

# Indians make gains on land rights (Janadesh), 2007

- [\(mainly or initiated by\) people of color](#) [1]

## Timing

2 October

2007

to:

28 October

2007

## Location and Goals

Country:

India

Location City/State/Province:

Gwalior to Delhi

[View Location on Map](#)

Goals:

Ekta Parishaed demanded that the Indian government: (1) establish a national land authority, which would focus on monitoring land use across the country and identifying land available for redistribution; (2) formally recognize ownership rights of the land-holding peasantry; and (3) set up fast-track courts to settle past and present conflicts and disputes related to land.

## Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 037. Singing
- 038. Marches

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 037. Singing
- 038. Marches

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors

- 037. Singing
- 038. Marches

Methods in 4th segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 037. Singing
- 038. Marches

Methods in 5th segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 037. Singing
- 038. Marches

Methods in 6th segment:

- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention
- 162. Sit-in

Segment Length:

4 days

## **Classifications**

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Democracy

Economic Justice

Group characterization:

- Indigenous people
- and distressed farmers; including many women
- landless peasants

## **Leaders, partners, allies, elites**

Leaders:

founding member of Etkā Parishad, Rajagopal P.V.

Partners:

Not known

External allies:

Noted Gandhian Nirmala Deshpande, social activist Swami Agnivesh, environmentalist Sunder Lal Bahuguna, Magsaysay Award winner Rajendra Singh, and farmers' leader from Madhya Pradesh Sunilam

Involvement of social elites:

Communist party of India- General Secretary A.B Bardhan

MP Jyotiraditya Scindia

## **Joining/exiting order of social groups**

Groups in 1st Segment:

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length:

4 days

## **Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence**

Opponents:

Indian Government

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known

Campaigner violence:

Not known

Repressive Violence:

On the morning of 29 October, the marchers woke to 1,500 police guarding the now-locked grounds. The police were armed with riot sticks and bamboo shields. There is no record of the police using these weapons against the protesters.

## **Success Outcome**

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

4 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

Total points:

8 out of 10 points

Notes on outcomes:

A year after the march, Ekta Parishad attributed the following government actions to their campaign: creation of the National Council for Agricultural Reform, passage of the Forest Rights Act, the Land Acquisition Act, and the Resettlement & Rehabilitation Act, and national attention toward tribal rights. Despite many policy successes, Ekta Parishad was not completely satisfied with the actions taken by the Indian government.

In the early 2000s, many residents of rural India did not own the land on which they lived and worked. Without land rights, peasant farmers were often economically insecure.

Exacerbating local economic hardship, the Indian government began acquiring thousands of acres of land to create special economic zones. The government sometimes loaned some of this acquired land to local residents, but would often reclaim it a short time afterwards. Through this process, the government facilitated the replacement of small shopkeepers with corporate retail businesses.

The group Ekta Parishad aimed to raise awareness about the government land grabs and demanded land reform in the interest of local residents. A founding member of Ekta Parishad, P.V. Rajagopal, accused the government of deliberately trying to undermine the villagers' self-sufficiency. Inspired by the example of Mohandas K. Gandhi, Rajagopal decided to lead a march.

Ekta Parishad demanded that the Indian government: (1) establish a national land authority, which would focus on monitoring land use across the country and identifying land available for redistribution, (2) formally recognize ownership rights of the land-holding peasantry, and (3) set up fast-track courts to settle past and present conflicts and disputes related to land.

On 2 October 2007, the anniversary Mahatma Gandhi's birth, Ekta Parishad launched the march from Gwalior to Delhi. They called the march 'Janadesh', or 'People's Verdict'. Over time approximately 25,000 landless peasants, indigenous people, and distressed farmers joined the march, walking in columns of four and carrying the Indian flag, banners, and pictures of moral leaders such as Gandhi. Social activists, environmentalists, human rights activists, and followers of Gandhi expressed support for the march.

The marchers rested alongside the road at night. Seven people died during the march, killed by trucks, exhaustion, or low temperatures. They arrived in Delhi on 28 October 2007, having traveled 350 kilometres. That night they camped in the gated Ram Lila fairgrounds near the Indian Parliament.

On the morning of 29 October, the marchers woke to 1,500 police guarding the now-locked grounds. The police were armed with riot sticks and bamboo shields. The protesters sat down and chanted "Give us land or give us jail!" A leader of Ekta Parishad stated that the people gathered would not leave until the government took action on their demands. He even suggested that the marchers would perish in Delhi rather than walk home defeated.

Later that day, the Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and the Rural Development Minister promised to meet all of Ekta Parishad's demands. They agreed to establish a National Land Commission to be chaired by the Prime Minister, and invited Rajagopal to sit on the commission.

A year later, on 18-19 October, 2008, members of Ekta Parishad convened a public assembly in Gwalior to evaluate the outcomes of the Janadesh March. They attributed the following government actions to their campaign: creation of the National Council for Agricultural Reform, passage of the Forest Rights Act, the Land Acquisition Act, and the Resettlement & Rehabilitation Act, and national attention toward tribal rights. Through these mechanisms, the Indian government distributed hundreds of thousands of land ownership titles to indigenous families. In the state of Bihar alone, the government redistributed 324,000 hectares to landless families.

Despite these successes, Ekta Parishad was not satisfied with the actions taken by the Indian government because the implementation of the legislation was not complete.

Ekta Parishad led a second march beginning 2 October 2012 to demand full implementation of the reforms promised in 2007. More than 50,000 people participated in that march. At the time of this writing Ekta Parishad remains unsatisfied with the government's follow-through, and remains committed to empowering rural residents to achieve more control over their land.

# Research Notes

Influences:

Ekta Parishad drew upon the Gandhian tradition sourced from the Salt Satyagrah of 1930-1931. (1)

This campaign influenced a similar march in October 2012. (2)

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Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

Melissa D Romanow, 06/03/2013

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