organized by COVA, there was an agreement to organize support rallies in all the thirty districts in Andhra Pradesh in the month of October. We are trying to contact organizations and individuals across the country to organize at least 400 district level rallies on 2nd of October in support of Janadesh 2007. We hope that action in 400 districts out of 607 districts in India should be large enough to create an impact”.

In his concluding remarks, Rajaji said that Janadesh would no longer be limited to just nivedan (requesting) but would instead deliver an aadesh (order) to the government to act on land issues in earnest. “no more pleading or imploring the government, otherwise we will miss the boat forever”, he said. He added that “Now that we have been able to establish ownership and that is expanding exponentially, Janadesh is now ready to broad-base its message and outreach to other movements and peoples across states. We will make it a truly people’s movement, and if the government does not wake up now, then we will tell them we will come back with thousands of

our fellow men to your cities and not leave till you listen to our cries!”.

After the discussions, a **Janadesh National Coordination Committee** was set up, with the following (tentative) membership:

- **PV Rajagopalan**
President
Ekta Parishad
New Delhi.
- **Shri Eknath**
Maharashtra
- **Shri Pankaj**
Jharkhand



- **Shri Sadhu Sharan Singh**
Bihar
- **Shri Uman Singh**
Himachal Pradesh
- **Shri PT John**
Kerela
- **Shri Ramesh Chandra Sharma**
Ekta Parishad
New Delhi.

Shri Ramesh Sharma of Ekta Parishad gave the concluding vote of thanks.