

Medical Center Cologne Hosts Ekta Parishad

Cologne, Germany, June 21st through 23rd 2014



The first sentence of the Bill of Human Right reads:

"Each human being has the right to live in dignity"

Prithvi Sukta, Atharva Veda:

"The Earth upon which the sea, and the rivers and waters, upon which food and the tribes of man have arisen, upon which this breathing, moving life exists, shall afford us precedence in drinking."

In his facilities in Cologne in Germany, **Robert Gorter**, the director of **Medical Center Cologne (MCC)** hosted the annual international congress of the non-profit organization **Ekta Parishad** (“unity forum” in Hindi) is a large Indian activist movement founded in 1991 by **P.V. Rajagopa**. Ekta Parishad is a federation of approximately 11,000 community-based organizations and has about 250.000 individual members. It is currently actively operating in 11 states.



Janadesh 2007, Delhi

The two main activities of Ekta Parishad are: dialoguing with the government at the state and national level and mobilizing the villagers for struggle at the grassroots level. Yet both are interlinked: people are struggling at the bottom level and their struggle is supported by a formation of institutions giving them the tools to fight for their rights (using democracy and non-violence) at the top level, through dialogue. *Vice versa*, there are supporters dialoguing at the

top level to give space for political action and/or struggle at the bottom level.

The grassroots struggle is centered on the struggle for land rights. Approximately 70% of India's population depends on access to land and its natural resources for their livelihood. Without any legal claim to these lands, thousands of people are forced to migrate to urban centers everyday where they are left with no choice but to become manual laborers without rights or financial and life security. Thousands of people in India unite to free themselves from the oppressive hold that the land policies of this country have over their lives.



Ekta Parishad thus pressures the top and the bottom of the Indian political and administrative system, which is mainly blocked due to

severe corruption on all levels of government. The latter engenders an inefficient distribution of information and inequitable distribution at the grassroots levels. The people at the bottom level don't receive what they need to live in a decent way and are powerless.



March to Delhi (2007)

Ekta Parishad helps the people by empowering them in order to defend their rights and provides a platform for people to share their experiences and ideas with the confidence that their voices will be heard.



***Rajagopal** speaking to 25,000 people, Janadesh 2007*

In the footsteps of Mahatma Ghandi

In March 1930, Ghandi's **Salt Sartyagraha** (Salt march) was a march of 24 days and 395 km from Sabartmati Ahram to Don the Gujarat coast to oppose the British production and taxation of salt. After Ghandi's arrest, 2.700 people stayed behind in Adharrasa in coastal Gujarat and resisted salt as being mined by the British. These people were beaten and tortured mercilessly with steel rods by the British army, and yet they continued to resist in spite of four death and hundreds of people sustaining major injuries of which in the days thereafter still many succumbed. It was this follow up, and actually not the actual Salt March, which was the beginning of the end of the British rule and colonial administration.

The elements of resistance were:

- 1) Maintaining courage in face of oppression
- 2) Seeking reconciliation with , rather than defeat of opponents
- 3) Accepting self-suffering without causing harm to others
- 4) Rejecting physical means of violence; and
- 5) Retaining hope that social justice would result.
- 6) Mahatma Ghandi experimented with these non-violent techniques in South Africa, but they were originally derived from Jainism and other Hindustani and Buddhist traditions

(NB: **Jainism** traditionally known as Jaina dharma (Sanskrit: જૈન ધર્મ), is an Indian religion that prescribes a path of non-violence towards all living beings and emphasizes spiritual independence and equality between all forms of life. Practitioners believe that non-violence and self-control are the means by which they can obtain liberation.



Morena (05.10.2012)

The word Jainism is derived from the Sanskrit verb root in ("to conquer"). It refers to a battle with the passions and bodily pleasures that the Jain ascetics undertake. Those who win this battle are termed as Jina (conqueror). The term Jaina is therefore used to refer to laymen and ascetics of this tradition alike.

Jainism is one of the oldest religions in the world. Jains traditionally trace their history through a succession of twenty-four propagators of their faith known as tirthankaras with Rishabha as the first and Mahāvīra as the last of the current era.



For long periods of time, Jainism was the state religion of Indian kingdoms and widely adopted in the Indian subcontinent. The religion has been in decline since the 8th century CE due to the growth of, and oppression by the followers of Hinduism and especially by the Islam as the Islam sanctions violence for almost any failure in their eyes and go to war or practice corporal punishments for almost any offence. And Holy Wars (Jihad) are even a Holy Duty.)



Land-Movements and Non-Violence

In India, the most publicized land-movement was the Bhoodhan movement. On the 1950's and 1960's, a disciple of Mahatma Ghandi, Vinodha Bhave walked across the country asking for gifts of land. His strategy was to ask land-owning families to treat him as one of their own and give him one share of the land, which can then be redistributed to the landless people. It took 14 years for Bhave to walk across the country and collect more than 4 million acres of land. This was a radical approach based on his philosophy of "change of heart" The left-political parties often criticized this approach because they thought that Vinobha Bhave was trying to protect the landowners and prevent a forceful law that would enable the state to take over the farmer's land.



Farmers and Landless Laborers in a Common Cause

Like in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, many farmers said: “We may get a small compensation when our land is taken by the government; but what will the laborers get?” And: “if the government will continue to take all our lands what are we going to do?” And: “We are making a living by working on those farms that are now taken from us.”



No commentary



Police everywhere when it is about peaceful demonstrations but none when farmers are expelled from their land by force and through bulldozers and Mafioso individuals

The Politics of Displacement

The major debate in current India is the development of the country into an industrialized nation. Some call it the Politics of Development but others call it the Politics of Displacement. Currently, the major problems are the struggles for a fair and proper rehabilitation. And, there is the problem of displacement. If one's family has been living and working on a piece of land as a farmer for thousands of years, how does one suddenly "overnight" find a new home and a way to survive economically and culturally?

Often, corrupt local governmental personnel and judges take a significant part of the financial compensation of what was awarded to the farmer(s) in question and the farmer who lost his land "to make the development of India into a modern state possible" might receive 10-20% of what was awarded to him.

Businessmen play a big role in the displacements of farmers by offering support of improving the infrastructure and build school a local, etc. Of course, nothing is done. Recently, several cases made it finally with our help to the "High Court" in Delhi and it was a general consensus among the foreign observers that the High Court clearly sided with big business and the pretention "India must become a modern industrialized nation!"



Twelve thousand extremely poor and displaced farmers and their families walking in the Gandhi non-violent tradition organized by Ekta Parishad (October 2012)

P.V. Rajagopal is an academic and activist; he is Vice Chairman of the Gandhi Peace Foundation, New Delhi, and the president and founding member of Ekta Parishad, a grassroots right-based organization which organized the massive non-violent landless march Janadesh 2007 and Jan Satyagraha 2012.

Rajagopal grew up in Kerala, a state in south India and then pursued agricultural studies at Seva Gram. In the early 70s he worked in the violence-ridden area of Chambal in Madhya Pradesh to help rehabilitate dacoits.

Rajagopal decided to use only his first name in order not to be associated with a caste.

In the years that followed, Rajagopal travelled to several tribal areas and developed an understanding of plight and needs of India's tribal people. Their cause became part of his lifetime mission. After setting up a number of training organizations across Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Orissa, the subsequent mobilization led to the consolidation of a people's organization, namely, Ekta Parishad in 1991. This organization is focused on people's control over livelihood resources in an environment where land is being grabbed, and where forest rights are not being implemented. This is making the Gandhian vision of the advancement of self-reliant communities and local governance, more challenging.

After consolidating a membership of at least 250,000 people (majority women) across six states, Rajagopal began using the Gandhian technique of foot-march or padayatra to galvanize greater support among the poor. With a track record of 10 state level foot-marches, he led a national march to Delhi in October 2007. In the march, Janadesh 2007 25,000 people marched 340 kilometers from Gwalior to Delhi and compelled the Government to take action and land reforms and forest rights. The campaign had three main demands: The campaign has three specific demands around land reform. These were:

1. Establishment of a National Land Authority to provide a clear statement of land utilization in India
2. Establishment of fast track courts to settle past and future conflicts related to land
3. Establishment of a single window system so that farmers can resolve easily and freely the land issues

After the marchers were imprisoned up for a full day in the Ram Lila grounds (a stadium), the Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and the

Rural Development Minister agreed to all the demands and set up a National Land Commission chaired by the Prime Minister on which Rajagopal was also given a seat.



Declaration of Decisive Action - 3rd October 2012, Gwalior.

In my opinion, Rajagopal's big mistake was to accept a seat in yet another committee that would come up with recommendations for the development of rural areas. Part of the tactics of corrupt governments is to establish committees that meet once or twice a year to come up with a discussion paper on how to come up with recommendations to the government in Delhi. And to offer a position in such a committee to a strong opponent of current politics is part of the tactics to make him one of them; to make him part of the system.



Though the Land Reform Commission has issued its report, the government has not yet accepted it (of course!!). Rajagopal is therefore organizing yet another, still larger march, Jansatyagraha 2012 which will be involving 100,000 persons. The planning and carrying-out of the foot march will be done by 6'000 leaders across 25 states.



Land reform is a (on purpose?) forgotten agenda in State policy today. But given the jobless growth of the Indian economy and the spurt in rural violence, with people protesting their lack of access to land, water and jungle, it is land that must provide livelihoods not only to labor already attached to agriculture and allied pursuits, but also to a segment of surplus urban unemployed returning to rural areas for shelter and livelihood. This can only be facilitated by a consistent land reform policy



There is a lot of literature on the present problems in agriculture, including several volumes of the Swaminathan Commission report. All of it deals with techno-economic factors such as the lack of public investment in the primary sector, unfavorable terms of trade for agriculture, chemical fertilizers, absence of institutional credit facilities, etc.

All of these factors are important. But there has never been any serious discussion on the mode and relations of production in agriculture. These techno-economic factors must be viewed in the context of agrarian relations. Unless agrarian relations are conducive, the availability of investment, credit etc. will not by themselves solve the agrarian crisis.



West Bengal is now recognized as an agriculturally advanced state. But from 1891 to 1981, agricultural growth rates in Bengal varied between 0% and 1% per annum. The century-old stagnation came to an end in 1982-83 thanks to a conglomeration of a number of conducive forces in production relations. This point is often ignored by the agriculture pundits: land reforms in West Bengal played an important role.



Jawaharlal Nehru, byname *Pandit* (Hindi: “Pundit” or “Teacher”) was born in 1889 in Allahabad and died in 1964, in New Delhi, first prime minister of independent India (1947–64), who established parliamentary government and became noted for his “neutralist” policies in foreign affairs. He was also one of the principal leaders of India’s independence movement in the 1930s and ’40s.

Jawaharlal Nehru’s (1889-1964) autobiography offers a vivid account of the participation of peasants and agricultural workers both in the civil disobedience movement of 1921 and the non-cooperation movement of 1931. Peasants took part in these movements in large numbers and suffered repression and police atrocities in the hope that political freedom would be accompanied by their emancipation from the oppression and bondage of the Taluqdar and Zamindar who were the ‘lords of the land’ and whom Nehru described as “the spoilt

children of the British government". Swami Sahajanand, the first president of the All-India Kisan Congress (then a front organization for the Indian National Congress) asserted in 1936 that "no compromise was possible between the peasants and the landlords except dispossession of Zamindars of their land" (Bandyopadhyay: Land Labor and Governance, World View, Kolkata, 2007, p 102). Radical land reform was accepted as a post-Independence program of action by a large section of the Congress, particularly those who described themselves as the "Congress Socialists Group".

Soon after Independence, the All-India Congress Committee (AICC) set up the Congress Agrarian Reform Committee, commonly known as the Kumarappa Committee. Among other measures, the committee proposed fairly radical ceilings on land. The First Five-Year Plan generally endorsed the recommendations of the Kumarappa Committee and left it to the states to implement the ceiling provisions depending on the realities of each state. Since then, land reform has been an item for action in all five-year plans. In the Seventh Five-Year Plan, there was a clear statement linking land reform with other major programs in the plan. It stated clearly: "Land reforms have been recognized to constitute a vital element both in terms of the anti-poverty strategy and for modernization and increased productivity in agriculture. Redistribution of land could provide a permanent asset base for a large number of rural landless poor for taking up land-based and other supplementary activities. Similarly, consolidation of holding, tenancy regulation and updating of land records would widen the access of small and marginal landholders to improved technology and inputs thereby directly leading to increase in agricultural production." In short, this document, though late in the day, acknowledged the centrality of

land reform in the whole process of rural development and poverty alleviation.

After this late recognition came the tsunami of liberalization which drowned all issues of fairness and justice in the socio-economic field.

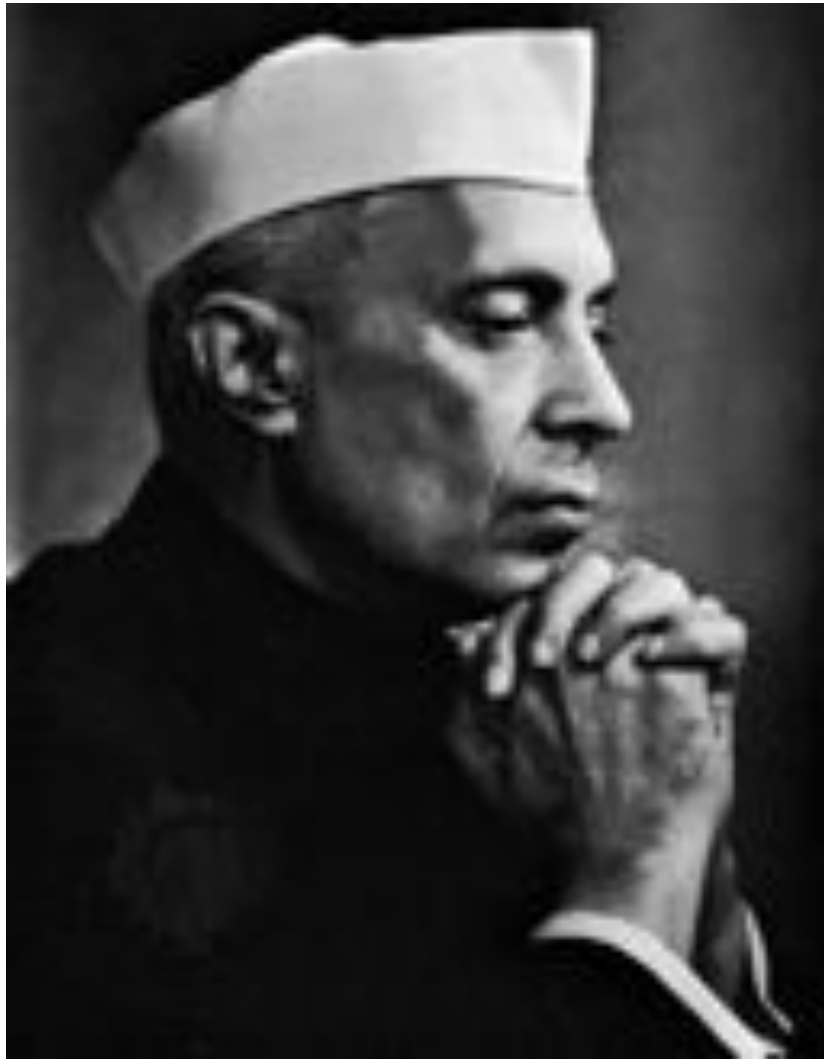
Enthusiasm for land reform abated in the early-'60s when India faced a major food crisis, particularly in the eastern region. Naturally, the focus shifted from land reform to enhancement of grain production and productivity. Land reforms retreated from the foreground. But rural unrest in the late-'60s and early-'70s brought it into sharp focus again. In 1972, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi convened a meeting of chief ministers to tackle the problem of rising rural unrest, commonly known as 'Naxalism'. At that meeting, the then Home Minister Y B Chavan made his oft-quoted famous statement: "We will not allow the green revolution to turn into a red revolution." At the meeting, a consensus was arrived at to reduce land ceiling and to introduce family-based ceiling on land, tenancy reform and other similar measures.

However, things did not happen the way one would have expected. Reviewing the situation almost a decade later, the Sixth Five-Year Plan (1980-85) observed: "If progress on land reforms has been less than satisfactory, it has not been due to a flaw in policy but to indifferent implementation. Often the necessary determination has been lacking to effectively undertake action, particularly in the matter of implementation of ceiling laws, consolidation of holdings and in not vigorously pursuing concealed tenancies and having them vested with tenancy/occupancy rights as enjoined under the law."

When neo-liberal economic policies hit India with gale force in 1991, land reform went off the radar of the Indian polity; it became a forgotten agenda in State policy. Marketeters dominated all segments

of governance and they found it repugnant to talk about land reform or even mention it in polite society in case investors and other big operators in the market were frightened away by any sign of government intervention in the land/lease market. They considered the existing land reform laws that were enacted on the basis of central guidelines in the early-'70s not just roadblocks but detrimental to the free play of capital in the land/lease market. In short, they wanted to do away with the peasantry and the peasant way of life. For many of them, land reform had become totally irrelevant, an undesirable anachronism in the heady days of liberalization, privatization and globalization.

This is one side of the story. On the other side, according to our present prime minister, 'Naxalism' poses the most serious threat to the internal security of the country. The Ministry of Home Affairs' assessment, in 2006, was that 120-150 districts in 12 states were "Naxal-infested". Obviously, normal writs of the State did not operate in these areas. Thus, a huge chunk of mainland India was being "governed" by extra-legal and, in some places, illegal authorities. The assessment also showed that militants, whoever they were, had established a rapport with the local population due to which they were able to move about freely evading and avoiding the pincers of the law-enforcing authorities. They were proving to the hilt Mao Tse-tung's doctrine of 'Fish in Water', where the fish were the militants and the water the mass of disgruntled, disaffected peasantry and landless agricultural workers. If the disaffection of the latter could be substantially reduced, the water would evaporate and the militants disappear.



Nehru

The present spurt in rural violence has once again highlighted the issue of poor people's access to land, water and jungle. Will there be a knee-jerk response from the State in terms of temporary palliatives? Or will there be a consistent long-term policy framework for land reform in all its different facets? That is the issue that confronts the intelligentsia today.

The rural violence that we are currently witnessing in India is not an isolated and totally indigenous event. There are similar movements in several countries in Latin and Central America and in parts of South Africa, the Philippines and Indonesia. What we are seeing in these

countries, in the form of violent land movements, is basically the 'third wave' of Left politics. As the agrarian crisis becomes more acute, there is a deepening of the political vacuum in the countryside. The traditional parties of the Left, which had a rather nebulous relationship with the dispossessed in the countryside, have by and large succumbed to the logic of capital, either to obtain power or to continue in power after obtaining it; they eschew Marxian Left policies although many still carry the name of Marx on their breastplates as a brand name (logo). Some of these traditional Left parties openly and unashamedly promote neo-liberalism in its crude form, discarding even the fig leaf of egalitarianism, not to mention socialism.

Third wave 'virulent' Left politics is the direct result of the traditional Left's subservience to the needs of capital exhibited through its adherence to neo-liberal economic reform policies. So we have the violent Maoist movement in India, the Zapatistas in Mexico, PARC in Columbia, MST in Brazil, and the Hook in the Philippines.

The hopes our early planners had -- that with the country's rapid industrialization, surplus labor in agriculture would be drawn away and absorbed into the secondary and tertiary sectors -- were never realized. At the end of the Tenth Five-Year Plan, almost 60% of India's labor force is still engaged in the primary sector, contributing around 21% to the country's GDP. Industry employs 17% of the labor force, producing 27% of GDP. What is happening in India is not unique. China, which is today the third largest country in the world for manufactured commodities, still has 49% of its labor force engaged in agriculture, producing 15.2% of the country's GDP; industry engages only 22% of the labor force, contributing 52.9% of GDP (figures quoted from 'Pocket World in Figures 2007: A Concise Edition', The Economist, p 60 and p 66). This shows that macro-economic growth

in both these contexts has failed to create better prospects for the rural poor in allowing them to acquire productive assets, get gainful employment or significantly improve their income and quality of life.



Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru being greeted by U.S. Pres. Harry S. Truman at the start of Nehru's visit to the United States in October 1949; Nehru's daughter, Indira, who later served as prime minister, is on the right

Employment figures for the organized private and public sectors present a dismal picture. In 1991, total employment in this segment was 267.33 lakh. It went up to 282.85 lakh in 1997. Since then it had been continuously dropping. In 2004, the figure was 264.43 lakh, 3 lakh less than the figure for 1991 when liberalization was initiated.

We are therefore witnessing a gradual squeezing out of regular employment, increasing the pool of the urban unemployed. What is also happening is that regular jobs are being 'casualized' in the organized sector. Casual employment is also getting 'feminized', putting a greater burden on women to earn a livelihood and look after the household. The ILO describes this situation as the "feminization of poverty".

It is now evident that the UNDP's prediction in the mid-'90s -- of ruthless, pitiless, uncaring 'jobless growth' -- is turning out to be true in the Indian context. As a result, a majority of the additional labor force in rural areas will necessarily have to be absorbed both in the farm and non-farm segments of the rural economy. We may also have to deal with the back-flow of urban labor of rural origin rendered unemployed through the process of jobless growth. Under the circumstances, land will have to provide some sort of livelihood not only to labor already attached to agriculture and allied pursuits, but also to a segment of surplus urban unemployed returning to rural areas for shelter and livelihood. Hence it is being increasingly recognized that without a significant policy shift towards comprehensive land reforms, including a program for getting more land under ceiling laws for redistribution, security of tenure for tenants-at-will, access of the poor to common property resources (CPR), proper social and economic rehabilitation of displaced people from coercively acquired land, a further deterioration of the economic, social and political conditions of the rural poor can neither be arrested nor reversed.

The interaction between poverty, food security and resource rights is starting to bring about a refocusing of national and international agendas on the revival of agrarian reforms and resource tenure for

agricultural communities as well as fisher's men folk and coastal communities, forest-dwellers, pastoralists and other traditional resource users.

Agrarian reform is primarily about changing relationships. First, it aims to change access and tenure relationships. Second, it aims to change the current culture of exclusion so that the poor gain access to credit, technology, markets and other productive services. Third, it aims at making the poor active participants in the development of policies and programs affecting them and their livelihoods.

While talking about redistributive land reforms, coercive evictions from land and livelihood because of compulsory acquisition of land for 'development purposes' are greatly aggravating poverty distress and landlessness of project-affected persons (PAP). A well-known scholar Dr Walter Fernandes estimated that between 1951 and 2005, roughly 55 million people were forcibly evicted from their land through land acquisition processes. This is a colossal figure; it is more than the population of the majority of member countries of the United Nations. Tribals constitute 40% of PAP; the absolute figure would be around 22 million out of a total tribal population of a little over 80 million. It appears that tribals who have the least sustaining power have borne the brunt of development. It is estimated that only 18-20% of displaced tribals have been properly resettled and rehabilitated. Thus a vast majority of displaced, homeless, landless and jobless tribals is moving about like flotsam and jetsam in the cruel development process. They are depressed and dejected, annoyed and angry.

The situation is worsened by the almost mindless ‘landgrabs’ in the name of Special Economic Zones (SEZs). This is nothing short of the rich man grabbing the poor man’s land for himself. It is difficult to come up with exact figures as they change every day, but this new **landgrab** has given rise to sharp popular resistance as witnessed in Nandigram in West Bengal and Jagatsinghpur in Orissa. Halfway across the world, in the Chiapas region of southern Mexico, indigenous people declared in 1980: “We demand absolute respect for our communitarian self-determination over our land, over our natural resources and over the forms of organization that we wish to give ourselves. We are opposed to having our natural resources plundered in the name of a supposed national development.”

Our scheduled tribe (ST) leadership had been demanding almost the same thing. Partly in response to this, the central government enacted PESA in 1996 giving substantial power to the gram sabha and other tiers of the panchayat in the fifth scheduled areas. Unfortunately, state governments observe the law more in the breach than in adherence, fuelling tribal anger against the establishment.

Common property resources (CPR), where every member of the community has easy access and usage facilities, used to be an integral part of the social and economic life of the village poor, particularly landless and land-poor households. Among the landless, a vast majority belonged to Dalit groups which had to depend heavily on CPR for their survival. A study in seven states in semi-arid areas indicated that CPR accounted for 9-26% of the household income of landless and marginal farmers, 91-100% for their fuel wood

requirements and 69-89% for their grazing needs (Jodha, 1986, Reclaiming Land).



The daughter of Neruh who became the second Prime Minster as Indira Gandhi

The expropriation of CPR in order to hand land over to the corporate sector for agribusiness and industry has caused ‘de-peasantization’ among farming communities and accentuated the misery of already poor landless and marginal farmers, most of whom are Dalits. Depeasantization directly increases landlessness and acute poverty, coupled with assetlessness and debt bondage.

The last five decades of ceiling law application in the country have resulted in the vesting of 7.43 million acres of land, of which 5.70 million acres were taken over and 4.34 million acres distributed

among roughly 5 million beneficiaries. The total area vested is less than 1% of the total area of 812.63 million acres in the country; barely over 2% of arable land area.

The National Sample Survey Organization's (NSSO's) survey of land ownership patterns in 2003 also shows extremely skewed landholding patterns. At the all-India level, marginal and small owners constituted 90.40% of the total number of owners. But they owned only 43.43% of land, whereas medium and large farmers who constituted only 9.60% of landowners owned as much as 56.21% of land. Therefore the argument that there will be no land available for a third wave of acquisition of ceiling-surplus land is incorrect.

The achievements so far have hardly been worth writing home about. There is enough evidence the world over to show that self-cultivation on small farms yields significantly higher levels of productivity than large farms cultivated by tenants or hired labor. Therefore, equity and efficiency demand that the ceiling limit be drastically reduced to the level of 5 to 10 acres per family. Since the various classifications of land provide ample opportunity to landowners to evade ceiling, the law must come up with a simple definition of land as given in the standard English dictionary. If this is done, a number of escape routes will be blocked in one stroke. Moreover, the law must provide for the cancellation of all benami and farzi documents retrospectively, as these are proven methods of evasion.

On the tenancy front the picture is not very bright. The National Sample Survey (NSS) figure of 6-7% is generally admitted to be an underestimation. Tenancy being illegal in many states, respondents often do not disclose the truth. Several micro-studies indicate that the incidence of tenancy varies between 15-35%. These are all concealed tenancies run under extremely exploitative terms, under oral contracts. The emergence of the phenomenon of reverse

tenancy is also cause for serious concern. Hence, while discouraging the earlier system of rent-seeking sub-infeudation, leasing-in and leasing-out of land for cultivation should be permitted within a ceiling limit. All non-owner crop-sharing tillers of land should be recorded, prescribing fair sharing of crop @ 75% (for the tiller) and 25% (for the owner), and they should have heritable rights of cultivation without title to the land. The moment recorded sharecroppers get a certificate of sharecropping they will become bankable. This will infuse institutional credit to augment both production and productivity.

Other points to be considered could be:

- 1) A massive operation should be undertaken to restore alienated tribal lands to their rightful tribal owners.
- 2) Appropriate amendments of the Land Acquisition Act of 1894 and Coal Bearing Areas (Acquisition Development) Act of 1957 in tune with PESA.

Issue of 'user pattas' in the names of women and men for use of CPR including tree pattas for forest-dwellers and water pattas for fisherfolk over inland or coastal CPR waterbodies.

- 3) Setting up of a dispute settlement mechanism at the gram panchayat level with gram panchayat members and representatives of beneficiary groups, with a representative of the bureaucracy as a member-convenor, to keep records and explain the legal position.

All these points have to be thrashed out through intense public debate.

In real terms, land reform must entail the disempowerment of a small empowered caucus of people and the empowerment of many powerless people by the transfer of land resources from the former

to the latter, through State intervention. In a democratic society, this can be carried out without bloodshed. But there will inevitably be some tears. There will be strong resistance from vested interests, particularly among the landowning classes. The key to success will be strong organizations of prospective beneficiaries vociferously demanding change in their favor, backed by equally forceful political will on the part of the State intervening on behalf of the rural poor and dispossessed. The birth of a better social order cannot be without its birth pangs.



Land Grab

Land is life. It is the basis of livelihoods for peasants and indigenous people across the Third World and is also becoming the most vital asset in the global economy. As the resource demands of globalization increase, land has emerged as a key source of conflict. In India, 65 per cent of people are dependent on land. At the same time a global economy, driven by speculative finance and limitless consumerism, wants the land for mining and for industry, for towns, highways, and biofuel plantations. The speculative economy of global finance is hundreds of times larger than the value of real goods and services produced in the world.

Financial capital is hungry for investments and (quick) returns on investments. It must give commodity everything on the planet - land and water, plants and genes, microbes and mammals. The commodification of land is fuelling the corporate land grab in India, both through the creation of Special Economic Zones and through foreign direct investment in real estate.

Land, for most people in the world, is Terra Madre, Mother Earth, Bhoomi, Dharti Ma. The land is people's identity; it is the ground of culture and economy. The bond with the land is a bond with Bhoomi, our Earth; 75 per cent of the people in the Third World live on the land and are supported by the land. The Earth is the biggest employer on the planet: 75 per cent of the wealth of the people of the global south is in land.

Colonization was (is) based on the violent takeover of land. And now, globalization as re-colonization is leading to a massive land grab in India, in Africa, in Latin America. Land is being grabbed for speculative investment, for speculative urban sprawl, for mines and

factories, for highways and expressways. Land is being grabbed from farmers after trapping them in debt and pushing them to suicide.

India's Land Issues

In India, the land grab is facilitated by the toxic mixture of the colonial Land Acquisition Act of 1894 (!), the deregulation of investments and commerce through neo-liberal policies - and with it the emergence of the rule of uncontrolled greed and exploitation. It is facilitated by the creation of a police state and the use of colonial sedition laws which define defense of the public interest and national interest as anti-national.

The World Bank has worked for many years to commodify land. The 1991 World Bank structural adjustment program reversed land reform, deregulated mining, roads and ports. While the laws of independent India to keep land in the hands of the tiller were reversed, the 1894 Land Acquisition Act was untouched.

Thus the state could forcibly acquire the land from the peasants and tribal peoples and hand it over to private speculators, real estate corporations, mining companies and industry.

Across the length and breadth of India, from Bhatta in Uttar Pradesh (UP) to Jagatsinghpur in Orissa to Jaitapur in Maharashtra, the government has declared war on our farmers, our Annadatas, in order to grab their fertile farmland.

Their instrument is the colonial Land Acquisition Act - used by foreign rulers against Indian citizens. The government is behaving as the foreign rulers did when the Act was first enforced in 1894, appropriating land through violence for the profit of corporations - JayPee Infratech in Uttar Pradesh for the Yamuna expressway, POSCO in Orissa and AREVA in Jaitapur - grabbing land for private profit and

not, by any stretch of the imagination, for any public purpose. This is rampant in the country today.

These land wars have serious consequences for our nation's democracy, our peace and our ecology, our food security and rural livelihoods. The land wars must stop if India is to survive ecologically and democratically.

While the Orissa government prepares to take the land of people in Jagatsinghpur, people who have been involved in a democratic struggle against land acquisition since 2005, Rahul Gandhi makes it known that he stands against forceful land acquisition in a similar case in Bhatta in Uttar Pradesh. The Minister for the Environment, Mr Jairam Ramesh, admitted that he gave the green signal to pass the POSCO project - reportedly under great pressure. One may ask: "Pressure from whom?" This visible double standard when it comes to the question of land in the country must stop.

Police in India have broken up a mass hunger strike led by the country's most famous yoga guru by detaining him briefly and using tear gas on his supporters.

Baba Ramdev, who has a following of over 30 million, owns a 'peace' island in Scotland, and is worth over \$40m, had been fasting in the Indian capital New Delhi since Saturday to press the government for tougher action against rampant corruption.

Hundreds of police officers swooped down early on Sunday on the venue of the hunger strike and forcibly removed the guru and thousands of his supporters. About 30 people were injured in the police action.

Officers claimed to have detained Baba Ramdev for security reasons, but later released him, said Rajan Bhagat, a police spokesperson.

"The permission was for a yoga camp for 5,000 not for 50,000 people for agitation. We have cancelled the permission and asked them to move out," Bhagat added.

Attempts by the federal government to dissuade the guru from going on fast had failed earlier with talks between him and ministers breaking down

One of Baba Ramdev's key demands includes government steps to get back "unaccounted wealth" that the corrupt have stashed away abroad.

The government said on Saturday that it had agreed to most of Ramdev's demands, but he appeared determined to continue his fast.

The forcible eviction could potentially lead to a hardening of Baba Ramdev's stance and spark protests by his supporters across the country.

His fast came weeks after a similar hunger strike by veteran social activist Anna Hazare galvanized the Indian middle class and put the government under immense pressure.

Ashis Nandy, a sociologist and political scientist, said Baba Ramdev is popular primarily as a yoga guru and teacher, but the police action to disband his meeting may help him become a more prominent public figure now.

Violation of the Land

In Bhatta Parsaul, Greater Noida (UP), about 6000 acres of land is being acquired by infrastructure company Jaiprakash Associates to build luxury townships and sports facilities - including a Formula 1

racetrack - in the guise of building the Yamuna Expressway. In total, the land of 1225 villages is to be acquired for the 165km Expressway. The farmers have been protesting this unjust land acquisition, and during peaceful demonstrations, four people died - while many were injured during a clash between protesters and the police on May 7, 2011. If the government continues its land wars in the heart of India's bread basket, there will be no chance for peace.

In any case, money cannot compensate for the alienation of land. As 80-year-old Parshuram, who lost his land to the Yamuna Expressway, said: "You will never understand how it feels to become landless."

While land has been taken from farmers at Rs 300 (\$6) per square meter by the government - using the Land Acquisition Act - it is sold by developers at Rs 600,000 (\$13,450) per square meter - **a 200,000 per cent increase in price** - and hence profits. This land grab and the profits contribute to poverty, dispossession and conflict.

Similarly, on April 18, in Jaitapur, Maharashtra, police opened fire on peaceful protesters demonstrating against the Nuclear Power Park proposed for a village adjacent to the small port town. One person died and at least eight were seriously injured. The Jaitapur nuclear plant will be the biggest in the world and is being built by French company AREVA. After the Fukushima disaster, the protest has intensified - as has the government's stubbornness.

Today, a similar situation is brewing in Jagatsinghpur, Orissa, where 20 battalions have been deployed to assist in the anti-constitutional land acquisition to protect the stake of India's largest foreign direct investment - the POSCO Steel project. The government has set the target of destroying 40 betel farms a day to facilitate the land grab. The betel brings the farmers an annual earning of Rs 400,000 (\$9,000) an acre. The Anti-POSCO movement, in its five years of

peaceful protest, has faced state violence numerous time and is now gearing up for another - perhaps final - non-violent and democratic resistance against a state using violence to facilitate its undemocratic land grab for corporate profits, overlooking due process and the constitutional rights of the people.

The largest democracy of the world is destroying its democratic fabric through its land wars. While the constitution recognizes the rights of the people and the panchayats [village councils] to democratically decide the issues of land and development, the government is disregarding these democratic decisions - as is evident from the POSCO project where three panchayats have refused to give up their land.

The use of violence and destruction of livelihoods that the current trend is reflecting is not only dangerous for the future of Indian democracy, but for the survival of the Indian nation state itself. Considering that today India may claim to be a growing or booming economy - but yet is unable feed more than 40 per cent of its children are a matter of national shame.

Land is not about building concrete jungles as proof of growth and development; it is the progenitor of food and water, a basic for human survival. It is thus clear: what India needs today is not a land grab policy through an amended colonial land acquisition act but a land conservation policy, which conserves our vital eco-systems, such as the fertile Gangetic plain and coastal regions, for their ecological functions and contribution to food security.

Handing over fertile land to private corporations, who are becoming the new zamindars [hereditary aristocrats], cannot be defined as having a public purpose. Creating multiple privatized super highways and expressways does not qualify as necessary infrastructure. The

real infrastructure India needs is the ecological infrastructure for food security and water security. Burying our fertile food-producing soils under concrete and factories is burying the country's future.



In India, the state forcibly acquires land from farmers and hands it over to private speculators, real estate and big industrial companies to establish large industrial complexes with little or no laws to protect the environment

In **Pune** district, the government has approved 54 SEZs for private sector industries such as Syntel International, Serum Institute, Mahindra Realty, Bharat Forge, City Parks, InfoTech Parks, Raheja Corporation, Videocon and Xansa India. All SEZs are located around Pune, in areas like Pune Nashik National Highway, Pune-Bangalore National Highway, Pune Hyderabad National Highway and Pune Mumbai Highway. The MIDC has identified 7,500 hectares of agricultural land for procurement in the name of SEZ creation in Pune.

Opposition to SEZs has become apparent in many states and areas, including Karla and Other Southern states. These communities, primarily Maratha, OBC and Adivasi, are chiefly engaged in agricultural activities. Their major crops are potato, onion, sorghum, jowar, rice, flowers and pulses. Many village youth have also initiated small-scale businesses like poultry, milk collection and pig rearing.

Although these villages are near the Bhima River basin and surrounded by a small watershed, the government's lack of investment in infrastructure has left local farmers dependent on unreliable tanker water. Instead of meeting demands for sustainable irrigation schemes to improve the conditions of local farmers, the government seeks to reduce the land of local citizens in order to create an SEZ.

One farmer from the village of Gulani explained why the local population opposes the Bharat Forge SEZ:

“We have cultivated enough to nourish the entire country and this needs to be continued for future generations. Land is our Mother, self-reliance, self-esteem, our livelihood, our identity and way of life so the government must not snatch it.”

Other farmers in Gulani furthered these claims by saying ‘we will die, but will not give a single bigha [half acre] land to the MIDC or SEZ’.

In other words: we are extremely concerned about the long term future of India.