

## Fr. Philip Manthara leads "Samvidhan Par Charcha" with Rural Youth

A three day workshop on "Indian Constitution and Role of Youth in Panchayat Raj" was organized at BDVS administrative office for 45 youth from Barh, Barbiga, Haveli Kharagpur, and Manner from July 16 to July 19. The workshop was lead by Fr. Philip Manthara, a veteran social activist in Bihar and former President of People's Union of Civil Liberties (PUCL), Bihar Unit. The workshop was organized with three objectives: (1) enable rural youth to grasp the 'idea of India' as enshrined in Indian Constitution; (2) to enable rural youth to evaluate social, economic and political reality of their own respective area in the light of the values and rights enshrined in the constitution; and (3) enable the youth to assume their responsibility towards transformation and development of their own locality by asserting the values and rights enshrined in the constitution for every Indian Citizen.



Fr. Philip Manthara remarked that his engagement with youth after many years has shown him that there is a huge gap of 'experiential knowledge' among the youth of today as compared to the youth of last decade. In spite of this, he and his team enabled the rural youth to delve deep into the spirit of Indian Constitution, which enshrines freedom; equality; justice; fraternity; secularism; dignity of every person; sovereignty and unity of the country as its core principles. The three day workshop engaged the youth with intense discussion on the meaning of each of these core principles. For example, they discussed in the group, 'what does dignity of every individual mean' to them in real life situation which involves various forms of discrimination including gender discrimination. In the same way he empowered the youth through a large number of group discussions focusing on the preamble of the Constitution and their own experience of rural reality.

To supplement the workshop on Indian Constitution, a full half day was devoted to understand the provisions of Right to Information Act and to get introduced to the use of these provisions to promote the rights of each Citizen guaranteed in the Constitution. Fr. Manthara informed the youth, "The Indian Constitution is the 'adhikaar patra (document of rights) of every Indian Citizen". As part of this workshop, Mr. Akhilesh interacted with the youth on how to use Right to Information Act to strengthen Indian democracy and to build an India as enshrined in her Constitution.

The youth were highly inspired and motivated by Fr. Manthara. He introduced to them how a workshop can be conducted with the participation of all. He said, 'democracy has to be at the root of every discussion, planning, decision making'. The methodology of the workshop itself was a practical lesson in democracy. The youth drew up an action plan, once again through a democratic process of group discussion ensuring participation of every individual youth. The youth have pledged to implement the action plan each group had prepared choosing one Panchayat from their own respective regions. The workshop encouraged a good number of them to prepare them to become peoples' representatives in the forthcoming Panchayat Raj Elections. BDVS has scheduled another workshop on the Constitution for 45 girls from different regions of BDVS' operational area.

*Report by Fr. Anto*