

NEWSLETTER APRIL 2025

Workshop on Tribal Heritage and PESA for the selected teachers of Khunti District: A one-day workshop on "*Tribal Heritage and Identity and PESA*" was held on 14th April 2025 at RC Boys' Mission School, Sarwada, Khunti. Renowned tribal rights activist, researcher,



and author, Mr. Gladson Dungdung, was the resource person of the day. His thought-provoking address shed light on the complex intersections of tribal heritage, identity, governance, and law. He opened the session by emphasizing the richness and uniqueness of tribal communities. He highlighted that tribal life is rooted in a philosophy of harmony with nature, mutual respect, and community-oriented living. He warned that a growing disconnects from these roots — influenced by external cultural and economic forces — threatens the survival of indigenous identities. "By abandoning our core values and embracing imposed beliefs, we unknowingly accept them as truth," Gladson remarked, drawing attention to the concept of mental colonization. "This mental slavery is why 15% of people rule over the remaining 85%." He



elaborated on the tribal worldview across four pillars: a) Social/Cultural Philosophy: He said that Tribal communities are Communitarian. They promote equality, loves autonomy, believes in mutual cooperation, and loves self-reliance. The core values of tribals are fearlessness, cohesiveness, and respect for rights. b) Economic

Philosophy: Tribes traditionally produce only what they need, with no emphasis on profit-making. Gladson said that modern society is consumerism society and driven by advertising and unnecessary desires. c) Political Philosophy: Leadership is based on consensus and satisfaction and does not believe in competition. Justice is restorative, and decision-making is swift and participatory. d) Religious Philosophy: Tribes revere nature as the creator and reject rigid doctrines. Their spirituality is rooted in balance, equality, and lived reality rather than abstract metaphysics. Then Gladson went on to discuss about PESA and Constitutional Provisions. He explained how constitutional articles such as 244 (1), 243M (1), 243ZC, 246 (3) & (4), and 254 are crucial for understanding tribal autonomy and governance under the Fifth Schedule. He emphasized that PESA is not merely a legal provision but a framework for tribal self-rule and identity preservation. The open discussion saw active participation, with queries on PESA's scope, strategies for cultural preservation, and integrating tribal values in education. Participants expressed both concern and hope, seeking actionable steps for community empowerment. In his closing remarks, Fr. Alphonse Kullu, Parish Priest of Sarwada Church underscored the urgency of reviving ancestral values in the face of cultural erosion. He encouraged continued dialogue and collective action to strengthen tribal identity. The session concluded with a heartfelt vote of thanks by Mr. Xavier Hamsay, who appreciated the insights shared by Gladson and the enthusiastic engagement of all attendees.

Orientation on Women Federation: On 7th April, SIGN organized an orientation session on women's federations at Grahatali. A total of 93 women, including office bearers and members from 26 Self-Help Groups (SHGs) of Lali Panchayat, participated in the program. The session aimed to build awareness about the power

of collective strength and the important role federations play in empowering women-led groups. Fr. Bipin Pani, Director of SIGN, opened the session by posing a thought-



provoking question: “What is the greatest power in the world to rule the world?” He explained that across centuries, the strongest power has always been **NUMBERS**—either in terms of money or people. “A wealthy person,” he said, “is powerful because they

hold large amounts of money. Similarly, someone supported by hundreds or thousands of people is also powerful. As poor people, we may not have a lot of money, but we do have the potential to unite people.” He emphasized that forming



groups is the key to harnessing this power. A Self-Help Group is one such unit. When SHGs across villages come together, they form a federation—a larger, united body with the strength to raise voices, take initiatives, and sustain businesses.

To inspire the participants, Fr. Bipin shared the success stories of two major women-

led movements: **SEWA (Self-Employed Women’s Association):** Founded in 1972 by Ela Bhatt and a group of women in Ahmedabad to support poor, self-employed women such as street vendors and artisans. In 1974, they established SEWA Bank, offering small loans for just ₹10 annually. SEWA expanded to 18 states across India and internationally, offering skills training, employment, and dignity. During the COVID-19 lockdown, SEWA launched *Anubandh*, an e-commerce platform connecting women producers with buyers. Today, with over 2.1 million members, SEWA is a global symbol of empowerment through unity and self-reliance. **Lijjat Papad:** In 1959, seven



Gujarati women in Mumbai started making papads with just ₹80 and a dream of financial independence. Their commitment to quality and unity led to the formation of a cooperative that empowered thousands of women. Lijjat Papad became a beloved household name, not only for its taste but for its inspiring legacy of women uplifting one another—one papad at a time. Fr. Bipin also

highlighted the **Madhya Pradesh Mahila Aajivika Sangh**, a federation of 70,000 SHGs with over 2.5 million members. What began with agricultural products earned state-level recognition for its outstanding economic impact. Inspired by these stories, participants actively engaged in discussions and raised concerns about the financial challenges of starting their own ventures. In response, Fr. Bipin encouraged them to reflect on their inner strengths and consider beginning small-scale businesses using locally available resources. While acknowledging that external support is valuable, he stressed that the foundation of lasting success lies in building strong, united federations. The orientation concluded with renewed enthusiasm and a strong sense of purpose among the women. They left with a clear understanding that **unity and collective action** are powerful tools for generating sustainable livelihoods and transforming their communities.