

## Continuing to learn- a letter from Rajagopal to friends in Europe

The inspirational nonviolence leader of Ekta Parishad \*(United Forum) in India, Rajagopal P.V. has decided, at the age of 65, to re-focus his energy. In a letter of 30 May, entitled "Back to the Villages" written to his many friends in Europe, including Quakers in Britain, he has announced that he will step back from the leadership of Ekta Parishad and concentrate on nonviolence training. For those Quakers who have walked with Rajagopal in the villages of India or on the large scale marches of Janadesh 2007 and Jansatyagraha 2012, or observed his heart to heart communication with people of all ages at the Quaker Peace & Social Witness (QPSW) conference in Swanwick in August 2010, his letter offers further insight into his realism and vision. It may be that a reflective reading of this letter can inform our own decisions about how better to respond "in faith" to matters of concern near and far.

Unfailingly generous towards the role of others, he writes "I have gained wisdom and strength by associating with you over the years and I take this opportunity to thank you for all your support and kindness." He notes the "general criticism" in India "that older people are not stepping down to give responsibilities and opportunities to the younger generation. I think it is important to listen to this criticism and respond positively...I have decided to step down from the role as President of Ekta Parishad and provide greater space to my friends in the organization. One by one I have also decided to step down from positions that I am holding in other organizations .... where I think my involvement is not absolutely necessary."

"In the future I will continue to support and promote all kinds of activities that will have long lasting effect in the life of marginalized communities. By moving out of institutions I am trying to create more time and space to be available to processes that will impact the society in a positive way."

"After Jan Satyagraha 2012, Ekta Parishad has taken a new direction that we call "back to villages". Each activist will be required to now go back to villages to strengthen the community organization and also work at improving the local economy. They can use many years of their experience in this action with fresh energy and I will continue to support them in their efforts."

"I have also worked with the National Team of Ekta Parishad to redesign their role as a National Support Team" in order that they can "provide support to the State level team without interfering in their day-to-day activities. I then went around meeting the leadership in each State to deepen their understanding about their own work."

Rajagopal's great love remains the nonviolent empowerment of the "younger generation" which, from my observation in India over an eight year period, seems to include 14-38 year olds! Building on work in progress he aims to "develop two centres for imparting training in Nonviolence". One will be in southern India at the already established Centre for Education, Scientific and Cultural Information (CESCI) in Tamil Nadu and the other in northern India in Katni (Madhya Pradesh). The former will provide "intellectual and theoretical training", the latter concentrate on "training for social activists (national & international) in the use of nonviolent methods in their action to protect and

promote the livelihood resources of the marginalized communities.” He sees “great value” in gaining our “active support in shaping these two training centres”.

“By now Ekta Parishad has many friends in and out of the country and it will be the responsibility of State and National teams to reach out to them.” We might expect that Action Village India ([www.actionvillageindia.org .uk](http://www.actionvillageindia.org.uk)), [a British charity, and the Quakers will not have heard the last of this movement.](#) [Rajagopal concludes:](#) “I am sure all of you are very much concerned about the level of conflicts emerging around the world and at home on land and livelihood resources. At this stage if we fail to engage with this conflict from a position of solidarity with the marginalized communities the situation may lead to greater levels of confusion, conflict and violence. Resisting and opposing the market oriented and greed centred globalization process through nonviolent methods is a huge challenge and I think we have the responsibility to support and guide the process in whatever way we can.”

\* Ekta Parishad's website: [www.ektaparishad.com](http://www.ektaparishad.com)

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