

32 YEARS
At
THE SERVICE OF SAVARA TRIBALS



OUR INSPIRATIONS



32 YEARS
At
THE SERVICE OF SAVARA TRIBALS

Message of the Provincial Superior

“Rejoice, rejoice and render thanks to God our Father for He has done marvels in you”(RL Art.1)

Yes, it was the marvelous plan and work of God that we Brothers ventured in to the deep jungles of Srikakulam Dt. of AP to be one among the most primitive tribals of India in 1983. I take this opportunity to salute the pioneers of this mission, Bros.Mathew M.K., and Sebastian K. M. and all the other Brothers who rendered their service there, who opted to take the road less travelled. It is also time to



Bro. Pratap Reddy

appreciate all the Brothers of the congregation and of the Province in particular for their unflinching support and encouragement for the past 32 years for the cause of the poor. Yes, collectively we have given meaning to our call as religious Brothers.

Visit to this mission always inspires me and gives me a sense of fulfillment. Working for the poor is exciting, demanding. It requires uncommon dedication to strive for social reform. By working for the poor we attend to those in distress and identify and remedy the social ill that rob people of their dignity and prevent them from achieving their full potential. We help them to function in the best way in their own environment. We create awareness among them on various issues like health, education, rights, responsibilities, co-operation ect.

The work we do make a real difference to the peoples' lives, whether we are helping to raise educational standards or improving peoples' employment opportunities. A sort of magical transformation has taken place in these tribal villages of Srikakulam and Vizayanagaram Dts. The presence of Montfort Brothers of St.Gabriel for more than 30 years has been a beacon light for these under privileged ones in many areas of their lives. We are involved with the day today joys and struggles of people of 50 villages. Apart from that we are giving residential education to 500 children free of cost. So we have plenty of reasons to feel proud of our commitment and thank God for the numerous blessings showered on us. I appreciate the efforts taken by Bro.Monson in preparing this document which gives us a glimpse in to the marvelous mission we are involved in. I conclude quoting William Words Worth “Woods are lovely deep and dark, but I have promises to keep and miles to go before I sleep”.

Bro.Pratap Reddy

Provincial Superior
Province of Hyderabad

Girijana Seva Sangham(GSS)

Vision : The vision of Girijana Seva Sangham (GSS) is to reach out to the most vulnerable section of our society namely Savara Tribe to express our solidarity and communion with them.

Mission: Transformation of persons and society aiming at unveiling communities of love, justice, freedom, fellowship and peace ie the reign of God.

The overall aim

To promote scientific intervention and apply appropriate methodologies in the prevailing occupations among Schedule Tribes for enhancing their livelihood needs and access to education and health in selected Villages of Srikakulam and Vijayanagaram districts of Andhra Pradesh

Objectives

- : Collaborative action with Youth for development in the region;
- : Collaborative action on Sustainable livelihood through sustainable agriculture.
- : Collaborative action on access to education and health with Herbal based health care
- : Collaborative action on issue of money laundering in tribal areas through different art form, street play, drama, songs with the help of local community.
- : Collaborative action on no-drop out in the region with Government education department.
- : Holistic health care and awareness given to all the tribals of the area.
- : Develop and promote pro active leaders from the tribal community.

- : To get access to natural resources and train the communities on optimum use of natural resources for betterment of the Scheduled Tribes habitations.
- : To see integration between Scheduled Tribes occupations and natural resources for betterment of their livelihood needs.
- : To get access to education and health for all in selected Scheduled tribal villages



Manapuram village as on today

1. INTRODUCTION

Girijana Seva Sangam (G.S.S), Savara Gopalapuram, may not ring bells beyond the boundaries of its presence in a few tribal hamlets. Its 32 YEARS of involvement may be a non-event as far as history is concerned. Yet G.S.S. is a story of a small band of men from the congregation of the Brothers of St. Gabriel of Central Indian Province and now Hyderabad Province, who ventured into the search with courage for a more radical meaning to their Christian Religious Commitment. It's a story of challenges and struggles, of achievements and failures, of what has been accomplished in faith and what has not been for lack of it.

This report is the result of an evaluation of our involvement, done by a number of Brothers who were involved in the mission at different periods.

To make it easier for the reader and to be more specific, this write up is divided into two parts. Part one deals mainly with our involvement and its impact on the people: and part II presents our understanding of the fundamentals of consecrated religious life as experienced in the situations of our involvement.

PART – I

2. INVOLVEMENT OF G.S.S. AND ITS IMPACT ON THE PEOPLE

2.1. THE GENESIS:

The Montfort Brothers of St. Gabriel, protagonists of the cause that Girijana Seva Sangam (GSS) represents, draw their inspiration from St. Louis de Montfort who left an Indelible mark on the history of the early 18th century, France. He helped the church of his times recover the dynamism of the gospel message, dwelling among the poor, bestowing on them a sense of identity and hope. His charism and holiness drew sensitive people to

follow in his footsteps. The Brothers of St. Gabriel have their inspiration in Montfort. Goaded on by the founding charism of the community, the congregation has been searching out for ways in the recent past to break out of institutional approach in our services. The province of Central India then and Hyderabad now has also been making attempts to make its life and mission authentic and relevant in the context of the poor.

2.2. THE SAVARA TRIBE : THE CULTURAL BACKGROUND

The hill tracts of Eastern Ghats in the two districts of Srikakulam and Vizianagaram are inhabited by two major tribal groups, Savara and Jathapu. Unlike Savaras, Jathapu tribe fell victim to the influence of non-tribal culture. Today with the adoption of new culture and subsequent loss of their own they appear to be more Hindu than tribal.



In a festive mood

Savara is one of the most ancient tribes of our country. There is mention of Savara even in the epics like Ramayana

(Savaras of Andhra Pradesh by Dr. M.V. Krishna Rao). At present they number over 6, 00,000 (1981 census), scattered in different parts of India. 82,100 of them live in Andhra Pradesh and 98% of these are found in Srikakulam and Vizianagaram districts.



Perfoming Puja

of huts facing each other. Each row is divided into a number of family compartments.

The Savaras are the children of the forest. From time immemorial it has been their main source of food and shelter. Terrace and podu (shifting) cultivation is their main agricultural activity. The other smaller sources of livelihood are dry and wet farming, collection of minor forest produce like tamarind, soap-nuts, and beedi leaves etc. Traditional practice of hunting wild animals supplements their predominantly cereal diet.

Unlike most other tribal groups, there is no clan organization among the Savaras. Enforcement of law is done by a single man who is also the dispenser of justice. Punishments are usually in the form of fine levied. Being animists they believe in super natural powers and in the spirits of the dead. Consequently

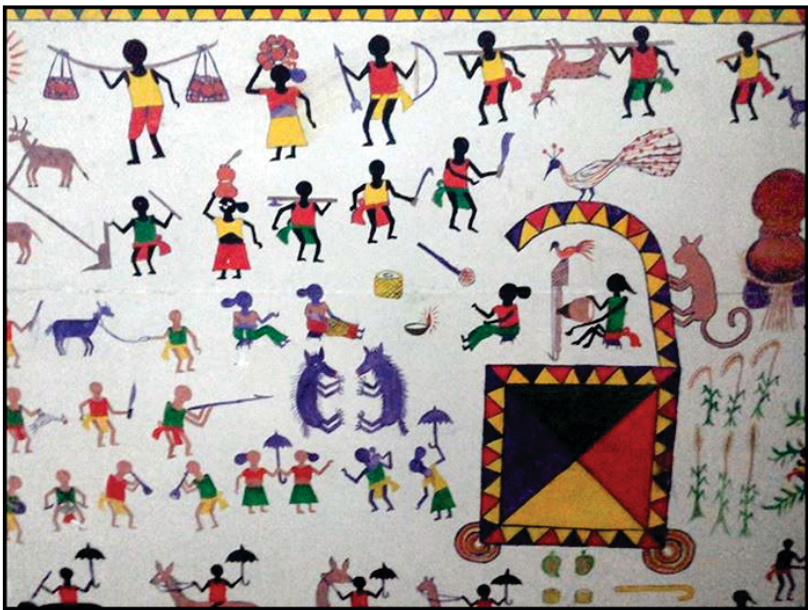
rituals are performed to appease the spirits both in time of prosperity as well as misfortune like ill health. The Savara women are given much importance in the social, economic, cultural and ritual life. Besides consanguineous marriages, levirate (real or classificatory younger brother inherits the widow of deceased elder brother), and widow re-marriages are permitted. The process of settling the marriage involves the bridegroom pleasing the father of the bride by paying the bride price. Both the husband and wife have equal right to seek divorce. The size of the family varies from 4 to 8. Families are generally poor and do not pass on any valuable assets to their progeny.

2.3. SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND:-

The Savara tribe had always tended to remain an isolated group. Centuries of civilization and decades of planned development since independence have failed to touch their lives. Excessive exploitation by the vested interests through user and land alienation have not only pushed them to abysmal depths of poverty and misery but also reduced the once independent and self-reliant tribals to mere bonded- laborers. Adding to this deplorable situation the influence of naxalite movement in West Bengal led to rebellion in the heartland of Savara country in late “60s. This subsequently led to a land – mark decisions by the State. The first was the promulgation of a bill on tribal land protection and regulation act by which non-tribals lost their right to buy or own land in the tribal belts. The second was to set up exclusive tribal development agencies for the welfare of the tribals.

The years that followed, however, did not bring expected changes in the lives of the tribals. They continued to live on the

fringes of society in subhuman situations exposed to exploitation and calamities of nature. Subtler forms of exploitation replaced the old ones. Instead of land grabbing they began grabbing its produce through usury. In an economy that is based largely on the barter system, the illiterate tribals always found themselves on the losing side. Their literacy rate was abysmally low at 12% according to census last taken. Health care facilities were non-existent and infant mortality rate was high. This resulted in the steady dwindling of their population. Agricultural activities were carried out using unproductive and outdated technology. Their primitiveness stood out in the tatters they wore, the imbalanced food they ate and above all in their fear of non tribals.



Tribal Art

It was into the midst of this Savara community that the pioneers of G.S.S. decided to insert themselves.

2.4. LIVING WITH THE PEOPLE:

1st Phase

MONTFORT BROTHERS OF ST.GABRIEL,CENTRAL INDIA, entered in the tribal belt of Seetampetta Mandal, Srikakulam Dt of Andhra in India in 1983 under the leadership of Br.M.K.Mathew and Sebastian K. M. After a through



scouting of the Savara region, Brothers chose Manapuram, a fairly large hamlet with 58 families, to pitch their tent. The village was strategically located, having road links to the nearby town and provided easy access to a number of other tribal villages. Even though all was set, the fear and suspicion that the natives had of non-tribals came as a block for us to make a beginning. So the Brothers began visiting the village on a regular basis, staying in the Govt. guest house 10 k.m. away. Since health conditions were deplorable, health care was used as an entry point. Slowly they understood that the Brothers were neither Govt.representatives nor private exploiters. On seeing the benefits of what was offered, the elders invited Brothers to stay with them. Due to our efforts we

soon established a rapport with the children and the youth. The old guard in the meantime continued to be apprehensive about our identity and real motives. It took them well over a year to



Manapuram Village and the Children

understand the Brothers . Later on many Brothers joined them namely C.D.Varghese,Chinnappa Reddy,Monson Kuriakose,Benny,Pius,Bala Basker,Hruday Kumar,Ravi Kumar, K.K.Thomas,Anthony Reddy, Bala Showry.

They inserted themselves in to the life of the tribals by living a simple life. In course of time Brothers were the centre of all activity in the village. The people of Manapuram and neighbouring villages accepted us, as one among them. We mainly concentrated in the areas of health, education and developmental activities.

After 8 years of our mission, as per our original plan and ideology, also to help the people to stand on their feet we shifted to Mamidimanaguda in Kurupam Mandal of Vizanagaram Dt.in 1991

2nd Phase

Mamidimanaguda or M M Guda is 30 KM from Manapuram inhabited by the same Savara tribe.Once again Br.Mathew led the team. Many brothers worked in this place. They

include Bros. Augustine, Suresh Reddy, Monson, A. Anthony Reddy, Benny, Arogyam, K. K. Thomas, Sebastian Kuruvanmakkil, B. Joseph. We continued the mission with same objectives and methodology.

3rd Phase

In the year 1998 there was a request from the people of M M Guda to start a school for them. The proposal was studied by the administration and acted positively. Initially we approached the Govt. for land. Since it was not possible to acquire tribal land we purchased 4 acres of land at Savara Gopalapuram of Veeraghattam Mandal. Br. Monson was entrusted with the task of starting the school. So after 9 years of our stay at M M Guda, Brothers shifted to Savara Gopalapuram village in the year 2000 June. Staying in the village, school building was constructed. We constructed the school building with generous contribution of Mr. Gencarlo and family from Italy (family members of Sr. Imelda, Cannosian sister).



Sr. Imelda



**Mrs. & Mr. Gencarlo with SP of Srikakulam Dist ,
Inagiration of School Building**

2.5.A Very important decision

Since we decided to start a formal residential English medium school exclusively for tribals free of cost, we decided to entrust the responsibility of running GSS activities to ARIKA KRISHNA



Arika Krishna Rao

RAO of Manapuram village. Till then he was part and parcel of our mission and struggle. Being a Savara himself, it was our vision that a credible leadership emerges to continue our mission. We continued to support him in every way possible and to date walk hand in hand. Krishna Rao officially got GSS registered with Govt in 1998 as an NGO.(Societies Registration

Act, XXI of 1860), himself as the president of it. All our activities are planned and executed together. We are proud that he rose up to this level of managing an NGO, the only one in Srikakulam Dt exclusively by the PTG community.

In 2001, August 16th, we officially started the school exclusively for the primitive tribal children. We started with 60 children and 2 teachers . Children were all admitted in



The Pioneers of Cannosian Sisters in AP LKG.

So far 3 batches of students have successfully completed

their 10th class from this school. All the years we had excellent result. At present we have nearly 500 students from LKG to 10th class given free residential education in English medium.

Brothers and Sisters who worked as Head Masters



Bro. Monson
2001 - 2004



Bro. Berchamans
2004 - 2005



Bro. Arogyma
2005 - 2007



Sr. Annie
2007 - 2008



Bro. George Reddy
2008 - 2010



Bro. Chinnappa Reddy
2010 - 2013



Bro. C A James
2013 -

3.1. THE APPROACH:

Looking at the past few decades it was clear to us the developmental programmes Launched by government as well as private agencies benefited largely those who were already better off. To give expression to the deep stirrings of this consciousness, we wanted to function as a social action group, with the aim to help the deprived sections of people and organize them to take control to their own destinies.

The moving force behind the venture being the historical Jesus experienced As the ‘Christ of faith’, His three-pronged strategy of incarnation, organization and confrontation gave us the direction. We understood our mission precisely as a call to incarnate in the midst of real life situations of the people we wanted to serve. We had to become equals with them by sharing their physical, psychological and social environment. We did all our household work, cooked food and wore simple clothing. We began learning their language, participated in their religious and cultural celebrations and even joined them in their places of work.

The next step was to organize them by raising their level of consciousness. Various programmes aimed at conscientization were taken up. As the final goal was to transform the dehumanizing structures, concrete actions on the issues that affected people were taken up. In all this our policy was to teach the child walk rather than carry it around. So we preferred to work at people’s pace than our’s. We considered ‘what we were to them’ to be more important than ‘what we did for them’. To that extend we were less result oriented.

4. OUR INVOLVEMENT AND ACTION PROGRAMMES :

In our perception, marginalization, exploitation, oppression and the low level of consciousness were not the result of poverty but its root causes. And, if poverty and underdevelopment were to give way to justice, freedom and joy its underlying causes had to be effectively tackled. Our involvement and action programmes among these tribals ment to organize them in order that they be able to transform the dehumanizing systems that surround them. And this required proper assessment of the causes of poverty and backwardness which is a need for any concrete action programme.



Bro. Monson with Tribal couple

In our first plans certain basic issues like ill-health had to be given immediate attention as short term objective. Given the constraints of language, newness to their culture, transport, personnel etc., all activities had to be planned on a low key. The following are some of the important action programmes undertaken.

4.1.FORMALAND NONFORMALE EDUCATION.

Literacy in any culture is the most powerful tool of social change. The primary reason for the low level of consciousness of the Savaras is the deplorably low literacy level which was at 6% (1981 census). Hence education became one of our priorities.

Many villages in the area had single-teacher schools. But their functioning was more of an exception than a rule. Since opening new schools was not in our agenda, we decided to revitalize the existing ones. The teachers were persuaded to show a greater sense of responsibility to duty. Children themselves were given incentives for regular attendance. Some of us started teaching in villages with no schools. The process of learning was made an interesting activity with songs and games. Those who showed an aptitude for study were encouraged to join the residential schools run by the Integrated Tribal Development Authority (ITDA)

Adult literacy programmes were started in the evening hours for the youth and the children who go for grazing cattle during the day. The adult literacy classes were not limited to the teaching of the three R's. But they were aimed at bringing awareness on social, economic and political issues. And they were helped to discuss the problems that concerned them.

4.2.YOUTH ACTION GROUPS :

Discussions in the adult literacy classes began to be focused on specific issues like illiteracy, de-forestation, low prices for agricultural produce, exploitation by money lenders, and bribery in Govt. Offices etc., the rise in the level of consciousness gave them confidence that they were capable of altering the existing situations, if only they could stand united. Along with the



Durga Rao
Youth Leader

power of knowledge came the ability to look at society from their perspective. From this awareness was born 'Yuvajana Sangam', (Youth Action Groups). They received immediate acceptance and acclaim in some villages while others responded slowly. To promote a friendly spirit among the members of the different units, games like volley ball and kabaddi were organized and matches were held periodically. There were regular meetings help for these groups.



Meeting of Yuvajana Sangam

The Youth Action Groups soon became agents of social change in the area. They formed a 'Cultural Troupe' which became the torch-bearer of awareness programmes. Through music, songs and role plays they communicated to their fellow tribals, their newfound awareness. Slowly there emerged 'Core Group' of youth leaders who could think objectively and decide wisely. Besides striving against issues of injustice and exploitation, they organized adult literacy classes in different

villages on their own. These volunteers are mostly primary school drop-outs. Their slogan is ‘each one teaches whatever he/she knows.

4.3. THRIFT SCHEME

The land protection and regulation act after the tribal uprising of the 60’s put an end to land alienation (as seen in 2.3.). Problems were not all over as usury came into practice. Since the Govt. Agencies did not provide economic assistance necessary for agricultural activities, the tribals once again turned to the ever obliging money-lenders who only waited for such an opportunity. The loans were given at exorbitant rates of interest amounting to as high as 800% per annum. The repaying had almost always been in kind. The moneylenders took on the dual role of business and banking, and controlled the whole economic process. In order to extricate themselves from the clutches of money lenders, a ‘Thrift Scheme’ was started with some of the enlightened youth as members.



Thrift Scheme

The Youth Thrift Scheme which began with 15 members developed into a 100 member group. It involves the payment of Rs. 10/- (as decided by the group) every month. Once the individual has saved up to Rs. x/-, he/she can take loan to the tune of Rs.3x/-. This is to be repaid in installments with a nominal interest of 1.5%. Today this scheme has a rolling capital of Rs. 50,000/-.

The members gather on the first day of every month at different villages by turn. Besides financial transactions the gathering also provides a forum for the youth to discuss the various issues that concern them and plan out courses of action for their improvement.

4.4. WOMEN'S ACTION GROUPS (MAHILA SANGAMS) :

The capacity of tribal women for combined and consistent effort was one potential that went unnoticed and untapped for too long a time. A few factors like their lack of communication abilities and improper knowledge of Telugu contributed to this. However the state-wide anti-liquor agitation provided the needed breakthrough. This was an issue that concerned them directly and had a lot of emotional appeal. The otherwise coy and gentle women organized 'Mahila Sangams' and successfully stopped the distilling and sale of liquor in the area. The taste of success has given them the much needed impetus. Today they feel confident to organize themselves to take up issues like health care, literacy and income generating economic programmes for self-reliance.

4.5. HEALTH CARE :-

Health care facilities in the area a few decades ago were as good as non-existent. The lone primary health centre was ill-equipped and understaffed. Even ordinary fevers and diarrheas

often resulted in deaths. Infant mortality was very high. Since ill health was associated with their displeased ancestral spirits, sacrifice of fowls and animals as prescribed by the village priest was resorted to, to appease them. This ignorance was an additional cause for frequent deaths.



Mobile Clinic



Dr. Prabhakar Checking our students

We followed a two-pronged approach to health care: curative and preventive. A fairly well stocked dispensary was run to provide curative medication. People were educated to understand the importance of sanitation and healthy food habits. Mothers were instructed on child-care. Serious cases were referred to the hospitals in the towns. The fact that the child mortality rate today is minimal provides ample proof of the success of the health care project.

5. ISSUES TAKEN UP:-

Involvement in the lives of the poor often found us on a confrontational course with the oppressive powers that are at work. Along with the rise in the level of consciousness, the tribals began to understand the dehumanizing that surrounding them. So the next step in our approach was to organize the people to positively confront and transform these inhuman realities. We took up specific issues and stood along with the people in their fight. The following are a few of the important issues taken up.

5.1. LAND ISSUE AT PEDDURU VILLAGE:

Pedduru is a tribal hamlet consisting of 25 families. They have been cultivating in the surrounding forest land for several years. All of a sudden in 1986 the forest department occupied the 150 acres of their cultivable land for raising a eucalyptus plantation. Standing crops of paddy and jowar were destroyed indiscriminately to plant the eucalyptus saplings. We organized the people to stand against the gross injustice. The matter was represented to the district administration and protests were organized. In a rare show of solidarity hundreds of tribals from the area gathered at Pedduru and plucked out the eucalyptus saplings. An enquiry was ordered by the District Collector, and the forest department and the local revenue official (M.R.O) were jointly held responsible for this anti-people programme. Thanks to this prompt action, the tribals of Pedduru have continued to live on their land, enjoying the fruits of their labour.

5.2. MONEY-LENDERS ISSUE:

Money lending at exorbitant rates of interest as already mentioned (3.3 Youth Thrift Scheme), is one factor that has contributed immensely to the economic slavery of the tribals. The problem was discussed at length in the village meetings. With the help of the cultural troupe the magnitude of the problem was explained to the people in detail. The Yuvajana Sangam came forward to provide financial assistance to all who refused to borrow from money lenders. A fund raised through contribution from schools run by our Brothers was also used for the purpose. Cases were then booked against money lenders for their illegal activities. In spite of threats from the powerful money-lenders and sometimes even from the police, people refused to buckle under pressure. Thanks to the courage and determination of the youth, many villages today are debt free.

5.3. PRESERVATION OF FOREST WEALTH:

The Savaras have been aptly called ‘The Children of the Forest’, as their entire life is centred around forest and what it provides. The wealth of the forest is nature’s bounty to them. Most of their agricultural activities are on the hill slopes. Their meager economic income is supplemented by minor forest produce. To destroy forest is to cut off the very life line of the tribals. Hence it became very important to preserve what was left of the once lush green forest cover.

The forest is being destroyed day after day by vested interests. Stealing of timber was done by timber mill owners in connivance with the forest department personnel. After making sufficient study on the problem, The youth organized themselves to prevent this. Roads were guarded and carts loaded with timber were confiscated by the youth. They had to face the ire of the mill owners, forest department and the village elders. However they persisted in their action and as a result the tree felling is reduced considerably.

Raising the prices of minor forest produce like tamarind was another of our successful ventures. The village-owned tamarind trees were sold at a paltry sum of Rs. 1000/- per year to non-tribals. Realising the enormous loss they incurred every year, the youth decided to buy the crop one year. They paid the villagers Rs. 5,000/- and had a net profit of Rs. 20,000/- in spite of giving away half the produce to the villagers for their own use. They have also been able to pressurize the Govt. run Girijana Co-operative Corporation (G.C.C.), which was buying tamarind at a meager Rs.2/- per kg to raise the price. Once they tasted success, similar methods were applied for other forest and agricultural products.

6. THE IMPACT OF OUR LIFE AND MISSION ON PEOPLE:

32 years of involvement did bring about a major transformation in the situation. Poverty and exploitation continue to exist, though to a lesser degree. Many still remain illiterate. Yet people who observe closely will notice a qualitative change that has come about in the lives of the people. The children who grew into youth



Animators with Bro. Monson

and the youth who grew into adults are of a generation with a difference, when compared to their predecessors. They look at things and face people with

confidence and dignity. They have learned to face situations collectively and are able to resist the subtle forms of exploitation. Today they are able to meet Govt.

Officials, development officers, contractors, teachers, bank officers, police etc., and get their work done. Most of the schools function today. Teachers are more regular to school.



With the Officials

Parents are beginning to feel the need for basic education. They have better self-esteem and human dignity. The child mortality rate has become minimal. Most seek medical aid in time of

sickness. The influences of ritual sacrifices for cures have become minimal.

As a policy we have moved away from the first village, Manapuram, to another village. M.M.Guda, 20 km away, after nine years of involvement and again moved from M.M.Guda to Savara Gopalapuram in the year 2000.. It was a painful decision both for the people and for us. But the result of this move is encouraging. The youth rose up to the occasion to organize themselves. Collective leadership has emerged. They have shown that they can stand on their feet.

Men like Addaiah, Singa and Sumbru now say: “Years ago we knew little about our situation, the outer world and our own capabilities. Even the sound of an automobile made us run into the



Animators Training Programme

forest. We now realize that some with vested interests have taken undue advantage of us even to the extent of depriving us of our human dignity. Today we stand on our feet. Reading and writing helps in getting our work done from Govt. Offices. We will not allow undue exploitation. And we will work for our development through every means available”. Perhaps the ground is now ready to sow the seeds for a more participatory development.

7.LEARNING FROM THE PAST :

The approach we adopted requires years of patience and one cannot see quick changes or development within a short

period. Looking for quick results would be like chopping a tree for the want of wood rather than sowing a seed for the same purpose. If it has taken centuries for the people to be as politically and socially conscious as they are today, can any worthwhile changes be brought about overnight. What we have been doing was to study the situation closely, identify the blocks that are on the way of development and reasons for their backwardness, and help them to tackle their own problems and set them on a new direction in which they can steadily move into a better future.

Looking back we realize there is much more that could have done. There have been certain drawbacks in our involvement that could have been avoided with some planning and care;

- i) We did not purr to use the tool of scientific analysis of the socio-economic conditions of the people. No formal survey of the area was made. No proper records were maintained. Due to lack of accurate knowledge of the situation, we could not tackle the problems scientifically.
- ii) Agriculture is the main source of livelihood for these tribals. They still use primitive methods in agriculture. This results in low level of production. They are hardly able to make both ends meet. We could not provide a breakthrough in this field.
- iii) We were more involved with the village in which we lived. As a result, the surrounding villages got less attention. Each member of the team could have taken charge of certain villages. This would have enabled us to implement programmes in larger number of villages.
- iv) Lack of continued follow-up of youth groups resulted in loss of enthusiasm for effective action.

- v) Though we have lived among the Savaras for 32 years, we did not master their language. Nor did we promote their culture systematically.

PART II

1. RELFECTIONS ON OUR RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT AND BROTHERHOOD:

The very motivating factor in our mission to work among the poor tribals is our religious commitment. This has not only been just a motivating factor but also sustaining factor in all the challenges we came across. During the course of our journey our perception on Religious life and its basics have changed considerably. This was due to our own experience of the sub-human existence of the tribals among whom we lived. Religious commitment in these circumstances appeared meaningful and fulfilling.

A major part of our discussions in the evaluation meet was on the fundamentals of our religious life such as spirituality, the vows and community life or Brotherhood. We feel that it's worthwhile to put some of these reflections into writing. This may not give a comprehensive picture on religious life as it is just the sum of few reflections gathered.

1.1.A LIBERATIVE SPIRITUALITY:

Life in the midst of the people, sharing their lot, was never an easy task. There were times when nothing seemed to go right. While we were over enthusiastic to act, people's response was always slow. The kind of methodology followed often necessitated the absence of tangible results that could be counted as accomplishments. Adopting and adjusting to the limitations of physical necessities too was often challenging. We had to outgrow the delimiting bondages of greed and selfishness to become true



Fighting for Rights

agents of God's liberative action. It meant discovering and developing an inner source of strength and sustenance that would enable us both as individuals and community to face up to the demands of our way of life.

The shoots of such spirituality began to sprout when we read the Scriptures in context, shared our enlightened reflections and encouraged each other to grow. We experienced many of the Scriptural passages coming alive in our context. Oppression in the land of Egypt, the situation that called forth God's liberative intervention in Israel's history was very much a reality for the tribals. They were groaning under the yoke of poverty, afflicted with malnourishment and ill health, maltreated by a new breed of task masters – greedy money lenders, cut-throat were we to become agents of God's radical concern and liberative action for these His children? How were we to make the kingdom of God inaugurated by Jesus – a kingdom founded on the Fatherhood of God, and the basic equality of all men and women – a reality?

We began to understand our spirituality as one of solidarity with the people in their struggle for a better society, thus ushering

in God's reign of justice on earth. Our spirituality could not be isolated from our life. We learnt to relate the events of our daily life – our success, failures, joys, sorrows, and helplessness – to our spiritual life. Regular community prayer, an essential element of our life together often became moments of sharing our intimate experiences, thus fostering understanding and promoting growth. Traditional structural forms of prayer were replaced with meditations on the word of God, sharing reflections in the light of our experiences, rejoicing at life, sharing our concerns and praying together. Relating Scripture to the day – today events of life was a profound God experience. Often we took time off on week-ends to spend longer hours in personal reflections and sharing, to evaluate our life and plan ahead.

It was never easy to live up to this ideal of spiritual life. There were moments, we felt it was superfluous. Those were moments when we lacked depth. Being constantly open to evaluation, criticism and correction enabled us to go beyond these temptations and confront ourselves before God. Today we realize more than ever before that to be true men of commitment and action we have to be at the same time men of deep spiritual communion with the Divine. The trail we have tried to blaze does offer certain amount of contended ness, but we have still a very long way to go to reach our goal.

1.2. VOWED FOR THE KINGDOM :

Trying to live out the demands of Incarnational spirituality led us to reflect on the deeper significance of the evangelical imperatives of poverty, celibacy and obedience. Our reflections led us to the conclusion that the vowed life is indeed relevant to our situations. Faithfulness to the vows enabled us to critically

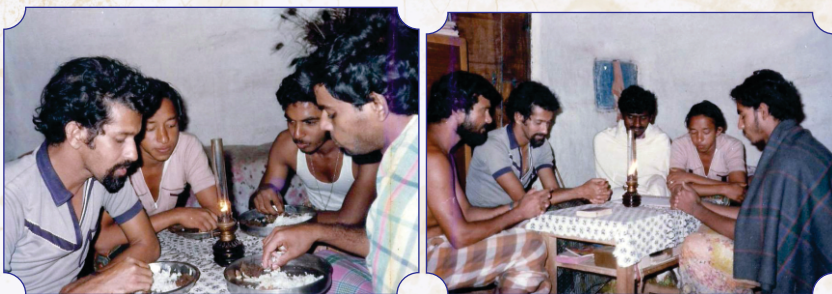
comprehend the socio-economic and cultural milieu of our presence and radically respond to it. Being thrust into the midst of the life struggles of ordinary poor people we began to understand the vows practically rather than in theory.

Poverty both material and socio-political is a daily experience for the tribals. They are poor not out of choice, but because of force. If there is any option for them, they would first and foremost opt not to be poor, for poverty is a highly dehumanizing factor. It certainly is not a virtue. Undue accumulation of wealth is a vice as long as there are poor in our midst. Preoccupation with wealth is as dehumanizing a factor as poverty. If poverty thus is an evil in itself what would be the implications of our vowing to be poor out of choice. We began to understand our poverty as an expression of solidarity with the poor – a sharing in the incarnation solidarity of Christ with the poor of Palestine.

On the practical front we understood our poverty as an invitation to a radical openness to the poor. Thus we kept our doors open for the poor to enter in and feel welcomed. Further we tried to share in the life of the poor by joining them in their places of work, hunting grounds, sharing their food... etc., Our poverty made us go closer to the lives of the people, understand their needs and respond to them in our own limited ways. Yet, on the personal front, while shedding many of the encumbering baggage's gathered on the way we found ourselves still materially richer than most tribals.

The purpose of the vow of celibacy is to free persons to love unconditionally. It is a commitment to go beyond the exclusivist of a few relationships and to reach out to all, in genuine

fraternal love. Celibacy being a concept alien to the tribal culture,



Community Sharing - Food - Prayer

it was always difficult for them to understand our state of life.

The early stage of our stay was marked by a deep sense of suspicion from the people. Our motives were often suspect. How could a group of men stay in their midst, claiming no personal gains. Gradually, however, the attitude changed. The freedom we enjoyed as men committed to celibacy enabled us to build up relationships. Soon we began to be addressed as “kakoun” in the tribal dialect, meaning “brother”,. Being thus addressed challenged us to establish genuine brotherly relationships with all our brothers and sisters. The freedom that celibacy provided also enabled us to face up to the demands of our mission, even risking our very lives. Looking back, we feel had we been men with exclusive relationships and responsibilities, we might never have been as daring as we were.

Unwavering adherence to the norms of social behaviour is a hallmark of tribal life. The good of the community is the ultimate deciding factor in all decision making. They not only make decisions that promote the common good, but also abide by them. They are able to rise above personal interests to ensure the well being of the group. The sense of obedience prevalent among the tribals was a constant source of inspiration for each of us in the practice of our vow of obedience. It was always an invitation for

us to place our trust in God and transcend our petty interests in all decision making. Our vow of obedience demanded of us to submit ourselves to God and to the wider community of people. We had to discern and decide together working at the people's pace, avoiding all temptations to be on the fast track. It required our subscribing to the decisions of the people even when we had differences of opinion. Jesus' own obedience to the will of the Father, even to the extent of being killed on the cross was our constant source of inspiration in our practice of the vow.

1.3. COMMUNITY SIMBOLOF FRATERNITY:

Life in community was another significant aspect of the venture that was dwelt upon. It was always the fount from which we drew our strength to go out in mission to the wider community of people. Ours was community that tried to transcend the distinctions based on title and position. We were basically a community of equals. Our being able to be largely in agreement in ideology and



Present Brothers Community

methodology of action enabled us to work as a well-knit group.



Present Sisters Community

Fr. Joy with Bro. Monson

Readiness to share that responsibilities for the common tasks was always a boost for the community spirit,. Regular community prayers and making all decisions in dialogue enabled us to understand one another and relate at a deeper level. The love and concern we were able to show the people was always an overflow of what we experienced in the community. It helped us to deepen our commitment to the tasks at hand.

Tensions and frictions too were a part of our life together. However, the openness and freedom that we had among ourselves enabled us to go beyond these stumbling blocks and become an effective sign of God's kingdom.

Milestones and achievements of our mission

- *Successfully experimented with insertion community
- *Stuck to the original objective of non permanency in any place
- *Helped to improve the health of the people. Due to our intervention many lives were saved.
- *Created awareness regarding the need for Education. As a result literacy level went up among the tribals of this area
- *Strengthened the village committees, as a result improved the functioning of govt.schools, public distribution system etc
- *Successfully fought against money lenders which helped people to improve their economic standard

- *Managed to control deforestation by the non tribals.
- *created credible leadership from Savaras. We have panchayat presidents,MPTCs,ZPTCs,NGO,among the savaras due to our presence and the awareness created.
- *Joined in the anti liquor movement and controlled it
- *Created women's group of savings and successfully implemented many welfare schemes
- *Educated many children and today they are in different Govt. jobs
- *Started an English medium residential School exclusively for tribals. Today we have nearly 500 students getting educated free of cost.
- *To sustain and promote savara culture and tradition, organized regularly ADIVASI JATRA at Manapuram.
- *Conducts regularly GIRI SHAKTI ADIVASI VOLLEBALL TOURNEMENT for youth of the area every year. Nearly 60 teams participates.
- *With our intervention tribals were able to get govt. schemes, buildings, land pattas etc.
- *Govt.schools and PHCs started functioning more smoothly and effectively.
- *Promoted rights of women and fought for their issues
- *Created village cooperatives, which marketed the local products for better rates
- *Created awareness on different rights of adivasis through rallies, seminars etc.

Our Collaborators

1. Cannosian sisters,Gopalapuram
2. Cannosian sisters,Veeraghattam
3. GSS,NGO, Manapuram

4. Laya,NGO,Vizag
5. Artic,NGO,Kothuru
6. ITDA,Seethampetta
7. ITDA,Parvathipuram
8. Jattu,NGO,Parvathipuram
9. Arts,NGO, Peddapetta.
10. Samyogita,NGO,Kallatta
11. Velugu Assosiation, kothuru

Our Challenges

1. Finance
2. Entry of political parties in the villages
3. Un employment
4. Gap between poor and rich among the tribals
5. Infiltration of non tribal culture in to tribal culture.
6. Individualism and materialism more than ever.
7. Corruption at every level
8. Poor health standards.
9. Poor Educational standards

Our Action Plans

1. Organize street plays in villages and create awareness on education, health, savings, women's issues, deforestation, on culture and language.
2. Strengthen village committees through regular meetings and seminars
3. Organize regular medical camps
4. See that no drop out in the villages.
5. Collaborate with NGOs and Govt in getting developmental schemes.
6. Give quality education to the children in our school.
7. Encourage and help the children to do higher education
8. Encouraging and promoting Eco friendly projects like wormy-

compost, Bio gas cooking, solar lightings etc.

9. Promote sustained agricultural methods and water harvesting systems

10. To safeguard our culture through celebration of tribal festivals, concretization, literatures, arts and drawing.

CONCLUSION :

There were a number of reasons that prompted this evaluation. The Province has expressed time and again at different times to evaluate our mission with a view to assessing their effectiveness. Besides, the church as a whole is in search for new models of religious communities that can recapture the primordial values of the gospel message. The experiences of the last 32 years of a band of Religious men who chose to live among the poor sharing in their agonies and ecstasies empowering them in the process, can certainly add to the search.

We realize that what has been recorded in these pages is a pale picture of all that has happened to us and to our people in the last 32 years. Because profoundly deep experiences cannot be captured in words. One thing we are sure of is that their lives have mingled with ours. In the process all of us have experienced transformation. It has shaped our faith that the God who has never failed to act decisively for the affairs of people and history, continues to do so, leading the whole creation to newness and freedom.

Bro. Monson Kuriakose

C/o Monrfort School,

S. Gopalapuram village,

Veeraghattam P. O.

Srikakulam Dt, AP 532460

Phone - 08332801379, 07702908853

Email: monsonkuriakose@gmail.com

Website: www.girijanaseva.org

Some of the Brothers who worked in this mission



Bro. Monson



Bro. Anthony Reddy



Bro. Bala Showry



Bro. Santosh



Bro. Hruday Kumar



Bro. Arogyam



Bro. Sebastian



Bro. Joseph



Bro. Mathew M.K.



Bro. Chinnppa Reddy



Bro. Dayanand



Bro. Ravi Kumar

Our School

