

**THE GENESIS OF THE CONGREGATION
OF
THE DAUGHTERS OF ST. ANNE
IN
RANCHI ARCHDIOCESE**

**THE
MEMOIRS**

OF

**SR. ANNA MARY BERNADETTE DSA
FOUNDER OF THE CONGREGATION**

**TRANSLATED
BY
FR. ALEX EKKA S.J.**

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Presentation

The 'Memoir' of Sr. Anna Mary Bernadette, the leader among the four Founders of the Daughters of St. Anne, Ranchi, is the only written document left as a heritage to us regarding the origin of the Congregation. Praise the Lord! At least we have this beautiful Memoir. It tells us how God inspired these four Tribal girls at the very early stage of the Catholic Missions in Chotanagpur to commit themselves to belong to Jesus, and to Him alone and serve Him wholeheartedly in His people and their own people. In the face of all the difficulties, their unshakable faith reminds us of St. Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles and makes them heroines of the Catholic Church in Chotanagpur.

In this event we can see three distinct factors. First of all, it was God's work. It was He who inspired them, guided them, and gave them strength and courage. All along in their struggle they felt His presence and protection. Second, the exemplary life of the early missionaries certainly made a deep and indelible impact on them. So they decided to imitate them as they imitated Jesus. And the third factor is their strong faith and determination to love and serve JESUS.

Thus they shine out as glory and pride of not only the Catholic Community of Chotanagpur, but also of the whole Tribal Society and of the Society at large in this Central Tribal belt of India.

The whole 'Memoir' makes a very inspiring and interesting reading. Fr. Alex Ekka, S.J. has translated it beautifully. There is a flow in his style, which renders accurate even the sentiments and feelings of the persons, places, times and the context. It is indeed a very fascinating and a true story, which will make every reader happy and proud of the four Tribal girls who became the founders of the first indigenous Congregation of the Daughters of St. Anne, Ranchi. And it happened already before the end of the nineteenth century that also within twenty years of the arrival of the Apostle of Chotanagpur, the servant of God, Fr. Constant Lievens and the work of evangelization. No doubt it is part of the miracle of Chotanagpur. The Daughters of St. Anne's, Ranchi, in their history of little more than 110 years, the way they have grown and spread, bear sufficient witness to this fact. Their contribution in the work of evangelization is something amazing and incomparable. They are indeed the glory of the Church in Jharkhand.

As we re-tell the story of JESUS in our schools, it would be wonderful to tell the story of Sr. Anna Mary Bernadette as well, for the benefit of enrichment of all our future generations.

I sincerely hope and pray that if not all of them, at least Mata Anna Mary Bernadette, someday be raised to the honour of the altar and thus bring glory to God and to the people in these parts of India.

September 30, 2007
Ranchi, Jharkhand

+ Telesphore P. Cardinal Toppo
Archbishop of Ranchi

Preface

The Memoirs of Sr. Anna Mary Bernadette DSA are the English translation of her manuscript in Hindi. When she was sick and admitted at Holy Family Hospital, Mandar towards the end of her life in the late 1950s, Dr. Sr. Barbara Taggart, MMS requested her to write about herself and the story of her vocation to religious life. This Mother Anna Mary Bernadette did with a remarkable exactitude of memories and flair for local spoken Hindi.

This brave lady, the daughter of the soil of Chotanagpur, attracted many young girls by her simple but profound life of a religious. She was extremely intelligent too. She was a woman who encountered God and received special graces (charism) from the Divine Majesty to start the Congregation of the Daughters of St. Anne. Though I did not have the privilege of seeing her, I have learnt to love her and follow her example. With a deep sense of gratitude, I thank her for founding the Congregation of the Daughters of St. Anne.

I am confident that the life of Mother Anna Mary Bernadette will inspire those who come to know her. I hope and pray that her inspiration brings many vocations to religious life not only from Chotanagpur, but also from other places far and wide. It will certainly be a great tribute to her to continue her mission involving in God's work through the service of the Church.

I am grateful to Fr. Alex Ekka SJ, Superior of Xavier Institute of Social Service, Ranchi, who has done a labourious task of translating the manuscript into English. I requested him to do the translation specially because the language of Mother Anna Mary Bernadette in the memoirs is a mixture of Hindi and local dialects Uroan and Sadri. And since Fr. Alex hails from Kaimbo, his ancestral village and Mother Anna Bernadette's neighbouring village Sargaon in Mandar Parish of the Archdiocese of Ranchi, I thought he would be the right person to do the translation because of the local linguistic expressions known to him. He has a good command of English too. He is currently, the Assistant Director and Director Research at Xavier Institute of Social Service, Ranchi. I have read many of his research works and national and international publications in English. So I thought he would understand the local words, terminologies and their nuances, often used in the manuscript, and render them adequately in English without digressing much from the original thought of the author. He has done this wonderfully well. Reading the English translation of the memoirs, one feels as if one is reading the original text of Mother Anna Mary Bernadette. Thanks to Fr. Alex's judicious translation.

Mother Anna Mary Bernadette suffered a long spell of illness for about 26 Years. She was admitted at Holy Family Hospital, Mandar for six months where she started writing the memoirs. She continued writing it even when she was discharged from the hospital. In fact she wrote many drafts of her memoirs. Towards the end, she had grown very feeble and started losing her memory, and finally a time came when she could write no more. But what she wrote is complete in itself. We are using the final draft for translation into English. It relates the entire story of her vocation, her early struggles and finally the founding of the Congregation. She has covered the twenty-five years' history of the Congregation. Witnessing the Silver Jubilee celebrations of her Congregation must have been a great rewarding experience for her. It certainly is for us when we read it. Therefore, her memoirs are complete, as they give the Genesis of the Congregation.

The suggestion to translate the memoirs into English came first of all from those Sisters who had lived and worked with Sr. Anna Mary Bernadette, like Sr. Kalyani DSA and those in-charge of formation like Sr. Victoria Kujur DSA and Sr. Manjula Kindo DSA. In particular Sr. Kalyani insisted that the memoirs, the precious heritage of the congregation, should be translated as a priority. She had served Mother Anna Mary Bernadette during her illness. Consequently, she felt the need of the English translation more intensely to make it available to a wider readership. Sr. Kalyani's desire is being fulfilled now, but she went to heaven long ago on October 20, 1989. Prior to this English translation, the Xeroxed copies of the memoirs were made available to all the Sisters of the Congregation.

What really expedited the present work was a resolution taken during our Eighth General Chapter in December 2004 to get the text translated into English at the earliest. So I requested Fr. Alex to do the translation. He submitted the first draft of the translation to my successor, Sr. Pushpa Kujur DSA by early 2005. To give a proper ending to the memoirs, he also suggested adding the experiences of some Sisters, who had known Mother Anna Mary Bernadette. Since I had to take up teaching at the Albert Ekka Memorial College, Chainpur, I could not pursue the work of the translation and publication. Only when Sr. Ethelina Ekka DSA, the Assistant Mother General took over the reins of the Congregation's governance from Sr. Pushpa, the ailing Mother General in August 2006, progress could be made in collating and writing the experiences of older Sisters. We also took some time in getting right photographs for inclusion in the book. Hence, the delay in its publication has been entirely due to these unavoidable circumstances. All this while Fr. Alex kept reminding us about our *magnum opus* (great work) and helped us to put the book in proper shape. Words fail to thank him for his dedication to the task. On behalf of the Daughters of St. Anne, I thank Fr. Alex Ekka SJ once again for his painstaking and skillful work in translating Mother Anna Mary Bernadette's memoirs from Hindi into English.

I take this opportunity to thank all those who have assisted in the publication of this book. First of all I express my heartfelt thanks to His Eminence, Cardinal Telephone P. Toppo, for writing the Presentation in a very personal and inspiring manner. We, the Daughters of St. Anne, deeply appreciate his message and his personal care of us. Also through him we express our gratitude to all his predecessors, who made it possible for our Congregation to come into existence and to make it flourish in the last more than one hundred years. Secondly, I thank Sr. Subhashi DSA, who was my Assistant in the Generalate for encouraging me to start the process of translation. In the similar vein I say a big 'thank you' to my successor, Sr. Pushpa Kujur DSA, for doing the needful to get the translation and Sr. Ethelina DSA for pursuing it and supporting its publication. A few others who gave the logistical support and secretarial help in this regard are Sr. Tarcilla Kujur DSA, Sr. Linda Mary DSA, Sr. Julie DSA, Sr. Shivani DSA, Sr. Punyawati DSA and Sr. Tarcilla Choranth DSA. Thirdly, I thank Fr. Francis Matthijis SJ and Fr. Linus Kujur SJ for guiding us skillfully during our General Chapter and advising us to publish the English translation. Fourthly, I thank Fr. Lalit J. Tigga SJ for providing us with beautiful photographs of the village Sargaon, including the house of Shri Puran Prasad and our convent in the village as well as the houses at Siromtoli, Ranchi, where the descendants of Puran Prasad still live. And finally I thank Fr. Alex Toppo SJ, Director Catholic Press, Ranchi for printing the book so beautifully and on time. May the motherly blessing of Sr. Anna Mary Bernadette help us all to follow our Lord Jesus in spreading His love and service among people, especially among the most needy, wherever we are put to work in His vineyard.

Sr. Dr. A. Anupa Kujur, DSA
St. Anne's Convent, Chainpur

September 8, 2007
Feast of Our Lady

Translator's Word

We are privileged to have the memoirs of Sr. Anna Mary Bernadette, the founder of the Congregation of the Daughters of St. Anne, Ranchi. She wrote them in Hindi towards the end of her life and edited them herself after composing the drafts many times. That is why the seventy-pages-manuscript of her memoirs has a beautiful layout beginning with the title, the subsequent paragraphs carefully indented and the manually drawn left hand margins all along. She wrote them with pen and ink and not with a fountain pen or a ball-pen as we do them today. She had to dip the nib of her pen like a quill into the inkpot every minute or so. Her handwriting is beautiful and looks almost like print. The pagination is on the top margin in the centre within the brackets, starting with the numerical "2" on the second page and omitting the numerical "1" on the first page with the title, like the standard practice. She has used the Roman script to write the names and surnames of the bishops, priests and nuns and their designation with remarkable exactitude and accuracy. These few words in Roman script are also written in beautiful handwriting.

I must explain here the manner of her presentation and my rendering of the memoirs into sections and subsections for pleasant appearance and reading. As to the composition proper, she has used the first person, the second person and the third person in the singular and the plural according to what she felt was the best expression. Similarly, she has used the past, present and future tenses as she felt was proper in describing a situation or stating an idea. She has also used direct and indirect speech to report what one said. But she has not been consistent in the use of the persons as subjects and tenses as well as the direct or indirect speech. Besides, many of her expressions are a mixture of the local dialects called Uraon and Sadri. Notwithstanding some of these observations, the entire composition is remarkably bright with lucid expressions and accurate with facts and figures for her education more than a hundred years ago. As one reads her memoirs in Hindi, one feels that one is listening to her story and to the story of her congregation as being narrated in person. All her descriptions of events and expressions of feelings are laden with vivid imagery, right emotions and choice of accurate words and phrases as could be found to some extent in the translation. All these make her memoirs a high quality writing and very aptly suited to describe the genesis of the Congregation of the Daughters of St. Anne, Ranchi.

Having stated this, I feel humbled at the temerity of translating the memoirs of Sr. Anna Mary Bernadette, DSA, for there could have been a better rendering of this precious work into English by any other more competent person. For this reason I accept any criticism coming from the reader. But personally I have enjoyed reading the original memoirs in Hindi many times and have tried to do my best in translating it into English, keeping closest to her ideas, feelings and insights. Though most of the accounts are in the first person, I have put other descriptions too in the same style to fit into the overall narrative form.

The table of contents of the memoirs presented here into seven main chapters and sections is my doing to give it a sequential presentation. Consequently, this is an arbitrary scheme for the composition presented here. Nevertheless, without unduly creating the table of contents, I feel that the text itself reveals this inherent but invisible framework. So, I only hope that it makes now a clear and pleasant reading. Besides, I have given a brief background story to the memoirs, to facilitate proper understanding of the tribal situation at the time of Sr. Anna Mary Bernadette. This also gives her family profile and that of her three companions to show how they were related to each other. And finally, a glossary is at the end of the book for easy understanding of some names, words and phrases as used in the book.

Since the memoirs have an abrupt ending - an incomplete sentence, to be precise - I have duly completed them knowing the context. In order to give it a wholesome ending, the recollections and experiences of some St. Anne's Sisters on Sr. Anna Mary Bernadette, though very few, have been included under the section "Witnesses Who Knew Her". The hymn "I hear thy welcome voice" is given in full to show the deepest sentiments of Sr. Anna Mary Bernadette towards Jesus our Lord, who had called her to follow her. To put this hymn in this section was the suggestion of some St. Anne's Sisters, who had known Sr. Anna Mary Bernadette and had heard her sing it devotedly even in her last days.

The memoirs of Sr. Anna Mary Bernadette of her life and the beginning of her congregation have thus been made complete. They cover very well the life and work of the congregation for thirty-seven years after its inception, including its silver jubilee.

I congratulate the Daughters of St. Anne, Ranchi for deciding to publish the memoirs in English. I express my compliments particularly, to Dr. Sr. Anupa Kujur DSA, the former General of the Congregation for her astute leadership in getting them translated into English and published.

I would also like to thank all those who have assisted me in the translation and publication of the memoirs. First of all I thank Fr. Francis Matthijis SJ for encouraging me with the translation and suggesting where and how to get the correct names and surnames of the missionaries mentioned in the memoirs. Secondly, I express my gratitude to Captain and Professor George Kuriyan of XISS for giving me valuable suggestions to improve on the work. Thirdly, I owe my thanks to Fr. Peter Jones SJ, of Hazaribagh Province, for reading the draft once and helping me to improve upon it. Similarly, I thank Fr. Erik Breye SJ, Professor of St. Albert's College, Ranchi and Sr. Maeve IBVM of the Loreto convent, Doranda, Ranchi for reading the final draft and enriching it with valuable suggestions. Sr. Maeve IBVM also helped me to write accurately the names of some of her Sisters, who had played a key role in the initial grooming of Sr. Anna Mary Bernadette and the three other Sisters as religious.

And finally I am grateful to Fr. Walter Pillen SJ, the patriarch of the Catechetical Training Centre, Tongo for finding the spelling of the disease "phthisis", of which Sr. Anna Mary Bernadette makes a mention in the memoirs in Hindi. I asked many people, including medical practitioners, how it was spelt in English and what it meant, but nobody was able to tell me about this seemingly strange disease. So, once when I went to Chainpur to consult Dr. Sr. Anupa regarding her preface for this book, I dropped in at Tongo and asked Fr. Pillen what the correct word would be for "phthisis" written in Hindi. Since I had stayed there overnight, Fr. Pillen took pains to look into a medical book called *The Merck Manual* and found it there. He told me like an expert how many Sisters suffered from this disease in the early decades of the twentieth century. I was amazed at his erudition and practical knowledge even on health and hygiene.

Once again I express my gratitude to all, who helped me with this English translation and its publication. It has been my privilege to do this work. I have learnt a lot from the memoirs and feel proud that Sr. Anna Mary Bernadette is one of the finest fruits of the Lord's vineyard in Chotanagpur, nurtured through the missionaries more than a hundred years ago, as she became the founder of Congregation of the Daughters of St. Anne, Ranchi. May the Lord reward her in heaven and bless her Sisters here on earth.

Fr. Alex Ekka SJ
XISS - Ranchi

All Saints Day
Nov. 1, 2007

The Background Story

In order to facilitate a better understanding of the memoirs, it deems proper to present a short background to the socio-economic and politico-cultural situation in Chotanagpur towards the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, when Sr. Anna Mary Bernadette lived and worked, besides founding the Congregation of the Daughters of St. Anne. Along with this it is also important to briefly mention her family background to show how the three of the four Sisters of the nascent congregation were related to each other. This background story has three main sections. The first one describes the tribal situation during the period under consideration and the second one recounts the spread of the Christian faith at this time. And finally, the third section gives the family profile of Shri Puran Prasad Kispotta,¹ the father of Sr. Anna Mary Bernadette.

The Volatile Tribal Situation

The socio-economic and politico-cultural situation of the tribals in Chotanagpur was explosive in the middle of the 19th century and continued up to the first half of the 20th century. The *jagirdari* system² of the Moghul rulers had been replaced by the *zamindari* system³ of the British with the introduction of the Permanent Settlement of land tenures in 1773. Consequently, the tribals lost ownership rights of their lands, which had belonged to them as the first settlers in the region since the first millennium BC.⁴ This broke the tribal agrarian system called the *Mundari Khuntkatti* or the *Uroan Bhuihari*.⁵ Besides paying rents and taxes to the *zamindars*, the tribals were also subjected to forced labour, extortion and repression by the non-tribal traders, moneylenders, government officials and the police.⁶ The outcome was a series of uprisings by the tribal people against their oppressors to redeem their lands and restore their dignity, besides reestablishing themselves as the real owners of their country. These were the Kol Rebellion of 1832-33, the Bhumij revolt of 1834 and the Santal insurrection of 1855 to mention a few.⁷ Another response to the call to liberate the tribal lands was through the messianic movements of Birsa Munda (1875-1900) among the Mundas and Jatra Uroan (1892-1917) among the Uroans of Chotanagpur.⁸ Both were charismatic leaders and claimed divine powers to restore people's lands, religion and culture. They led violent attacks on the exploiters including the British, but were captured and jailed. The missionary intervention in this situation was another effort to restore the tribal rights, identity and dignity in a much more radical but non-violent way.

¹ "Shri" is the honorific title in Hindi prefixed before the names of men and is akin to Mr. in English. Its feminine form is "Shrimati" or Mrs. in English. And the surname "Kispotta" literally means the intestine of a swine. It designates an important clan among the Uraons just like Ekka (tortoise), Lakra (tiger) or Xess (paddy) do in their respective clans.

² Land tenure system in which all lands under a king or an emperor were given to a few prominent people in return of their allegiance and services to their sovereign masters. Such landed estates were called *Jagirs* and their recipients *Jagirdars* who had to pay tributes to their kings or emperors in cash and kind besides the military service, if needed.

³ The same land tenure system like the *jagirdari* system but the recipients of lands were called *zamindars*, meaning landlords. They also collected land rents and taxes for the British, but did not give any military service to their colonial masters.

⁴ Van Troy, J. 1987. "Ranchi Town: A Short History," *Sevartham* 1987, p. 22.

⁵ The corporate tenure of the original settlers of land.

⁶ Ekka, A. "Hundred Years of the Christian Missions in Chotanagpur," *Indian Church History Review*, December, 1999, pp. 79-80.

⁷ Clarysse, L. 1985. *Father Constant Lievens*. Ranchi: Satya Bharti, pp. 95-97.

⁸ Ekka, Philip, SJ. 2003. *Tribal Movements: A Study in Social Change*. Pathalgaon: Tribal Research and Documentation Centre, (Published posthumously by Madhya Pradesh Jesuit Society.), p. 189.

Redemptive Intervention of the Missionaries

The first Christian missionaries were the Lutherans who came to Chotanagpur in 1845 followed by the Anglicans in 1868 and the Catholics in 1869.⁹ One of the most ardent pioneering Belgian missionaries was Fr. Constant Lievens SJ who came to Doranda in 1885. He first tried to understand the tribal agrarian system and studied the existing land laws so that he could help the hapless tribals in the court cases. The expected happened and through the legal aid of Lievens, many tribals were able to redeem their lands confiscated by the zamindars. He also told them to refuse forced labour and undue land rents. This made the tribal people question why their guardian spirits had failed to protect their lands and resources, while those of Lievens' religion were able to do so. When the news spread of the first successful case of the tribal people's land restoration through Lievens' legal advice, hoards of them began to come to him for similar help. With the land cases being settled in favour of the tribals and their honour and dignity defended against the oppressors, they were convinced that their emancipation lay in becoming Christians. He too wanted to teach and preach Christ among them like St. Francis Xavier in the 16th century in Goa and South India. Lievens made his objective very clear. He said: "I have come here among you for your eternal happiness. But in this life too, I can make you happy. Confide your difficulties to me. I shall help you as much as the law allows."¹⁰

Lievens traveled far and wide on foot as well as on horseback from Sarwada and Torpa in the Munda areas¹¹ to Dighia and Barway in the Uraon areas¹² with indefatigable zeal to preach Christ and to bring social justice to people. By August 1, 1888 Lievens had 11,291 baptized Catholics and 39,060 catechumens in 832 villages from 7,139 families. He had a band of 189 catechists, 95 chapels and 77 schools with 2,400 children.¹³ His successors continued his mission. Prominent among them were Fr. De Cock, Fr. Van Der Linden, Fr. Cardon and Fr. Edward De Meulder covering other regions like Biru¹⁴ and even the neighbouring tribal areas of Orissa and Madhya Pradesh. Fr. John Baptist Hoffmann was the brain behind the enactment of the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act, 1908, to prevent tribal land alienation. In 1909 he started the Catholic Cooperative Credit Society, which became the backbone of the tribal community's economic life. Similarly, during his lifetime he wrote the 16-volume Encyclopedia Mundarica, a masterpiece for the preservation and promotion of the Munda culture, language and religion.

The Family of Shri Puran Prasad Kispotta

Shri Puran Prasad was the third and the youngest son of Shri Pusa Kispotta of Sargaon village in Mandar parish, which today is in the Ranchi Archdiocese.¹⁵ He was born towards the end of 1850 and was baptized in the Lutheran Communion as an innocent child.¹⁶ His eldest brother was Shri Rissa Kispotta and the second brother was Shri Prabhu Prasad Kispotta. Both of them had received some education. Since Puran was the youngest in the family, he had received

⁹ Clarysse, L. 1985. *Op. cit.* p. 112.

¹⁰ Clarysse, L. 1985, *Op. cit.* p. 145, as quoted from the letter of Livens to his Provincial from Torpa on November 22, 1887.

¹¹ These areas are presently in the Khunti District of Jharkhand

¹² Dighia is the first Uraon area in Ranchi District of Jharkhand visited by Lievens. Barway comprises the Dumbri and Chainpur Blocks of the Gumla District.

¹³ Clarysse, L. 1985, *Op. cit.* p. 249.

¹⁴ Biru comprises the present Simdega District in Jharkhand having a heavier concentration of the Kharia tribals.

¹⁵ Earlier it was under the Bengal Mission like the whole of Chotanagpur.

¹⁶ Kujur, Anupa and Van Exem, A. 1997. *A Gift of Service (The History of the beginning of the Congregation of the Daughters of St. Anne, Ranchi.* Ranchi: Catholic Press, p. 23.

the best education that Ranchi could offer in those days. He had probably studied up to the fourth standard at a Lutheran boarding school in Ranchi. He had not learnt English and even in later years could not easily decipher Roman script. Yet he had gone on to qualify as a *Mukhtar*,¹⁷ a holder of the power of attorney, in the Ranchi court and so was quite well versed with the prevalent legal system. His earnings were enough to support his family. Because of his legal profession he had to live in Ranchi at Siromtoli¹⁸ where he bought a piece of land and built a house and from where his daughters went to school in the town. On weekends he came to Sargaon, his ancestral village, sometimes along with his daughters.

The wife of Shri Puran Prasad was Shrimati Paulina Kispotta. She hailed from a good Lutheran family and had studied in a Christian school. The Lord blessed them with a baby girl on the bright day of 2nd June 1878. She was baptized and christened Christ Anandit Ruth Kispotta on 9th June 1878.¹⁹ But soon Puran Prasad lost his beloved wife and Christ Anandit Ruth, her darling mother, Paulina. Notwithstanding this tragedy, Christ Anandit Ruth was nursed and taken care of by her *Bari Maa*,²⁰ the wife of Prabhu Prasad and the sister-in-law of Puran Prasad, according to the fine tribal social custom.

When Christ Anandit Ruth was two years old, Puran Prasad married again. His second wife was Shrimati Margaret Kispotta and the stepmother to Christ Anandit Ruth. Thus Christ Anandit Ruth had now two mothers to care for her: the *Bari Maa* and the *Sauteli Maa*.²¹ Margaret loved and took care of Christ Anandit Ruth like her own child. The Lord blessed Puran Prasad and Margaret with a baby girl, Sushila on 28th September 1881. Two more stepsiblings of Christ Anandit Ruth were Mary and Christopher born to Puran Prasad and Margaret. But this was not the end. Puran Prasad married a third time on the death of Margaret. His wife was Mukta who bore him a daughter, Adora and a son, Robert.

Not much is known about Puran's eldest brother, Rissa, except that he lived in Sargaon and took care of the family properties along with his second brother, Prabhu Prasad. The wife of Prabhu Prasad was Christkila, whom Christ Anandit Ruth addressed as the *Bari Maa*. Prabhu Prasad and Christkila were blest with six children - Kripa, Piyari, Alfred, Masihdas, Francis and Alma.²²

From this huge clan of Pusa and Puran Prasad, the three great women, who become the first Religious of the Daughters of St. Anne were (1) Christ Anandit Ruth who became *Mata*²³ Anna Mary Bernadette, (2) Kripa, who became *Mata* Veronica and (3) Sushila, who became *Mata* Cecilia. The fourth member was their school friend, Mary Kanil from the village Bejang, about four km from Sargaon to the northwest in Mandar parish. She became *Mata* Mary and the co-religious with the other three. Her parents were Shri Samuel Kanil and Shrimati Mukta Kanil. Mary lost her father as a young girl. Therefore her only guardian left was her widowed mother,

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 24.

¹⁸ Siromtoli is situated between the present Club Road and the Station Road in Ranchi.

¹⁹ Kujur, Anupa and Van Exem A. 1997 *Op. cit.* p.26.

²⁰ *Bari Maa* means the senior mother. In English it is aunt.

²¹ *Sauteli Maa* means stepmother.

²² Kujur, Anpua and Van Exem, A. 1997, *ibid.* p. 26.

²³ *Mata* means mother. In the religious terminology it fits into the honorific titles like the Mother Superior or the Mother General.

who brought her up and offered her to the Lord to join the pioneers of the Congregation of the Daughters of St. Anne.

Both villages, Sargaon and Bejang were and are still in Mandar parish, which was started in 1898, just one year after the founding of the Congregation of the Daughters of St. Anne. As the Director of the Missions, Fr. Lievens used to visit the Mandar area from Manresa House, Ranchi in the late 1880s. Like other Lutherans, Puran Prasad was disillusioned by the famous (or infamous) Sardar Movement, which consisted in collecting money from the tribals to defray the expenses of sending petitions to the Government for redressing their wrongs. *Sardar* simply meant leaders, who were Christians. Hence the Christian leaders, who wanted all exploitation and oppression of the landlords to end regarding land rent matters, led the Sardar Movement. The Government thought that the Survey Settlement Act of 1869 would meet all claims of the people for justice. But it did not happen. The Lutheran missionaries had also informed the Government of the rising discontent and therefore asked it to do the needful. In planning to deal with any possible uprising, the Government asked the support of the missionaries, who only persuaded the people to give up their campaign. But this led to the suspicion of the *Sardars* against the missionaries' complicity with the Government.²⁴ Many left the Lutheran faith, as they felt discouraged by the Lutheran missionaries. In the meantime Lievens' method of redressing people's grievances had worked and many tribals came to him for help, including the dejected Lutheran converts on account of the Sardar Movement. Puran Prasad was one of them.

For the two or three months following the first approach to Fr. Lievens, Puran Prasad had observed the Catholic mission at Ranchi and assisted at the religious services in the mission chapel. He then asked Fr. Lievens to be received in the Catholic Church and added that many of his people also wanted to become Catholics. After ascertaining their genuine desire to become Catholics and also visiting them at Raghunathpur, Ganapur, Puldih, Pakna, Tangar and Londri on between 7-9th June 1888, he admitted them into the Catholic faith. Puran Prasad and the Uraons of the North Koel indeed became the vanguard of much larger groups of Uraons to accede to the mission.²⁵

Other details of the socio-cultural milieu of the time under discussion are described in the memoirs as required. This short background and sketch now must suffice to understand the life of the four pioneering indigenous Religious of the Daughters of St. Anne and the genesis of their Congregation.

²⁴ de Sa Fidelis. 1975. *Crisis in Chotanagpur*. Bangalore: A Redemptorist Publication, pp.113-114.

²⁵ Clarysse, L. *Op. Cit.* pp.237-240.

Chapter - I

The Dawn of the Catholic Mission

The great apostle of Chotanagpur, Fr. Constant Lievens came to Ranchi on 17th March 1885. He lived at Doranda for a few months. During this time he went around visiting people and after his talks and instructions, he admitted many of them into the Catholic Church. He used to say mass on Sundays in a bungalow at Tharpakhna on the jail road. Thereafter his superior sent him to Torpa where he lived in a house of a Christian till he built a *Kachcha* house for himself. The Protestants, viz. the Lutherans and the Anglicans, had spread their religion much before the Catholic missionaries came to Chotanagpur.

When Fr. Lievens started to teach and preach the Catholic faith from Torpa, people came to him in big numbers from all directions. Even the Lutherans and the Anglicans as well as the Pagans belonging to the Uroan, Munda and Kharia tribes, flocked to him. In a span of just five years the Christians became so numerous that Fr. Lievens, Fr. John Desmet and other Jesuit Fathers wrote to the Archbishop of Kolkata, Most Rev. Paul Goethals to request the Loreto Sisters to start a school for the girls and also to teach religion. Through this they expected a great success in their missionary work. At receiving such heartening news, the Archbishop requested the Loreto Sisters to open a convent at Ranchi without delay, where girls would learn to read and write, especially learn the catechism. Knowing the great desire of the Archbishop, the Loreto Sisters took up this religious enterprise filled with God's love and generosity.

The Loretos in Chotanagpur

Those days Mother Mary Gonzaga Joynt was the Provincial of the Loretos at Kolkata. She selected four of the best Sisters. They were the Superior Mother Mary Gonzaga, Mother Mary Patricia, Mother Mary Aloysia and Sister Teresa. These were the first religious Sisters who were sent to bring in the souls of the poor girls and women of Chotanagpur into the true Church of Jesus. So the four Sisters left for Ranchi immediately.

Those days there was no train here, not even a rickshaw. However, there was one carriage called a *Puspus* that plied from Purulia to Ranchi. Each of the *Puspus* carriage was pulled by five or six coolies, who ran day and night and covered 75 miles to reach Ranchi. These coolies made their way with great difficulty through the dense forests and hills. On the way they warded off the tigers and bears with shouts and noise. After completing their job, these wretched coolies would receive some money as wages and go away. Other coolies then would immediately take over and resume the perilous journeys. The Loreto Sisters had to face immense hardships to make the hazardous journeys; but filled with the love of Jesus, they were always ready to do anything.

The Loreto Sisters finally arrived at Ranchi on 19th March 1890 and soon began to get going on their work. The Fathers collected the girls from all around and sent them to school. Sometimes the total number of the girls present in the school was about 400 – 500. Many girls were uncouth and lacked any knowledge. But some of them were a little knowledgeable, since the Fathers had given them some education for one year and half prior to the coming of the Sisters. It must be mentioned here that St. John's school was already started for the boys at Ranchi in 1887.

Impact on Girls

The girls began to learn fast, for the Fathers taught them day and night. When the girls heard the Fathers speak about religion they began to relish their sweet, tender and loving words. They also learned religious decorum and began to love and respect the Sisters greatly. Within three years of this learning and encounter four of the girls began to ponder seriously the work of the Sisters. It struck them how these Sisters had left their dear parents, brothers and sisters as well as their friends and relations, their own country out of love of Jesus and had come to the godforsaken *jungle* area among the poor and lowly people and how they laboured day and night with great affection to help the souls to reach heaven. They said to themselves that if these Sisters sacrificed and did so much for them, then why should they not be ready to follow their beautiful example and work for the good of their own country and people? From then onwards having understood very clearly in their hearts what to do, they wanted to learn more from the Sisters. So, they began to watch more carefully their life style and work. To satisfy their desire in serving others, the four girls did whatever work was given to them – teaching the children and looking after them when they were sick. Thus they helped the Sisters earnestly and diligently.

In the beginning no one knew the hidden intentions of these girls. Only much later Rev. Fr. Desmet and one or two Sisters knew the aspirations of the girls. When they reached the age of 14-15, the parents and the kinsmen and women started marriage negotiations for them. But these girls refused to get married. And only then the people came to know about their secret thoughts. Now the girls suffered much for not giving their consent to the marriage proposals.

“What nonsense, the girls don’t want to get married?” people began to make comments.

“It will never do,” remarked others.

Even a few Fathers spoke to the girls’ parents sternly.

“What kind of parents are you that you allow your daughters to go against the norms of the country? Be careful and don’t do this. Do not hesitate to discipline your daughters, even if you have to beat them with canes. If you leave them free to do what they want, then the work of our mission will come to a standstill. Maybe after 20-30 years later such a thing can happen, but not now...”

Chapter - II

My Story of the Early Struggles

Once we had gone home to our village, Sargaon from school for vacation. One day our dad said:

“Look here my daughters. I want to learn the Roman script. I can recognize a few alphabets all right, but I cannot read and write any letter. When a few letters come to me from the Fathers residing in the rural areas, I cannot read them.”

One day it so happened, that one Father sent a letter to my dad. He opened it and saw that it was in Roman script. So he called me and said:

“My dear daughter please read this to me.”

I took the letter from his hands and began to read it. The first part of the letter’s content concerned some lawsuit of one village; but the latter part was full of rebuke to my dad on account of us, his daughters. Our dad was so upset that before the reading of the letter was completed he said,

“Enough please enough; now I know what follows.”

He then took the letter from my hand and later finding an opportunity he said to me,

“Now you know exactly what was in the letter, therefore change your decision right away.”

Bride of Christ not of Man

My poor parents were in a dilemma. What could they do? On the one hand we were adamant in our resolve and on the other all kinds of comments and calumnies were hurled at them from all sides. Even the Fathers tried their best to dislodge us from our resolve. They started sending boys to the Sisters to see us and ask for our hands in marriage. Sister Superior brought us before the boys and asked us whether we would marry them and be happy. Not being able to take it any more, one-day I said to the Sister quite boldly.

“Sister you know very well that I do not want to get married.

Therefore, I think it is improper to bring me before the boys for this purpose.

You don’t know the customs of our community. Even the boys don’t know about it.

It is true that I am a schoolgirl; but know that I am not an orphan.

If I were one, then you would have had full authority over me in the school.

So why do the boys come here to select girls for marriage?

Shall we or any other girl consent to the boys looking at their faces and outward appearance? What does the girl know about the boy’s character and temperament? What does she know about his family and his people? All this is to be known by the parents and the kinsmen and women first and then the negotiations may start. And it is up to them to see whether the negotiations work or not. All of you please never bring me before the boys. I tell you frankly that I will not get married.”

Finally, when all efforts failed to dissuade us, the Fathers sent complaints to the Archbishop of Kolkota Most Rev. Paul Goethals S.J. that unprecedented things were happening in the mission. And if we were not stopped in the beginning, then all their work would be spoilt.

How would it really be compatible, when the Catholic faith was just getting rooted everywhere in Chotanagpur with great enthusiasm, we were jeopardizing the mission work by foolishly declining to get married and wanting to remain virgins? People would not like to send their daughters to school fearing that they might follow the same path as we did.

“Therefore, we beg your Grace,” they said,

“Rusticate such girls who have no inclination to marry.

These girls have been spoiled by the love and care of the Sisters and that could be the reason why they don’t want to leave them.”

The great Archbishop, who was an ardent missionary, soon issued an order that all the girls who did not want to get married must be sent away from the school. How would the dear Loreto Sisters disobey his Grace? But did the Fathers and Sisters not love us? Certainly they did. I could even assert that the Sisters loved us more than the Fathers did. Therefore, it did not mean that all the Fathers and Sisters were so negatively oriented against us on this issue. Where in the world could be found all happiness and peace? Where there was pain and struggle, there was peace and victory. Therefore, God in his infinite wisdom allowed all this to happen.

No Marriage! Get out of School!

The Sisters called us and explained to us the Archbishop’s edict. Then they blessed us lovingly and sent us away from the school. Now what could poor me do? I felt aghast and wept uncontrollably. Tears ran down my cheeks incessantly as I sobbed and went back home. We said to ourselves:

“Now to whom shall we go and where should we be comforted?”

The very dear Archbishop, Fathers and Sisters were all of one opinion. The incident had broken the hearts of many Fathers and Sisters. Yet for our spiritual good they offered all this pain and sorrow to God. At home in Sargaon the situation was no different. Everyday the parents, brothers, sisters, kinsmen and women as well as friends felt the heart rending incident. It looked as if the whole earth was engulfed in utter darkness for us. We were in such despair and dejection that there was no interest left in work, food and drink. From such a miserable state of mind, we wrote three letters pleading to our dad.

“Oh dear daddy, out of mercy for us kindly talk to the Fathers and settle the matter favourably for us, so that we could always remain virgins in the service of God. We are ignorant and unworthy to become Sisters, but we can certainly serve them.”

Our daddy never replied to us. On the contrary he behaved as if he never knew our case. Many days passed and we all lost hope of getting any reply from him. Then one evening around five O’ clock, I went to plead to him for our cause. He then began to make me understand:

“My dear daughter, your stubbornness is quite peculiar and is beyond my comprehension. You are so damn stupid. Even animals understand scolding and yelling, but you just don’t understand what I tell you. See, all will spit on us because of you. Due to calumny and mockery from everywhere, we are hanging our heads in shame, but you don’t know this. Look here; there were many Lutheran girls who were determined not to get married. But they remained unmarried only for a few years, for later on all of them got lost,

living immoral lives. Hear my words and change your intentions, lest you too would get lost on account of your stubbornness. Therefore, if it really happens, then I tell you seriously, I will kill you with a gun or a pistol or cut you to pieces with a sword. Thereafter, I will kill myself.”

Continuing Ordeal at Home in Sargaon

When I heard these words of my dad, I ran away from there to a dark room and wept bitterly. I then lay down on the bed without food and drink. The family members called me for meal many times but I turned a deaf ear to their calls and remained lying down. When I did not get up, all thought that I was fast asleep; so they left me alone. But they sat outside my room and began to talk about me. So, I could hear them all. They were neither stupid nor illiterate. They were educated and religiously devout persons. One of them said that our intentions were really very good. The second person said that it was just impossible for their native daughters and sisters to remain virgins for life. Similarly, the third person said that from childhood to adolescence we girls had lived happy lives in everyway. Love of the parents, brothers and sisters and the relations as well as the upbringing, clothes and all were just fine, that was why we girls were totally ignorant of the joys and sorrows of the future. But the fourth person said that all the family members must forget all that had happened and from henceforth deal with us kindly and affectionately. He also suggested that we should be provided with some jewelry to divert our attention from pious thoughts and win us over for marriage.

The last suggestion was taken up very seriously and a goldsmith was called in one day and was shown some samples of jewelry. The goldsmith was then asked to make similar pieces for me. So, he went home and made the jewelry as ordered in ten days. When he brought the jewelry to my house, I ran away from home and hid myself in a bush in the kitchen garden. I sat there quietly and began to weep at the thought of another test. My parents called and looked for me everywhere, but could not find me. They waited for me for some time, but I would not appear. So they took the jewelry from the goldsmith and sent him back.

Now it so happened, that one old woman of the neighbourhood, Salome by name, came that way collecting some twigs for firewood. She was surprised to find me hiding in the bush and asked:

“Why are you sitting here and crying? Your people are looking for you. They got some pieces of jewelry made for you by the goldsmith and wanted to put them on you.”

I said:

“Grandma, I don’t want to wear any jewelry; for if I do, my heart and soul will become worldly and I will be lost forever.”

The old woman replied:

“No my dear child, nothing will happen. You must accept all what the parents give you. You are a young woman but your hands and ears have no ornaments as yet. This does not look good. Therefore, you must accept with love what the parents offer you.”

I pleaded again:

“My dear grandma, have pity on me and do intercede with me on behalf of my parents. Tell them that I thank them whole-heartedly for everything and will continue doing so always, but I refuse to get married and wear the ornaments. I know parents love me deeply, but in this matter I will not accede to their wish. I don’t want to go to them just now, for if I say anything to them, they would be displeased with me.”

Discussing this way for a while, the old woman agreed with me and went home with the firewood she had collected. Then she went straight to my parents and spoke to them:

“Look here my folks; please don’t harass your daughter anymore. She is hiding in the bushes and is weeping incessantly. I tried to make her understand, but she would not listen. She refuses to marry and wear any ornaments. So please leave her alone. Maybe she will accept your views one day. If you force her to obey you, she might walkout, God knows where, and this might bring you more pain and suffering.”

Learning from this old woman where I was hiding, my parents brought me home. And after helping me to wash myself they gave me some food to eat. But after I had eaten my food, some of my people began to rebuke me and look down upon me.

They said:

“Look at her tantrums. She hides in the bushes and wails just because her dad wants to give her some ornaments. How we wish it were given to us! She gives up food and drink and bemoans her silly fate. What else can she be, if not mad and an idiot?”

I listened to their fuming and outbursts, but did not react.

Excommunication and Ostracism

It must be known here that the household of Shri Puran Prasad, my dad was Lutheran earlier. But when the Catholic Fathers came to Chotanagpur, he met them and after listening to them on the true faith, he expressed a great desire to become a Catholic along with many others. That was why many Lutheran Pastors and other luminaries envied him and became his bitter rivals. They put all kinds of blame on him and threw him out of the residence of the Mission called *Derakhana*. Where would poor Puran Prasad go in the rainy season with his wife and children? He was literally on the street with his family. After roaming around for a while he got shelter in the workshop of a poor carpenter. He made a little roof and wall with bamboos and lived there till he bought a piece of land and built his own house at Siromtoli in Ranchi. The poor carpenter, who had given shelter to Puran Prasad, was also victimized by the Lutherans. They made all kinds of allegations against him, so much so that on a Sunday they read out to him and his family an edict of excommunication from the Church. They were six persons facing social boycott. It meant that no others would associate with them – no tobacco and no meals with them, no handshakes and not even exchange of greetings with them. The offenders against these rulings were to be punished severely. After issuing the order, the people were so hard on Puran Prasad and his family that anyone, who showed himself to be a Catholic or talked to the Catholic priests, was not allowed to set foot in their mission compound. Anyone caught entering their compound was chased out by the watchman on duty. What could the relatives and kinsmen of Puran Prasad do at such a strict order? Not all were bad all the same. Some nice people met

Puran Prasad and family in private especially at night, but during the day they pretended to be inimical towards them. There were also some who were like the venomous cobra, looking for a chance to strike. But with God's grace, nothing happened to the Catholics, who did not bother about the external threats.

Christ Anandit Ruth a Staunch Lutheran

Later when Fr. Lievens stayed at Doranda and said Sunday masses at a bungalow at Tharpakhna, my dad Puran Prasad and many others met him and became Catholics more openly. I, Christ Anandit Ruth, his eldest daughter, was studying at a Lutheran school in Ranchi. My dad did not pay much attention to me in the beginning as I was too young, and left me at school to study. By the time I was about ten years old, the Lutheran faith was steeped into me. I came to know that my parents had left the Lutheran faith and had become Catholics. I was quite upset about it and began to think of a way out. Finally, one day bending my head low I went to the Lutheran Pastor who was in charge of the school, and after accepting to become his adopted child, began to stay with him. From then onwards, whenever I got an opportunity from the school, I went running to my parents and tried to make them understand how foolish it was to become Catholics.

I said:

“The whole congregation looks down upon you and hates you, so know that God Himself dislikes you. I hear that the Roman Catholic Priests are around here. They are no good. They wear long garments, go round the streets and preach a false religion. They keep different kinds of statues and pictures and they worship Mary like God. They put light and offer flowers to her. You should beware of such anti God religion. Repent of your wrong doings and return to your former faith. Ask for forgiveness and mercy before the whole congregation and everything will be all right.”

I repeated these warnings and pleadings to them many times, but they did not listen to me; rather they laughed at me. And on the contrary, they influenced me to become a Catholic. Whenever they saw me coming with a book, my family members taunted me saying:

“Come quick everybody, get ready to hear the sermon of the Lutheran preacher.”

Looking at the anticlimax I would say:

“If you are so careless and do not heed to my words, then I separate myself from you all. From today don't even think of me.”

Having said this, I went away from them and lived in the school for about two years.

Poor me an ignorant girl! How would I know which faith was right and which was wrong? I knew only what I had heard from the teachers and what I had read in the erroneous books. Looking at the way I was going about, my parents got quite worried. In order to win my mind and heart to the Catholic faith, many times they gave a small crucifix, some pictures, a scapular and a rosary. But my teachers took the crucifix and pictures and burnt the other items in front of me, calling them the hocus pocus of Roman religion. When I saw this, I developed a strong dislike towards the Catholic faith. Then one day Puran Prasad, my dad decided to take me out of the Lutheran school. So, he went with his friends to the Lutheran Pastor. The Lutheran pastor saw him from far and growled at him like a tiger:

“Who are you? Why are you coming here without permission?
You come here to desecrate us. Get back right away, or else I will scourge you.”

He ordered the watchman on duty:

“Watchman! O watchman! Get these Romans out from here.”

My dad explained to him that he wanted a leave for me from the school; but the Pastor got wild and said:

“You are a thief. You want to take your daughter from her religion and destroy her. Get out from here.”

When they heard the great commotion, people got shaken at the bungalow. My dad along with his five friends came closer to the school and called out:

“My dear daughter Christ Anandit Ruth, come out here for we have come to take you home.”²⁶

Poor me, I began to shiver out of fright and hiding myself in a corner of the room, began to cry. Then I sent word to my dad through someone that I would never become a Catholic. My dad wanted to take me home by all means, but the pastor and the watchman threw him out. His heart sank in distress for the Fathers had told him that he would be denied the holy sacraments while his daughter remained in the Protestant school. What could my poor dad do? On one hand his heart was writhing in pain and on the other, I was stubborn in my resolve.

Sometimes my dad sent my second sister Sushila to me asking her to bring me home to Siromtoli. But what could she do? She did come to me and tell me that dad was calling me for something, but I would not listen. I would rather send back my younger sister flying. Then after sometime, our dad along with some Fathers went to meet the Lutheran Pastor. The Fathers greeted him with great respect. But the Pastor got enraged right away. Only a little later he began to speak peaceably. The Fathers explained to him that I, studying in his school, was a minor. And because of my tender age I needed to be with my dad. So if he still kept me detained, then my dad would be forced to take me home through the court. To this the Pastor said to them that they should allow me to remain there for the time being. He would see what could be done when the holidays came. My dad agreed to this and went back home quietly.

So, when the holidays began, I went straightaway to my village Sargaon. But to my utter surprise I found that all the family members were ready to become Catholics. Many people tried to make me understand why I should become a Catholic, but to no avail. They all told me that it was the doing of my own dad. So I thought that it would be good to make him understand first. Consequently, I returned to Ranchi and began to stay with him. Whenever I was at home in Siromtoli, there was always a discussion on the matters of religion. My people attended the holy mass on Sundays and feast days, but I, stubborn as I was, went always to the Lutheran church.

²⁶ At Siromtoli in Ranchi.

Chapter - III Ripples of Change

One Sunday after the church services in Ranchi, I was talking to my friends exchanging news and views. As we talked on the way, we came across some 4-5 teachers. They inquired about my wellbeing and after exchanging the pleasantries, said that in reality the Catholic Church was the true Church, for Jesus Christ Himself established it. The Pope was the overall in charge and the whole Church was under him. No sooner than such words came from their mouth than there started a heated debate on the matter of religion.

One of them said:

“Brothers, we are only teachers. We read all kinds of books. But a careful reading does reveal that the Roman Catholic faith is the true faith. But it is sad to say of course, that we will live and die where we are placed. It is only for the sake of our livelihood that we are Lutherans, though we know that this is an erroneous faith. Puran Prasad did the right thing when all his family members became Catholics, except for this poor girl. The cuckoo flits from one grove to another and from one tree to another in search of the most juicy mango, flower and fruit.”

When I heard these words, I got scared. I went home to Siromtoli and began to observe the Catholic way of life more carefully. One day it so happened, that when I was at home, some Fathers came to see my dad. When I heard about their coming, I thought that they would make me a Catholic by force, so I hid myself in a lonely place. When the Fathers came to the house, the whole household, including the pagans of the locality came and talked to them quite freely and frankly. Then I came a little closer to the door from my hiding place at the rice granary called *Mora* and began to watch them and listened to their conversation more intently, but still partly hiding myself. The purpose of my observation was to ascertain the integrity of the Fathers who were reportedly cheats and taught falsehood in the name of religion and often lured people with money in this regard.

My dad looked for me everywhere, but could not find me; and only when the Fathers had left the place and gone some distance, I came out from the house. The Fathers had left with my dad a small crucifix, a rosary, one scapular and some holy pictures for me. But I took nothing for myself from these gifts except the little crucifix. I kept it and thought of the Fathers quite often of how people spoke of them so poorly and disparagingly. But I had seen them with my own eyes and heard them with my own ears and found that they were very respectable, tender, soft spoken and friendly people. I wanted to observe and examine them on other areas too till I was satisfied with my findings.

Then suddenly a blessed day dawned for me. My dad used to go and talk to the Fathers everyday about court matters. One of the house servants or my younger sister used to reach food for him. One day my mom asked me to go along with my sister to deliver food to our dad. Both of us obeyed her and took the food packet for our dad. Looking at both of us dad spoke to the Fathers:

“Look here Fathers, today my eldest daughter is also coming here. You must talk to her. She will stay on with her sister for some time because of the summer heat. They will return home only after four or five O’ clock.”

The Fathers were extremely delighted at this news, since they worked day and night with ardent love of Jesus to gather as many souls as possible. Certainly there was me, the poor girl who was blinded by wrong teaching and was in need of salvation. When both of us came to the Fathers, they spoke to us tenderly and taught us how to make the sign of the cross. Another girl Sushila made the sign of the cross quite properly. But I did not know how to do it. I was much ashamed about it and yet tried to make it quietly in the air. The Fathers smiled at my efforts and said that I would learn gradually and make the sign of the cross quite properly like my younger sister.

This continued for sometime and the holidays were over. I was once again admitted in the Lutheran school without fees. When the school authorities asked for fees, I expressed helplessness as I had come to school without my dad's permission. The school authorities felt sorry for me, but decided to keep me as an adopted child and began to look after my every need. Though I lacked nothing in the school, I was quite disturbed in my mind and heart. I did not pay as much attention to other subjects, as I did to the religion classes. Around this time a book in Hindi entitled *Roman Mat Khandan* (Refuting the Roman Teaching) was published. There was much anti Catholic teaching in the school. The girls began to get confused and began to question a lot of things taught to them. The teachers tried to explain and said that in fact the Catholic Church was the original Church instituted by Jesus Christ. But later it got corrupted and Martin Luther, the originator of our faith, started reforming it but all in vain. The students became more inquisitive and began to discuss these issues among themselves.

The Loretos Open Girls' School

On March 19, 1890 four Loreto Sisters came from Kolkota to Ranchi and opened a school for girls at the Red Lodge on the Purulia Road.²⁷ Puran Prasad, my dad thought that he would enroll both of us - Sushila and myself with the Sisters, so he sent my younger sister to call me saying:

“Tell her, daddy is calling you to talk something special with you.
So come quickly with me.”

Hearing from my sister that I was being called home, I became more inquisitive to know as why I was being called. So I asked my sister the real reason of the summons. Finally, my younger sister told me clearly that some Sisters of the Roman Mission had come and that dad wanted to send both of us to their school. When all the girls present heard this, they burst out laughing and taking the message as a joke, chased her away.

They said:

“You have come here to steal away your elder sister. To hell with your Roman devil. Get lost at once, before the Pastor and his wife ask the watchman to beat you black and blue to drive out all your thieving.”

The poor girl came home and told the whole story to our people. So, finally my dad put only Sushila and my cousin Kripa in the Sisters' school.

²⁷ Where now stands the Ursuline Convent.

Now all the family members became Catholic, except me, who quite stubbornly remained a Lutheran. But my mind was restless just like a boat, which is tossed about by the waves in the sea.

When holidays came again, the Lutheran Pastor and his wife asked me whether I would stay with them or go home. I replied that I wanted to go home for a short while to find out how things were. So, they allowed me to go home. During these days I came to the Catholic Church for holy mass. I was astonished to see the statues of Mary, Our Lady and other saints, besides some holy pictures, flowers, candles and incense in the church. I wondered why my people were worshipping the statues like the pagans. So, I began to enquire about these things at home. Everybody in the family told me that it was not a pagan worship and that the statues and pictures were kept in the church in remembrance of saints. If anyone loved the king and honoured him, he would surely honour his mother too. Similarly, he would show love and reverence to all his dear people. Then again if someone came to the father, would he greet him alone with reverence or will he do so to all the members of the family? They argued saying that just like the mother, sons and daughters of the family got respect from the father, in the same way the Virgin Mary was the mother of Jesus and the saints and all the angels, were dear to God. So why would they not get proper respect? They were not worshipped, for God alone was worthy of such worship and reverence.

After thinking and pondering deeply over these issues I was convinced about what my people had explained to me. So the next time when I went for the holy mass, I watched the statue of Our Lady of Lourdes very intently and was immediately attracted to her. I changed my mind totally and said to myself:

“This certainly could be the true faith, for the Virgin Mary was given due respect. There is nothing of this sort in our Protestant faith. On the contrary, people hate specially the Virgin Mary. Now come what may, I will surely become a Catholic.”

So, I stopped going to the Protestant church. When the Protestant Pastors leant about it, they sent my teacher to me with the instructions:

“Go and make her understand properly. Why does she behave like a lunatic? Does she not fear to accept the erroneous faith? She must change her mind and come back to the school.”

To this I replied:

“I want to know about the Catholic faith. If it is the true faith, I will certainly accept it and will never turn back. And if not then I will come back to you. I thank you very much for your lovely education, care and concern.”

Christ Anandit Ruth Becomes Mary Bernadette

I came to the convent school at the Red Lodge in Ranchi on June 2, 1890 and began to study the Catholic beliefs with utmost eagerness and joy. Along with me, five Protestant women also got educated and received the Holy Communion on 31st July 1890. I was baptized in the Catholic faith and was christened Mary Bernadette. Sushila was christened as Cecilia and our cousin, Kripa (daughter of our dad’s second brother) as Veronica. But the daughter of the widow kept her original name Mary. Veronica and Mary received the sacrament of Confirmation quite

early, but Cecilia, dad and I received it when his Grace Most Rev. Archbishop Paul Goethals came to Ranchi from Kolkota on 21st May 1892. Now after becoming Catholic, all lived in peace and happiness.

Hardly had we spent two years in the school, when marriage proposals began to pour in from everywhere. It so happened one day that some people came to see Veronica for marriage negotiations. Veronica refused the proposal right away. When the groom's party still persisted, she ran and climbed a huge tree and sat on the topmost branch.

She said: "Please go away from here. I do not want to marry."

Still they waited for her for a long time, but she did not care and remained perched comfortably on the tree like a bird till they went back quite disappointed. A few months later the boy got married, but within a year he became mad and roamed about day and night. He used to utter meaningless words and finally died. We thanked God for saving Veronica from such a fateful life.

Discerning the Religious Vocation

The four of us whose names are mentioned above, expressed our desire to become nuns to Rev. Father John Desmet S.J. He helped us a lot and kept encouraging us in our resolve. Also a few days later Sister Teresa, the Superior of the Ranchi community, together with Fr. Desmet encouraged us with her talks, works and counsels. After sometime Fr. Chrysanthus Sapart S.J. and Fr. Louis Hagenbeek S.J. also explained to us about the religious life. But other Fathers and Sisters thought that it was too ambitious an idea, which would be possible to actualize only after thirty years or so, but not now.

As described above, we, who had refused to get married, were sent out from the school. Now when the Provincial of the Loretos, Sr. Mary Gonzaga came from Kolkota to Ranchi for her annual visitation, she heard the whole story from the four of us and was quite moved. She said to us:

"My dear daughters, I will try my best to fulfill your desires. Till then don't lose heart. Always remain good girls and be ever ready to love Jesus whole heartedly."

The three persons who made representations before His Grace, Most Rev. Paul Goethals for the four of us were – Fr. John Desmet, Rev. Sr. Provincial, Mary Gonzaga and Sr. Mary Teresa. They said:

"Your Grace, please allow the four girls to stay in the school. You can yourself examine them and see whether they have a vocation from Jesus or not."

Then His Grace asked in writing to Fr. Rector of Manresa House to take us back for we had been sent away from school due to our refusal to get married. When we heard about the Archbishop's decision from Fr. Rector about readmitting us into the school, all four of us were exceedingly happy. Immediately, Cecilia, Mary and myself went together to bring Mary Veronica from our village, Sargaon.

Crossing the Torrential River

On the way to our village it rained heavily and we got so completely wet that it was difficult for us to proceed. So, we took shelter at a pagan relative's house in Susai. They accepted us warmly and lit a fire for us to dry our clothes. Then they gave us meals from whatever was left over. They really fed us well. They asked us to stay put for the night in the rainy season. Maybe the river was also full, they said. But the three of us listened to no one and went ahead. When we reached the hamlet of Susai village close to the river, the villagers also asked us to stay back for it was getting evening.

“How will you go?” They asked.

“For two days ago our boat was carried away by the rising waters in the river. Probably the boat of your village was kept upstream, but people might have stopped ferrying for the day and gone home.”

But we would not listen to their advice and insisted that they reached us to the bank of the river where the boat from our village was kept tied. One brave fellow obliged and went along with us. We reached a rivulet from where water gushed out into the river. Our escort knew our determination, so he helped us to cross the rivulet. But now, how to cross the big river? The boatman in fact turned out to be our relative. He had tied the boat with a rope to a tree and had gone home for the day. Then we saw a man far away in the hazy evening and called out to him loudly to come and take us across the river. The man heard our frantic calls and came to us instantly. He put the boat in the river and began to row it faster. When we crossed the river, the boatman found that we were in fact related to him as sisters. He was exceedingly happy to help us cross the river. He then escorted us home. We thanked him heartily and sent him back to his house. After this we stayed in the village for a week and when we returned to the convent, Mary Veronica came along with us.

With Corpses and Jackals at Midnight

The Sisters now began to look after us more carefully, so they put us to work at various chores of the convent and the school like – teaching other girls, sweeping and cleaning in the church, arranging the altar, working in the kitchen and the storeroom, looking after the sick, doing the night vigil and washing the dead bodies and preparing them for burial etc. One day due to some illness two girls of the convent died one after the other in the afternoon around three O' clock. Since the Doranda cemetery was far away and the sun had already set, we could not bury them the same day. The dead bodies were kept on the mat in the infirmary. They were to be buried next day after mass. Now another girl of about twelve – thirteen years old also fell ill and was moaning. She was so weak that she could not even close her eyes nor utter a word. Seeing her serious condition, she was given the sacrament of confession and extreme unction. Now it was the turn of Sr. Mary de Pazzi and another girl to keep watch at night. This girl was extremely frightened and faint-hearted. She would not venture out in the slightest darkness at night. She would shrink and shiver at the sound of a jackal or an owl. Especially, she was deadly scared of the corpses. Now both Sr. Mary and this girl began to attend to the sick girl, who looked better after sometime. Since Sr. Mary was exhausted by the day's work and wanted to test the girl's strength and stamina, she said to her:

“Look here, I am going for a while. There is medicine and water etc. on the table. Give them to the girl as prescribed till I come back.

There is nothing to be afraid of, for the girl looks better than before.

So if we try our best, then she might pull through. But don't worry if she dies, for she has received the last sacraments. Let God's will be done.”

Having said this, Sr. Mary went away from there. The girl attending was not so upset in the beginning, for she thought that Sr. Mary would return shortly. That was why she felt shy and did not say anything to her. But when it started getting very late and Sr. Mary did not return by eleven O' clock at night and even by one a.m., she began to be terribly afraid and upset. For it was pitch dark and there lay two dead bodies in the room. Besides, the sick girl lay on the bed very close to the door. Two jackals got the smell of the corpses and wanted to get in by all means. But the girl had not even a stick to chase them away. Poor girl began to tremble out of fright and tried to drive the animals with her hand. But they would not budge. She felt shy even to give a yell, thinking that people might tease her later on. Finally she could not stand it anymore. She thought to herself that she could neither protect the sick girl nor the corpses lying there, for out of fear she herself almost felt dead. So there was no choice but to run away from there. But then she thought that if she were to run away, then the sick girl might suffer much and might even die. Then if the jackals were to drag out the corpses and tear them to pieces, what a pitiful and despicable issue it would turn out to be.

“O my God what should I do now?” She mumbled and said to herself,
“I am almost breathless out of fear.”

She was in deep thought for a while with such anxieties. But after some time controlling herself she stood up and remembered the patron saint of the school. He was none other than the guardian angel. So she began to pray fervently to all the guardian angels.
She pleaded:

“Please help me you heavenly beings, for I do not have the courage to fulfill the task given to me. Look here holy beings, I offer them to your protection. So please protect them from all dangers and harms.”

After having said the prayers, she took the light from the table and putting it right in the middle of the door, ran to the convent to call Sr. Mary. She tiptoed and came to her quietly and found that she was fast asleep because of the extreme fatigue. So she did not wake her up, but went fast towards the school and begged her friends to come along and help her as she had come from the infirmary in sheer helplessness.

She said:

“Look how dark the night is. I am alone. Two jackals are trying to get at the corpses. I cannot do anything. My heart is beating faster and my whole body is trembling out of fear.”

In response to her pleas, many girls were ready to come along with her. But she took only two or three of them with sticks in their hands and began to drive the jackals away. Finally, she and the assisting girls thanked the guardian angels for protecting them from all harm. As for Sr. Mary, after waking up from a deep slumber, she came to the infirmary and had a hearty laugh when she heard the girls' awesome stories.

Another Test: Have a Mixed Marriage

Our people in the household were no less worried about us. Parents of suitors also began to pester our parents to give us in marriage to their sons. Our relatives found three rich and educated but staunch Protestant bachelors for Cecilia, Veronica and me. They even came to Fr. Rector at Manresa House in Ranchi and tried to influence him with their sweet words on the matter. They also made a representation to the Archbishop of Kolkota Most Rev. Paul Goethals

seeking his permission for a mixed marriage. People's machination was such that they even made a false allegation about us, saying that we had chosen Protestant grooms for ourselves of our own free will and consent. So, now the only formality left was that we girls acknowledged this personally and publicly.

After investigating the peculiar case of these marriage negotiations, Fr. Rector of Manresa House came and told the Sisters, and after a little interaction, hid himself close by thinking that we might feel shy or frightened and not tell him the truth. When the Sisters heard about our marriage story from Fr. Rector, they were exceedingly sad and refused to believe it.

They said:

“We just can't believe it. But according to your suggestion, it seems proper to ask the girls themselves about it.”

We were in our classes. The Sisters called us one by one on the pretext of some work and asked us about what they had heard from Fr. Rector. We did not know that Fr. Rector was listening to our conversation. He heard very clearly all that we told the Sisters. In the beginning all three of us were astounded to hear such things. The answers of all three of us were the same. We said:

“This is a blatant lie. We have neither talked to any boys nor written any letters to them. We have never said anything regarding such a mean and repulsive mixed marriage to anyone, nor will we ever do so in future. May we know who the guys are, who want to marry us? Where are they from? Bring them here. We want to see the handsome faces of these cheats, and ask them as when, where and how did the negotiations take place. How despicable! Certainly some people want to spoil our names out of jealousy through such false allegations.”

Having said this we began to cry bitterly and uncontrollably. Later, all came to know that this was only a false and a cooked up story to get us for marriage. Soon after this, Fr. Rector explained everything to the Archbishop in a letter.

They Must Marry, Come What May

Yet on the appointed day all preparations were made to have the marriage ceremony of the three of us at our house at Siromtoli. The meals were ready and the people assembled in a big number for the marriage celebration. Then started the feasting, singing and dancing. When our would-be parents in-laws gathered, then our dad went to the school to bring us home. We were having religion class when he arrived at the school. He bowed and after greeting the Father said:

“I have come to take my daughters home.”

Then to us he said:

“Bernadette, Cecilia and Veronica come home right away.”

On hearing our dad's harsh words we were scared and looked at the ground. At this he said thundered again:

“Don't you hear me? Why don't you come out from the class?”

Then I stood up and said:

“Dad, please wait for a while till the religion class is over.

Once it is over, we will ask permission from the Father then come with you.” To this dad objected: “No, no, it is not required. You've got to come home immediately.”

In the meantime the Father and the other girls were watching the fun. The Father called one girl and sent her to call the Sister. The Sister came as soon as she got the news and asked our dad:

“Puran Prasad, what’s the matter?”

He answered:

“Sister, I have not come to talk to my daughters.”

And to us he commanded:

“We’ve got to hurry up. Come on now, let us go.”

Seeing the situation the Father got up and gesturing to our dad to keep quiet, he called the three of us and spoke to us softly. He said:

“Look here my dear girls, Fr. Rector has told all the Fathers about you and he has ordered us to offer masses, prayers and mortifications for your sake so that you are victorious in this test. Be firm in your faith. Be careful about marrying strangers, especially the Protestants. Never lose heart. Be brave and go home without fear. God will surely protect you.”

With this he took out some holy pictures from his breviary and gave them to us. We wept out of gratitude and thanked the Father for his comforting advice and the beautiful pictures. We also knelt down to receive his blessing and then left for home with our dad.

Outside the convent gate, dad gave us strict orders to reach home straightaway and he himself went elsewhere for some work. After we had walked some distance, we met a Catholic catechist, James by name. When he knew why we were going home, he cautioned and advised us:

“Be careful and don’t be cheated. Win the struggle with a courageous heart. This is going to be a real test for you, not only regarding the marriage but also for being firm in your faith. People have intentionally organized this event. They have even asked permission from the Archbishop for your mixed marriages, but don’t be afraid. People may beat you and frighten you with sticks, but don’t be swayed by their intimidation. Instead be firm in your Catholic faith.”

In this way the catechist emboldened us with advice and left us.

We looked at each other as we walked. We were extremely worried and our hearts beat faster out of fear. We prayed as we walked and sometimes talked on lighter matters trying to encourage ourselves. Finally we reached home. We were confident that with the grace of God we would do our best to be victorious in the impending trial.

As soon as we reached home at Siromtoli, we were given a good meal. But how could we eat for we were so sad and heartbroken? We felt our throats grow numb and we were not interested to say anything. And yet we were forced to eat something. After some time the people started talking sweetly to attract and allure us to their intentions. We behaved as if we knew nothing and kept quiet. But then the people began to pressurize and even threaten us, if we refused to marry. So finally we had to speak. We said:

“No never.”

And asserted further:

“We do not want to marry at all. Despite knowing all about this you are creating such a row by arranging this disgraceful mixed marriage.”

But the people argued back:

“The whole world does this; therefore you will not commit any sin when you agree to marry. Even the Archbishop and the Fathers have agreed on this point. So don’t worry. Everything has been arranged. Moreover, the lads are handsome and from respectable as well as educated families. What a blissful life is awaiting you! You will not have to bother about anything. Therefore, talk like sensible people. What does it matter if the boys are Protestants? Let them follow their faith and you follow yours. They along with their households promise that they will not interfere in your religious affairs. So now, what do you say?”

To this we said in one voice that we did not want to get married. But our answer infuriated the people and they began to scold and intimidate us still more, saying:

“You are damn stupid and stubborn. Why do you delay in giving a positive answer? Your father is not at home but is coming back soon. If he comes to know that his daughters are so obstinate and foolish, then he might even give you a sound beating. Think of this, how shameful it would be then.”

Even after listening to their scolding and threats we were unmoved. When our father came home and learnt about our decision, he got wild and ordered us to be put separately. People took Veronica and Cecilia and locked them up in someone’s house, so that I might not be able to go to them. For it was I who had allegedly spoiled them and gave them all support. Dad’s order was carried out instantly and we were separated from each other, so that we would not know each other’s plight.

Chapter - IV

The Final Ordeal

There was a big crowd waiting in the inner courtyard of our house at Siromtoli. I was presented before the guests gathered there. Seeing me brought there, all the invited were exceedingly happy and began to shake hands with me and kiss me according to the custom. But poor me would not even look at them, instead kept my head covered with the border of my *sari* like a *ghunghat*²⁸ and cried incessantly. Now when a young man came to shake hands with me, a woman from the crowd said:

“Don’t cry dear daughter, but look at your would-be groom who is standing before you. Lift your eyes and look at him and shake hands with him respectfully.”

Hearing this I pulled my right hand back and closing my fist hid it under my *sari*. People urged me strongly to behave and said:

“Daughter, don’t be funny. Look, this is the life of the world. Whether the girls are rich or poor or are exceptionally loving, they must go to someone else’s house after marriage and must become the queens of their homes. You, being the daughter of such a respectable man, are such a fool. How sad that you don’t even have any self-respect! All are looking at you. But by your pig-headedness you are only earning dishonour and shame for yourself and for your family. Look how Veronica and Cecilia have accepted everything so gladly. It is only you alone who are such a headstrong and self-willed girl who would not relent. Follow their example and everything will be all right. How lovely it would be to see the three sisters getting married under the same *marwa!*”²⁹

I replied:

“Very good. If the two want to get married, let them go ahead. But I refuse to get married.”

I knew very well that what they said was not true, but they wanted to trap me by all kinds of manipulations and pretensions. The people present there got angry and said,

“Look your father says that if you don’t listen to anyone then you are free to go where you like and become what you want. But he won’t give you a single penny.” Then they said to one another: “She has all comforts of food, drink and clothing, that is why she has nothing to worry about.”

As the heated conversation was going on, one of my cousins, a family relative, standing close by said:

“Leave her to me and let me deal with her.”

Having said this, he caught hold of me and dragging me from the crowd a few steps aside began to slap me left and right and pull my ears.

He growled:

“If you don’t listen to the loving words, then you really deserve the beatings. Tell fast, will you get married or not.”

²⁸ Head covering of women by the end piece of their *saries*.

²⁹ Marriage tents of the Adivasis made of poles and branches in the courtyard of the bride and the bridegroom.

I answered:

“No, never.”

Whereupon I had to face more insults and scolding from the people.

“What kind of girl are you?” they jeered, “If you were a human being, you would understand. Even an animal would obey for fear of beatings. But are you a Satan’s child that you don’t like to be in the human company?”

Finally the crowd intervened and said that such cruelty to me must stop, for I was only about 16 years old. They reasoned to themselves that I might regret it afterwards for getting nervous. Perhaps later on I might see reason and gradually accept what was being told to me.

Dad was so upset and disappointed that he came away from among the guests and sitting in a room began to cry uncontrollably. He wailed:

“What a waste it has been to bring her up with great difficulties! It would have been better if she were to die along with her mother when she was but a baby. It would not have pained me.”

The crowd heard dad’s wailings and was moved to tears. But controlling himself after a little while my dad shouted from inside:

“Please make the girl understand, otherwise I will shoot and kill her with my own hands; thereafter I will kill myself.”

Hearing such terrible utterances from him, some people ran inside the house and removed the gun and the two pistols from their places and hid them. Seeing dad’s horrendous mood, some brethren began to persuade me to consent to the marriage.

“Just say once, ‘Yes I want to marry’, and everything will be all right.”

They called the boy who was to marry me and asked him to hold my hand. The boy came close to me and said:

“Why do you behave like this? I promise that I will not interfere in your religious matters. But just look at me once and check whether I am lame, disabled, blind, deaf or dumb etc. And then shake hands with me. I will be totally satisfied. Besides this I want nothing.”

Saying this he tried to hold my hand. But I was firm in my resolve. I hid my hand in my *Sari* and said:

“I will never shake hands with you. Know that I will never be yours. So don’t trouble me.”

To this the boy said:

“Even the strangers and people on the street shake hands with one another as they meet one another in the street.”

To this I snapped back:

“Such hand shakes are common. But this one is different. For heaven’s sake, don’t ever imagine that I love some other boy. However, if you think so, it would be a serious mistake. I tell you very clearly that I don’t ever want to marry anyone.”

Marriage or Murder

Dad was listening to my words from inside the house. Then all of a sudden he rushed out with a sword in his hand and advanced towards me. The crowd cried out in unison to stop dad's madness. My brothers who were around me told me to run away fast and escape his wrath. So, they opened the door quickly for me and helped me to escape. People caught hold of my dad and stopped him from assaulting me. In the meantime, I had fled quite a distance. But dad ordered two men to give me chase. So, to please him these men took a long stick and pursued me to some distance. After sometime when they returned home, they told my dad that I was beyond their reach. So, they could not catch me. On hearing this, my dad gave strict instructions to all the members of the family saying:

“Since she has run away from home, from today she cannot put her foot in the house anymore. I am going to write to the Sisters and Fathers immediately that they mustn't give a place to this Satan of a girl in the school.”

Escape to Safety

I had run for my life and by four O' clock I reached the convent. Immediately I entered the church and fell on my knees before the Blessed Sacrament, crying profusely and thanking the Lord Jesus immensely for all the protection I had received from Him. I also thanked the Lord for the victory I was experiencing through the prayers of the Fathers, Sisters, girls of the school and people of goodwill. When the Sisters and the girls saw me alone, they began to be extremely worried. They asked me about Veronica and Cecilia. But how could I tell them, for I myself had no idea what had happened to them. I had thought that they might have reached the convent before me. But now I knew that they were not there and so I began to be anxious about them. At last, when it was towards evening, Veronica and Cecilia reached the convent. They had not the least idea when I had run away from home. But now our joy knew no bounds when we met each other. We began to tell of our ordeals to one another. Veronica and Cecilia told me how people had told lies to them saying that I was a simple girl and that by obeying the parents I had agreed to get married. It would be good for me, they had said. Therefore, Veronica and Cecilia were asked to follow my example and to say “Yes” just once and all would be fine. But to this they had answered that they had nothing to do with my decision to marry or not to marry. They were clear about themselves – not to marry. Seeing their strong resolve against marriage, one of the cousin brothers slapped Cecilia twice or thrice saying that she was but a kid and yet she was so stubborn. He did not beat up Veronica because she was the bigger girl. Later when they were called for some work outside the house, both of them took a chance and ran away from home.

Next morning the Sisters received a long letter from my people at home with all kinds of threats and complaints against me. But the Sisters were not bothered about them nor did they speak about them to me. They thought that it was not proper to let me know about the hurting and humiliating words from my people. My people had even demanded my clothes from the Sisters. So, keeping the torn clothes for myself, I put all the good clothes carefully folding them in the box along with this letter:

My dearest and the most loving mom and dad,

Peace of Christ, and my loving kisses to both of you
and to all the young and the old at home.

Respected and dear parents, I thank you all from the bottom of my heart for your immense love, labour, toil and trouble that you took for my sake. Please forgive me for all my offences and disrespect caused to you through my words, works and behaviour till this day. I even thank you for your loving rudeness, which I believe was only a pretense. You have done all this only for my good. There is no fault of yours in this. You did what you thought was proper. And by doing your duty, my own interest has been served. Leaving this aside, even the bad name earned by you on account me, has been cleared before the world. Now people have recognized your tricks. But I am not sad at your deeds. My heart will ever cherish the sweet memories of your love and I will have a grateful heart towards you all.

Your obedient daughter,
Christ Anandit Ruth Mary Bernadette

When the people at home received my clothes and letter, they were quite astonished, but they hardened their hearts and kept quiet. They thought that I would be in a miserable condition, for I had nothing with me except some torn clothes. But the loving Sisters and friends took pity on me and began to provide me with clothes and other necessities from their own resources. Later the Great Revered and dear Father John Desmet consulted Mother Superior and arranged that necessary items be given to me and to my two sisters. And so it was done.

Induction as Sodalists

Finally our suffering came to an end. We thanked God immensely for the grace of this conquest. We affirmed strongly that only because of the special prayers, penance and holy masses of the very loving Fathers, this priceless grace was bestowed on us. We thanked them whole-heartedly a million times and we acknowledged that if assistance were not to come to us through so many holy masses, prayers and penances, we would certainly have been beaten in this test.

When His Grace Paul Goethals came to Ranchi from Kolkota, he took care of us and spoke to us through Sister Mary Teresa that if we had the fervent desire to live the convent life, then we must wait for eight more years. He also assured us that if we were to keep ourselves upright and worthy of this great spiritual and holy life, then he would think about it. He asked us to be with the Sisters and help them in their works.

Seeing our ardent desire to live the religious life, the Archbishop spoke his mind saying that just like the Sodality of the boys at St. John's High School, he would start the Sodality for the girls – that is the Legion of the Immaculate Virgin Mary. He said:

“If all four of you join the Legion of Mary and become the faithful daughters of the most pure and immaculate Virgin Mother, then and only then I will think of your religious life.” With these words he also blessed us.

On hearing the words of His Grace our hearts were filled with boundless joy. From that day we began to count the days, weeks, months and years. We counted how so many days had gone by out of the total eight years and how our courage had not diminished. We began to live with the Sisters so very happily. They engaged us in different types of work like being in charge of the girls day and night, sweeping and cleaning the church, decorating the altar, arranging the mass vestments etc. Similarly, we washed the soiled linen of the church and ironed them, did stitching and sewing besides nursing the sick and the young, and kept vigil at the service of the orphans. Other works were teaching in the school, giving religious instruction to girls and women, looking after the storerooms, the kitchen and the flowers and vegetables in the garden. We also did marketing from time to time. It was not always easy to do all these works perfectly. We suffered due to people's complaints and woes as well as our own nervousness and sadness. But with the grace of God and with the support of our confessor Rev. Fr. Sapart, Rev. Father Haghenbeek and especially Rev. Fr. Desmet we got strength and comfort. This was how time and years passed by.

At the Service of the Cholera and Famine Victims

All happened as God had ordained. There spread in the country a terrible famine and cholera epidemics in 1895 and 1896. People died of cholera and hunger every day. The Govt. provided cooked rice to the poor and the downtrodden. Hundreds of people – men, women, young and old – came to get a little rice that was being distributed. But there were many others who were extremely weak and suffering and who could not even get up and walk. They could not come to get food. These poor people were dying everywhere – in towns, villages, fields, plains, roads and drains. Those days there were very few Fathers. And yet they went about saving souls and people as much as they could. Even the Sisters were asked to help the Fathers out in their work. But soon the epidemics spread in the school claiming many lives. So, the school was closed down and all the girls were sent home. Only four girls (my three sisters and I) stayed behind of our own will to work with the Sisters. We used to go around the villages and hamlets visiting families everyday with the provisions of medicine, rice, clothes and mats, which the coolies carried for them. On these rounds we distributed medicines, rice, dal, clothes and mats to the needy and comforted them, besides explaining to them the basics of religion. To the dying we gave baptism without delay. We used to hear the wails and mourning of the people everyday. The Sisters and the four of us had no time even to say our prayers and have meals. People used to come running from everywhere to the Fathers and the Sisters. Some asked the Sisters to come to their house and give medicines to two or three persons who were on their deathbed. Others begged for some rice, dal or a mat for they had lost their father, mother, wife, son or daughter. And they had no provisions to bury them. Whom to listen to, whom to refuse?

In this situation Mary Teresa Bonner, the Mother Superior was the angel of mercy to the poor and the afflicted, whom she loved dearly and became their benefactor. She spent hundreds of rupees in the works of mercy. She also brought many orphan children to the convent school and took care of them. She was like a real mother to them as she brought them up. Of the four of us assisting the Sisters, Cecilia had to go home, where our dear ones were also sick and needed care. Dad took Cecilia home with the permission of the Mother Superior. And when the bed-ridden Christopher our brother recovered from his sickness, Cecilia returned to the convent.

Goodbye to Parents

In October 1896 we said goodbye to our parents and came to live in the convent. We were determined to stay on in the convent, obeying the Sisters and doing everything they asked us to do. Kripa, Mary Veronica, Sushila Cecilia and I stayed in the village Sargaon for two weeks. We met our dear ones and relatives in the village and told them that it would be our last meeting with them. They felt sorry to hear this and some even cried. It indeed was a golden chance for us to leave home and the village.

But at the last minute another problem came up when Jonas Tigga of Brambay began to pester me to get married to him. So, I said to him:

“My dear brother Jonas, please know that I am going to serve the Lord Jesus. Therefore, it is my humble request to you that you do not put any hurdle on my way – no boulders, no bricks and no stones of any kind, which might cause me to stumble and fall due to my human nature. I tell you firmly not to allow even a leaf or a bit of paper to be blown towards me through the wind of human weakness. Now please know that this is our last meeting and so accept my final loving greetings.”

Then he said:

“You can yourself tell me, whom I should marry.”

I replied to him:

“It should be your own choice.”

But he pleaded:

“Still I will marry gladly any girl whom you will recommend to me.”

I answered to him:

“I do not go anywhere without the permission of my parents. Only once I had gone to Brambay for the marriage of Alphonse Kujur and Robertina of Susai with the permission of the Sisters. Now I suggest that you get married to Luisa Lakra, daughter of Mathias Lakra of Pathalkudwa. She is a very simple girl. But it’s up to you to decide. Do as you please. May God’s grace and blessings come upon you and all your kindred. I even promise that I will take all your sons and daughters as my foster children and will pray for them always.”

This is how Jonas Tigga and Luisa Lakra got married. And we three sisters had to go to Brambay at the behest of the Reverend Sisters for the marriage of Jonas and Luisa. When the marriage feast was over, we left the newly wed couple and came to Susai. After staying there for about two hours, we came back to our village, Sargaon. All at home were happy to see us. They killed a fattened pig for feasting. They sent a big portion of the pork for the relatives at Siromtoli, Ranchi. Despite feasting, all the family members and relatives were very sad at our farewell. They cried. And yet, knowing God’s holy will they bade us farewell. We certainly knew it very well how hard it was for our dear ones to give a farewell to us their three daughters at one go. But it had to be that way.

Chapter - V

The Founder Religious of the Daughters of St. Anne

Thanks be to God abundantly. When the disease was eradicated, the school was reopened. We resumed our respective works as earlier. We tell honestly that all that happened concerning us, was only God's doing. For after sometime many Fathers, Sisters and others began to see and understand what had happened. They came to the Archbishop on their own as witnesses and pleaded to him that the three of us be inducted to the religious life without delay. They said:

“Earlier we had held the view that living unmarried was against the custom or tradition of the country, hence it was impossible for the three girls to remain single. We had also argued that no one could live without marriage in our society. But now after observing their behaviour, listening to their talk and especially seeing their works, we firmly believe that the girls' intentions are just right. Therefore, if the girls from other countries can live a consecrated life for the glory of God and the salvation of souls through the acts of charity, then why can this not happen in our own country? Knowing the strong resolve of these girls to remain virgins, we now understand what they want. It is certainly God's will. He wants that the girls from this underdeveloped country should also commit themselves totally to love and serve Him and work for the salvation of souls. So, Most Reverend Archbishop please examine this matter and see what can be done.”

The most ardent in this matter were Rev. Father Desmet, Mother Provincial of the Loretos from Kolkota, Rev. Mother Mary Gonzaga Joynt and the Superior of Ranchi, Mother Mary Teresa Bonner. These were the three persons who, with their full strength did everything possible from the beginning till the end to bring things to a happy conclusion. Then after a lot of discernment, the Archbishop gave permission to start the sodality of the Immaculate Virgin Mary on December 8, 1896. The loving Sisters wrote the names of fifty simple girls on a paper and fixed it at a conspicuous place for three months for all to see. Since then, whenever the Sisters found any of the fifty girls committing any fault, they put a mark against her name on the list. Later a medal with blue ribbon was given to each one who was found eligible to become a Sodalist. Then again the names of the blue ribbon girls were put up on the notice board for final selection. Finally, only those girls were chosen and admitted to the sodality, who were found to be of excellent character and behaviour. They were twelve girls who received the medals of the Virgin Mary along with the broad blue ribbons from Rev. Fr. Sapart after he duly blessed them. This was the first day of the Sodality for girls in Ranchi.

As described earlier, how our dad had tried his best to get Cecilia and myself married including our cousin (and his niece) Veronica and how we had expressed to our family members and the kindred our strong resolve to remain unmarried. Thereafter, we had come to the convent on 10th October 1896. But our colleague Mary, the daughter of the widow Mukta, had remained in the convent itself.

Later His Grace Most Rev. Paul Goethals agreed to lay the foundations of the Congregation of the Daughters of St. Anne. Knowing this, the Superior of Ranchi, Mother Mary Teresa Bonner sent us home for two weeks to meet our parents and dear ones for one last time. All of us were very happy to come home. We used to tell them about religion everyday, so that

they might experience some peace and comfort when we would be given the final farewell. Thus when the holidays were over, we had to take leave of them. How painful it was to get separated from one another. Everybody's heart was heavy and the eyes were brimming with tears out of sorrow and sadness. No one could say anything. It was as if everybody's throat was choking. And yet we managed to stop our tears and controlling our heavy hearts met everybody saying *Yesu Ki Barai*³⁰ for the last time and kissed them. The next moment we left home. Our people wept and wailed at seeing us depart from them. Still crying they stood and looked at us intently till we could no more be seen on the horizon. We could understand the deep sorrow of our people, for we, the three daughters of theirs had to leave them all on the same day.

The First Postulants

When the Archbishop's appointed day came, then we four were admitted as the first postulants in the Congregation of the Daughters of St. Anne on 26th July 1897. On the day of our entry into the Congregation, we had to kneel on the pews before receiving the Holy Communion and make the following offering:

“Dear Jesus, do accept my small offering. You have given yourself for me, may I be able to give myself to you. I offer you my body, to keep it pure. I offer you my soul to keep it free from sins. I offer you my heart, to love you always. I offer you all my breath, even unto death. In life and death, I give myself to you so that I may remain yours forever.”

After having said this prayer, we received the Holy Communion.

We were given many simple rules to follow, like praying together, eating together, and recreating together, besides observing silence, making meditation and saying prayers together as well as doing some religious studies together. Our dresses were of the same colour and style – white *sari* with black *anchal* (end piece), full sleeved white jacket and a medal of Mother Mary strung on a broad blue ribbon and worn round the neck. The head had to be kept covered with the *sari* like a *ghunghat*. We used to have religious instructions once a week by the Fathers and twice a week by the Sisters. The instructors those days were Rev. Father Andre Grignard S.J. and Rev. F. Chrysanthus Sapart S.J.

When His Grace, the Archbishop saw that we girls were strong in our holy desires, then he began to deliberate not to cut our hair as part of the congregation's dress code and to conduct our lives according to the third Order of St. Francis of Assisi. Regarding our attire, we made a request to His Grace, the Archbishop through the Superior Mother Mary Teresa Bonner and the Provincial Rev. M. Mary Gonzaga that our congregation's dress and the life style should not be European, but according to the custom of our country. We said to His Grace:

“We hear that you will not cut our hair. But we don't like this. It is our strong desire that we belong to God totally. It is true that women's hair is ornamental, but we are ready to sacrifice our hair gladly. So, please know that even if you decide not to cut our hair, we will do it ourselves.”

Indigenous Dress for the Indigenous Religious

³⁰ Praise be to Jesus.

We were against the European style of dressing and living, because of the intense poverty in our country. We insisted on this because if we faced any problem, like on a religious persecution, as it happened in other countries, then we would be able to live among our own people. Knowing our intentions, Most Rev. Archbishop Paul Goethals and dear Rev. Mother Provincial began to deliberate upon our suggestions. Finally, the Archbishop decided on the following dress code for us: eight meters long blue colour sari with two white stripes, a white cincture made of thread with five knots in remembrance of the five wounds of St. Francis of Assisi and a full sleeved jacket or shirt including a white band for the head.

His Grace the Archbishop also wrote the rules for the Daughters of St. Anne. He then asked Rev. Father John Desmet S.J. to translate the same into simple Hindi. Fr. Desmet did as he was told. Later we copied it and kept it for ourselves.

Through the grace of the most merciful God, we saw the day, which we had waited for so many days. In the investiture of 6th February 1899, we four of us were adorned in the dress of the Congregation. His Grace, Most Rev. Paul Goethals himself conducted the investiture ceremony. The apparel included, as described earlier, eight-meter long blue colour sari with two white stripes, a white cincture made of thread having five knots and one big rosary. All these items were blessed and were given to us one by one. Normally the names were changed after becoming a religious Sister. But His Grace the Archbishop wanted that we four girls kept our own names, as we were the first Sisters of the Congregation. We four of us were: Sister Anna Bernadette, Sister Anna Cecilia, Sister Anna Veronica and Sister Anna Mary.

In order to increase our joy on this day, the Provincial Rev. M. Mary Gonzaga brought Sister Teresa who with other four Loreto Nuns came to Ranchi for the first time on 19th March 1890. Our happiness knew no bounds seeing ourselves in the presence of our own people. The Sisters themselves might have been exceedingly happy too, especially when they saw that their poor girls gave themselves to Jesus after their own example and good demeanor. Some even cried with joy. On the same day, the old dear Mother Teresa took me in her arms and spoke like the old Simeon:

“O Lord, now let this humble handmaiden go in peace, for I have seen the fruit of your wonderful love. I see that you have also called the girls of this lowly country to be your brides.”

On this auspicious day of rejoicing, our dear dad Puran Prasad also was reconciled with us. He gave a big feast inviting the respected friends and relatives amidst a lot of singing, dancing and drumming. Many people came to dad's house at Siromtoli. It so happened, that one of our brothers, Alfred was to get married on the same day. So it was decided that the feasting for the three daughters and one son would be organized on the same day. But His Grace, the Archbishop called our dad and said to him:

“Look Puran Prasad, your three daughters belong to God now. Therefore, the celebrations for your daughters should be held first. Arrange the marriage for your son some other day.”

So it was done as the Archbishop had instructed our dad. He gave a big feast in our honour – his three daughters and made everybody very happy.

The Novitiate and the First Profession

We did our novitiate for two years and two months. Rev. Mother Mary Imelda Mc Loughlin IBVM was our Novice Mistress. She looked after us and taught us the way of religious life. After we finished our novitiate, the Provincial Rev. M. Mary Gonzaga IBVM and the old Sister Teresa IBVM returned to Kolkota. During this time Mother Provincial appointed Mother Mary Gertrude as Superior and took along Mother Mary Teresa with her. Mother Teresa was really a mother to us. She took care of us and bore all hardships for our sake so that we could be good religious. We were very sad to miss her, but accepted her transfer as God's will. It was the law of nature that happiness and joy were mixed with sorrow and sadness. But we really felt sad to lose her. We cried with broken hearts and expressed our utmost gratitude to her. We told her how we were overwhelmed with her love. We thanked her for all her benevolence and promised to remember her all through our life. We also assured her of our prayers. It was true that we were indebted to her for everything. We could never repay her for all that she did for us. It was only God who could pay her on our behalf in this life and hereafter in heaven. With these words we gave her a warm send off.

After two years of novitiate we were given permission to take our first vows. His Grace Most Rev. D. Paul Goethals made additions to the constitutions of the new Congregation. But we were sad to know that His Grace became ill and was unable to come for our first profession. Nevertheless, he delegated Father Superior Brice Meuleman S.J. to receive our vows. Consequently, Fr. Meuleman received our vows on 8th April 1901. He gave to each of us, the newly professed Sisters, a medal of St. Anne and a ring duly blessed by him. We put the medal on a black ribbon and we wore it around the neck. This was part of the Congregation's attire.

Our joy was beyond description. How to praise the Almighty and the infinite merciful God for His surprising and bountiful love? Through His immense grace, He made us his own. We could truly say: "Lord Jesus you are my all and I am yours". Who could acclaim our good fortune and who could comprehend and measure it? This was beyond human understanding. Through God's infinite compassion and benevolence each one of us was raised to great heights of sanctity. Consequently, it was binding on our part to love, honour and thank Him with all our mind and heart. On our part we could only be committed and determined to be at His service in joys, sorrows, fatigue and severe want, even unto death.

On our great day, the most beloved Provincial Rev. M. M. Gonzaga IBVM redoubled our joys by her presence. Thanks to her a million times. Her affection and kindness knew no bounds when she met us. There were many other benefactors who also deserved our heartfelt gratitude. Our parents, friends and relatives too joined us to thank the Lord, whose loving gaze fell upon Chotanagpur, giving to the world such great souls.

But our dearly beloved Rev. Father John. Desmet S.J. could not be present for this occasion as he was at Morapai those days. Nevertheless, he spoke to the people about the new Congregation. As a result, four Bengali girls came to Ranchi as candidates and became postulants on the day we took our first vows. It was a matter of great sorrow that His Grace Most Rev D. Paul Goethals passed away on 4th July 1901. The Lord called him to his heavenly reward. May his soul rest in peace!

Renewal of Vows

The four of us renewed our vows on 26th July 1901 and again the following year on 26th July 1902. The same year the four Bengali girls were given the congregation's clothing on 8th December 1902. They were: Sr. Anna Regina, Sr. Anna Veronica, Sr. Anna Agatha and Sr. Anna Magdalene. Then it was decided that the Ursuline Sisters would come from Belgium to Chotanagpur in the place of the Loreto Sisters. Therefore, the four Bengali Sisters had to go to Morapai with the Loreto Sisters and start there a house of the Congregation. In the meantime they stayed with the Loreto Sisters at Entally when their house was getting ready. Finally, they built a Mother House at Morapai. It included the houses for the candidates, the postulants and the novices. The Loreto Sisters took care of their formation.

Thus through God's bountiful grace Rev. Father J. Desmet S.J. became the counselor and supporter of the Chotanagpur girls in religious life. Through the work of this same Father, the door to religious life was opened for the Bengali girls.

But our sorrow was indescribable when we were separated from our dearly beloved Loreto Sisters. These were the Sisters who first came to Chotanagpur, and for 12 years took great pains to educate the rustic girls and women so lovingly, meeting all their expenses in food, clothing and medical care. These same Sisters planted the seed of the Catholic faith in people's hearts. It was their very work, which ensured deep roots of profound Christian love as well as character and strong desire for education among the girls and women of Chotanagpur. With the passage of time, the whole of Chotanagpur grew like a huge tree in the Catholic faith and education, yielding fruits of progress and development. Their extraordinary love, compassion, toil and tears were indescribable. We were ever grateful to them and remembered them always with profound love in our hearts. May the Lord reward them abundantly for their countless and selfless services.

The Spiritual Pillars of the St. Anne's

Most Rev Father Alphonse Schaerlaeken S.J. was our instructor, godfather and provider from November 1902 to 4th April 1926. He took care of all our needs – spiritual and temporal – whether big or small. At the behest of the Archbishop this same Father Schaerlaeken developed further the rules of the Daughters of St. Anne according to the norms of the Church. And subsequently, His Grace Most Rev. D. Brice Meuleman accepted the new set of rules in 1904. Rev. Father Alphonse Schaerlaeken S.J. wrote two books for the Daughters of St. Anne. First was a compendium for daily meditations called “*Dharm Vishayak Dhyan Sangrah*” and the second was on Our Lady called, “*Bhali Mata Ka Darpan*”³¹. Both of these books were excellent in content and in devotion. The services of Fr. Schaerlaeken were like sacrificial offerings for us. Whether it was burning heat, torrential rain or biting cold, he would come daily to give religious instruction and spiritual guidance to us, the poor and humble daughters of St. Anne, besides looking after our wellbeing and providing our daily needs. He was indeed like a mother hen, which protects her tiny chicks under her wings from all dangers. He protected us and took care of us till his death. It was impossible to repay his goodness and benevolence towards us. We were eternally grateful to him. God the most loving Father called Father Schaerlaeken to his heavenly reward on Sunday 4th April 1926. May the Lord grant him eternal rest.

³¹ Good Mother: Mirror of Love.

Under the Care of the Ursulines

The Rev. Ursuline Sisters came to Ranchi on 13 January 1903 in the place of the Loreto Sisters. In the beginning only four of them came to Ranchi as in the case of the Loreto Sisters earlier. The first four Ursuline Sisters were: Rev. Mother Gonzaga OSU, Mother Anthony OSU, Mother Ursula OSU and Sister Sabina OSU. Many more of them came later. We the Daughters of St. Anne were under their protection. They took the responsibility of our care and upbringing. We worked under them and with them for 16 years. We thank all the Ursuline Sisters for their compassion, love and services. We thank them whole-heartedly, because they have come to us, the people of Ranchi – Chotangpur, to save our souls. They left their parents, brothers, sisters and dear ones even their motherland and came to us and worked so hard.

But finally we were separated from the Ursuline Sisters as was expected. Now we the Daughters of St. Anne had our own convent. We had our own Superior, who was called *Mata* or the Mother. We had our own Mother House in Ranchi, where the postulants and novices resided and where their formation took place. Every year 3-4 formed Sisters were sent to the mission stations. Under the care and guidance of the Jesuit Fathers, we conducted schools for girls and gave religious instruction to the adult women. We prepared them for baptism, confession, Holy Communion and for the sacrament of marriage. In fact the Archbishop himself was the head of the Daughters of St. Anne. He appointed the Congregation's second in command, the Spiritual Father for us. These two eminent persons took care of all the physical, material and spiritual needs of ours, the Daughters of St. Anne.

We the four pioneering Adivasi Sisters completed three years of temporary vows on 26th July 1903. We took our final vows on 26th July 1906. His Grace Most Rev. D. Brice Meuleman SJ received our vows and the Ursuline Sisters organized a grand festivity for this occasion.

The Daughters of St. Anne worked with the Ursuline Sisters in many places: at Ranchi in 1903, at Khnuti in 1904, at Tongo in 1906 and at Rengarih in 1908. They were also sent by the Ursuline Sisters to other rural areas like Soso and Basia Noatoli in 1903, to Kurdeg in 1906, to Samtoli in 1915 and to Jashpur and Ginhabahar in 1918. This is how they have been working together at nine places till November 1919. Even after the separation from the Ursuline Sisters, the Archbishop sent the Daughters of St. Anne and Ursuline Sisters in groups of four or five to various places for religious instruction and general education. These places were Samtoli, Kurdeg, Jashpur Ginabhar, Katkahi, Nawadih and Majhatoli since 1919, Hamirpur since 1921, Mandar and Gaibeera since 1922, Chechari Mahuadanr since 1923, Torpa since 1924, Lachragarh since 1926, Dighia since 1927, Karra since 1928 and Jashpur Tapkara since 1934. But it should be kept in mind that the Ursuline Sisters have convents at Ranchi, Khunti, Tongo, Rengarih and Basia Noatoli and The Daughters of the Holy Cross got a house at Gaibeera since 1926.

The First Deceased of the St. Anne's

28th August 1906 was the saddest day when three St. Anne Sisters died of cholera in one day. This epidemic had spread the same year killing hundreds of people everywhere. The hapless people brought orphan infants to the Ursuline Sisters for care and protection. Since these infants were also infected with cholera, the St. Anne Sisters attending to them also got infected by them. Unaware of the contagious disease, the Ursuline Sisters readily put the infants under the care of

the St. Anne Sisters. Trained for total obedience and service, the St. Anne Sisters put in charge of the infants' nursing, devoted themselves to their utmost care. But the inevitable happened. One night, a one-month old baby girl and three St. Anne Sisters died of cholera. Around that time His Grace, Most Rev. D. Britius Meuleman had come to Ranchi from Calcutta and was staying at Manresa House. When he heard the sad news of the poor Sisters' demise, he came to see them and blessed them at their beds in the convent. When he came to know how the Sisters had died, he was very sorry and said that henceforth no such infants would be put under the care of the St. Anne Sisters. It wasn't fair that three Sisters died while taking care of one or two infants. Not anymore, he resolved. If the Ursuline Sisters wanted to take care of such infants, then they must find other ways and means; but they must never ask the poor St. Anne Sisters to do the job.

"This is my order."

Said the Archbishop.

"For besides the day's hard work in the classes and other places, it was impossible to take care of the infants day and night."

He bemoaned.

Since then the Daughters of St. Anne stopped taking care of the infants. Many times they heard the complaints from the people as why the Daughters of St. Anne did not accept the orphan infants as other Sisters, like the Ursulines did. Why did the Daughters of St. Anne not accept the orphan infants at least from the neighbourhood? People wanted answers to these questions; to which our answers were that we the Daughters of St. Anne were meant for other works and apostolates. We were also very poor and helpless ourselves, which was not hidden from anyone. Needless to say, in our country no girl or woman received her share of property or wealth. So how could we bear the expenses of the infants' care and salaries of the maid etc?

As related earlier, the Loreto Sisters opened their first school in Ranchi on 19th March 1890. Consequently, we celebrated its silver jubilee in 1915. The Loreto Sisters also participated in the celebration and gave us a pedal sewing machine as a memorial present.

Chapter - VI

The Silver Jubilee of the St. Anne's Congregation

It has also been described above how the Congregation of the Daughters of St. Anne was started on 26th July 1897. So we wanted to celebrate the silver jubilee of our foundation day. But two of the first four sisters fell ill in 1921: Sr. Anna Veronica on 21st November, the feast of the Presentation of Our Lady in the temple and Sr. Anna Mary on 30th December of the same year. They suffered from phthisis. When they were still conscious they made their confession, received the last sacraments and the Holy Communion with great reverence and slept in the Lord Jesus, their heavenly bridegroom.

So, the two of us still alive – Sr. Anna Cecilia and myself Sr. Anna Bernadette – made our three days retreat to commemorate the great event and thank the Lord, who in His great bounty and love poured His blessings and graces upon us 25 years ago. This great day of celebration was on 25th November 1922. There was Holy Mass in the Cathedral where we renewed our vows. As we came out of the Cathedral, the band played the welcome music for us even as there was a firework display. The great rejoicing resounded to the heavens and the netherworld. All people gathered for the occasion were happy. All thanked the Lord in unison for His great gifts and graces. We were privileged to write down below the gifts we received at this occasion:

S.N.	Name of the Person	Amount or Gift Received
1.	The Diocesan Fathers	Rs. 100/-
2.	The Loreto Sisters	Rs. 100/-
3.	Father Joseph Van Gerven S.J.	One paddle sewing machine
4.	Father G. Boswell	Church items like incense, seven-pocket candle-stand, coloured candle, lamp-stand with the picture of the sacred heart of Jesus and Mary, two boxes of one foot long each with the beautiful candle prints of Jesus and Mary, two boxes of 8 inches long each with candles and three inches long beautiful candle brought from Kolkota.
5.	The Women of lace school	Rs.26/-
6.	Father Louis Cardon S.J.	Rs. 25/-
7.	Father Van Lemberghe S.J. of Manresa House	Two bronze flower vases
8.	The Ursuline Mother Superior	10 booklets on catechism with question and answer
9.	Ursuline Convent School Girls	Song, welcome address and bouquet of flowers
10.	Ursuline Convent Teachers	A big bronze pot
11.	St. John's High School Boys	a beautiful welcome address, bouquet of flowers, a small statue of the Sacred Heart and a piece of paper from each boy mentioning the number of prayers and intentions to be offered for us. These pieces of paper were presented in bundles from every class.
12.	The Catholic brethren	Beautiful song, welcome address, bouquet of flowers and a Hindi drama in the evening in the hall of the Ursuline convent.

In the second half of the day, there was a solemn benediction in the Cathedral. It concluded the Silver Jubilee celebrations with *Te Deum*.³² This is how the young and the old thanked the Lord together for His bountiful graces with great love, reverence, praise and gratitude. The silver jubilee was celebrated amidst great pomp and rejoicing.

We the humble and poor Sisters of St. Anne thanked all the Fathers, Sisters and all the young and the old present for the occasion, for they did everything possible to make the great event successful. We assured them that we would not forget their love and service and that we would pray for them in return for God's favours and graces. We spoke to them the words of Jesus: "Whatever you did to the least of my brethren, you did it to me" and said that if He assured us to give to us the joys of heaven, when a cup of water was offered to anyone in his name, then the Lord Jesus would certainly reward them abundantly for all their works of love and mercy.

Silver Jubilee of the First Profession

We also described a while ago that we took our first profession on 8th April 1901. So there was also a plan to celebrate the silver jubilee of our first profession on 8th April 1926. Everything was planned and ready for the occasion, but the Omniscient God had willed it otherwise. What we had proposed, He disposed according to His inscrutable ways. Before we realized, a great tragedy befell us. Our great teacher, foster father and benefactor Rev. Father Alphonse Schaerlaeken S.J. fell sick with pneumonia and passed away in just seven days. His death was so sudden that we could not express our sorrow and grief in proper words. Since God alone was the master of joy and sorrow, we only praised Him always in every way.

It was Rev. Fr. Fredrick Peal S.J. who took the place of Fr. Schaerlaeken S.J., our dear teacher and foster father. We were very glad to have him as our mentor and guide. We thanked the Lord for this new appointee, who was so well known to us. He was the same Father who used to give us religious instructions daily when we were studying as school girls under the Loreto Sisters. When there was a terrible epidemic and famine in 1895-1896, many people were in great distress. Then all the Fathers residing in Manresa House had come forward to meet the physical and spiritual needs of the epidemic and famine affected people. Rev. Father F. Peal S.J. was one of them.

Finally at the advice of Fr. Peal, we celebrated the silver jubilee of our First Profession on 27th May 1926, for which the arrangements had been made since 8th April of the same year. Both of us Sisters made our three days retreat and prepared ourselves to celebrate this great event. Rev. Fr. J. Van Lemberghe SJ, the Rector of Manresa House offered the high mass in our small chapel and Rev. Fr. Peal assisted him. There were four seminarians too as altar boys for the occasion. Both of us Sisters renewed our vows. There was a special prayer for us before the final gospel and the blessing with the holy water. The same day during the holy mass and the solemn benediction at 3.00 O'clock in the afternoon, the seminarians sang the hymns including the *Te Deum*. Three Ursuline Sisters were also present at the holy mass and the solemn benediction that day.

³² We thank you O God.

After the Loreto Sisters went away from this beautiful land of Chotanagpur, they were not able to come to us and share our joys. It was not that they forgot us or that they did not love us. It was not so. On our part we had invited them cordially through our loving letters. We came to know the reason of their absence – they could not come without the permission of their superiors. So they could be present only through their mind and heart. And to express their participation in the celebration, Mother Provincial of the Loretos sent Rs. 100/- to us through the kind care of the old dear Ursuline Sisters who were present for the occasion. Mother Superior of the Ursulines, Rev. Antonia gave to us a memorial gift – a pair of big and flowery bronze lamp-stands. They were used only at the benediction on solemnities. We thanked all the Fathers, the Sisters and the seminarians from the bottom of our hearts for all their services and compliments. We prayed to the Lord earnestly that He rewarded them all abundantly on our behalf.

The Great Fr. Peal

Rev. Fr. Fredrick Peal S.J. gave his services to us from 4th April 1926 to 28th December 1933. During these seven years and eight months, he took utmost care of the temporal and spiritual needs of the Daughters of St. Anne. With him we were like small chicks under the wings of the mother hen. He was very courageous and hardworking. Whatever be the affliction or calamity, he would never tire or retreat from any enterprise out of fear. He was ever ready to accomplish any undertaking in the best possible way. His biggest virtue was that despite sadness and suffering, he always showed himself to be happy, cheerful and busy. He wanted others also to imbibe his spirit of loving kindness and sweet speech. He encouraged people through his advice and example and lifted the spirits of those who were broken hearted physically and spiritually. He did his best to instill deep faith, hope and charity in us through his countless instructions on the life of the Lord Jesus, the Immaculate Mother Mary and the biographies of saints. He used to tell us repeatedly:

“Look dear Sisters; this world is temporary, but don’t ever think that you can sit in a car or train and reach heaven faster through a shortcut. On the contrary, you must battle against the Satan, the world and especially against all concupiscence and temptations of the body. Then only you will get the prized crown of victory.”

Thus Fr. Peal strengthened our weak minds and filled our hearts with peace and joy often with peals of laughter. There shone many other extraordinary virtues in Fr. Peal.

But we lived under his guidance and protection only for a few years. We were extremely sorry and sad to lose such a loving Father. But what could we do and how can we ever pay back for his immense love and services. Our prayers will certainly ever be with him with deep love and gratitude.

He was transferred to St. Stanislaus College, Sitagarha in Hazaribagh on 28th December 1933 by his Superiors in accordance with the will of God. He had hardly lived there for a year, when one day he suddenly became unconscious and was bedridden for 2-3 days. He died soon thereafter on 5th October 1934. He spent his whole life praising God and saving countless souls. So the Lord Jesus will certainly reward him according to his own promises:

“You certainly were an honest and faithful servant. Since you were faithful in small matters, I will reward you greatly. Come and share in your master’s happiness”.

He bequeathed all his ordination gifts to us after his death: a beautiful and sparkling chasuble for mass including one beautiful stole, surplice, alb, chalice, ciborium, monstrance and a veil for the benediction. He left them all for us the poor Daughters of St. Anne. Besides these, he gave to us the Sisters, the working girls and the servants of Soso, the whole year’s expenses and provisions like rice, *dal*, salt, sugar, tea and kerosene oil to mention a few.

Chapter - VII Witnesses Who Knew Her

Mother Anna Mary Bernadette was by nature very cheerful, had a lot of patience and knew how to take good decisions. She was also a good reader and writer. She was often seen reading and writing by other St. Anne's Sisters, novices and postulants. She offered her prayers, made confessions and received the Holy Communion frequently, as if these were the last acts of her life. After receiving the Holy Communion, she prayed so intensely as if she was encountering Jesus face to face. She was gifted with many qualities to offer herself as an instrument of God and His mission. Her life was a witness to the love of Jesus, for her performance was better and better for the sake of His love. She was a great example for every religious, especially for the Sisters of her Congregation. One feels that she is still alive and active through her teaching, charism and spirituality. She inspires everyone who follows Jesus. She knew Him intimately, loved Him ardently and followed Him closely, according to the spirituality of St. Ignatius of Loyola, who has also been the spiritual father of the Daughters of St. Anne. She was a great lady before joining the religious life, and afterwards an example par excellence of enthusiasm, dynamism, holiness and commitment. Her crowning glory was to become the founder of the Congregation of the Daughters of St. Anne.

During the last days of her life, she was kept at Soso to recover from her illness. She was physically very weak and became seriously ill. Consequently she was brought to the Mother House at St. Anne's Convent, Purulia Road. She had an unbearable pain. But she never uttered a word of complaint. She never went against the plan of God. She offered every bit of pain to Jesus. She used to say; "comparing to the suffering of Jesus, my suffering is very little." This made her a living saint. Towards the end of her life she felt that Jesus was indeed calling her, for which she had long been ready. That was why she used to sing or hum the hymn "I hear thy welcome voice" in Hindi so often. She really meant it what she sang as the lyrics of the hymn indicate.

1. I hear thy welcome voice
That calls me Lord to thee
For cleansing in thy precious blood
That flowed on Calvary

2. Though coming weak and vile
Thou dost my strength assure
Thou dost my vileness fully cleanse
Till spotless all and pure

Ch. I am coming Lord
Coming now to thee
Wash me, cleanse me in thy blood
That flowed on Calvary

3. Tis Jesus calls me on
To perfect faith and love
To perfect hope and peace and trust
For earth and heaven above

4. Tis Jesus who confirms
The blessed work within
By adding grace to welcome grace
Where reigned the power of sin.

5. All hail atoning blood
All hail redeeming grace
All hail the gift of Christ our Lord
Our strength and righteousness

A few weeks before she passed away, she lost her speech. She died because of her old age and bouts of tuberculosis at the Mother House on the Purulia Road, Ranchi at the age of 83 on 16th April 1961. She served her congregation and the local church for 64 years. May her soul rest in peace.

Blessed are you, Mother Anna Mary Bernadette
Blessed are your meekest works, the Lord exalted
Blessed are you, the founder of God's little band
Blessed are your privileged Daughters of St. Anne

The Glossary

- Anchal : End and the front-top piece of the *Sari* worn by a woman.
- Bari Maa : Wife of the elder uncle.
- Basia Noatoli : The two villages Basia and Noatoli are about 120 km from Ranchi city to the South. It is a well-established parish in Gumla diocese, Jharkhand.
- Bhuinhari : Corporate land tenure system among the Uraons who were the original settlers in the village.
- Brahamby : A village about 20 km from Ranchi to the West on the Daltonganj road. It comes under Mandar parish of Ranchi Archdiocese.
- Chechari : Local name given to an Uraon region covering the districts of Palamau, Latehar and some parts of Gumla district in Jharkhand.
- Chotanagpur : In the late 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries Chotanagpur was part of the Bengal Presidency. After the Independence of India in 1947, it was Southern part of the State of Bihar known as the tribal region. Since 15th November 2000 it has become the new State of Jharkhand.
- Dal : Local name for pulses eaten at meals as an essential item with rice and curry.
- Derakhana : A house for temporary stay normally in the mission compound.
- Dighia : A village and a well established parish under Ranchi archdiocese in Jharkhand. Fr. Lievens started the Uraon mission from Dighia, which is close to Mandar.
- Doranda : It was a locality in Ranchi known for the military regiment in the late 19th century. Prior to the statehood of Jharkhand Doranda had the Headquarters of Bihar Military Police, but today it is the Headquarters of the Jharkhand Armed Police. Initially Fr. Lievens worked from here. Today it has a parish and is part of Ranchi urban conglomeration.
- Gaibeera : A village and a well established parish under Rouerkela diocese in Orissa.
- Ghunghat : A slight covering of a woman's head by the end and the front portion of her *Sari*. This covering is done in deference to respectable and elderly men when talking to them or passing by them.
- Ginabahr : A village and a parish under Jashpur Diocese in Chhattisgarh. Earlier it was in the State of Madhya Pradesh

Hamirpur	:	A village and a well established parish under Rourkela diocese in Orissa.
Jagir, Jagirdars:		Landed estates given by kings / emperors to prominent non-tribals called <i>Jagirdars</i> in lieu of their allegiance to them and the tributes and taxes in cash or in kind paid in return.
Jashpur	:	A district town of erstwhile Madhya Pradesh State, but now in the new State of Chhattisgarh since Nov. 1 st 2000.
Jashpur Tapkara:		A village and a well established parish under Jashpur diocese in Chhattisgarh.
Kachcha house:		Mud house
Karra	:	A village and a well established parish under Khunti diocese in Jharkhand.
Katkahi	:	A village and a parish about 160 km from Ranchi to the South West under Gumla diocese in Jharkhand.
Kharia	:	One of the top 30 tribes of Jharkhand
Khuntkatti	:	Corporate land tenure system among the Mundas by the original settlers of the village.
Khunti	:	A rural locality about 28 km from Ranchi city to the South. Today it is a semi urban area with the Head Quarters of Khunti diocese in Jharkhand.
Kispotta	:	Surname in the Uraon tribe under the name of this clan. It literally means intestine of a swine.
Kolkota	:	Earlier known as Calcutta.
Kurdeg	:	A village about 180 km from Ranchi city to the South. It is a well established parish under Simdega diocese in Jharkhand.
Lachragarh	:	A village and a well established parish under Simdega diocese in Jharkhand.
Mahuadanr	:	A village and a well established parish under Daltonganj diocese in Chechari, Jharkhand.
Majhatoli	:	A village and a parish about 120 km from Ranchi to the South West under Gumla diocese in Jharkhand.
Mandar	:	A village and a well established parish under Ranchi archdiocese in Jharkhand. The villages Sargaon, Susai and Brahamby come under this parish.

Marwa	:	Traditional marriage tent made out of poles and branches in the courtyards of the bride and the bridegroom.
Mata	:	Mother, an honorific title given to the Sr. Superior.
Mora	:	Rice granary made of thickly plaited ropes of straw. Its cylindrical shape is about 2 to 3 feet in diameter and about 3-4 feet in height. Its head and bottom are closed with the plaited straw ropes and is kept vertically erect. This indigenous rice granary contains 40 to 50 kg of rice depending upon the size. It's airtight and well protected from rats and moths.
Morpai	:	A locality at Kolkota in West Bengal, the first Head Quarters of the St. Anne's of Calcutta.
Munda	:	One of the top 30 tribes of Jharkhand
Nawadih	:	A village and a parish about 165 km from Ranchi to the South West under Gumla diocese in Jharkhand.
Pagan relatives:	:	Non-Christian relations of the same socio-cultural background.
Paisa	:	The smallest denomination of the Indian Rupee.
Pathalkudwa	:	A locality in central Ranchi
Puspus	:	A carriage pulled by five or six coolies in olden days.
Phthisis	:	This sickness is caused by vitamin 'A' deficiency causing blindness and death in advance cases.
Ranchi	:	In the late 19 th and the early decades of 20 th centuries, Ranchi was a semi urban village. Today it is the capital of Jharkhand.
Rengarih	:	A village about 170 km from Ranchi city to the South. Today it is a well established parish under Simdega dioceses in Jharkhand.
Rickshaw	:	A tricycle carriage
Sadri	:	A local dialect of the Chotanagpur region.
Samtoli	:	A village about 150 km from Ranchi city to the south. Today it is a semi urban area with the Head Quarters of the Simdega diocese, Jharkhand.
Sari	:	Indian apparel of finely woven long sheet worn by women
Sauteli Maa	:	Stepmother.

- Siromtoli : A locality between the Club Road and the Station Road in Ranchi today.
- Soso : A village about 110 km from Ranchi city to the South West. It is a well established parish under Gumla diocese in Jharkhand.
- Susai : A village on the riverside before reaching Sargaon. Both Susai and Sargaon villages are in Mandar parish. Today of course, Sargaon is a mass Centre looked after by Mandar parish.
- Te Deum : Initial of the Latin hymn “We Thank You God...”
- Tharpakhna : A locality in central Ranchi.
- The Red Lodge: The first settlement of the Loreto Sisters in Ranchi. It stood in the premises where today the Ursuline Sisters have a convent and school on the Purulia Road.
- Tongo : A village about 140 km from Ranchi city to the South West. Today it is a well established parish under Gumla diocese in Jharkhand.
- Torpa : The first mission area of Fr. Lievens among the Mundas. It is 75 km south of Ranchi town. Today it is also a well established parish under Khunti Diocese in Jharkhand.
- Uraon : One of the top 30 tribes of Jharkhand. It is also spelt as Oraon.
- Zamindar : A non-tribal landlord installed by the British in Chotanagpur according to the Permanent Settlement of Tenures in 1773.

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