

RANCHI CALLING 2012

December 2011

Dear Friends,

In his annual Ranchi Calling Newsletter of 2010 my predecessor Fr. Ranjit Toppo, gave a very apt description of India today in terms of the co-existence side by side of two worlds: the world of the middle-class and well-to-do, called INDIA, and the world of the poor, called BHARAT. He also described how the Ranchi Jesuits are present in these two worlds.

It is with a grateful heart that I would like to continue the tradition of my predecessor and hereby **I send you my first Ranchi Calling**. While giving some news about our various works and activities of this past year, I would like to focus in this letter more on our work among the **youth of Jharkhand**, in particular the tribal youth. They are a great opportunity and also a cause of concern.

Youth Today: One basic problem

We notice that in the youth in Jharkhand, we also are dealing with two worlds. There is the **youth in the towns**, especially in a town like Ranchi. They live in the world of INDIA, a world which is greatly affected by globalization and consumerism. The impact of this globalization, with its all-pervading consumerism manifests itself in a culture and atmosphere of the 3 "S"ses: Superficiality, Self-indulgence and Self-deception. Many people live at the surface without depth, at the level of having and not of being. Much of the young people's attention goes to comforts and pleasure, instant gratification, instant success. As for self-deception, the consumerist culture throws up a lot of lies. It is not at all easy for the youth to resist the pressure of these "opportunities" which are so aggressively and unscrupulously promoted by the media.

Then there is the **youth in the villages**. Though even there we find some signs of influence of globalization, particularly in areas which have seen some "progress", in the far interior areas the situation is different. Besides the still very traditional agriculture, there is a near total lack of employment opportunities, and the impact of government development programmes is minimal, often nothing more than corrupt eye-wash. As a result there is the flight of the young people to the cities. Those who stay on in the village unemployed are an easy prey to alcoholism and petty criminality, or to the rebel movement which for these reasons is very active in those areas, extending their hold on these young people. This creates a lot of fear and further insecurity.

What is our response to both these categories of promising and struggling youth?

Education Today: role of our schools

"Education is the currency of the future", the USA President told a group of students at St. Xavier's College, Mumbai, earlier this year. Many people, including the government, are acutely aware of this. Yet at the same time education has become very very "market-driven", consumerist one may say. This means that education has not only become very costly, far beyond the budget of the poor

people, but the outcome of this type of education is also that the focus in the whole teaching-learning process is on a product, not on the person. In other words young people get equipped with skills and knowledge so as to become employable in the globalised technological world of INDIA. This brings about a terrible competition. People will do anything to get their children in 'good'



schools. This poses two big challenges to our Jesuit Education endeavours.

There are of course our 'good' schools, which according to the all India survey of India Today are among the best. They cater to the formation of the whole person and try to keep a balance between the matters of the mind and the matters of the heart. Our St Xavier's College, XISS, St John's and St Xavier's Schools and others do this. But we cannot cater only to the middle class youth of INDIA. We also need to cater to the less privileged groups of BHARAT. It is not enough to give these groups a so-called "equal and fair chance". There has to be equality of opportunity, which implies that education has to be accessible to them. Reaching out to the youth of BHARAT and making education accessible to them is our endeavour in our schools in the remote rural areas. In their own quiet and often difficult way they do wonders for many young people, opening for them a viable future.

Secondly, we cannot be satisfied with providing our students with only intellectual inputs and skills as the consumerist culture would demand. We have to inculcate values and attitudes. It is a matter of the heart. This requires a process of reflection on real life experiences, embedded in our educational formation. Only real encounters can bring about a "change of heart" said Fr. Nicholas, General Superior of the Jesuits.

In most of these educational institutions there is the CLC (Christian Life Communities) which, though meant mainly for adult Christian formation, is focused on High School youth. Updated and re-energized it could mean a lot to many young students. Similarly

at the university level we have the AICUF (All India Catholic University Federation).

Noteworthy is the **Jeevan Prawesh** initiative. Jeevan Prawesh, "Entrance to Life", is 5-day program initiated by Fr P.P. Van Nuffel SJ for High School and College students: at the threshold of their adult life they receive direction and information. The Jeevan Prawesh Programme is given to students irrespective of religion or background. A team of 4 people (Fr. Solomon Barwa SJ, two Sisters, 1 lay person) is busy with this much appreciated programme for young people the year round. Every year they cover 20 different schools in Jharkhand and neighbouring states, reaching out to about 2000 students. It is a work with the youth in depth. Not easy as you can imagine with so much that is changing, not the least in the youth.

There is the Yuvak Sangh (Youth Group) present in many parishes, a loosely structured group of boys and girls, coming together for mostly ad hoc issues. Because there is no broader framework to rely on, it is for the most groups an up and down movement. In some places, depending mostly on the kind of leadership of the local priest or of a local leader, it works well. In this case it is a pillar for many young people. In other places it does not work well. A real "Youth Movement", such as a Young Farmers Association or a Young Workers movement, does not exist.

Father Ignatius Lakra SJ, Ranchi Province Youth Coordinator who attended the last World Youth Meeting in Madrid, came back full of enthusiasm and new ideas. Besides being in contact with the wider spectrum of youth organizers in the other areas of India, he tries to strengthen the existing initiatives and also organize different activities and seminars locally and for the whole area. Every year there is a youth convention ending in a rally on 15th August for about 1000 enthusiast youngsters. We are looking for ways "to strengthen the tribal youth" which was the topic of the Ranchi SJ Province gathering in 2011. Yet, it remains an effort of trial and error.

The real challenge: unorganized youth and our response

The above mentioned efforts are for the youth within an organizational structure. The vast majority of young people are in what we can call the unorganized sector: the youth in villages. As already mentioned above, massive unemployment is the biggest problem in the rural areas. Even though all the tribals have land, agriculture at present does not offer a viable livelihood opportunity for many of the young people and therefore the future looks very bleak for them. As pointed out in a recent survey, in the future 75% of the job opportunities will be skill-based. As of now only 5% of India's labour force aged 18 – 24 years has undergone vocational training and these 5% are residing in the urban areas. The educational curriculum in the schools laid down by the State, is such that it does not provide any vocational training up to class 12. This is a basic shortcoming in our educational system. Given this situation, how do we respond to the needs of the unorganized youth?

Three initiatives deserve to be mentioned.

The Outreach Programme of St Xavier's School Doranda, a school for the youth of INDIA, is doing excellent work also for the youth of BHARAT. Generously using the premises of the school which closes at 2.30 pm, and with some of the Staff and student volunteers, scores of poor boys and girls mostly from the slums close by, who often work part time, attend the classes which prepare them for Standard X and for Standard XII public exam of the "Open School System". Wonderful work: every year 15 students pass Std X and 6 pass Std XII. It may look so little, but they give a chance for the poorest boys and girls who never would even have dreamt of it. Many regular students of St Xavier's help out for the teaching and other activities (computer training, yearly picnic, awareness building, sports training) and rub shoulders with the youth of "that other world of BHARAT". It is for them a valuable



education in itself, besides opening a brighter future for so many.

There is of course Kishore Nagar, now under the care of Father Louis Francken, (the successor of Father Vic Van Bortel, founder of KN), Father Walter Beck, Brother Mukul Kerketta and Br. Blasius Ekka. This is a work close to my heart because it puts into practice the option for the poor which we as Jesuits often proclaim. 670 boys, youth, from the margins of society find a home and a future which otherwise would be very bleak for many of them. "Give them a chance" and "help them to stand on their own feet when at the age of 16 to 20 they leave Kishor Nagar" were two basic principles of late Fr Vic Van Bortel. These remain the inner driving force of KN. I find Kishor Nagar as a fine example of our work with the unorganized youth and a very important 'symbol' of our vocation as Jesuits and of the Ranchi SJ Province. Looking at them we get in touch with our own vocation in whatever other apostolates we work. This has been beautifully expressed in the words of Louis Francken himself.

"Working at Kishor Nagar or for that matter working with

unorganized youth is a work 'at the frontiers'. There is no set pattern nor a fixed set of rules to run such an institution. It is not a school nor a hostel, it is a home. It is feeling one's way in unexplored territory, finding a way of enabling the children from different backgrounds to live together as a family and take responsibility for their day-to-day life. Enabling them to grow up and discover their own worth as human beings. It is a work "at the frontiers" which is not without risk or dangers; there is the risk/possibility of boys running away and going missing for some time, doing odd jobs and trying to survive on their own. It is a continuous search and it entails an intense awareness of God's wonderful ways of protection and guidance. It is a discovery that everything works for the good. It calls us to be sensitive to the various ways in which God guides each one. It is a challenge to help each child to grow and find its way of being."



The boys follow regular classes up to class X so that they can pass the matriculation examination. A few go for technical training after that or for other higher education. In addition to classes all the boys are involved in doing the various jobs and chores required for the running of a home. It includes cooking meals, looking after animals on the farm and work in the fields growing vegetables for daily consumption. They also look after the maintenance of the house and help out in the repair workshop. The big boys help the smaller ones as happens in a big family. There is no formal vocational training, but they get hands on experience and acquire various skills and learn to take initiative, preparing them to stand on their own feet.

Another noteworthy endeavour with regard to the unemployed youth of the villages is of course the work of Father Marc De Brouwer sj and his assistant Fr Alhonso Aind sj. They are able to retain these unemployed and often educated youth in the villages. How? Basically by giving them self-confidence through personality and motivational training, by teaching them the skills that are needed in the village (beside agriculture), by helping them to create the opportunities for self-employment on the spot, by giving them the group support and network which upholds them. **Gram Uthan**, "Village Uplift", is present in any of these stages in



their endeavour in 500 villages. They themselves believe in personal contact in the villages. They spend much of their time on the motorcycle reaching out to those young people in all nooks and corners. Marvelous work indeed!

In the context of the large scale unemployment among rural youth, I would like to mention that Fr. Ereneus Toppo with a degree in agriculture has joined the Staff of the Agricultural Training Centre (ATC) at Namkum. Plans are afoot to give a new direction and new impetus to ATC so that it can evolve ways and means to make agriculture a viable livelihood option for the tribal youth in the villages. This is a major challenge for this institution, which will celebrate its Golden Jubilee in 2012.

The youth is changing, changing fast as they have to respond to the fast changing world. I suppose this is the case for every generation, though one wonders whether the 'generation gap' nowadays comes much faster as the world is changing at such a neck-breaking speed. This phenomenon is clearly discernible in our novitiate where our young aspirants join the Jesuits and get their first formation. They are children of their time all right. Though the time tested ways of the Jesuit formation are no doubt still valid, yet how to present them so that they are heard and make an impact on the youngsters. It is a real challenge. We as a Jesuit Province are faced with a similar challenge when addressing the tribal youth of Chotanagpur today.

News in Brief

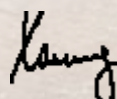
In the beginning of 2011 St. John's School, our oldest school in Ranchi (1887), shifted into a magnificent building in a new location, behind Manresa House. This was made possible, thanks to the help of St. Xavier College, which has now taken possession of the old St. John's building and is in the process of remodeling the structure to accommodate the large number of students (8000 students).

The construction of the Ground Floor of the Academic Block of the Xavier Institute of Polytechnic and Technology (XIPT) is ready as well as the spacious workshop. The Ground Floor is just sufficient to accommodate the two batches of students (360 in number) now on the rolls. For the next academic session the First Floor has to be completed, but unfortunately we have not been able to start the construction on account of lack of funds. The Agricultural Training Centre provides hostel facilities for the students of XIPT. There is a good occupancy in our Jharna Spirituality Centre where a good team of old and young SJs help out in mainly retreat work.

Though the pace of the building activity in the province has somewhat slowed down, there is still much need, especially in Assam which is our mission in full expansion. They are crying for resources and personnel as indeed our missionaries have done since Father Stockman SJ put his feet on our lovely Chotanagpur hills in 1859. We now profit much from their efforts and the generous support of the Belgian people "then". We hope that future generations will profit from our efforts and your generous support "now". Are we not one family?

Next year after my visit to Rome I plan to go to Belgium. Fr. Aurel Brys SJ, who is in-charge of the India Desk which fosters cooperation between Belgium and the Ranchi/ MAP Provinces, will organize in Belgium an **INDIA DAY on Sunday 13th May** for all the friends, benefactors and well wishers of our Lievens' Mission. God willing I will be there on that occasion. It will be an occasion to deepen our time-tested relationship.

Let me end this letter by wishing you all the joy and peace of Christmas and God's abundant blessings in 2012.



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