

EKTA PARISHAD MEET



Ekta Parishad Madhya Pradesh organized a two-day Land Rights Convention in Bhopal from December 18-19, 2006, at the Technical Teachers Training Institute auditorium at Bhopal.

The programme began with a song by Sujat Bhai, followed by welcome address by Ramesh Sharma, who also briefly introduced the objective of the workshop to the gathered audience.



Ms Shraddha of Ekta Parishad, in her welcome address, said there were different programmes on the issue of land. "We are trying to bring them together on one platform to have a dialogue with the government on the issue. This convention

was a part of that process", she added. She said that through this convention we will hold discussions with representatives of the government, political leaders and local communities to find a solution to land-related issues.

Ekta Parishad National President, P V Rajagopal spoke on the changing scenario on land rights. He said that today land is being looked as a commercial issue, while it has been a source of livelihood to the rural poor. In this era of commercialization, both the MNC's and the people have been fighting for similar

Ekta Parishad Land Rights Convention,
Bhopal, December 18-19, 2006



resources, namely water, forest and land. In this fight, the government machinery and the markets are with the MNCs. He added that social organizations working with tribals are also now beginning to harness constitutional powers as given under the Constitution of India. However, this is also becoming a source of violence, leading the country towards *arajakta*, which in future could pose a threat to our democracy. "We

should understand the scenario and accordingly plan our strategy", he said.

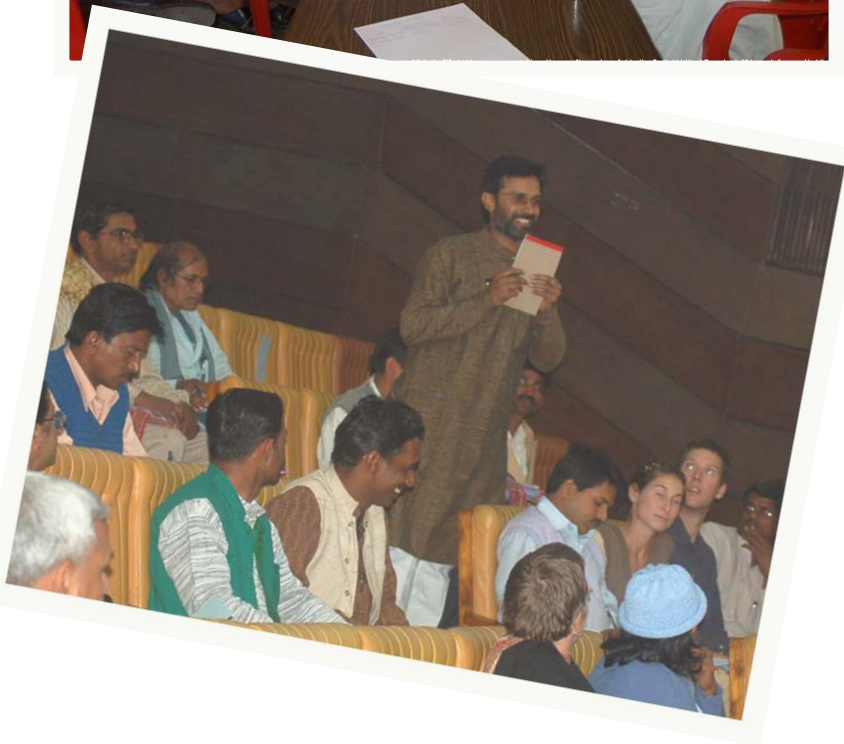
Rajgopal said another pressing issue was poverty, leading to increased migration and growth of slums in cities and towns across India. "People are living a hellish life and the government has not paid any attention to these problems", he said. Thirdly, MNCs are becoming aggressive in the agricultural sector also. "Our farms are going to MNCs. More production is being touted as a solution to the problem of hunger. But our argument is that we should see who is producing the grain. If the poor have land, they will be the producers and this will help tackling hunger on a large scale, instead of snatching away their lands", he observed.

Ektā Parishad Land Rights Convention,
Bhopal, December 18-19, 2006



Rajgopal also stressed the role of panchayat's in land distribution. He said panchayats can help in identification of real beneficiaries and help them get land.

Jayant Verma of Niti Samvad spoke on the constitutional aspect of land rights. He said that a majority of laws in the country were made by the British, which reflect the then ethos of how to treat slaves. "Sadly, we are still carrying these outdated laws. We need to change our laws with changing times", he said.



Former Chief Secretary of Madhya Pradesh, R S Khanna, said the focus of land reforms should be a complete ban on private companies acquiring land. He also stressed on checking

official misuse of laws related to land acquisition. He said that only persons who till the land should be given ownership of land.

Rajkali of Ekta Parishad spoke on the issue of struggle for land in the Mahakaushal region, and how the Department of Forests was treating tribals. KK Singh, MLA, Sidhi, said that leaders, officials and the judiciary have been exploiting tribals and weaker sections. The Parliament and Assembly has failed to deliver. Ironically, when the issue was being discussed in the State Assembly, standing crops were being destroyed in Chaupal Panchayat of Sidhi district. He announced the formation of a *manch* comprising MLAs and policy experts, which would work as a pressure group for the implementation of government orders.



Representatives from different areas also discussed land rights cases from their areas. Sadhna Pathak discussed the conclusion of the Land Distribution study in Chambal and Baghelkhand in 2000.

Chief Election

Commissioner, Gopal Sharan Shukla, spoke on problems on land issues. He said there were two issues- firstly, the government was lax on the issue and the land revenue department needed to take firm steps. Secondly, it was a social problem and the society should find a solution to problems such as these.

Former Chairperson of Lal Bahadur Shastri Academy and Chandigarh University, Professor Aiyyar, who was also conducting research on suicides by marginal farmers, spoke on land reforms. He said as far as land reforms were concerned, we should look at distribution of government land and what share goes to the landless and landlords. "There has



been a major change in attitudes towards land reforms. Land and forest are the two basic needs of tribals. But they do not have either of these" he added. He said that farmers and labourers have self respect and feelings - they will not compromise on their self respect, and only needed awareness raising. At many

places, tribals have got *patta* but not possession of land, because of which they face innumerable problems.

Anil Garg from Betul said that both forest and revenue departments work at loggerheads- the forest department has given the land but the revenue department takes it back, saying it was under encroachment, which creates a very unpleasant situation for the beneficiary. He said that the struggle by tribals during independence was to protect their natural resources. The land acquired from the *Zamindars* and *Maalguzar's* was given to develop forests. He added that there was no need for the Tribal Bill 2005 as the bill was more or less similar to Indian Forest Act of 1927 and the Forest Conservation Act of 1980.

In his address Ekta Parishad National Coordinator Ran Singh said discrepancies in law and providing livelihood to people are two different issues. There have been instances where *patta's* have been given but were cancelled the following year and new *pattas* again distributed.

About 'Jamadesh-2007' he said it was a movement in which organizations working to bring about change are coming together. He said the movement needs the participation of a large number of people and more and more people should join the movement.

In conclusion, Ekta Parishad National President P V Rajgopal said that not only in India but across the world the situation with relation to land issues was similar, and people were becoming more aware of their rights.

