The Outreach Programme for Science and Education at the Jesuit Colleges of Tamil Nadu in India

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1. Introduction

All the four Jesuit Colleges in Tamil Nadu, India are trying to reach out to the rural masses. They are autonomous colleges and hence can operate to modify the curriculum to suit the needs of various outreach programmes that reach out to the rural masses badly in need of concern and attention. St. Xavier’s College, Palayamkottai; Arulanandar College, Karumathur; St. Joseph’s College, Trichirappalli and Loyola College, Chennai, are the four Jesuit colleges in Tamil Nadu. These are well known colleges in Tamil Nadu, India.

All these colleges have outreach programmes: in particular, STAND (Students Training and Action for Neighbourhood Development), ARISE (Arulanandar Rural Initiative for Social and Education), LEAP (Loyola Education Action Programme) and SHEPHERD (Science and Humanities for People’s Development). These programmes are carried out by the college students with the guidance of the staff besides the government sponsored NSS activities.

LEAP has adopts slums in the city for its operations. Other colleges have adopted villages for their operation. Though each college operates the outreach programme in its own way, I have codified it under one category with the available information. Certain facts are more applicable to one college than the other.

2. The Need for the Outreach Programme

The education system functions at the cost of the poor man’s sweat. He deserves to get the benefit of the educational system. The major share of the cost is supplied by the poor through their taxes.

The bookish knowledge given to the student at the class room set up makes him dull and inactive and the present system of education is what Paul Freire calls the Banking method of education wherein the student
simply accepts what the teacher imparts. The new system of education should be a two way process wherein the student and the teacher interact. This interaction is possible only when both the teacher and students are exposed to the hard realities of society. The outreach programme fulfills this demand thereby making the education more active, dynamic, creative and beneficial to the poor. This programme takes its inspiration from the Ignatian charism of Action, Reflection, Evaluation and Back to Action.

The Jesuit General Congregation 32 decree 4 emphasizes the need for faith doing justice which means opening the Jesuit educational institutes to the poor and the marginalised of society. This concept is realised through the outreach programme. It is our duty and our mission to impart values to those who come to our institutions. All those students who study in the Jesuit institutions should be men and women for others and leaders of the nation. This is possible only by making the students interact with the villagers. The simplicity and generosity of the village poor people will play a major role in shaping the personality and value system of the students.

The village serves as the testing field to the student to understand and critically evaluate the knowledge the student imbibes from the class room.

2.1. The Curriculum

Course Structure The outreach programmes of all the colleges are treated as a separate department for the purpose of linking the student and teaching community with the neighbourhood villages. It is a compulsory programme for the students at the Under Graduate level and Post Graduate level. Each department in the college must adopt one village separately for P.G. first year students and U.G. second year students.

A staff member is in charge for one group of students. The staff accepts this work besides regular work. Other staff in the department extend their cooperation for the successful conduct of the Programme and related works. The village is selected by the Director and the coordinators of the programme keeping in mind the need of the people and their cooperation.

Each class will undertake evening visits to the village, one 1-day camp and one 3-day camp. In this process each student will spend 100 hours in the village during the year. All the students have to accomplish the visits during their course of study.

Regular notes are maintained separately for each student in which the attendance and the performance of the students are regularly recorded. The records are evaluated and assessed during the end of the semester and based on the findings, marks are awarded.

Approach of the Programme Each wing of the outreach programme follows a participatory approach to achieve two way impacts-on the rural community in one way and the students in the other way. The approach includes five components. They are (1) problem Identification through in-
teraction, (2) awareness generation, (3) organisation building, (4) direct action, and (5) participatory evaluation.

First, as the students enter the adopted village for the first time their intention is to identify the various problems facing the community. This is because all the actions will be planned based on the nature and intensity of the problems. For this purpose they follow the following ways to identify the problems. House visits, Group discussions and interaction with the village leaders and a socio-economic survey.

The problems facing the village community cannot be solved unless the people are helped to realise the problems. This realisation can be effected only through the process of awareness generation. Thus awareness building has been a successful approach and this process has helped to foster their involvement and interest in solving the village problems. To create awareness, the techniques such as Training, Public meetings, Cultural events and Audio visual programmes, corridor meetings and exposure to other places are used.

Action can start only through organised platforms. The students focus their attention on the promotion of micro level organisation among the village community. Through experience we have realised that organising womenfolk will bear more fruit in community development. Sangam formation, Youth and children’s club formation are other activities to organise the village people.

2.2. Method of Operation

Camps During the year the students organise live-in camps in the adopted villages. At this time they have direct experience of the rural realities, the existing infrastructure facilities the standard of life of the people and the social inequality in the rural areas. Students also develop leadership qualities during these camps. During the camps, students have an opportunity to share their concerns with the people and vice versa. They also learn skills like silampattam, kummi and oyilattam.

Visits In general student groups are involved in teaching the rural school children, conducting classes for dropouts, and adult illiterates, on health, environment and promoting people’s organisation. These visits are guided and monitored by the Director, Coordinators and the faculty members. The students plan with their respective coordinators before the visit and submitted a detailed report of the work done. The students initiated pre-schools in the villages with the collaboration of NGO’s and the government. In some villages Non-formal Education centres for school dropouts are established by the students. Many school dropouts between the age group 6-14 learnt to live in these centres.

Programmes Awareness programmes on National Social Welfare assistance scheme are organised in collaboration with the field publicity depart-
ment. Students are also trained to teach the people in preparing household consumer commodities like detergent, cleaning powder, talcum powder and nutrient powder.

Under guidance of doctors a diabetic survey is conducted in some villages. Some students undertake a micro study on nutritional status of children between the age group 0-15 years. The result of the study shows that 90% of the children are under nourished due to lack of protein and a low calorie diet. Based on the study remedial programmes were arranged.

The “Liaison Officers” The students with the villagers prepare applications and memoranda to tap benefits of Government schemes, and accompany the applicants to contact the officials concerned. In the case of community level issues, they organise mass signature campaign and submit to concerned authorities with the help of the coordinators.

In another place they meet the officials of the Education department to appoint more teachers in the local schools. Hence two teachers are posted by the department. By sheer pressure of the students a primary school has been started.

With the efforts of the students and the local youth club a link bridge to the village has been sanctioned. In short students establish a connection between the village people and the Government officials, Press, Police and other agencies. They can realise many things for the poor people. They meet the officials including the central ministers without any difficulty and bring them to the remote corners of the villages. The students in fact feel very proud of their achievements which otherwise will be impossible for the people in the villages.

3. Promotion of Science

At the end of the twentieth century, the battle field has become primarily one of economic warfare, and economies are increasingly being dominated by scientific knowledge, technologies and information. At this juncture Science has to be used for the purpose of a liberating force rather than a weapon to dominate others. The sharing of Scientific knowledge goes very well with sharing of responsibility in sharing this world for a better future. Certain steps are taken by the college students in this regard.

3.1. Eco-Friendly

Nursery Raising Bio-intensive promotion of kitchen garden, cultivation of herbal plants, nature cure and herbal medicine, organic farming and Bio-dynamic agriculture are practised and advocated in the outreach programme. The use of bio-fertilisers and vermi culture are encouraged. People are also given training for pest control through biological methods.

Nursery raising is being done in one place. It fulfils the demands of the villagers. Seedlings are made available to everyone at a nominal
cost. Students are given theoretical principles and methodology of nursery raising which later become a source of income in future.

**Community Garden** The main purpose of the herbal community garden is to help people to realise the importance of herbal medicines a locally available source. It also aimed at conserving the rare species of medicinal plants which are on the verge of extinction.

Bio-intensive kitchen gardens are promoted in the village. In each village 10 families are selected and five varieties of seeds distributed. Students motivate the people to make use of the backyard land to grow and cultivate more vegetables.

**Tree Plantation** The students and the coordinator conduct community meetings to motivate the people and popularise the concept of planting trees for protection of the environment. The local youth, women and college students jointly prepare the land for the planting. Tree plantations are encouraged in the villages. With the support of the District forest officers tree plants are distributed to the village people. They in turn make efforts to grow the trees with care.

### 3.2. Appropriate Technology

**Cost Effective Methods** Certain low cost appliances and technologies are introduced to the village people according to their requirement. The traditional way of doing things has been replaced by scientifically designed tools to make their living comfortable and less costly. They have promoted smokeless choolan (oven) in the villages. It consumes less firewood at the same time water can be heated on one side and meals can be prepared at the other side of the oven. Under the energy saving scheme solar cooker is used for demonstration to the village people. This scheme was introduced through the DRDA. Chock pits, low cost sanitary facilities have been introduced in the adopted villages.

**Demonstrations** Through the DRRA solar cookers, wind power water pumps have been introduced in the villages. People have been given demonstration to prepare soap, washing powder, ink, om water and candle making. Poultry keeping, aquaculture and prawn culture have been encouraged through government programmes.

### 3.3. Science Exhibitions

**Motivation for the Teachers** With the support of the Tamil Nadu council for Science and Technology programmes are organised for the village teachers to promote science in rural areas. The programmes motivate the teachers to have a scientific bent of mind. They also aim at instilling the application of Science and Technology among the village people. The teachers are also instructed to apply scientific methods in their teaching.
Exhibitions To create interest and inculcate the scientific temper periodical exhibitions are organised by the college for the rural children since the rural schools do not have adequate laboratory facilities. The main objective of this exhibition is to encourage the rural children to get involved and bring out their talents and to inculcate the scientific temperament among them.

4. Promotion of Education

4.1. Training and Consultancy

Health Education The students contact the local Government health centre and arrange periodic visits by the VHNs to the village to discuss preventive, curative, reproductive and nutritional health care. In general veterinary, dental, Siddha and eye camps are conducted in collaboration with Government health departments, Veterinary Training Research centre and Eye hospitals.

AIDS awareness campaigns are organised in the villages with the help of NGO’s. This campaign included posters, video shows, public meetings and counseling. At the end of the campaign, the people were asked to contact the NGO’s if they need any help.

A “Pulse Polio” immunisation programme has been conducted. Students are involved in identifying the children below 5 years and they are administered pulse polio. Like Unnani, Ayurveda and Homeopathy, Siddha is a system of medicine prepared from the plants and herbs. During siddha awareness camp, the villagers are intimate ahead of time and the students prepare relevant materials to be displayed during the campaign. The medicines are exhibited where the village community gathers.

Human Rights On the Human Rights day, programmes are organised to highlight the human rights to the people. The message is given to people through seminar, cultural programmes and competitions. With the help of the experts the students organise seminars on legal aid.

Awareness education is brought to the village people during the camp days through street plays, seminars, debates and valakadu mandram. Social and other relevant themes are taken for discussion. The students also encourage the local people to take active part in the programmes. Functional skill training and vocational training programmes are organised. For example artificial gem cutting, book binding and other courses are conducted.

Computer Training To initiate the knowledge of computers computer training for rural youth is given. The training is supported by the National Backward Classes Finance and Development Corporation.
Cattle Management Training on cattle management for the youth and women is given and the participants discuss the method of starting cooperatives on dairy units in their villages.

4.2. Literacy Programmes

Dropouts The Mahalir mandrams established in some villages take care of the dropouts. They are motivated to attend schools. The child labour is put into question by the presence of the college students in the villages. The children respond very well to these programmes.

The students also conduct student enrolment campaigns in the villages. Taking into consideration the school dropouts the animators conduct classes on non-formal method in twin objectives. One to compensate the loss of basic education of the dropout working children and to motivate them to go back to school. Now there is considerable improvement in the dropout level in the rural schools.

Coaching During the regular visits students take up coaching classes for all the school going children. They prepare them for the final exams. In fact in many villages the students get through their exams with the support and encouragement of the college students.

Study centres have been constructed in some places for the use of the village people. Local dailies are bought for reading purpose. The village children also make use of the study centres to study.

Adult Literacy Periodical Adult literacy programmes are being conducted. The college students also take classes for the interested people who want to learn in their late age. Women in particular respond to these programmes.

4.3. Fair to “The Fair Sex”

Besides the youth clubs for the boys, the students have promoted women clubs, Mahalir Mandrams to enable collective action and reflection process amidst the women. Promotion of savings and credit schemes, village herbal garden are the activities of the women clubs. Certain skill trainings are given to the girls.

Sewing machines are given to some women clubs for training members. They also help in the Siddha Medical camps, Human Rights Day celebrations. They also actively participate in the preparation of household articles and in the herbal training.

The women clubs also conduct classes for the school dropouts and run the pre-school in their villages. They also take up certain common issues and show their protest. For example they campaign against the illicit arrack in and around their villages. They also run the women cooperation dairy unit.
5. Supporting Agencies

There are many agencies which collaborate with the outreach programmes. The district Science Centre actively takes part whenever our students go for camps to the villages. The village people are taken to the District Science Centres which are kept in some district head quarters to promote the values and interests of Science. The Field Publicity Officers also take active part in the rural programmes. They combine their programmes with the college outreach programmes and impart the knowledge of the Government programmes to the poor people in the villages.

The District Industrial Centre, Khadi Craft and Khadi and Village Industries Commission also extend their helping hand to arrange programmes in the villages. The District Social Welfare Office and Employment Exchange officers come forward whenever the college students approach them for any welfare measures and job opportunities. The Local Non Governmental Organisations also help the students and the village people to organise camps and other programmes for the good of the village people. The United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia and the State Council for Science and Technology, Chennai give funds for the programmes of some the Jesuit colleges.

6. Conclusion

These programmes have brought life to the campus activities of the college. The students feel very happy with their achievements during their involvement in helping the people. Due to the outreach programmes the villagers are not strangers to the college campus. They feel at home when they visit the college campus for any meeting or any exhibition. Folk art of the village people are staged in the college on various occasions.

The Government officials are very happy to join hands with the students for implementing their programmes and help the peoples. Priority is given to the rural children who come from the adopted villages in the admission of the college. The outreach programmes are the eye-opener to the city students to realise that the heart of India lies in the villages.