

A FILM BY CHRISTOPH SCHAUB AND KAMAL MUSALE

MILLIONS जनसत्याग्रह CAN WALK

JAN SATYAGRAHA – THE MARCH FOR JUSTICE

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1. MILLIONS CAN WALK - Synopsis

Hundreds of thousands of Indian men and women, landless farmers and the Adivasi – Indian aborigines – underway on foot. On dusty roads, on the National Highway, through villages and cities. Large-scale exploitation of mineral resources, the construction of immense plantations and tremendous infrastructure projects have resulted in the fact that these people have been and still are being driven from their homes and robbed of their peaceful existence.

Now they have come together from all across the land to fight for an honorable existence. Led by the charismatic Rajagopal, leader and pioneer of the movement. Their protest march leads from Gwalior to Delhi – 400 kilometers away. They endure the heat, defy illnesses, and take on hardship and deprivation. Because one thing is clear to them: they will persevere and only return home once the government heeds their demands.

It is as if the poor and oppressed of the whole world are rising up and speaking out. And energetically pointing out that they are not willing to accept the violation of their rights. Their march, based on the idea of Gandhi's philosophy of passive resistance, will go down in history and will be covered by the most important international media. The world can no longer look away.

How can one fight for one's rights without using violence? With such an important contemporary question, the film of Christoph Schaub and Kamal Musale spreads far beyond the borders of India. It shows the multiple facets of this imposing protect march, plunges into what is happening along the way. And it focuses over and over again on some of the participants and their fateful stories as well as the into daily realities of these proud people.

«Millions Can Walk» is a militant yet philosophical and emotional film with surprising pictures of great metaphorical power. It is captivating to the very end: Will these men and women be successful? Will the government fulfill their demands?



2. Jan Satyagraha – March for Justice

Jan Satyagraha means «March for Justice». The participants in the march, which begins in Gwalior and leads to the metropolis of Delhi 400 kilometres away, demand straightforwardly the right to existence and respect for their dignity as humans. The landless farmers and the indigenous people in the forests demand the right as hunters and gatherers to live in and from their forest.

Demands made by the participants in the JAN SATYAGRAHA

The new laws guarantee the protection and the basis for the livelihood of the Adivasi. Among other things:

- The landless and the homeless get land for building and agriculture.
- A wife can now newly acquire or own land without her husband.
- In land disputes, speedy legal proceedings are to be applied. In addition, legal assistance is granted free of charge.
- The 2006 Law on Forest Rights of the Adivasi is finally to be applied.
- The Central Government makes it binding for the States and Union Territories to implement the agreements.
- A taskforce, composed of members of the Indian Central Government and the EKTA PARISHAD, will monitor implementation.

Further information: www.ektaeurope.org → Jan Satyagraha2012 → agreementofoctober11th

What has been accomplished up to the present:

Sechs Monate nach dem Ende des Jan Satyagraha...

- ... 70% of the agreements have been adopted by the Central Government.
- One year after the end of the Jan Satyagraha...
- ... 80% of the demands have been accepted in the Central Government and adopted on a legislative level and in commissions of the member states..

For implementation nationwide and for enforcement down to the level of the communities, it is now necessary to maintain the pressure over the coming years, especially with regard to the regional elections this winter and the national election next autumn.

Further information: www.ektaeurope.org → News → 11th of October 2013
www.ektaparishad.com → News → 12th October 2013



3. The Adivasi

Adivasi is the term used to designate India's tribal population. The term is made up of the words *adi* = «original» and *vasi* = «inhabitants», thus literally «the original inhabitants».

Thus, in the first third of the 20th century arose the Hindi/Sanskrit expression «Adivasi», which was used among the educated and politically active members of the tribal people. In the meantime, the self-designation Adivasi has established itself independently of the various tribal names.

The Adivasi originally lived in many regions of the Indian subcontinent, as fishermen, wandering shepherds and farmers, hunters and gatherers. Between 2500 and 1500 B.C. pastoral tribes from western Central Asia took over the land and created the caste system that ostracised the indigenous people. Part of the Adivasi were subjected and integrated into the prevailing order at the lowest level as «casteless» or the so-called untouchables (referred to today as Harijan, Scheduled Castes or Dalit).

In the course of the Indo-European immigration, which lasted until 500 B.C., the Adivasi were forced to retreat into the surrounding forest and mountain areas.

The areas in which they now lived proved to be rich in resources. Tropical timber, natural resources and water resources were first exploited by the British and then released to national and international companies. Like this, over decades family groups of the Adivasi were forced out of their settlement areas. They were – and still are - unable to retain any of their original wealth.

Today 90 million of the Indian inhabitants belong to the indigenous tribal peoples. The Indian constitution recognises only 700 tribes («scheduled tribes»). They are not part of the Hindu caste system, but, in spite of existing legal protection, are socially strongly disadvantaged.

Further information:

www.adivasi-koordination.de → [adivasi_english](#)



4. Director's Note

Background

What is happening in India is happening all over the world: in Brazil, in China, in Indonesia – a race is going on in the so-called emerging countries / threshold countries. All these countries want to catch up as much as they can with the rich countries of the world. They want to be attractive for investments and match up their growth rate with the world market. In this regard, no consideration can be taken in India for the traditions of the indigenous people or the untouchables. Capitalism in its present-day global character – without guardrails, without ethics, without religion – is heading for an apocalypse, all-consuming, without ideas for the future.

This may be a drastic description, but its garish portrayal is reality for our protagonists Pankhi Bai, Ghinnu Kole, Sushmita, Selva, Lakshmi and Biras Topno. They represent the 100'000 people who are marching to Delhi, and, who in turn, represent hundreds of millions of landless persons as well as farmers and indigenous people who have been expelled from their land.

Christophe Schaub

After a trip with his family through the southern part of Tamil Nadu, Christophe Schaub spent a few days in the Training and Cultural Interaction Centre CESC of Ekta Parishad. He was very excited to meet the people there and discover their social and political work, as well as experience their thoughts and their deep conviction. That's where he first learned about a gigantic march involving 100'000 people, which they were planning for the year 2012. A year later, the producer Franziska Reck encouraged him to proceed with the project. The idea of making a film with a specific political subject interested him, not a political film in the sense of agitation and propaganda, but rather a film dealing with politics. It became interesting for Christophe to make the resistance and fight of indigenous people and landless farmers visible – to show the methods of their resistance – as it would help understand non-violence better. But, due to technical problems, Christophe wasn't able to come to India for the casting, preparation and shooting. In order to realise this film, the production had to find a director who would be capable of directing the filming in India. And they found him! Kamal Musale.

Kamal Musale

Kamal, an experienced director and cameraman, is Indian and Swiss, living in Mumbai. He has been researching and filming different contemporary issues in India, relating to gender equality, love marriage, and the social and economic situation of the poor in cities and in the countryside. His deep exploration of the layers of Indian society is also apparent in his fictional work. It made total sense, when he was approached to coproduce and direct this documentary, to include it in his line of work.

If the collaboration with a remote co-director was not an obvious one, a common understanding and immediate respect of one another allowed these two directors to allow the emergence of this movie, which they both consider as an important one.

Rajagopal – Founder of the Ekta Parishad

Rajagopal P. V. is Vice President of the national Gandhi Foundation as well as President and founding member of the Ekta Parishad. His untiring energy, his great understanding and his skill in encouraging people to stand up for their rights have gained him great respect – from the bases of the population up to national government circles.

Rajagopal P. V. grew up in Kerala in southern India and studied agriculture in Seva Gram. He became politically active in the early 70's. In central India he helped to bring peace to a valley by convincing the «Dacoits» (organised criminals) to lay down their arms and live peacefully. Rajagopal's family name indicates that he belongs to a privileged caste, so he only uses his first name.

“When we sweat under the sun, when the earth and the sky are burning, when we walk, sweating under the sun's heat, that is sacrifice. When we sleep on the streets, that is sacrifice. When we eat once a day, that, too, is sacrifice. So all of you are ascetics. You are not just revolutionaries. And why are you making this sacrifice? So that their hearts shall melt!”

Ekta Parishad

EKTA PARISHAD supports the protest march Jan Satyagraha. It is an organisation that acts – politically, organisationally and educationally – within the Indian field of tension between wealth and poverty, power and powerlessness. It seeks to change the conditions of the rural population.

Ekta Parishad is a non-violent popular movement. Its goal is that the poorest people of India regain their control over the resources that are most important for their survival, in particular LAND, FOREST and WATER. Ekta Parishad believes that the village community is the perfect basis for planting the seeds that will nourish unity and non-violence, which can achieve positive political, social and economic changes – to prevent migration into the misery of metropolitan slums.

Over the past years Ekta Parishad has grown immensely and is now made up of about 12'000 volunteer activists and reaches some 80 million of the poorest people in India. RAJAGOPAL – the charismatic leader of this movement – is highly regarded in Indian society. Ekta Parishad is substantially supported financially by the progressive middle class in India, Europe and North America.

Not only the idea of a non-violent march is based on the philosophy of Gandhi, but also other important factors, such as equality of religions, of the sexes and of mankind (overcoming the caste system) and finally, the promotion of a modern state without corruption, despotism and caste thinking. In addition, the idea of villages taking care of themselves should be an ecological matter of fact. In the meantime there are very concrete solutions on the basis of these ideas, which Ekta Parishad is striving to achieve. The living conditions of the poor should be definitively improved, without party-political motivation.

Further information:
www.ektaparishad.com
www.ektaeurope.org → whowere → ektaparishad

Land Grabbing

The term “land grabbing” comes from the English language and can be described, literally, as “usurping” the land or “snatching land”. Government agents and private investors take over the land without paying for it. They utilize the land for large-scale extraction of its resources and for realisation of immense infrastructure projects.

Although “land grabbing” very often takes place within a legal framework, most of the time through contracts between investors and governments, the consequences are fatal and connected with violation of human rights: indigenous farmers are driven away, lose their land and thus lose the possibility of providing for themselves and their communities. The Indian government willingly agree to these deals, whether out of individual greed or because they believe wrongly that they are promoting development. Because of poorly defined land rights it is easy for them to close deals without even consulting with those who are affected.

The latest boom is “land grabbing” for agricultural purposes. Governmental players and private investors from industrial or emerging countries make agreements over arable land at ridiculously low prices in developing countries, where they then produce on a large-scale basis for export.

Further information:

www.breadforall.ch → Development policy → right to food

CESCI Association

The charitable Swiss association CESCI exists since 1996. It supports the objectives of Ekta Parishad and its goal is to make the organisation known in Switzerland and to promote its interests there.

An important aspect of the association's work is also ideological and financial support of the CESCI centre near Madurai in the south of India: a place for advanced education of the Ekta Parishad members and their followers.

The political and friendly connection of the leadership of the Ekta Parishad in Switzerland, especially of Rajagopal, greatly facilitated the organisation and logistic development of the film.

Further information: www.cesci.ch

