

AUGUST 2023

>>> NEWSLETTER <<<

SOCIETY OF THE SACRED HEART

PROVINCE OF INDIA



NEWS FROM THE TORPA COMMUNITY



In this newsletter the Torpa community, Charusheela Gaikwad, Sushma Topno, Lily Kullu, Neelam Hemrom, Mukta Bhengra and Mariaelena Figueredo share our joint efforts to address the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The newsletter has been creatively designed by our visitors Paola and Silvia, who also share their Torpa experience.



➤➤➤ TORPA'S BUZZING BEE-KEEPING BIZ

With wild flowering trees flourishing in Kelo and Jarakel villages, the local tribal communities learn the basics of bee-keeping and head towards making the area Jharkhand's first honey hub.

We started with the same number of beehives in two villages simultaneously. In the first model 49 women from four self-help groups (shgs) of Kelo village managed 50 hives. In the second model one man managed 50 hives in Jarakel village.



The criterion for selecting the apiary site was a minimum of 100 flowering trees within a 3 km radius of the location because the honeybee collects nectar from flowering trees within this distance from the hive.

In order to pick the right site, a team of four staff and six members of the village community spent weeks identifying the perfect flora for setting up the apiary sites, walking through difficult forest paths for hours together. It was the indigenous wisdom of the Munda tribe that led them to finding hundreds of karanj (*Milletia pinnata*) trees in Kelo and Jarakel villages.

Within 30 minutes of setting up the apiary the bees were collecting nectar from the dhelkatta trees. On some mornings the bees swarmed the gamhar (Indian white teak) tree. Usually after the first week of April the karanj tree starts flowering. But this year due to the heat wave, flowering was delayed. Bees found nectar in flowers of tamarind trees. Finally, towards the end of April, the buds started appearing in karanj trees and the honeycombs were glittering with honey.

Along with the women shgs, the team monitored each and every bee hive closely. Hive inspections involved recording important data such as the date of visit, queen presence, queen cell formation, brood pattern, health of the bees and presence of honey in the combs. Hive inspection sheets were prepared for recording data and monitoring the progress of the apiary.

Before the karanj season began, we had started live demos about handling bees. Initially everyone was afraid of stings and it took the women a while to start inspecting the hives. It was necessary to teach the community about regular hive inspection. After a few weeks each shg member was able to identify the queen bee and check the health of each hive.

We held regular training sessions about beekeeping and live demos at both the apiary sites. The exercise was started with a cost benefit analysis which was developed in the local language to explain the importance of return on investment and profit margin in sales.

In Kelo 40kg of honey was extracted and in Jarakel 26 kg was extracted in the first phase of the programme. The extraction was done with manually operated cylindrical extraction machines. This pure karanj honey has been filtered and stored in food grade containers for further marketing.

The tribal community have established two thriving apiary sites. With the generous support of the Cor Unum Covid-19 fund, the women shgs have successfully identified local flora, managed the hives, monitored bee health and extracted high-quality honey. The enterprise holds promise for sustainable livelihoods and economic growth, transforming beekeeping into a flourishing entrepreneurial endeavour within the region.



Sr. Mariaelena Figueredo rscj

➤➤➤ MY EXPERIENCE IN TORPA

On the 20th July 2023, the Children of the New Dawn School hosted a program called ‘*Van Mahotsav*’. The theme was “Plant a tree today for a better tomorrow”. One teacher talked about the *Van Mahotsav* festival. *Van Mahaotsav* was first observed in India from 20th July to 27th July in 1947. Since then *Van Mahaotsav* is a common event celebrated across India.

In the primary school, each class creatively made a tree on chart paper. They also wrote a few slogans on *Van Mahaotsav*. It was a short program conducted by class 3 and class 4. There was a tree planted by each of the primary classes. It was a good message for the children and for me. For the tribal community is very close to the ‘jal (water), jungle (forest), jameen (land)’.



On 24th July 2023 in Torpa and again on 6th August 2023 in Khunti, I joined the silent protest for the increasing violence in the state of Manipur, in India. Representatives from the All-Churches Committee (different denominations) and the lay faithful walked together in solidarity. We began at 12 with a small prayer. We walked in silence. Thousands of people participated to share the pain for our brothers and sisters of Manipur.

I follow the news every day. I find it very painful to see the people of Manipur rendered homeless, without any food to eat, orphaned, injured or killed. I can only pray for them that God will be their strength as they continue to face situations of violence.

Sr. Mukta Bhengra rscj

➤➤➤ MY EXPERIENCE OF TEACHING IN A REMOTE GOVERNMENT-AIDED SCHOOL

In July 2023 I began the experience of teaching in a government school in a remote area, which is around 74 kms away from Ranchi. There are a total of 75 students in the school with classes from 1 to 8 and there are only 3 teachers.

When I first visited the school, I realized that the school is located too far away. So, I requested the congregation of the Daughters of St. Anne, to accommodate me in their local community at Mandar. The sisters promptly agreed and very kindly and willingly accepted my request. The sisters made me feel at home and I have become a part of their community. I am very grateful to them for their kindness and generosity.

I travel by scooty daily from the community to the school allotted to me for the teaching experience. It takes me around one and half hour to reach the school. On the first day, when I went to the class, there were a total of only 16 students. I introduced myself and asked each one to do the same. Then I realized that the students of class 6 to class 8 were seated in one class. It was totally confusing for me. I did not know what to teach them. And I did not know how to begin. I discovered from the other teachers and they guided me how to teach the children.

When I began teaching, I realised that the children of class 6 to class 8, did not have a basic knowledge of the subjects. It made me feel sad that the children lack knowledge because of insufficient teachers. So, I decided to teach them some basics as long as I am here.

In the beginning they were not interested in studies so I began to show them short videos related to their topics of interest. Gradually I won their hearts and now they are showing some interest in studies. The students are able to read and recognize the words. It makes me feel happy that I am able to contribute something. The students are grateful. They express their gratitude by bringing little love offerings - mushrooms, guavas and vegetables. This really makes me humble. I accept it all with great love.

Teaching in this remote government school, I experienced the reality of a school in a remote area. I cannot do much but I do share a little love and knowledge.

Sr. Neelam Hemrom rscj

➤➤➤ MY LIFE WITH THE “COME AND SEES”

For me, the “Come and See” experience is like a very small grain planted in Torpa. Together, we try to nourish the grain in our midst with different activities planned for the group. Currently there are nine young women who want to know our Society, our life of prayer and our community life through being a ‘Come and See’.

Manjusha Horo, Birang Barla and Nilima Hemrom successfully completed the Inter Arts examination from St. Joseph’s College Torpa in March 2023. These three have been with us for almost 25 months. Kusum Barla has been with us for more than a year. She will continue her study for the second year Inter Arts. In June 2023, Laksha Hemrom and Sonali Horo joined the group. Both of them have also successfully completed their Inter Arts studies. In July 2023 Mariam Guria and Rahel Guria joined the group. Both of them are first year Inter Arts students at the St. Joseph's College Torpa.



The ‘come and see’ group have a regular program. After morning prayer there is the daily eucharistic celebration, gardening, housework, cutting the vegetables required for the meal, ministry experience or college studies, English class, Gospel reading class and the evening prayer. Sr. Sushma Topno leads the morning prayer. The English conversation class is taken by Sr. Charusheela Gaikwad. Sr. Lily Kullu helps them to read the Gospel as a preparation for the next day’s morning prayer. These possible vocations are encouraged to continue their personal devotions like reciting the rosary and vocal prayers. They are also introduced to silent prayer and Adoration. They are invited to live together to experience community life. They join the community prayer every Thursday for Holy Hour. And every Sunday they join the community for lunch.

To get to know our apostolic service, every morning, Manjusha Horo, Birang Barla, Nilima Hemrom, Laksha Hemrom and Sonali Horo, help out at the Bal Niketan. The 'Come and Sees' are very happy to decorate the chapel for the weekly Holy Hour, to help in the sacristy, to make wax candles and to prepare flower arrangements. They practice singing, dancing and playing the mandar (drum) in their leisure hours.

Every Sunday after lunch, five of them share something in simple English. This helps them to get familiar and comfortable with conversational English. Given the fact that they have not had an atmosphere of speaking or listening in the English language neither at school nor at college level, the exercise on Sundays will help them at this initial stage to learn one official language of the International Society.

We entrust these possible vocations to St. Madeleine Sophie and St. Philippine Duchesne with a prayer that many more young women will be attracted to come and see our way of life as a Religious of the Sacred Heart.



Sr. Charusheela Gaikwad rscj

➤➤➤ **INAUGURAL SILVER JUBILEE CELEBRATION OF "THE CHILDREN OF THE NEW DAWN SCHOOL"**

Saturday 13th of May 2023! There was excitement in the air. The staff and the students were trying to give the final touch to various areas that needed attention. It was a happy and joyous day. Despite of the burning heat, the morning began with a sweet fragrance. A soothing breeze was blowing and even the birds of the air were chirping away to welcome the joyous day with their thrilling pitch that added to the moment. The entire school was decorated very tastefully, looking colourful and festive.

Our Chief Guest for the day was Rev. Bishop Binay Kandulna, Bishop of Khunti Diocese. When he arrived the students welcomed him with the traditional Adivasi dance all the way from the main gate till the entrance of the school. The auspicious long-awaited day began with the Thanksgiving Eucharistic Celebration. The Bishop was the main celebrant with many co-celebrants. 25 lamps (dijas) were taken in an entrance procession as a symbol of our gratitude to God. The lit lamps were placed at the altar in their respective places. There was an entrance dance, bible procession, offertory dance and recessional dance gracefully led by the students in their colourful attire.



After a short break for refreshments the staff were ready to welcome the Chief Guest to the stage to bless the joyous occasion. The program was beautifully compered by 3 teachers and four students. The cultural program began with the lighting of the lamp invoking God's presence. This was followed by a prayer dance. The students of class 7 danced gracefully, adorned in pretty coloured sarees. All of us who watched, felt the joy of the moment.

Then the Principal, Sr Sushma Topno, shared her welcome address to welcome one-and-all, the Chief Guest, the Guests of Honor, government officials, parents, well-wishers, staff and students. The School Report was read out by three groups of teachers. It was very brief but touched the history of the school. After a few items, our Chief Guest Rev. Bishop Binay Kandulna was felicitated with a shawl and a memento. His message was very encouraging and very appreciative towards the Religious of the Sacred Heart, the management, the staff and the students. He mentioned that over the years, he had personally seen the growth and the development of the school.

The Guests of Honor - Sr. Ananda Amritmahal rscj, the Secretary of the Children of the New Dawn School, and Sr. Vimala (Elizabeth) Verghese rscj, the former Principal of the Children of the New Dawn School were both felicitated. Their messages were very down-to-earth, encouraging, supportive and very appreciative. They invited the staff and students to strive for a better future and a good academic standard. At the same time to care for the society and the ecosystem.

The former staff and the ICSE board toppers were felicitated. One of the teachers, Miss Usha Horo, who has served the school for more than 25 years, was also warmly felicitated. All these highlights were a very proud moment for the school.

Various dances from the north to the south and even Nepal, ranging from Hollywood to Bollywood and of course our very own tribal dance featured displaying a good mix of various cultures. The audience was overwhelmed and enchanted with the performance of the students. The synchronization of around 600 students' performance was the result of the dedication and hard work of both the staff and the students which was greatly appreciated by all. The cultural program ended with the School Anthem. And all were invited for a festive fellowship meal. Miss Anima Topno and Miss Usha Horo gave the concluding vote of thanks.



Sr. Sushma Topno rscj

➤➤➤ MY EXPERIENCE IN BAL NIKETAN

In June 2023, I got a chance to teach in the Bal Niketan, a ministry that caters to the pre-primary education for children in the age group of 3 to 5 years. I teach the U. K.G. children who are 5 years old. To be in Bal Niketan is a great joy for me and to be with the little children is a learning experience for me.

It got me thinking how a little child makes the transition from a familiar home surrounding to a formal classroom environment, is marvellous. The way these small children manage to make new friends, to take care of their little belongings – bag, books, pencil, lunch box is simply amazing.



The personal and social life of these little children inspires me and challenges me to be friendly, sociable, happy and innovative. On 15 August 2023, for the Independence Day program, I enjoyed the opportunity to prepare one girl to make a speech in English. She learnt the speech in 3 days' time and she spoke with confidence at this function.

I feel that I am placed here in Bal Niketan to form the children just like a potter - to mould them to be a beautiful human being, who will be fruitful to the society and the world at large.

This year 2023, when India is faced with so much violence and disunity, I feel so broken and helpless, but being with the little children gives me a sense of purpose to live with great HOPE.

Sr. Lily Kullu rscj

➤➤➤ ONE MONTH WITH THE PEOPLE OF TORPA

From the moment I decided to come to Torpa, as a volunteer, I knew I was embarking on a unique adventure, and what better than to invite Silvia to embark on this journey together. Our main role here is to work with children in classes, even despite the language barrier. Even though they don't speak English, the magic of Google Translate has made it much easier for us to converse with people!

Every day is a new challenge and an opportunity for growth, both for the children and for us. Helping them understand concepts and seeing their eyes light up when they get something right is an indescribable feeling. And the English classes with the girls have proven to be a mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge, even though they sometimes turn into a word game due to the language!



I have found myself more comfortable here than I imagined. The people of Torpa, and the sisters, have opened their arms and hearts wide, making us feel part of the community. Every morning, when we come down for breakfast, the children greet us with a cheerful "good morning sister," even though we are not sisters. This little confusion always brings a smile to our faces and makes us feel part of their community in a fun way.

This experience has been a constant roller coaster of emotions, of constant adaptation, and this has helped me grow in ways I never thought possible.

I'd do this experience all over again without hesitation. Torpa, has left an indelible mark on my heart despite the cultural and language differences.



➤➤➤ MY EXPERIENCE OF ONE MONTH IN TORPA

I don't really know how to begin these lines, because I would like you to really feel with me what I want to transmit. Sometimes, a few simple words open the door to a whole new and fascinating adventure. In my case, it was only a "Yes, Paola, I'm coming with you" that brought me here, to Torpa, to live one of the most human experiences of my life.

I remember the first moment I entered Bal Niketan, it was already dark and we arrived tired from the journey, the sisters offered us everything they had to make us feel at home, but the best thing was the next morning, to see how from 8 am, the children began to flood every corner of this centre with smiles that moments later turned into curious looks when they saw us but that soon ended up turning into hugs and grimaces. Having the opportunity to teach them a little of what they had learnt so far and seeing their happy faces when you corrected the exercises and they had got it right, that's when you feel that living this is a real gift. Walking through the streets of Torpa, discovering its modest shops and houses, seeing the streets full of people with enthusiasm to create a place of union and prosperity in the village, which was reflected in the two festivals we were able to attend, the Indian Independence Day and the World Indigenous People's Day, where the whole village celebrated what had cost so much to achieve, manifesting that sign of identity that belongs to them.

Although at the beginning the language may have been an obstacle, smiles break any barrier, one smile is enough to break the ice and start the daily English class that we give to 9 girls who want to start their religious journey. The fact of having to look for tools to be able to make ourselves understood has made us develop new skills that we will always carry with us, as well as the love that each person in this centre has given us, and which has made it feel as if we were at home, despite being so far from home.

