



Thinking new ways for resistance

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Thinking new ways for resistance

Intervention de Rajagopal P. V. à l'occasion des Rencontres internationales du programme Lascaux* « Penser une démocratie alimentaire », 25-27 novembre 2013 à Nantes.

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In the large field of agriculture, land and food, there are three major actors in place.

The first set of actors is those systematically trying to deprive marginalized communities from their land and resources in the name of development and progress. This process began with the indigenous people, then with the nomads, the small shop keepers, etc.

The second set of actors is those trying, through their work and actions, to influence and reform the institutions, the policies and laws. In a globalizing world, these actors are essential, whether they are researchers, members of NGOs or civil society.

The third set of actors is those who are resisting this process of globalization, through non-violent protests. The underlying principle of this resistance is to that when choosing between silence and action and between violence and peace, one must opt for non-violent direct actions.

In a globalizing world, conflicts are inevitable but violence or non-violence is a choice. On one side, we need to effectively work on this choice, and on the other side, we need to put an end to the contradiction that exists regarding the amount of money spend on conflicts, military equipment instead of non-violence and peaceful measures. In most countries, there is no ministry for peace, no budget for non-violence programs.

One process of non-violent resistance is converting anger into positive actions. Today, because of unemployment, poverty and deprivation, there is a growing level of anger within many societies. But anger is not necessarily a bad element; it gives the society more energy

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and determination. Coordinating anger and converting it into non-violent actions is one of the areas where NGOs such as Ekta Parishad¹ has been working for many years.

Another area of work is the conversion of difficulties into possibilities. Often, people say that mobilization is difficult because there are not enough resources. Therefore, it is important to analyze and understand the resources available within the society in order to convert the difficulties into possibilities. For example, a lot of poor people would say that they have to walk many kilometers to get drinking water or firewood. In terms of possibilities, this means that they have the capacity to walk. If they say they do not have enough food and they have to work under high temperatures, it means they are strong enough to survive difficult conditions. This is how Ekta Parishad managed to organize long marches with 25 000 people².

Another option is to create a “basket of success”, that is to say bring people together to act successfully. There are several components to this basket. First of all, we need to realize the power of the poor. Generally, we look at poor people with the idea that they need to be helped. But in reality there is an inbuilt power among poor people in spite of the situation they live in. Then, we need to realize the power of the young. Young people have tremendous energy, which can be used to breathe new impetus and take action. There is also the power of solidarity. For example, during the great march organized in India, hundreds of thousands letters came to the Prime Minister, which eventually led to a change of policy from the government. Finally, another component is the power of non-violence. If people can be trained, organized to protest non-violently, it can have a tremendous impact in terms of shift of policy.

In conclusion, in order to bring about change in a globalizing world where global forces are trying to grab land and resources, we need to innovatively think of new ways to encourage people to resist.

¹ Ekta Parishad is a popular movement founded in 1991 in India and based on the gandhian principle of non-violent actions with the aim to help people to better control the resources that are essential to life: water, land and forest (<http://www.ektaparishad.com/>).

² In October 2007, 25 000 people representing communities from all over India participated in the march towards Janadesh, which proved to be the greatest nonviolent movement for agrarian reform in the history of the country. Many victories were won, including the creation in 2007 of a National Committee for Agrarian Reform. Nevertheless, the situation remained extremely problematic for Indian farmers, which justified a new large-scale action in 2012. Over a whole year, until October 2th, 2012, marches were organized in different states - Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Orissa, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, etc. - and in some particular states, the march culminated in a rally. During the last two weeks, more than 100 000 people walked more than 300 kilometers from Gwalior to the Parliament in Delhi (See « Ekta Parishad : Pour une nouvelle dignité paysanne » ; <http://www.peuples-solidaires.org/ekta-parishad/>).