

Received from Father Godfrey, August 5, 2006

Ambatha Trip (Surgana Taluka, Northwest Nashik District, August 3-4, 2006)

Given the experience of the PALAS PROGRAMME in Shirpur I was invited by the Maharashtra Prabodhan Seva Mandal (MPSM), Karanjali, Nashik, to help train teachers and structure a similar programme in Ambatha, Taluka Surgana, Dt. Nashik.

My ST bus began the 4 1/2 hour 90 Kms journey at 7 AM from old CBS. On the way scores of Std.XI students boarded the (late) bus for some far off junior college. Our driver was skilled over potholes on rain battered roads. The weather was rainy - not deluging. Earth was brown and green. The road wound through lovely misty hills. Fields of rice terraced around us. Streams caramel and frothy white flowed gustily. The Jesuits in Ambatha were welcoming - hot tea, hot soup especially valued.

Sr.Anjali (BSW in NN) had 20 nonformal teachers in a dark damp classroom ready for their overnight training. About 50% were teachers for two years since their project began say 4 years ago. They were an interested/interesting group. The seniors were able to demonstrate previously instructed methods quite effectively. The firsthands were bashful.

We ran through a months syllabus, matched content with picture charts for better communication, sang songs, told stories, distributed small parcels of charts, chalk, etc. for the little band of teachers (16 girls and women, 4 young boys).

They will return to the wet and verdant hillsides where their little homes perch. They will gather little tribal children and give them a taste of class learning besides their constant learning from the hills and trees, fields and streams, cattle and humankind.

They will get a modest stipend. No tuitions on the sly nor permanent assurance of salaries. They will teach if they can persevere through many challenges of the task. They will also step into their water filled and slushy rice fields after class to transplant or to adjust the flow of the water course so that bunds are safe and seedlings dont wash off. They will use dampish firewood for cooking sparingly to keep going in this season adding wild vegetables to the menu.

The Jesuit school in Ambatha abets the NFE programme of Sr.Anjali. Electricity evades, the damp occasions colds or fevers, but life goes on rather cheerfully on the Ambatha hills thanks to the intrepid tribal inhabitants. One couldnt be more satisfied in a foreign university!