CHAPTER IV

PROMOTION OF SOCIO - ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF SANTALS

Liberation from Zamindari System

Fr. Anthony De Bono settled in his new mission station, Majlispur on 9th March 1925. During a previous temporary stay at Majlispur, he visited two villages whose population wanted to come over. Besides those, several Santals came to him and asked his protection against their Mussulman Zamindars. By his readiness to take their cases in hand, the Father has already won over many friends. Helped by the good advice of Fr. De La Croix, Fr. De Bono gradually and very fast grasped the situation and had every reason to hope that the Mission among the Santals founded by Fr. Knockaert, would soon yield abundant fruit to his apostolic labours. The news spread all round that at Majlispur, there was a Saheb ready to help them and they looked up to him as their guide and saviour. Fr. De Bono was aware of the lawsuits pending, to get back the lands belonging to the Mission; many more lawsuits to protect the poor Santals against the greedy Zamindars.

Adventure of Fr. De Bono with Muslim Zamindar

The Bengal Mission Superior, Fr. Maurice Veys relates an “Adventure of Fr. De Bono”, a dramatic encounter with a Muslim Zamindar, oppressor of the Santals. Father had taken the cudgels in favour of some of them, living in a village of the neighbourhood, Sidpara. The agents of the local landlord claimed that two Santals who moved about with Father De Bono, owned him money. It was true to the extent of two or three Rupees, but Father was told to pay off there and then fifty. With sticks in their hands they brought him back to Katalbari, a Santal village and would not allow him to move unless he paid off. They confined him to a house. He was intimidated and told that they would keep him for eight days. They kept watch round the village and saw to it that the Father should have no pencil to write to anyone. However he succeeded in sending a short note in pencil to the S.D.O., Kishanganj, some 20 miles away. Word was sent further to Islampur Thana (Police
Station) and on the next day the police came to release him. The police case of abduction and unlawful confinement against five persons was started at Kishanganj court. The accused began to see their case as hopeless because their Advocate petitioned the Archbishop and the Jesuit Superior in Calcutta to drop it. As this was an open attack on the Mission itself, the Superiors decided not to satisfy them with compromise. Everyone knew the worth of such compromises. Judgment was delivered on 29th June 1926, the zamindar and the other accused were sentenced to rigorous imprisonment for two years plus a fine of Rs. 100/- each. When the news reached Majlispur, all felt that the verdict was a real triumph which placed the Santal Mission on a firm basis.

**Redeeming the Land on Perpetual Lease**

Fr. De Bono had to involve himself in the problematic and sensitive issue of redeeming the landed property on perpetual lease. As soon as Fr. De Bono came to settle at Majlispur, he heard of the difficulties which the Santals of that village had with their Zamindar. They got 378 bighas of land from the Zamindar on a perpetual lease. They paid regularly Rs. 204/- per year, but receipts were refused to them. When the Zamindar came to know that a missionary was going to settle at Majlispur, he put in a case against the Santals, claiming the rent with interest of nearly four years, a lump sum amounting to Rs. 965/-. By doing so he wanted to kill two birds with one stone, *i.e.*, to get back the land by court decision and give it to others at a higher rent; and at the same time, having redeemed his land from the perpetual lease, to try his utmost to prevent the Father from settling at Majlispur. Moreover the Santals, if they had lost the land, had already decided to leave Majlispur and settle somewhere else. The Mission bought the land from the Santals; the poor ryots paid the money claimed by the Zamindar and the Mission was safe. As for the land difficulties they were by now nearly settled; all the tenants were found out; the land for each one for cultivation was duly ascertained together with the rent to be paid; many arrears had already been paid. The Zamindar, having thus failed in his plan of occupying the land of the poor Santals, tried to make the life impossible for Fr. De Bono who was building a bungalow. The Mohammedan merchants of the place were forbidden to sell him materials for the building. Twice the contract for
the building was broken. The Zamindar had persuaded the contractors not to work for the Father. Finally a Bengalee contractor of Kishanganj undertook to erect the palace of the missionary with walls of bamboo laths and a thatched roof. Considering the difficulties which had to be overcome, Fr. De Bono has certainly done great work during the year 1925, and the Bengal mission is most grateful to the Sicilian Province for sending the right man, Fr. De Bono to the right place, Majlispur.

Recovery of the Land of the Santal Ryots

Majlispur land was taken originally by Fr. Knockaert, but was registered in the name of the Santalryots in the mission area and not in the name of the Mission. When Fr. De Bono settled there in 1925, a case was brought against the ryots for arrears of rents. It was then that Fr. De Bono came to an agreement with the Santals that if they would register the land in the name of the Mission, he would settle the case with the Zamindar; but the transfer cost the Mission nearly as much as the original amount which was abnormal. Lately another case was brought against the Mohammedan tenant for arrears of rent, and all his property was put to auction. Fr. De Bono immediately took the land put to auction which included the portion belonging to the Mission. Unfortunately for us, the tenant was able to pay up at the last moment, and so the Father and the Santals of the Mission lost a fine chance of stepping into his shoes and of becoming the direct tenants of the Zamindar without any intermediary. Another advantage would have been that we could have got the whole land, estimating over 200 acres, of Majlispur and would have had to pay less for it than we would be actually paying for a part, that is, for about 120 acres. In reality, the Mission of the Santalryots had to pay more to the tenant for a part of Majlispur land than his payment for the whole of it to the Zamindar. Though Fr. De Bono could not be fully successful in bringing the land in favour of the Mission and his people in Majlispur, his efforts created much awareness among the Santals who were under the clutches of the Zamindars and Father was hopeful in solving this land issue in favour of his people.
Community Welfare Projects

Rice Banks (Paddy Banks)

A mission rice bank is a big stock of rice kept at the mission station for the service of the Catholics of that mission. Catholic farmers who are in need of rice could borrow from that stock at a very moderate rate of interest. The rice banks are of great help to the Santal farmers. The land of the Santals is generally of poor in quality and small in quantity to sustain the whole family all through the year. During summer, when there is no work in the fields many Santals leave their homes for work elsewhere. During the rainy season when they prepare their fields for paddy cultivation, they need paddy to plant and to eat. Those who do not have enough rice of their own have to borrow either from the small village shopkeeper or from some rich farmer. The loan plus the interest is paid back in kind in December. The rate of interest is abnormally high and sometimes, the farmers cannot pay that same year but the interest keeps piling up at a dizzying rate. After a year of drought or after a serious sickness many of the poorer farmers to repay their loans give their fields to their creditors for a number of years. In spite of the Government law which forbids the Santals to sell their lands, they lose them easily become landless in front of the moneylenders.

In the meantime, they abandon their homes and go search for work. They erect unsafe and temporary huts wherever they find work and stay in them till the work lasts. When the work in one place is over, the whole family moves to another place for work. They work as servants of rich farmers, on road construction, brick kilns and so on. However, most of this work is seasonal and the pay is so meagre that even if both parents work it is very hard to save anything. Between one job and another or when they are sick they find it very hard to survive. Most of their children die and the whole family is wiped out in a few years’ time due to hunger and sickness. The mission rice bank is meant to provide the Santals with cheap credit and so help them keep their fields. Moreover, the organization set up to supervise the distribution and return of loans educates the people in working together. The whole area of the mission station is divided into rural units of about fifteen Christian
families each. Then the Father and the head catechist fix the day when the needy applicants from each unit will come to take their rice and when to return it. Since the need is universal and they are not so difficult to organize in the Santal Mission the rice bank is developing into a regular work. The Christians expect to find a mission rice bank as they expect to find a mission school and a mission dispensary. The main difficulty is how to build up a stock of many tons of rice in each mission station.

The Paddy Gola (Rice Bank) at Cilimpur

The Paddy Gola (Rice Bank) was started in 1963 at Cilimpur mission with an advance from the Bishop Leo Tigga and financed by the Freedom From Hunger Campaign in Malta (FFHCM). Three hundred and twenty-eight Christian families took loans from the bank. About seventy applications for loans were turned down because the stock had finished. The ample way the people make use of the bank, shows how much they want it. Rice banks in other missions are in preparation with help received from Malta. The missionaries, by organizing rice banks, tried to imitate Jesus who multiplied a few loaves to feed a hungry multitude. In June 1978, when the paddy distribution was made, there was a total of 988 maunds in stock. Of this 909 maunds were taken by 187 members while 77 maunds were kept to be sold so that the capital be increased to build another store house for paddy. Fr. J. Portelli trained the parishioners well and Fr. J. Borg had been supervising the running of the gola.

Fr. Joseph Borg reminisces about the twenty years of Paddy Banking at Cilimpur:

“The year 1963 was a bad year for the people of Cilimpur and the surrounding villages. The drought was extremely severe and the people were left with no seeds for planting. Bishop Leo Tigga gave three thousand rupees to help the people in the desperate situation. The money was used to buy seedlings and each family was given a meagre ten kilos of seedlings and they were told to return them after the harvest. Many did return what was given to them and some returned a little extra. This was again loaned out later. The idea of the paddy bank was unceremoniously put into action. In 1965, Fr. A. Savona obtained a grant of twenty five thousand rupees from the Freedom From Hunger Campaign in Malta for the construction of a paddy bank at Cilimpur. The bank was built that same year and a drive for membership was
made. A committee from the village of Cilimpur was also formed to run the bank. Once the bank started functioning its progress was constant and after some years of groping it settled down to a membership of about two hundred with its members coming from Cilimpur and the villages close by. On 4th and 5th June of this year (1985), when the seeds for planting were given out, over one thousand quintals of paddy were distributed. Another thirty five quintals were left over in the name of the bank. This was also sold and five thousand rupees was realized from the sale. This money will also be used for the benefit of the members of the Paddy Bank.

Fr. Joseph Borg, very fittingly recalled the benefits of the Paddy Bank at Cilimpur and the progress it has created among the Santals of the locality.

A Stock of Rice in Talbaria

Many of the people of Talbaria and of the surrounding villages were daily labourers on building sites and in the local stone quarries. The wages were Rs. 2 per day for a man and Rs.1.50 for a woman. During the harvest time in December and January, rice was already sold at Re. 1 for 2 lbs. In 1966, the paddy harvest was poor and so the people had to face the price-hike of rice. As a matter of fact by July the price had gone up to Rs. 1.35 for 2 lbs. However, the wages of these landless labourers remained the same. That means a man doing very heavy work could hardly afford to buy 3 lbs. of rice to feed himself and his family. One day a week there was no work and so no pay and so no rice unless a labourer could save something during the other six days.

Under the direction of Fr. Joseph Borg, the Jesuit Priest-in-charge of Talbaria Mission, the local Santals used all the money they could raise at that time to buy rice and stocked it. Unfortunately at that time, they could only raise Rs. 4,000 and so bought only 8,000 lbs of rice. They started releasing the rice in June at Rs. 1.10 per 2 lbs. that is Re. 0.25 less than the current market rate. They charged Re. 0.10 to cover the transport charges and the loss which would eventually result due to shrinkage and to rats. Unfortunately in this mission station, they still did not have a good storing place for rice. The poor Santals of Talbaria Mission could make a considerable saving in straitened circumstances, due to the reduced rate for rice. Not only the people of Talbaria but even those from other villages came to buy rice from
the *paddy gola*. Since they knew the people personally and knew they badly needed it, they were sure that they were not re-selling it at the market price. In order to make the stock last, they were releasing only 500 lbs. per week not selling more than 10 lbs. per week to any one family.\(^{14}\) Even when the harvest was not a failure, in the three months before the new paddy was harvested, there was always a considerable rise in the price of rice. The Talbaria Santals hoped to make this *paddy bank* scheme a regular feature to help the poor of the locality, and strongly desired to extend its benefit by buying a bigger stock of rice during the coming harvest seasons.

**Rice Bank in Barharwa**

A rice bank was a common feature in most of the mission stations. The emerging Barharwamission station also managed to have a rice bank in 1966 with 26 members, who contributed 40 lbs. each of rice and their joint contribution amounted to just over 1,000 lbs. Through the help of friends abroad, with Rs. 1,000 the Santals of Barharwa mission could buy 5000 lbs more of rice for the bank. This rice was loaned to the members both as seed and to provide them with food while they were working in their fields. They would return the loan in December with 25% interest. Between December and July, due to the hot weather the rice shrinks by about 8% or 10%. The local rate of interest is 50% or 100%. In the previous year (1965) the paddy harvest was good and the demand for rice loans was less, then the *bazaar* rate of interest was 50%. This year (1966) the harvest was a failure and so everywhere the interest became as equal as the amount loaned.\(^{15}\) Thus the small effort in this line would present a considerable saving to the members of the rice bank. In December more people would become members of the bank and each will bring his ‘admission contribution’ of 40 lbs. If they could manage to increase the capital, then they would be able to admit them so as to help them.\(^{16}\) As a new venture, a *Grain Gola* was launched in Dudhani in January 1973, so that the Santal people of the Dudhani Parish could be helped in the time of paddy cultivation. About 50 families became members of the *Grain gola*.\(^{17}\)
Famine Relief in 1966

In the beginning of the year, 1966, India experienced one of the world famines of record. Thanks to the modern means of communication, the sad plight of millions of Indians soon became the immediate concern of people in other continents. Appeals were launched and relief missions were soon organized, Pope Paul VI appealed to all men of good will to come to India’s aid. The response demonstrated in a visible way the brotherhood of mankind. Fr. John Scicluna states, “We (the Maltese Jesuits), in the Santal mission were not spared. Our poor Santals, for whom hunger and malnutrition are no strangers, were faced with famine. Thanks to the generosity of our friends abroad, our Santals could be helped by the Fathers. Considering their great needs, the help we were able to give them was very little, yet it was a help they received with unending gratitude to the thousands who came to their rescue.”

The American Catholic Relief Services donated the food supplies. The people of Malta collected about £40,000 for India. An impressive figure! However, out of the sum, to help them in their relief work, their compatriots in the Santal mission received only £2,200, a very small proportion indeed. The British and Irish benefactors came forward with their regular stream of generous help to rescue the Santals during those difficult months. The financial help which was so generously offered, often at the cost of great personal sacrifices, instilled added courage and gave new impetus to the fathers to relieve famine and distress among the Santals. The efforts the Maltese Jesuits took during those famine days focused on the survival of the Santals.

A Drinking Water Well in Talbaria

Since May, 1965, when this new mission station was started, the Fathers have been residing in Talbaria village. The first problem we faced was that there was no all-year-drinking-water well in the village. In front of the village chapel there was an old well in a dilapidated condition. From July to December, this well provided all the water for the 28 families of Talbaria village. From January to
March we could still draw some water from it, but from March to June, the dry months, it just dried up and refused to give us a drop of water. The all necessary water had to be carried in pots skillfully balanced on the heads of the village women from a spring a quarter of a mile away;

Fr. Joseph Borg speaks of this Drinking Water Well project: “In March 1965, we started digging a new well. We hoped that the new spot was a suitable one. We succeeded beyond our expectation. The first sign of water appeared at 26 feet. We kept digging down to 40 feet. Even at the end of May, the worst month of the dry season, we were still getting 5 ft. of water during the night time. People who have no good well in their village and who live further away than we do from the hillside spring, instead of walking to the spring, often come and fetch water from our well. This well cost us Rs. 2,200. We received Rs.800 from the local Development Block. The rest of the money came from our friends abroad.”19

**Tinpahar: Relief from Water Problem**

If ever there existed a water-supply problem, it was at Tinpahar Mission Station. Now no longer. Thanks to the flair of Fr. La Greca, water has been found in abundance. His Lordship has supplied piping and a brand new diesel pump. The financial help so generously offered by Malta and the English benefactors to Tinpahar Mission has instilled added courage and given new impetus to the Fathers to relieve famine and distress among the people. Digging of tube wells and tanks, “food for work” programmes and redemption of the people’s mortgaged lands are in full gallop.20

A report of the work being done by Fr. George Muscat, parish priest of Rajibpur:

“…perhaps the most productive part of the programme this year (1966), which influenced and helped most people, has been the cleaning of water reservoirs – which had not been cleansed for perhaps hundreds of years – and the collection of the manure which had been deposited at the bottom. Farmers came to take it in droves; often 200 bullock carts were there at a time… we charged nothing and we cannot say exactly how many cartloads were taken: a good estimate would be 10,000. There are many fields over here where nothing can be produced unless they are manured every year. We have now manured these fields in a way they have been before. It is certainly
not easy to imagine the increase in crops due to the terrific amount of manure seasoned for so many years. We have stored a good amount for further use… Last year we cleaned up one reservoir holding about 500,000 gallons of water. This year, work has been completed on three more: the two bigger ones will hold from five to six million gallons of water each. Cleaning up and deepening these reservoirs has provided work for many people. Besides, these reservoirs will keep the surrounding area moist and if rain fails in a critical period, they will easily provide the much needed water…”

**Redeeming Mortgaged Fields**

The Maltese Jesuitshave been working among the poor farmers and landless labourers. The farmers had a valuable capital in their fields, even if they were not very good ones. Sometimes when they needed money, either to repair a house, or for medicine, or to buy a plough-animal, or for a court case or for some other purpose, they used to sell rice or a fowl or a pig or a goat. But when they required more money and they had nothing to sell, they used to go to a mahajan, the richest man of the village, or a shop keeper in the bazaar. For the money they required, they had to give their ornaments made from melted old silver coins as security.

The interest on these loans was reckoned monthly. The rate in 1960’s was Rs.65 per month (equivalent to 72% per year). Many of the people did not have any ornaments just because they had already given them as security and had never been able to redeem them. In such cases when they needed money, they surrendered their fields to the money lender for a number of years as their security. The money lender would plough the fields and harvest the crop all for himself. The usual rate was about Rs.30 per acre for one year. In such situations, the condition of the borrowers became considerably worsened. When their fields had been mortgaged by the mahajan, then at harvest time they had no crop, they were forced to be “landless agricultural labourers” who could get work only irregularly and lead a very poor and permanently under nourished existence.

The Jesuits of Santal Mission aimed to remedy this situation and, if possible, to prevent it from arising. For this they organized a Credit Cooperation Bank. The members had to pay Re.1 as ‘admission fee’ and promise to deposit Re.1 per month in the bank. In this way they hoped to encourage the habit of saving money,
although most of them had very little chance of saving much. Loans were available from the credit bank under the following conditions: if the applicant was honest to the judgment of the members, if, possibly, he could give some ornament as security, if he promised not to go to the money lender. So far there were 50 members in the credit bank. Except for three or four members who had deposited a considerable amount of money, many just managed to deposit only one rupee per month. They all hoped to get loans from the bank to redeem their mortgaged fields, or to repair their houses, or to pay for medicines etc. At first, even though they had some security, the Fathers could not meet all their demands for loans because they just did not have enough capital in the bank. Then they received a good help from the people of England and Malta for famine relief. This they put in the bank as a deposit from their friends abroad. Thanks to this big help they now have some money in the cooperative bank and, so far, no member who had given a security had ever been refused credit.25

The Fruit of a Famine

When Fr. A. Camilleri26 of Guhajori Mission met Phucu, an elderly local Santal expressed his typical tribal simplicity with a broad smile: “Never before in my three score years, Father”, he exclaimed, “had I dreamed that such a scourge as this year’s famine could be turned into such a blessing! There, look below!” As he pointed a shriveled trembling finger to the deepest place in the valley a couple of hundred yards below us, he added: “Thanks to great Christian hearts who pitied us, an age-long dream has come true.”27

Practically the whole Santal population of Dhoadi and Dhaka, two poor villages of SantalParganas in the Indian state of Bihar were tackling a problem that the hardships of famine forced them to come to grip with. The bleak prospects of a bad famine were known to all from the time the crops failed and prices started spiraling up as never before. The poor Santals who live on their one crop a year were the first to be badly hit. Resigned as they always are to the extravagances of a broken nature they just sat and waited. They ate their frugal meal so long as they could get it. When there was none left to eat, people climbed up palm trees and
drank the intoxicating juice. It slaked their thirst and made them forget their misery for a while. Some, the more enterprising or should we say, the more badly hit, would stray into the jungle to pluck a few white berries or dig out some sweet juicy root.\textsuperscript{28} It was really going to be a bad year for them.

But the outside world was well aware of the consequences of the famine. Appeals were made on India’s behalf and funds poured in from poor school children to big business management. The U.S.A., with generosity, was one of the countries to come to the rescue. In no time American supertankers were India-bound with huge loads of life-giving wheat. The friends and benefactors in England and Malta of Santal Mission also responded most generously. The response for help was incredible, wherever men of goodwill existed. Giving just for the asking is not the right kind of help. The easy and profitable art of begging is particularly tempting in India. Help, therefore, was not to be just doled out to helpless people who would remain helpless the moment the help ended. If it were, it would solve a problem for today leaving the perpetual tomorrows yawning wide in the unsteady future.\textsuperscript{29} All this God-sent help had to be utilized in the way it helped best the suffering people.

The Fathers became convinced of this as Famine relief funds started reaching them at Guhiajori when the first Catholic Relief Services’ truck of American wheat rolled into Mission compound. No sooner was this was this known than the traditional Indian files started wending their way to the mission house. Once again, as the mission was coming to the rescue, the Relief Organizers made use of this first chance “to let all concerned know that this was no mere help. It was all meant to help people help themselves. The funds were to be wages, and the grain food for work.”\textsuperscript{30} Many could count their ribs for hunger and those 190 lbs. bags of U.S. wheat were precious to them. Those who were interested had only to suggest a project that would benefit the whole community. The needy were anxious to work, provided they were assured a living in the coming lean months. Soon things started taking shape. John of Dhoadi came forward. Water was the main difficulty. Not only was there no irrigation for possible winter and summer crops, but there was not even enough for the cattle and the villagers themselves to drink. John offered an
acre of land at the foot of two hills separating Dhoadi from Dhaka and that would be turned into a dam.

As it was planned, the people of both Dhoadi and Dhaka and others of neighbouring villages were there on the spot, spades and shovels on the shoulders on men and bamboo baskets gracefully balanced on the heads of women. Not much expert advice was needed. They had to dig and build two high dams with the dugout earth to block the cavity between the two hills. Twice a week they would get their wages from the money sent by the benefactors in England and Malta and a few pounds of wheat, according to the work put in. As the bottom of John’s acre of land descended lower, the two dams rose higher. At the fifth foot, water started seeping through. The elders of the village recognized the old spring that kept countryside green in the past. To celebrate the happy event they asked for an extra ration of corn. With water already available the zeal for work increased. In a few weeks, John’s tank was fantastic to see. Over three hundred feet long and a hundred broad with two high dams over 25 feet in height, it was a sight that would rightly extract wonder and surprise from old Phucu. When the monsoon rains would fill up the reservoir, there would be steady supply of water for Dhoadi and Dhaka.

This community project inspired Surju of Guhiajori, who offered his mud-filled tank to be improved. Work was taken in hand. The jungle on the sides was cleared. The banks of the tank were pushed further back. Clearer springs were struck as a ten years old heap of silt was dredged and was dug deeper a few feet more. With the tank twice its original size, it was a beautiful sight to see. More than the tanks dug and the dams built, it was the dawning on the tribals of the realization that cooperation could yield immense fruit that they had reason to be grateful for. Finally, the people began to realize that if they wanted to live comfortably they had to extend their full cooperation, however insignificant that might be. This was the first good step towards the much-desired self-sufficiency, a great gift brought about by the charity of all who helped with money as well as those who helped with wheat and corn. It sounds paradoxical, but famine too can yield fruit.
Self – Help, a Movement among Santals

Fr. Anthony Murmu\textsuperscript{31} speaks with conviction: “With all the advantages and disadvantages of being a Santal priest I have ventured to launch a movement of self-help among our Santals, without obviously excluding the other communities with whom we live side by side for without self-help all our mighty missionary effort as well as colossal aid to uplift the Santals is going to produce only superficial result. I combine my visits to the Catholics scattered in far-flung villages with social meetings for all the villagers. These common meetings help to keep village unity intact. In the meetings the main topics that are put forward and discussed are social consciousness, thinking and planning for the whole village, making a united effort to increase the agricultural output, keeping a small rice bank and securing a village fund in each village, settling disputes in the villages themselves without unnecessarily resorting to litigations, checking animals from destroying the crops and men from going to liquor shops, giving at least primary education to all the village children, making use of the government aid and so on.” \textsuperscript{32}

The drive so far resulted in visible signs of improvement. Some disputes were settled in the villages without going to the courts. Last year, the Tilaki people started a primary school on their own because they wanted their village children to be educated. Furthermore they generated village funds to buy a diesel pump for cultivation. They were determined to make their village a happy and enjoyable place on earth. The people of Gadi managed to get more than Rs. 500 (£25) worth of wheat, grain and potato seeds and fertilizers. Two thirds of the work was over and they had only to irrigate their fields with the canal water on three sides of their village. Hoping in his own people, Fr. Anthony Murmu stresses: “There also other villages where signs of improvement have been noticed. Now I can say that our people are awakening. Yet I must confess that I am completely unable to give the exact description of the most complicated process of the awakening of a people. But I hope and pray that it will be beneficial for the building up of Christ’s Church and for the greater glory of God.”\textsuperscript{33}
Like Fr. Anthony Murmu, Fr Albert Said of Kundli Mission also emphasizes on Self – help among the Santals: “We felt the need of building some rooms where people who are suffering from the effects of drought and have contracted T.B. or other diseases can stay for some weeks or months till they regain some strength. An old Bengali doctor is helping me for a very little pay and we both are happy at the thought that together we have saved a few lives. This of course may appear as sounding our own trumpets but I wish to make you share our joy for what we have been able to achieve was only possible through your wholehearted support.”34 One of the T.B. patients undergoing treatment, spontaneously, took care of six pigeons which had been offered by some people during the Mass offertory procession. This paved the way for building with empty wooden boxes, a few pens for hens, rabbits and pigeons. The patients themselves were in charge of this small farm. The eggs and the birds provide some nourishment for the sick who were happy that they could provide something for themselves and help the Father also.

**Education**

**Education – A Luxury among the Santals**

In Guhiajori Parish, there was only one Catholic School, St. Joseph’s High School. This was for the boys only and so the girls of the parish had to be sent to Dudhani Girls’ School. Hardly adequate for an area of thousands of Catholics! Even so, very few parish children could attend. For a poor Santal villager, the expense on school and boarding was unthinkable and so he preferred to keep the children at home and to receive their labour to support the family. And this was in spite of the huge reductions made by the missionaries in the schools. And so, many children of the parish received no education at all.35 As a solution, Father Milanes, the Parish Priest, called the children from all the far flung villages of the parish, to stay at the Mission Station during the holidays. The grown-up boys and girls were given pre-nuptial instructions and the younger ones were prepared for confession and first Holy Communion.36
The Jesuits strongly felt the need of education as one of the main channels to uplift the standard of the Santals in the society and so they gradually started increasing the number of schools in the mission stations. Here Fr. Emmanuel Stellini speaks of his conviction for having schools among the Santals:

“If we want to know the future of the Church, we have to look at our children. After a few years these children will supply the vitality or weakness of their generation, and their success or failure depends almost completely on how they are being educated now. It is this thought which pushes the missionary through all the obstacles and sacrifices he has to undergo in building his schools and in seeing that they are well run. If the missionary succeeds in this, then he is a fortunate and happy man because his future flock will be better instructed and consequently better equipped to live a true Catholic life. Furthermore there is little hope of success in instructing the grown-up converts in the truth and ideals of our religion because they are set in their ways; but the children can be more easily moulded to these truths and ideals. This explains why we have so many schools in our mission and why we are trying to make them as efficient as possible.”

So far we have been meeting with considerable success and for this we should to be grateful to God. It is enough to say that from among the boys who have recently matriculated from St. Joseph’s High School, Guhiajori, three are on their way to the priesthood. Equally successful has been St. Theresa’s High School, Dudhani, from where a number of girls have joined religious congregations. At present, however, we cannot cope with the number of applications, and our solution to this problem is to build more and bigger schools.

Throughout the mission the importance of education in raising the standard of living of the people is recognized. In every parish there is at least a primary school, often run buy nuns, serving the nearby village children, mainly Muslims and Hindus, and a good number of Santals from jungle villages, most of whom come to stay in the hostel in the mission station, to attend school. Most of the boys pay in paddy or money for their board and schooling, but for the poorer ones, the fees are reduced or even waived altogether. Benefactors make such scholarships possible.

Throughout the Santal Mission area, the schools served as lighthouse with their beams reaching even the farthest villages. They moulded the life of numerous
children and the re-generation will continue in the future also. The Jesuits of Santal Mission can be proud of St Joseph’s School, Guhiajori established in 1935 and recognized by the government in 1938, St. John Berchman’s School, Tinpahar begun in 1936 and recognized in 1948, St. Teresa’s School for girls, Dudhani started in 1935 and recognized in 1949, Maria Goretti School, Torai begun in 1946 and recognized in 1975, St. Xavier’s School, Sahibganj started in 1957 and Carmel School, Madhupur established in 1958. It is worth mentioning some of the Primary Schools whose contribution cannot be undermined like De Bono Middle School, Cilimpur established in 1958, Holy Child School, Dudhani begun in 1964, Gandhi Jayanti Middle School, Sitapahar begun in 1969 and JisuJaher Middle School, Sohorghati started in 1975. 40 Besides these flourishing Schools, St. Ignatius School, Majlispur established in 1954, St Joseph’s School, Rajibpur, Holy Cross School, Rajibpur and St Thomas’ School, Rahutara, played an important role during the tenure of Santal Mission.

The Jesuits run St. John Berchman’s High School, Tinpahar (1936), St. Joseph’s High school, Guhiajori (1936) with over a thousand students, both Hindi medium schools, and St. Xavier’s school at Sahibganj, an English medium school for 800 boys that has a good reputation. Many boarders come from as far away as Calcutta and Patna, and since its foundation in 1957 the lowest result obtained by those who sat for the Matriculation, has been “Second Class”. The school draws most of its boys from the richer Hindus and Muslims; with the poorer Santals in mind, however St. Ignatius’ Hostel was conceived as an addition to St. Xavier’s School.

St Ignatius Hostel, Sahibganj

In 1959, when Fr. J. Portelli was the Regional Superior of the Santal Region, a property known as “Nellie Villa” was bought by the Society of Jesus at Sahibganj, a short distance from St. Xavier’s. The following year a boarding for the boys attending St. Xavier’s was started. After the boys shifted to the school premises, the house was used as a hostel for Santal boys attending Sahibganj College till they moved to the hostel run by the College. 41 A Catholic Hostel was started from January
1970, thanks to Fr. L. Caruana, the Regional Superior, at St. Ignatius’, Sahibganj for
the Santal boys who would attend classes at St. Xavier’s School. The fee was Rs.
50.00 per month including boarding and hostel fees, Tuition fees and other school
fees.42 They were 20 so far, but eventually there would be place for 70 soon. Fr. La
Ferla and Bro. Birendra Prasad looked after them with fatherly and motherly care
respectively.43 Fr. La Ferla, the first director of St. Ignatius’ Hostel, realized the
need for the Santal students who were to be accommodated separately. These
students required more guidance and attention in their studies. Though there was a
hostel in the School campus, the Santal boys were not admitted there because they
would not be able to cope up with others, especially the non-tribals.44

St. Ignatius hostel was only for the Santal students who are attending at St. Xavier’s School, Sahibganj. It is run and managed by the Jesuits of the Santal Region, a minority Christian Society registered under the society’s registration act 1860.45 The admission to St. Ignatius Hostel was increasing year by year. In 1977, 79 Santal boys were admitted. Thanks to the hard work of Fr. S. DeRaffaele and Fr. C. Minj, the boys had double-decker beds and new desks manufactured by Bros. Spiteri and Benjamin in Mariampahar workshop. Fr. Henry Schembri gave weekly coaching classes to the boys. Fr. G. Muscat would give the boys a three day retreat in the beginning of February 1977, at the C.T.C., Torai.46

As per the Motto of the Hostel: ‘Hard work, Discipline and Punctuality’,47 the basic thrust of the hostel is to create an environment in which the Santal students study diligently and grow into mature, self-disciplined, competent, responsible and well behaved citizens who know how to use their freedom in a responsible and trustworthy manner.48 With the constant accompaniment of the Jesuits, the Santal boys grow in maturity. Every year at least, 5 get through in the Matriculation examination.

**Dehat (Village) Primary Schools**

Under the guidance and inspiration of Bishop Telesphore P. Toppo, several Primary Schools were opened in the ‘dehat’ (villages) in various Parishes. One such
School, St. Paul’s School, was officially launched at Banjhi on 27th January 1979, by the Parish Priest Fr. S. Calleja Gera. All the other Parish Priests were earnestly encouraged by the bishop to establish such schools in the villages.\(^49\) Since then, 55 new village schools have come up with over 1, 500 children on their rolls.\(^50\) In Sahibganj, Fr. Calleja Gera started three village schools and they cater to 190 students. But Fr. Calleja had realized a long time before when he started St. Michael Primary School in the Parish compound which today has 170 children and from where 94 children have gone to Torai, Tinpahar and Guhiajori Middle and High Schools.\(^51\)

In Cilimpur, Fr. Borg had 266 boys in his parish hostel. In October 1982, 300 children from the village schools of the parish were brought to the Parish school for 10 days to benefit from a different atmosphere and to experience things on a bigger scale.\(^52\) In Jiapani, Fr. Mathew started his primary school on a small scale in June 1982, in three straw and mat rooms. But for the new school year in January, the school started off with 200 students on its rolls.\(^53\) Hathimara had the poorest set-up of all. The school is housed in open portioned cubicles around the small church. Gilbert and six other teachers coped with 160 children. But Fr. Cachia had hopes of great things for the future.\(^54\)

**American Food for Poor Santal School Children**

During the pastoral visit of the diocese before Holy Week in 1965, Bishop Leo Tigga observes:“One of the most striking and very consoling features I noticed was that in every mission centre there was a big increase in the number of school children. This increase has been possible due to the generous gift of food donated by the people of America.”\(^55\) Almost all our Christians are tribals and farmers. They live in villages dispersed among non-Christians. Some of them cultivate their own land. But a good many till the land of others with an agreement that they will deliver half the produce of the land to the landowner. If agriculture is far from being advanced in India, agriculture among tribals is often a mockery. The result is that these people do not get enough from the land to be able to have two square meals a day throughout the year.\(^56\)
Since our Christians live dispersed in the villages, very few can send their children to Mission schools as day-scholars. Their villages are too far from the mission centre. If they choose to send their children to the mission centre they have to enroll them as boarders. But to pay the boarding fees is a very heavy burden, in fact for many, it is beyond their means. A good many can pay half the fees and these are accepted by the school authorities who try to make up for the other half with the gift of the American people. That is how so many children have found their way into our mission schools. The half fees, plus the American aid enable the school authorities to give three meals a day to the school children. Hence the children look healthy, happy and many are being educated at a cost their parents can pay. If they had remained at home they would not even get two meals a day throughout the year and along with this physical starvation they would have been left to mental starvation.

Seeing so many children in our schools, the Bishop Leo Tigga could not help feeling hopeful for the future of the children and at the same time thankful to our benefactors. Spontaneously a prayer went out of his heart: “Lord, bless the people of America for their generosity. Reward with eternal life all those who do good to us for Thy name’s sake. Had it not been for their help so many poor children would have been doomed to a future as dismal as that of their ancestors.” The Bishop was always grateful to the donors for the food for the poor children.

Crafts in the School

“In an age when the ‘do – it – yourself’ craze is so much on vogue, one could safely have predicted that it was only a question of time before our schools in India would take up the cry. In our mission, our High School dedicated to St. Joseph the Crafts-man has taken the lead in building crafts-classes for boys. Among the crafts to be taught are carpentry and tailoring.” In Tinpahar, the Society of Jesus through the strenuous efforts of Fr. A. La Greca bought about 8 acres of land adjoining the High School with the view of starting an Agricultural and Technical Training Branch of the High School. As the Santals are tribals, who mostly work in the paddy fields at the edge of the jungle, such practical training in agriculture is most
useful, and even if some boys fail to graduate and return to the cultivation of the land in their village, their stay at the high school would have been of great practical use. For many years it was considered that the land at Mundli was barren. The curse continued till expert Fr. A. Camilleri moved in and transformed the face of the earth. The field behind the church which he levelled out proved that it was a good acquisition. The Deputy Commissioner of Dumka visited Tinpahar and suggested that it would help some Block officials to visit Mundli and see what dedication could achieve.60

Meeting of the Jesuits of Santal Region on Education

According to the Report of the Meeting of the Jesuits of Santal Region on 28th December 1971, Fr. Lawrence Caruana, the Regional Superior, reminded of the education of the Catholics who often were not able to pay the low fees in the schools and stressed on the establishment of an Educational Fund to help poor meritorious students.61 Fr. Alfred Agius spoke about some problems in the education of the Catholic Santals. He referred to a few problems such as the decreasing percentage of Catholics in the Mission Schools and the formation of the boys in the schools which was not given due to lack of personnel. He also raised a number of questions regarding the Jesuit educational endeavour: the aim of the school, the teaching of Moral Science and Catechism, directing some boys to the Agricultural Training Centre (A.T.C) in Namkum and the problem of the drop-outs.62

Unemployed Youth Trained for Employment

From 1983, Br. Paul Spiteri and Br. Marcus Samad directed the workshop at Mariampahar to train Tribal youth in carpentry and welding, a project under the Government scheme of TRYSEM (Training Rural Youth Self-Employment) which took up poor unemployed youth for one year, in such a way that they could return to their own village after their training and become self-employed. There were 32 young men being trained at the moment. Besides supplying them with tools, the Government also gave them a stipend of Rs. 200/- per month.63 Fr. James Aril of Santal Region, “The work at the Vocational Training Centre, is a direct war against
poverty and unemployment. It has exploded the myth that only the college educated and the government employees can earn a decent living. Ably managed by Brs. Paul Spiteri and Marcus Samad, it upholds the dignity of manual work. Rural youth between the age of 18 and 35 are the eligible candidates. No educational qualifications are needed, except that they should be able to read and write. People below the poverty line receive the highest priority. According to the government policy, only one person can be taken from one family.\textsuperscript{64}

Government aid is ensured for the trainees. A stipend of Rs. 100.00 is granted to them per month. For the purchase of raw materials each candidate is given Rs. 200.00 per year. The goods produced belong to the trainees who are expected to sell them and again purchase extra raw materials for themselves to produce other goods. The training - cum - production process is personally satisfying and economically rewarding to the trainees. “Earn while you learn” is the maxim of the scheme.\textsuperscript{65} Diplomas are awarded to them by the B.D.O. at the end of the course. The Director of the Centre, Br. Spiteri said, “There are 250 diesel pumps in the sub-division but there is hardly anyone who is trained to repair them. The same sad case with cycles and petromaxes! This December we hope to start training people in these lines too.”\textsuperscript{66}

Fr. Lawrence Caruana explained, “The Welding and Drilling section at the Centre was started by Br. Spiteri seven years ago, where at present seven young men are getting training. Twenty two are in the Carpentry section which was started this January in collaboration with the government in its National scheme of TRYSEM. We have great hopes that the Vocational Training Centre will benefit our villages.”\textsuperscript{67} The Centre, which is the fruit of a collaboration with the Government, is an incentive to many more such projects. S.S. Sinha, the then S.D.O. of Sahibganj, wrote to the Director of the Centre in August 1983 guaranteeing his fullest support. He hoped that the Vocational Training Centre will “save several from becoming ill and diseased organs of society.”\textsuperscript{68}
Empowering the Young Santals

Young Santal Association

Fr. William Soren, helped by another Santal Religious Bro. Paul T.O.R., founded the Young Santal Association at Ranchi. It aimed to help both spiritually and materially, Santal College Students studying in the city. Meetings were held monthly which included discussion of common problems and a spiritual pep talk. The members of the association were enthusiastic to come together and discuss the challenges related to their life.

Leadership Camp of the LTS

At St. Xavier’s School, Sahibganj, a leadership camp of the L.T.S. (Leadership Training Service) was held under the direction of Fathers R. Pilette and R. Wirth from 11th to October 1970. 28 College students participated. After the Camp the spontaneous prayer of the participants was to have the LTS officially recognized on an all-India basis and to have at least one Father assigned who could devote himself completely to this movement. The students were able to realize their leadership qualities to be more responsible in the society.

The St. Xavier’s LTS in Cilimpur

The St. Xavier’s L.T.S. Unit held its first working camp at Cilimpur on 8th to 11th April 1971. 17 boys attended the camp organized by Fr. R. Wirth and aided by Scholastic George Camilleri and Mr. Raymond Azzopardi. The boys worked pretty hard (the blisters in their hands show this) deepening a water tank and using the soil and the stones to level a play ground for the local school children and repairing the village road. All were extremely pleased with the outcome of the camp. Through this work camp, the students were aware of the dignity of labour, concern for the poor and universal brotherhood.
Study and Leadership Camps

Fr. De Raffaele held a study camp for 13 Santal boys lasting 15 days. A leadership camp was held for 72 Santal boys who were attending non-catholic schools. The team conducting this camp was of Frs. Cecil and H. Schembri, Scholastics Angelus Kujur, Benjamin Tigga and Brothers Sarupurti and Kisku. The boys came from the following parishes: Cilimpur: 15, Dudhani: 12, Kundli: 9, Jiapani, Torai, Ghuuajori and Ti npahar: 7 each, Sahibganj: 4 and two each from Talbaria and Sohorghati. These camps empowered the young Santal students both intellectually and socially based on the religious and social values.

Leadership Camps for Santal College Students

A four – day leadership Camp for College students was held at St. Xavier’s, Sahibganj. It was a success and it was hoped to organize others in future. Bishop Toppo participated in the camp which was organized by Rev. Charles Soren, ably assisted by Fr. P.A. Chacko, Scholastics Charles Tudu, Francis X. Soren and novice Ignatius Murmu. Later, Fr. Chacko and Bro. Ignatius Murmu conducted a Leadership Camp at Asanbani for Santal High School boys. These camps made the students aware of their duties and responsibilities as future leaders of the society.

Vocational Guidance Camp for girl Students

Vocational Guidance Camp was held at the C.T.C., Torai for 43 school-leaving girls from St. Teresa’s School, Dudhani and Nirmala School, Harimora. The resource persons were Frs. A.Agius and Gauci Sacco and Sr. Assunta Tudu of Cilimpur. Sr. Emmanuel Borg of St. Teresa’s School, Dudhani organized the camp. An exposure about the job opportunities was given to the Santal girls who desired to go above the traditional Santal women in the society.

Empowerment Programmes of Fr. Anthony Murmu

On 26th September 1970, the Union Deputy Minister of Education and Youth Welfare, Mr. Amiyo Kisku, met Fr. Murmu at Brindabon and discussed with him
the questions regarding Santali Script and the position of the Manjhis and Parganas in Santal Parganas. Fr. Murmu accompanied Mr. Amiyo Kisku in his tour of Pakur and Dumka sub-divisions. At Dumka they paid a visit to His Lordship Leo Tigga, the Bishop of Dumka, and discussed with him the possible steps that should be taken to promote College education among the Santals.\(^7\) The Gandhi Jayanti Feast was held on 2\(^{nd}\) October 1970 under the direction of Fr. A. Murmu. The life and teachings of Mahatma Gandhi were read out and explained to the people. On the same day Fr. A. Murmu held a meeting of Manjhis and Parganas of Santal Parganas regarding the service they should render to the nation.\(^6\)

On 10\(^{th}\) and 11\(^{th}\) October 1970, the \textit{Jaher Era mela} was held in the sub-divisions of Rajmahal and Godda. A week later the same mela was held in Pakur sub-division. Besides the usual commercial aspect of the mela, there were also competitions in drama plays and folk dancing. Prizes were distributed to the best groups of competitors. The Deputy Commissioner of Santal Parganas and other Government officers were invited. Mr. Seth Hembrom, Minister of Excise, inaugurated the mela at Durgapur and Pakur sub-divisions.\(^7\) On 16\(^{th}\) October 1970, at Dumka there was a meeting regarding the choice of the Santali script. The Roman script was chosen by 75\% of those present.\(^8\)

On 24\(^{th}\) October 1970, Fr. Murmu inaugurated a new Santal managed market at Bisunpur, Pakur sub-division. This brought the number of Santal managed markets in Pakur sub-division to four. The other three were at Durgapur, Padercola and lagdum.\(^9\)

\textbf{SidokanhuLahantiBaisi (Sido-Kanhu Village Uplift Movement)}

Fr. A. Murmu went to Delhi with a Santal delegation and succeeded to have an interview with the President, the Prime Minister, the Home Minister and several other Ministers, in connection with the Sido-Kanhu village Uplift Movement.\(^8\) In 1971, as in previous years, the \textit{Sido Kanhu Lahanti Baisi}, under the presidentship of Fr. Anthony Murmu, organized a \textit{Mela} at Bhognadi. Besides delegates from Assam, Bengal and Bihar, there were thousands of happy Santal people with their drama
parties from all over Rajmahal, Pakur and Godda sub-divisions. Headmen of Santal villages were in much greater numbers than before and children from the Samaj School at Dhanjuri delighted the public with their parade and action songs. The Mela attracted even Felix Richard, the young tribal film producer from Bombay who wanted to make a film on Sidokanhu in Santali in the near future. The Government put up an agricultural exhibition and provided prizes to outstanding individuals and groups in sports and folk dancing. The Government also sanctioned the construction of two wells in the vicinity of the Mela ground and the road leading from Barhit to Bhognadi. On 29th August 1971, Fr. A. Murmu opened a Santal upliftment centre at Pakur. This was the fourth of its kind. The others were at at Brindabon, Barhait and Sahibganj.

Activities led by Fr. Anthony Murmu

From 1st September 1971, Food for Work Scheme had been taken up in the villages of Banjhi and Birbal Kandor. A football ground has been leveled and the village road is being repaired. A meeting of the Manjhis and Parganas of Sahibganj sub-division was held at Campa Akhra, his residence in Sahibganj on 5th September 1971. In spite of the heavy rain the attendance was very satisfactory. They met again on 19th September 1971 and over a hundred persons attended. Mr. Seth Hembrom, the Transport Minister, later met them at the Circuit House. On 12th September 1971, there was a meeting of the college students of Bhagalpur University. Seventy Santal students and some high educated persons attended. The Executive Committee of the Sidokanhu Baisi met at Campa Akhra, Sahibganj, on 20th September 1971. The Jaher Era Mela took place in 12 Bungalows of Sahibganj sub-division on 29th September 1971.

On 7th October 1971, Fr. A. Murmu conducted meeting of the Catechists of Cilimpur. The Jaher Era Mela was conducted at Durgapur near Amrapara. The Santals started two markets near Amrapara. Fr. Murmu held a well attended social meeting at Taljharion 10th October 1971. A similar meeting was held at Roncore near Borio on 17th October 1971 and the people were urged to meet the Bihar
Governor, His Excellency Sri D. Barua who paid a visit to Santal Parganas on 28th October 1971.

The Governor was stopped at Dudhani where he was garlanded by the girls of St. Teresa’s High School, at Guhiajori where he met the boys of St. Joseph’s High School and finally stopped at Amrapara where Fr. A. Murmu with a large group of Santal dancers gave him a warm welcome. In the name of the Santals and Paharias of Santal Parganas, he presented a memorandum to the Governor. On 19th October 1971, Gosse era mela (Harvest Fair) was held at Paharpur, near Tinpahar.

Santal Market

The Social Movement of Fr. A. Murmu spread over Godda sub-division of Santal Parganas. Twenty two Santal villages joined the movement and opened a new market by the Santals, for the Santals and of the Santals. They were settling all the quarrels through the Headman without going to the Court. Fr. Murmu was busy settling many cases himself.

The SidoKanhuMela was held at Bognadi from the 7th to 11th April 1972. Mr. Amio Kisku, the Deputy Union Minister of Health, and Mr. Priti Cand Kisku, Deputy Minister of Agriculture, Bihar, were the Chief Guests. There were Sports, folk dances, dramas, plays and discussions on tribal problems. The office-bearers of the Baisi were re-shuffled.

Drought Relief in the Santal Region

One of the important topics of conversation in the first half of 1972 was the continued drought which prevailed in the Santal Region. The people were already aware of the hardships they would be facing in course of time. Except in one or two places rice plantation was an utter failure. Everyday all the parishes and institutions in the Region were besieged by people begging for food. Usually at this time of the year, the Santals would be relying on the maize crop to provide them with food and help them through till the rice harvest. However, due to the failure of the pre-monsoon showers, there would not be any maize crop this year. What will the
people eat? - This was the question echoed all over the Region. The magnitude of the problem was alarming due to the double failure of the maize crop and rice harvest.” What will the people eat in 1973? Where will they get the money to buy seeds for the next year’s crops? In Timpahar, a Day of Prayer for Rain was organized on a Sunday. The Blessed Sacrament was exposed till noon and this was followed by Mass. Notwithstanding the short notice given to the people, the Church was packed just as on Christmas day. The same Day of Prayer was organized by Fr. A. Said at Kundli. Massive aid from outside Bihar and Bengal could be the only solution. The Bihar Revenue Minister, who was also in charge of coordinating the relief work in the State, said in an interview that governmental efforts alone were not adequate to meet the situation. He appealed to voluntary agencies to come forward “to fill in the gaps in the programme which the government is taking up in all earnestness.” In the West Bengal Assembly the Finance Minister said that the drought in Malda and West Dinajpur districts would be fought on a war footing. Fr. Y. LaFerla reports that “C.R.S. and CARITAS are fully engaged in rushing aid to our districts of Malda and West Dinajpur. It is worth remembering that a year ago these two districts offered shelter to the millions of refugees from Bangladesh.” Bishop L. Tigga was in Calcutta and he personally met the C.R.S. officials to impress upon them the grave situation in Santal Region. He was assured that help would also be sent to Santal Parganas district in Bihar.

**Feeding Programme for Children**

After the drought in Malda and West Dinajpur districts, Fr. Y. LaFerla, the Director of Caritas, Raiganj, and the Parish priests in the two districts organized child feeding programme for over 30,000 children and Food for Work for about 4,500 for one month. Altapur had 4 centres with 3,200 children, Chotparua 9 centres with 5,000 children, Rajibpur 1 centre with 2,000 children, Majlispur 1 centre with 800 children, Alampur 10 centres with 10,000 children and Rahutara 20 centres with 7,770 children.
**Savings Scheme**

The scheme was intended to bring the benefits of long or short term savings within the reach of the Catholic Santals in an effort to promote thrift among them. Seeing the plight of the people whom the Fathers were trying to help to redeem their lands from the *mahajans*, Fr. Savona, the Diocesan Treasurer, started a scheme called: “Savings Scheme”. Santals are not used to save money in the bank, but rather take loans from the *mahajans* when needed. Hence they become their slaves. It is no use washing a pig, if immediately after it goes to roll back in the mud. Hence the habit of taking loans is to be changed into a habit of depositing money in the bank so that in time of need they would withdraw their own money and not become slaves again of the *mahajans*. Old habits die hard. Moreover many Santals are illiterate and would find it very hard to go the bank for transactions. According to this scheme, Catholics in a Parish need not go to a government bank but to their own parish priest and deposit money with him. He in turn would deposit the same with the Diocese. Very gradually this idea caught up. More and more people started depositing money. The “Savings Scheme” was eventually registered with the government, and now it has deposits of crores of rupees.

**Medical/ Health Programmes**

**St. Joseph’s Dispensary, Guhiajori**

St. Joseph’s Dispensary, Guhiajori, expresses its readiness and willingness to heal the sick in a Christian way thus, “I am a mission dispensary just born yesterday. My doors have opened to sick and injured of is my desire that they may be made well again. For this task, I have a head, I have a heart and I have hands- a powerful threesome against disease, poverty and ignorance. It is for my head to see through the case and to its cause and cure; for my heart to sympathize, suffer with, making others’ pain my own; for my hands to give themselves willingly and untiringly to the work of healing. For me there is no leisure, no quitting time. Whenever they come they must find me ready, but with all the medicine and motherly love and care.”

This dispensary was the felt need of the students in the School and the villagers in and around Guhiajori.
Fr. George Muscat, “A Doctor Saheb!”

Fr. George Muscat, S.J., in his daily round of duties had to put his hands on sores and heal them – He was a ‘Doctor Saheb’ for the village people. Here he gives some of the cases that he had attended: One day a young mother came to him. She looked extremely weak and he insisted that she should see the doctor. “My husband just died and I have nothing,” she said. He gave her some vitamins still insisting that she should see the doctor. Lately her mother came to beg for milk-powder for her little grandson. “How is the mother,” he asked. “She died and I am bringing him up,” she retorted. On another occasion a leper came for baptism. On his visit to the leper’s village, Father took with him some pills for him. Now when his supply of pills was over, he came to Father for more. The horrible disease had stopped its progress and those few pills would save his family from infection. Once a young woman got fire and her father in tearing off her clothes burnt his hands. Father made him plunge them in cold water and this was his practical treatment for such burns. His hands healed soon. The daughter however had a stinking sore. The funny thing about it was that she could stop her nose while he who needed both hands to clean the wound, could not do the same. On another occasion a man came to him informing him that his wife had a baby and that she was seriously ill. That was obviously a doctor’s case. Father could have given them some vitamins for her, but then they would not go to the doctor believing that the vitamins would work miracles. A doctor’s visit meant money and the people could not afford it. That is why they came to the missionary and trusted their life to him. He also asked them to contribute something for the medical expenses otherwise they had little faith in the medicine given and so it would not work on them. These contributions were kept in one box and they were used to buy more medicines. However if the missionary had to wait for these contributions, he would never buy medicines. Here again, the missionary depended on his friends to buy medicines – the saving tonic for so many people who otherwise would never go to the doctor.
Medical Ministry in Kundli Mission

While Sister Joyce, a qualified nun, opened a dispensary in Kundli, Fr. Albert Said rightly calls it “Jesu Ashram.” Rather than a full-fledged parish, Kundli is still very primitive. What buildings have so far been put up, are all simply structures, so while there are several buildings of varying sizes and purposes, all are of the same material and appearance as the other dwellings in the village. Fr. Said’s way of life, ministry and station-development are on a level with the life of the village, and the life of the village extends into his own and vice-versa. In working through the streets and village houses, I was never very clear whether we were on parish property, in the huts of the TB patients and the sick, and house of the people who offered him hospitality when he first came to the village, or in the house of some other friends.

One of his principal activities is the caring of the sick, TB patients and lepers. In the warren of larger and smaller huts lives an indefinite number of old, sick and infirm. For example, in a hut I saw a wrinkled prematurely old man who, a couple of days before, had been dying. As we came in he smiled at Fr. Said and told him that he was feeling a little better. By his head there was his fourteen year old son, who for three months had been faithfully attending him. When the communal gong sounds, he goes to collect his father’s and his own share of rice from the community kitchen and bring it to the hut. The people contribute something according to their means. The medical side of the set-up is now cared for by the Holy Cross Sisters, who every week come for a day or two to prescribe and give medicine to the inmates and to all those sick people of the area who show up at the clinic.

Ambulance for Asanbani

After months of labour and pains, Fr. J. Zerefa accompanied by Fr. S. Calleja, took delivery of the diesel – engine Land Rover Ambulance on the 10th February 1970 at Bombay without further hitches. The overland trip via Nasik, Dhulia, Raipur, Nagpur, Sambalpur, Jamshedpur and Dumka took 5 days, covering over 1400 miles. It was the realization of Fr. J. Zerefa’s old dream.
Cilimpur Hospital

When there was a dispensary in Cilimpur, the average number of patients per day was about 40 to 50 people from a surrounding area of over 15 miles. The people were also being trained to give a nominal fee of two annas that would make them understand that it was not completely free and hence that the medicines were genuine.\textsuperscript{104} The dispensary gradually developed into a hospital and the good work done by the Sisters of Capitanio at Cilimpur deserves to be put on record. Cilimpur is six miles west of Nalhati railway station. Thus the hospital is really in the heart of many villages and is rendering excellent service to the people of the area. Last year (1972) the sisters attended to 8600 outdoor patients and 120 indoor patients. This was done in spite of the fact that there is no road, no electricity and no conveyance.\textsuperscript{105} After hopefully waiting for a long time, the people of Cilimpur welcomed the arrival of Doctor Sister Adele for the hospital there. The news of her arrival brought more patients to the hospital and all the beds were occupied.\textsuperscript{106} This 20 bed hospital run by the Sisters of Charity of Maria Bambina has four nurses and one doctor on the staff of the hospital, all Maria Bambina Sisters. The patients treated in 1986 were 20589 of whom 3558 were new cases.\textsuperscript{107}

Mother and Child programme by Cilimpur Hospital

Health extension work is one of the special features of our hospital. We have a widespread Mother and Child program with 1200 beneficiaries looked after by 18 trained health workers under the direction of one Sister Nurse. A group of our Mother and Child beneficiaries gather once a week at Cilimpur hospital. The health workers using charts lecture the parents of their respective area on hygiene and nutrition. The mothers and children are examined and given the needed vaccines and medicines. Food from Catholic Relief Services is also distributed to them. This Mother and child program has had an impact on the villages covered by this program and noticeably less children die in infancy and very rarely is a woman lost in childbirth.\textsuperscript{108}
Homeopathy in Jiapani

One among the two protestant young men on the working staff of Fr. Mallia had a diploma in homeopathy and so he was employed by the Father to distribute homeopathic medicines in six different centres of Jiapani sector. He visited these centres every week and spent one day in each centre.109

A Medical Seminar for the Dispensary Sisters

As announced in advance in the Santal Region Newsletter110, a Medical Seminar for the Sisters in-charge of dispensaries in the Diocese of Dumka was organized at the Social Welfare Institute, Raiganj, from the 5th to the 10th August 1974. The Seminar was conducted by Sister Anne Mae Doran who was the Secretary of the Bihar Voluntary Health Association and her team from Holy Family Hospital, Patna. About thirty Sisters, including the two Doctors from Cilimpur and Rajibpur, attended the well – conducted Seminar. According to Sister Anne Mae, the participant dispensary Sisters showed great co-operation and Fr. Y. LaFerla’s organization was perfect.111

Outdoor Charitable Dispensary

On 17th December 1974, the foundations of the “Outdoor Charitable Dispensary” in the grounds of St. Xavier’s School, Sahibganj were started under the direction of Br. P. Spiteri. The dispensary was being built from a grant received through the kind offices of Fr. Y. LaFerla and it is hoped that the poor people of the villages surrounding the school would benefit most. One local doctor has already volunteered to give his services free to the patients in the dispensary.112

Rural Health Education

Since January 1975, the Bambina sisters of Dudhani had been carrying out a health education programme in the villages. Twice a week, two qualified sisters were going to the village centres to carry out surveys and follow up work in the health and nutrition fields.113 The old parish church of Dudhani was converted into a
well-planned public dispensary with facilities for a couple of in-patients. This dispensary has been a blessing to the local poor people and the boys and girls in the schools and boardings in Dudhani.

**Maternity Clinic at Purnea**

The clinic at Purnea run by the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary started functioning after the inauguration by the District Magistrate of Purnea. Sr. (Dr) Agatha and Sr. Gemma, a pharmacist joined the medical staff of the clinic. On 10th July 1976, Bishop Leo Tigga inaugurated and blessed the new maternity clinic of the Sisters in Purnea.

**Medical Seminar at Social Welfare Institute**

Thanks to the initiative of the Director, Fr. Y. LaFerla, two seminars were organized at Social welfare Institute (SWI), Raiganj. The first one was on “Natural Family Planning” and the second one was on “Our Role in Community Development”. Eminent scholars were invited to conduct these seminars. J. Troisi played an important role with his expertise in the second seminar. Two training sessions of fifteen days each for village health workers were planned as a follow-up action of the two seminars.

**The Missionaries of Charity**

The Missionaries of Charity at Dudhani paid weekly visits to Asanbani and Guhiajori from where hundreds of poor Santals received medicines from the Sisters free of cost. Their good medical work was very much appreciated by the lepers, T. B. patients and other sick people who came in big numbers to be attended by the Sisters.

**Medical Activities in SWI, Raiganj**

Thanks to the initiatives of Fr. La Ferla, various medical activities took place in the Social Welfare Institute (SWI), Raiganj. A course for midwives was organized
Many Sisters, field workers and two men attended the course. One free eye operation clinic was held. The First Aid Course was well attended. A Blood Donation Camp was also successfully conducted at the S.W. I. Some organizations used the Institute to hold their meetings. A home nursing course was conducted under the direction of Sr. Elizabeth of Rajibpur.

**Outreach**

Besides their normal missionary activities, the missionaries went out of their way to reach out to others in the spirit of Christian charity. They took up some expansionist measures to work among the non-Santals, Barois, Pulis, Paharias, the refugees, the poor, the sick, the needy and the marginalized. They always inculcated the value of other-centredness to their students, people and collaborators in their missionary endeavours.

**Missionary work among Barois & Pulis in Majlispur**

However, the excitement of the first two years seems to have quietened down: work among the Santals is at a standstill. Fr Cauchi left after one year to begin his life adventure, pioneering within the Damin - I - Koh. But low caste Bengalis were on the move. Unfamiliar with the Bengali language, Fr. De Bono called on Fr Remy Louwyck, a disciple of Fr. Aloys Wauters, the well known apostle of the Bengalis in Calcutta. Fr Remy had been Parish Priest of St. Teresa for 15 years and had presently joined his guru, who was Parish Priest of Sacred Heart, Dharamtola. The first group to whom Fr Louwyck ministered was a group of 24 converts from Protestantism and another of 58 Hindus, headed by one Bhuban Sarkar, schoolmaster at Jaigir, some 37 miles North of Majlispur. Later ten villages of Barois, numbering 700 low caste people whose profession was to grow 'ran' (pepper betel) showed interest in Catholicism.

There was another caste, namely, the Pulis who were far superior to the Santals showed enthusiasm towards Catholicism. They also were equally oppressed by high caste Hindus and Muslim zamindars and they were seeking protection from the missionaries. Fr. De Bono expressed his hope: “I am sure that if I could sacrifice
a thousand rupees in fighting cases for them, we might have them en masse. They are very numerous in this part of the country; several are already very well disposed; something more positive will be done for them in the near future.” Fr. De Bono was convinced that Majlispur would be a decent mission station in the near future since the first of January they had more than two hundred baptisms.  

Father Louwyck however was not permanent. A new assistant came to Majlispur, the Sicilian Fr. Joseph Cordaro, who belonged to the first batch sent by the Sicilian Province in 1924, had by now completed his Jesuit training and was ready for work. During his first missionary tour, he reports that he visited many Santal villages where he gave 106 baptisms and that he was approached by a group of Hindu Pulis, who spoke to him in Santali, a thing unusual among the Hindus and Mahomedans. They articulated their desire to him that they would become Christians. They also expressed their wish to receive baptism and asked for a catechist. While on the North of Majlispur there was a movement towards Catholic religion among the Bengalis and the Hindus, in the South also there was a similar awakening.

**Sahibganj L.T.S. to Poor Students**

A fete, organized by the L.T.S. group in Sahibganj bagged a net profit of over Rs. 1000/-. The group allotted part of this amount for scholarships to poor boys in the school. The group also organized every Saturday, ‘Coffee Nights’ in the hostel, to raise funds for their activities, one of which was a Sports’ Day for a neighbouring Primary School. On 15th August 1972, the L.T.S. boys of St. Xavier’s, Sahibganj, gave a free meal to more than 120 children and adults in a village nearby as part of their Independence day celebration. At the suggestion of Mr. Raymond Azzopardi, a Maltese volunteer in Sahibganj, on the first Monday of the month, the Students’ Council organized a collection for the poor. From the money already collected, a poor woman was provided with a hut. Materials for another hut were also ready. Some of the boys also brought some clothes to be distributed to the poor.
Jesuit Mission to the Paharias

Fr. Salvatore Nobile came in touch with the Paharias when he was in the Parish at Tinpahar in 1960s. He was acquainted with a small village called Bickani which was inhabited by the Paharias. He writes in the Santaliland in 1960, “This Bickani village is situated in the ‘Paharia’ country. The ‘Paharias,’ which means hill-people, from the word ‘pahar’ – Hindi for hill, are not Santals. They are aboriginals like the Santals and most of them speak Santali. Up to now very little work has been done among these people. He has just started and he finds that they are very willing to listen and and quite ready to come over. The biggest difficulty is ‘MEN’! We do not yet have enough to carry on the work we are at present doing, let alone to start new work.” Here Fr. Nobile strongly feels the need of the mission to the Paharias but at the same time he is handicapped with the scarcity of men and money.

Food Distribution to the Paharias

The first distribution of food to the Paharias in Barharwa Parish took place on the 15th April 1972. The first batch was from Pathna Bungalow. On the 16th and 18th April 1972, food was distributed to the Paharias of Ranga and Durgapur Bungalows. On each occasion, the Circle Officer of Pathna Development Block, Mr. Eugene Bkhla, who had formally requested help on the 3rd April 1972, was present with his office staff to issue an identity card to each family. Each card listed the number of members in the family. In all 1,112 families, grouped in 39 villages, had benefited from the food distribution. Other distributions took place in the beginning of May 1972 when printed ration card was issued to each family. Fr. Y. LaFerla supplied the food-stuffs and Fr. L. Caruana, the Regional Superior paid for the transport charges. For a few months the Paharia tribesmen were helped and fed in collaboration with the local Government officials. Throughout the hot and long summer months all over the Region, the Fathers and Brothers leveled and prepared many fields for sowing with the assistance and co-operation of Fr. LaFerla, the Diocesan Director of C.R.S. (Catholic Relief Services).
In 1983, the Jesuits opened a Social Action and Herbal medicine centre at Satia among the Sauria Paharia tribe for their welfare and upliftment. So far Dumka Diocese was working exclusively among Santals. This was the first venture that concerned a tribe other than the Santals. Fr. P. A. Chacko moved to Daharlangi on 12th May 1983. But before leaving Kundli, he established contact with the Paharias of Kerlo village, three hours walk from Kundli. When these people heard that Fr. Chacko wanted to stay at their village, they were very happy to have him and they went for him with a horse to carry his belongings to the village. Chacko spent a week at Kerlo staying in the Manjhi’s house and the Manjhi’s son offered to accompany Chacko to other Paharia villages. Looking back on these first months, Fr. Chacko says, “It is still too early to say anything about the Paharia Apostolate. No major breakthrough has been done. I have been able to visit a number of villages though much of my movements have been hampered by the erratic monsoon. The villages apart, my major haunting grounds have been the village markets, public roads, jungle tracts where the Paharias struggle with nature or any place where I come across them.”

“Often I am a silent onlooker. Language barrier is one big problem. Hence I watch them and try to learn from them what they can teach me about themselves. I am also trying to learn their language. So far I have not arrived at a systematic way as no grammar or dictionary is available. Some veteran missionaries console me by their experience of learning Santali by telling me that the oral method is a very effective means, and hence, it should keep me going.” After attending a Tribal Seminar in Chatra in August 1982, Fr. Chacko met Prof. Vidyarthi of Anthropological department, Ranchi, to get some information and resources about the Paharias from him as he has done some research about this people. Since Fr. Chacko began his work among the Paharias, it was always his desire to settle himself in one of their villages. This desire became a reality when the headman of Satia village offered him a small plot of land. Satia is just four kilometres from the road on the other side of the Daharlangi Community Centre. It nestles attractively under the wooded hill and can be reached by a rough road.
Fr. Chacko sank a well in this newly acquired land and at forty feet found water. This was a great blessing because the Paharias did not have wells and collected water from trickling springs here and there. With the well, a small hall and a room were put up and now a small house was under construction. Fr. Mathew moved to Satia in January 1987 and looked after the building.\textsuperscript{140}

**Paharia Youth Mela at Daharlangi**

A Paharia Youth Mela was organized on a modest scale in the moonlit night of 27\textsuperscript{th} November 1985 in tune with the International Year of Youth. It was the first time the Paharias got an opportunity to conduct a mela of their own to express and enjoy their talents and cultural heritage.\textsuperscript{141} Br. Anthony Lakra organized the opening item. He led a group of youngsters to the foot of a hill one kilometre away. From there, he whistled them off on a race with flaming torches. This race was followed by other items like flute playing, songs, tug of war and children’s programmes. The climax was an exhilarating dance competition by different Paharia groups who had their eyes on the prize goat.\textsuperscript{142}

**Bangladesh Refugees**

The problem of refugees from East Pakistan was getting more and more acute in our parishes in Malda and West Dinajpur. In Islampur parish, the number of refugees as follows: Patagora 35,000; Thakurbari 20,000; Daspara and Lokhipur 15,000; Maragutu 15,000; Matikunda 10,000. In Majlispur parish, at Kishanganj 2,000; at Gigli 6,000; at Bodhan 2,000; at Debiganj 8,000; at Kukradela 2,000. In Altapur parish, at Rasakawate 10,000. In Raiganj Parish, at Malan 50,000, at Dibingaon 35,000. In Rajibpur Parish, in the Mission compound, there were 1500 refugees. This camp was under the management of the school teacher, Father William Soren and Government Officers. One Priest with his 20 apostolics, two other Priests and six nuns have found shelter in the Mission. One Priest with his 20 apostolics, two other Priests and six nuns have found shelter in the Mission. At Rahutara there were about one thousand refugees in the Mission compound under the care of Fr. Nobile and Sisters. At Radhipapur there was a camp of over five thousand refugees. The Sisters of Mother Teresa have been given the medical care of the whole camp by the
Bengal Government. Mother Teresa has also sent two Brothers and two Sisters to help at Islampur. The Jyoti has also sent a group of volunteers to help at Purnea. Epidemics of small pox, cholera and dysentery are breaking out in many of these refugee camps. Most of these refugees are only receiving one poa of rice per day. There are three camps without tents. In the name of Christian charity I wish to thank all those who are lending a helping hand and wish to encourage others to do the same.143

**Relief work to Bangladesh Refugees**

Fr. Yvo La Ferla was appointed Co-coordinator of Relief and Medical Work for the refugees from Bangladesh in Malda and West Dinajpur Districts. The number of refugees in the Santal Region was almost two million. Government officials were constructing thirty huge camps to accommodate 50,000 refugees in each camp. A space of 12 ft. by 10 ft would be allotted to each family.144

In brief the latest position of the refugee camps in Santal Region is as follows; in Islampur Parish, there were seven camps with 205,000 refugees under the care of the Relief Workers, Fr. J. Cachia, Fr. K.T. Joseph and the Sisters of St. Anne of Ranchi. In Majlispur Parish, there were nine Camps with 70,000 refugees under the Relief Workers, Fr. G. Muscat, Fr. Alphonse and the Sisters of Capitanio. There were eight camps with 245,000 refugees under the Relief Workers, Fr. Varghese and Fr. LaFerla (the co-ordinator) in Raiganj. There was one camp in the Parish campus and others around it with 20,000 refugees under Fr. Nobile and Fr. K. Lambert in Rahutara Parish. In Rajibpur Parish, there were seventeen camps, one in the school compound with 100,000 refugees under the Relief Workers, Fr. Sebastian, Fr. W. Soren, Fr. S. Xalxo and the Sisters of the Holy Cross. There were 30,000 refugees at Adina in Alampur Parish under the Relief Workers, Fr. M. Joseph, Fr. V. Joseph and the Sisters of St. Anne, Calcutta. And under Fr. L.T. Mario, there were forty camps with 450,000 refugees. The Seminarians of Dumka Diocese helped the refugees along with other volunteers in almost all the parishes.145 In spite of the selfless service of the volunteers to the refugees in various camps, Cholera was widespread in the camps around Balurghat and an average of 100 persons per day was dying of
Cholera. Truck loads of Saline and vaccine were being rushed to the area to save the lives of the dying refugees.

Rev. Fr. L. Caruana, the Regional Superior and Fr. Calleja Gera visited the Fathers who were working in the Refugee Camps in Malda and West Dinajpur districts. The Regional Superior was very much impressed by the good work they were doing and the hardships they had to undergo. His visit and the words of encouragement gave the necessary pep to the Fathers working and staying in the Refugee Camps.\textsuperscript{146} Fr. Y. Laferla, the coordinator of the work among the refugees under Caritas India, had managed to rent an old cinema hall at Raiganj where he had his office and store rooms. The refugees in West Dinajpur and Malda districts had now been grouped together into sixteen big camps. In each camp, there was a group of volunteers, Fathers, Sisters and laymen, who distributed relief food and looked after the medical welfare of the refugees. However, the refugees were still pouring in and the need for building bamboo huts was still prevalent.\textsuperscript{147}

The floods had played havoc with refugee camps which were situated in low lands. The floods in Malda had swamped held the district’s total area affecting about 600,000 people. Purnea district and Rajmahal Sub-division of the Santal Parganas district were also very badly hit by floods. Thousands of villages had been swept away by the water. In Sahibganj many schools and were closed to give shelter to the flood stricken people.\textsuperscript{148} Fr. LaFerla writes that his biggest handicap was that his coordinators and co-workers were continuously changing. He was grateful to all the Provincials who were sending men to help him. A hospital was put up in Malda for the flood victims. He received two trucks from Caritas India which could pass through six feet of water. Caritas India and C.R.S. helped him to buy an old Cinema hall in Raiganj, which could be used as C.R.S. godown for Malda, Purnea and West Dinajpur once the emergency was over.\textsuperscript{149}

\textbf{Students in the Refugee Camp}

Thirty five boys and all able – bodied teachers from St. Joseph’s School, Guhiajori, offered themselves to work in the refugee camps in response to an appeal
made for volunteers by the Headmaster, Fr. A. Agius. The first batch of the ten students led by Fr. R. Wirth was assigned to Adina Camp in Malda district. When these students and their teachers were exposed to the refugee camps, they became aware of the human suffering and value of life based on the universal brotherhood.

**Steering Committee for the refugee Camps**

On 5th October 1971, all the voluntary Agencies had a meeting with the Indian Red Cross at Siliguri to discuss common problems in the refugee camps. It was decided that there should be a Steering Committee that would take up matters with the Government. Fr. Y. LaFerla was chosen member of the Steering Committee representing the voluntary agencies working in North East Bengal. Child feeding programmes were taken up in the Refugee Camps. Caritas India had been allotted 100 centres of which 60 centres were under the care of Fr. LaFerla. Each centre comprised 2000 children.

A team from the X.L.R.I., Jamshedpur, came to West Dinajpur district to study what works could be taken up in the Refugee Camps. As a result of this study, mat making, biri making, pottery, tailoring, knitting and kitchen gardens were started. For kitchen gardens each family was allotted a field 50 feet by 20 feet. At Raiganj, Caritas set up a team of four men to spray the camps with bleaching powder. An average of 1000 persons per day was inoculated against cholera. Since the winter was fast approaching truck loads of blankets were rushed to the camps. An average of 30,000 blankets was needed for each camp. All foreign Fathers were served notice to stop their activities in the camps. More Indian volunteers were needed.

By January 1972, 90% of the refugees left India. Caritas India, however, kept on its charitable work in Bangladesh to help these people to settle down. For nine months Caritas was still busy providing food and clothing for these people. Some children who lost their parents and relatives and being were cared for and were studying in boarding schools.
Free Eye Camp in Rahutara

Fr. K. M. Jacob, S.J., the Head Master of Rahutara St. Thomas’ High School writes: “This month (April, 1977), we had a Free eye camp in our school. Fifty four operations were performed by Dr. P. R. Roy, a famous oculist and eye surgeon of Malda. The food and medicines were provided by the Lion’s Club, Malda. The Doctor and all the patients were extremely grateful to the pupils who did voluntary work and took turns to be with the patients. I am happy at the way the boys and girls nursed and took care of the patients. This was a most successful social service thanks to the co-operation of all, especially of the Sisters of St. Anne.”

Aid to the Cyclone Victims of Andhra

On 23rd December 1977, after the annual examinations, there was a variety entertainment by the students of Primary and Junior High Schools, Rahutara, in aid of the cyclone victims of Andhra. It was a free entertainment for the poor village people and voluntary collections were received by the students themselves. For the same intention, during the entertainment, a special raffle, in which each ticket – holder received a prize, was organized and managed completely by the high school boys. First, the students were made aware of the need to feel sympathy for the suffering countrymen. It is extremely a sensitive event that the poor students as well as the poor and mostly illiterate local people became aware of and in their own simple way expressed their solidarity with the sufferings of others. The tragic cyclone in Andhra found an echo in the hearts of the Jisu Jaher community. During the community meeting, it was decided to raise funds for the homeless by foregoing some comfort (fruits, etc.) as well as by collecting funds from individuals in Dumka and organizing a lottery which would be drawn on Republic Day. Fr. P. A. Chacko organized these relief events. Thanks to the initiative of Fr. P.A. Chacko and the Jisu Jaher community, the raffle and collection they organized for the Andhra cyclone victims brought in Rs. 4, 700 including their personal sacrifices. The Tinpahar School boys collected Rs. 250/-and sent to the Andhra Chief Minister while another Rs.200/- also for Andhra cyclone victims was channelized through the Bihar Board of Secondary Education.
Santal Welfare Centre at Kodma

Santal Women meet every week in their respective groups, over 200 of them, to discuss their situation and find ways of improving the condition of their family and their community. In the same area, members of “Samiti” gather in the evenings with the villagers to reflect about the laws enacted to preserve and promote adivasi identity, culture and forms of governance and to plan collective ways of ensuring their implementation.163

A thousand and five hundred adivasi children receive education in schools run by the same Samiti, learning to read not only the written word but also the happenings around them. Developing pride in their culture, and learning to build on their traditional values, these students are being prepared to make responsible and effective use of their own resources to become future leaders in the society.164

Behind these efforts for the development of adivasis into a confident and self-determining people is a small team of Jesuits of Santal Mission and their collaborators, based in Kodma village in the heartland of the Santal people.

Involvement of Jesuits in social realities is an undisputed Ignatian heritage. This tradition was given a specific focus by Father General Janssens in 1949 when he instructed the entire Society to establish social centres throughout the world. He wanted the Jesuits to involve, through these centres, in the moulding of the new social order emerging after World War II, by establishing just socio-political structures. The social dimension was also receiving increasing attention in the official teachings of the Popes, and reached a climax in the Documents of Vatican II. These new developments in the thought and teaching of the whole Church shaped the life of Anthony Murmu, the first Indian and Santal Jesuit who joined the Maltese and Sicilian Jesuits of the Santal Mission in the ‘50s. Sensitive to the suffering of his people, Anthony Murmu was confirmed in his determination to work for their uplift and socio-political liberation. Ordained priest in 1966, he spent his time with the people helping them to recover their land from the moneylenders. This led him to political involvement that eventually forced him to give up membership of the society to Jesus. He continued to live and work for his people,
fulfilling the mission for which he had been formed, as an elected member of parliament for a while and also afterwards.165

The adivasis were, and still are, in great need of committed, dedicated leaders. The nexus of exploitation between the business community including the moneylenders, the police and the administration had reduced the Santals to near total dependency on the business community the people and the exploiters came to a head on 19th april 1985. The district administration held a village camp court in Banjhi to listen to the grievances of the people. The outcome of this was tragic killing of 15 adivasis by police firing “in self defense”. Among those killed was Anthony Murmu who had gone with the village headman to talk to the authorities.166

In this terrible and deliberate murder of innocent people, the Jesuits of the Santal region heard a clear call to solidarity with the people. They were aware that what Anthony Murmu had started had its roots in their own commitment to “faith that does justice”. Like him, they had to accompany the people in their helplessness, participating in their struggle for freedom. The Santal Region assigned Fr. Tom kavalakatt and Schol. MichaelRaj to this radical presence. They spent the following years living in the villages, helping the people to reflect about what had happened and to identify the underlying causes leading to the tragedy.

With this presence of the Jesuits and their guidance, the people soon realized that they had to take up responsibility for their own lives. They had been gullible enough to allow the dikkus – “exploitative outsiders” – to take control of them and of their resources. This state of affairs had to be there to do it for them: the moneylenders and government to whom they had looked for help were working against them. The first step was to get the people organized to meet, talk, discuss and find ways ahead together. These initial interactions led to the formation of the “Samiti” – Sona Santal Somaj Samiti – composed of men and women of all ages, united in their determination to stand up and take possession of what was their own. The Jesuits have remained, over the years, the guiding force and soul of this Samiti. The Samiti’s immediate and priority task was that of taking back their own from the moneylenders. The people declared themselves masters of the land and started
cultivation it. Their rightful ownership is enshrined in the Santal Parganas Tenancy Act, promulgated by the British after the Santal Rebellion of 1855 in which 10,000 Santals gave their life, under the leadership of Sido and Kanhu Murmu, to defend their proprietorship of the land. Armed with this knowledge, given to them by the Jesuits, and proud of their heritage, the common people in Banjhi and the surrounding villages began to discover the strength in them and their traditions and put them to practice.

This led to the next vital step that of reviving their traditional System of governance. The Santals have a highly developed System of self-rule but the law courts were gradually edging out this System. The Jesuits helped the villagers appreciate the values in their System, and soon land disputed were being settled by the traditional village baisi (official gathering) avoiding the expenses, harassment and bias of the civil courts. This work was supplemented with capacity building of the traditional village headmen and other village officials. Stress has been placed on formation of village Gram Sabhas (Village Body). Through these bodies the Government has acknowledged the validity of the traditional system and given official recognition to their self-rule structured. In the Gram Sabha the villagers take decisions about matters concerning the village, resolve their disputes, decide about the Government schemes that would benefit their village and take on such responsibilities is an ongoing task which the Jesuits based in Kodma have taken upon themselves as their top priority. Their focus is the ongoing formation of Samiti members. Preparing them to carry their knowledge and skills to the village. There the Samiti members, on their turn, teach the villagers about the and nurture the setting up of the Gram Sabhas and their functioning.

As the Jesuits taught the people about their own history and culture and helped them to gain strength from there, the people become aware of the limitations imposed by illiteracy. This made the Santals highly dependent on others and there were many ready to exploit their ignorance, whether by making them thumb-sign false statements or by giving them wrong information. The people understand that they had to educate their children so that they would not fall into the same traps. At that time no village Government schools were functioning and only a few selected
adivasi children were being educated in residential mission schools through the initiative and support of the Jesuit missionaries in the area. The people decided to ask some of these teach the children in the villages, since it was not feasible to send all children to the residential schools, given the expense. The parents expressed their willingness to pay something to the teachers, according to their means. They constructed sheds to serve as schools on their into solid mud huts. Having done all they could, the people entrusted to samiti the administrative and educational aspects of the schools. Village schools committees were formed to look after day to day school administration, while the Jesuits took up responsibility has been maintained and has actually increased with time.

The Samiti now runs eight day schools that give education to over 1500 children with a total staff of 40 teachers. Emphasis has always been placed on rooting the children in their rich cultural heritage even while opening them to other realities and teaching them to select what is beneficial in each culture. Since the last five years the Jesuits at Kodma are guiding the development of a curriculum for primary education that takes into consideration sound pedagogical practices as well as the abilities, knowledge and practices of adivasis. Integrated textbooks have been developed and field-tested for Class One and Two and the material and approach are yielding good results among the students, especially in terms of acquiring competencies, self-confidence and enthusiasm for learning. Presently five Jesuit primary Schools in the Dumka Raiganj Province are using the Class One Textbook and the new teaching learning approach on an experimental basis, in view of extending their use to other Jesuit schools.

Another major area of involvement of the Samiti is the provision of effective health care and promotion of indigenous medicines. This too grew out of the real need of the people since the lack of medical facilities resulted in frequent illness and high mortality, especially among children. An outbreak of cholera in the early 1990’s was tackled by prompt treatment and saved the lives of hundreds. Today the Samiti runs two Health Centres equipped with basic laboratory facilities. Local women, trained as nurse practitioners, run these clinics under the guidance of a lay
professional. Health workers have been trained to give treatment for malaria in their villages, since this is the major killer disease.

The major strength of Santal society lies in the women, and efforts to favour the growth of the Santal community must ultimately ensure women’s participation in the development process. The Samiti promotes women into Self Help Groups and over 200 groups are now operational. During their meetings women take up all issues that threaten the fabric of Santal society. Drawing on their traditional and personal resources, and opportunities, they constructively build their community. Effective action has led to recovery of mortgaged land, development of agricultural practices that yield a financial profit, a high percentage of village children in schools and a reduction in preparation of country liquor. Women now play a greater role in decision-making and their growing socio-political awareness often makes them the leaders of the community.

Over a period of 20 years a progressive transformation has been taking place among the Santals. People are growing in critical awareness, in control over their resources, participation in decision-making and determination to ultimately take their destiny into their hands. A small band of Jesuits are at the heart of this transformation, themselves being constantly transformed in their involvement with the people, imbibing their values, discovering anew that the Kingdom of God is already present there, among the emerging Santals. They are transformed to transform others in the society.

Endnotes

1Our Field, July 1925
2Ibid.,
3Our Field, December, 1925
4Our Field, January – February 1926
5Our Field, May – June 1933
6Santaliland, No. 58, January – February, 1964
7Ibid.,
8Ibid.,
9Ibid.,
In May 1964, a priest began to reside in Talbaria village and on 25th May 1965, it was made a Mission Station and from May 1968, it was entrusted to the Society of Jesus and later it was merged with the Mariampahar Parish from 31st July 1975.

Born in Xaghra, Gozo, Camilleri joined the Society of Jesus in 1946 and four years later was sent to the Maltese Jesuit Mission in SantalParganas, India. He was ordained priest in March 1959, after completing all his language, philosophy, and theology studies at Ranchi, Poona, and Kurseong respectively. After his final year of probation as a Jesuit at Hazaribagh, he was assigned to St Joseph's High School, Guhiajori where he served as headmaster for six years. From there he moved to the pastoral ministry and spent eight years as parish priest at Tinpahar. Camilleri was then transferred to the cathedral parish at Dudhani and for two years served as vicar-general under Bishop Leo Tigga, SJ, until the division of Dumka diocese in 1978 when Tigga was transferred to the newly-created diocese of Raiganj. Camilleri is parish priest at Dudhani. In 1993 Camilleri was appointed vicar-general of Dumka. Bihar, India, by Bishop Tlephore Toppo.
44 The History of St. Ignatius Hostel in the Diary of St. Xavier’s School, Sahibganj.
45 The History of St. Ignatius Hostel in the Diary of St. Xavier’s School, Sahibganj; The Handbook and Calendar of St. Ignatius Hostel, 2011 – 2012, p. 3
46 Santal Region Newsletter, Vol. 11, No. 1, January 1977, p. 3
47 The Handbook and Calendar of St. Ignatius Hostel, 2011 – 2012, p. 3
48 The History of St. Ignatius Hostel in the Diary of St. Xavier’s School, Sahibganj; The Handbook and Calendar of St. Ignatius Hostel, 2011 – 2012, p. 3
49 Santal Region Newsletter, No. 129, March 1979, p. 3
50 Santal Region Newsletter, No. 154, April 1983, p. 4
51 Ibid.,
52 Ibid.,
53 Ibid.,
54 Ibid., p. 5
55 Santaliland, No. 66, August – September 1965.
56 Ibid.,
57 Ibid.,
58 BogeJuda, Santal Region Newsletter, No. 10, December, 1957.
60 Santal Region Newsletter, Vol. 9, No.1, January 1975, p.5
63 Santal Region Newsletter, No. 161, April 1984, pp. 4 – 5.
64 James Aril, “Training Rural Youth For Self – Employment”, in Jivan, August 1984, pp. 9 - 10
65 Ibid., p. 10
66 Ibid.,
67 Ibid.,
68 Ibid.,
73 Santal Region Newsletter, No. 131, December 1979, p. 5
74 Santal Region Newsletter, Vol. 10, No. 6, December 1976, p. 3
76 Ibid.,
77 Ibid.,
78 Ibid.,
82 Ibid.,
83 Ibid., pp. 1 - 2
84 Ibid., p. 2
186

85 Ibid.,
86 Ibid.,
89 Ibid, News Letter of the Santal Region, Vol. 6, No. 5, April, 1972, p. 2
90 Ibid.,
91 Ibid.,
92 Ibid.,
93 Ibid.,
94 Ibid.,
95 Ibid.,
96 Ibid.,
97 BogeJuda, News Letter of the Santal Region, Vol. 6, No. 7, November, 1972, p. 4
98 Santaliland, No. 41, November – December 1959
100 Ibid.,
101 Ripples Over the Ganges, No. 93, March – April 1977.
102 Ibid.,
104 LitteraeAnnuae, Cilimpur, 21st June 1956
108 Ibid.,
110 Santal Region Newsletter, Vol. 8, No. 2, April 1974, p. 6; Santal Region Newsletter, Vol. 8, No. 4, July 1974, p. 3
112 HistoriaDomus (House History) of St. Xavier’s Out-door Dispensary, Sahibganj; Santal Region Newsletter, Vol. 9, No. 1, January 1975, p. 4.
113 Santal Region Newsletter, Vol. 9, No. 4, June 1975, p. 2.
114 Santal Region Newsletter, Vol. 11, No. 2, April 1977, p. 3
115 Santal Region Newsletter, Vol. 9, No. 4, June 1975, p. 2.
118 Santal Region Newsletter, Vol. 10, No. 4, August 1976, p. 3.
119 Santal Region Newsletter, Vol. 10, No. 6, December 1976, p. 3.
120 Santal Region Newsletter, No. 124, March 1978, p. 4
121 Born at Houthem, West Flanders on 24th June 1863; Entered the Society of Jesus on 26th September 1882; Reached Calcutta on 4th November 1886 and served the Bengal mission for nearly 48 years.
122 Our Field, March – April, 1930, p. 33.
123 Ibid., p. 35.
124 Ibid., pp. 35 – 36.
125 Ibid., p. 36.
126 Ibid.
127 Ibid., p. 37.
129 *BogeJuda*, Newsletter of the Santal Region, Vol.6, No.6, September 1972, p. 4
130 *BogeJuda*, Newsletter of the Santal Region, Vol.6, No.6, September 1972, p. 4
131 Santaliland, No. 43, March – April, 1960.
133 *BogeJuda*, Newsletter of the Santal Region, Vol.6, No.5, August 1972, p. 4
135 Santal Region Newsletter, No. 155, May 1983, p. 3
136 Santal Region Newsletter, No. 158, September 1983, p. 2
137 Ibid.,
138 Ibid.,
139 Ibid., p. 3
140 Ibid.,
141 Santal Region Newsletter, No. 180, December 1985, p. 3
142 Ibid.,
143 *BogeJuda*, Newsletter of the Santal Region, Vol.5, No.5, March 1971, p. 1
144 Ibid.,
145 Ibid.,
146 Ibid.,
147 Ibid.,
148 Ibid.,
149 Ibid.,
150 Ibid., p. 2
151 Ibid., p. 1
152 Ibid.,
153 Ibid., pp. 1-2.
154 Ibid., p. 2.
155 Ibid.,
156 Ibid.,
157 Santal Region Newsletter, Vol. 11, No. 2, April 1977, p. 4
158 Santal Region Newsletter, No. 123, January 1978, p. 3
159 Ibid.,
160 Ibid.,
161 Ibid., p. 4
162 Ibid.,
164 Ibid.,
165 Ibid., pp. 112.- 113
166 Ibid., pp. 113 - 114.