



St. Vincent College
(Affiliated to Savitribai Phule Pune University)
Pune -411037

Title of the Event	Rural Immersion Programme – AICUF, St. Vincent College		
Date of the Event	July 22–24, 2025	Place of the event	Pathardi Village, Nagar District
Objectives of the Event	The Rural Immersion Programme aimed to foster social awareness, empathy, and experiential learning among students by immersing them in the socio-cultural, ecological, and economic realities of rural Maharashtra, with a focus on community-led development, cultural preservation, and sustainable livelihoods.		
Name/s of the Resource Persons	Dr. Gilbi John & Fr. Sunil Gaikwad		
A short narration of the program			
<p>Rural Immersion Programme – AICUF, St. Vincent College</p> <p>From July 22 to 24, 2025, the All India Catholic University Federation (AICUF) unit of St. Vincent College organized a deeply reflective and experiential Rural Immersion Programme in Pathardi village, located in the drought-prone Nagar district of Maharashtra. Designed as a pedagogical journey beyond the classroom, the three-day immersion sought to cultivate social consciousness, empathetic understanding, and grounded awareness of rural realities among undergraduate students. The program was coordinated under the guidance of Dr. Gilbi John, faculty member and AICUF mentor, whose thoughtful facilitation helped students move from observation to critical reflection throughout the experience.</p> <p>The group was warmly welcomed and hosted by Fr. Sunil, S.J., a Jesuit priest and long-standing social worker deeply embedded in the community. Serving as both guide and mentor, Fr. Sunil provided a comprehensive orientation to the village’s socio-ecological context, with particular emphasis on the Karanji Watershed Program—a community-driven initiative that has become a model for participatory water conservation and sustainable land management in semi-arid regions. Students learned how collective action, traditional knowledge, and scientific planning have revived groundwater levels, enabled year-round agriculture, and strengthened local resilience against climate vulnerability. This case study underscored the power of grassroots development and the interdependence of environmental stewardship and economic dignity.</p>			



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The immersion extended beyond environmental initiatives into the cultural and social fabric of Pathardi. In Kumbharwada, students visited local potters, observing traditional craftsmanship and engaging in conversations about the challenges of sustaining artisanal livelihoods in an era of industrialization and declining demand. They also met members of the Dombari community, a historically marginalized group of traditional acrobats and folk performers. Through storytelling, song, and dialogue, the Dombari shared their rich intangible heritage alongside the systemic barriers they face in preserving their identity, accessing education, and securing dignified livelihoods. These encounters prompted students to reflect on issues of cultural erasure, social exclusion, and the need for inclusive development.

Further enriching the experience, students visited institutions run by the Medical Mission Sisters, who operate a neonatal care unit and a girls' hostel in the village. The Sisters spoke about their decades-long commitment to maternal and child health, gender equity, and educational access for rural girls—highlighting how faith-based service can catalyze long-term social transformation. Students observed the integration of healthcare, education, and community outreach in a resource-constrained setting, gaining insight into the quiet yet profound work of care and advocacy.

The program also included a practical session on horticulture farming, led by local cultivators who demonstrated organic farming techniques, crop diversification, and water-efficient irrigation methods. Students learned how horticulture—particularly the cultivation of fruits, vegetables, and medicinal plants—offers a viable pathway to income generation, nutritional security, and ecological sustainability in smallholder farming systems. The session emphasized the importance of local knowledge, market linkages, and cooperative models in enhancing rural livelihoods.

Evenings were dedicated to guided reflection, where students processed their daily experiences through group discussions, journaling, and shared insights. These sessions, facilitated by Dr. Gilbi John and Fr. Sunil, encouraged students to connect personal observations with broader themes of justice, solidarity, and ethical responsibility.

The Rural Immersion Programme was not conceived as a short-term outreach or service project, but as a transformative learning space—one that disrupts urban-centric perspectives and invites students into a



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deeper relationship with the realities, wisdom, and struggles of rural India. By centering community voices, honoring indigenous knowledge, and exposing structural inequities, the program aligned with St. Vincent College's Jesuit mission of forming "men and women for and with others." It affirmed that true education begins not only with knowledge, but with presence, humility, and a willingness to be changed by the encounter.

Name of the Collaborating Agency	AICUF
Learning Outcomes of the Event for the Participants	Students developed a nuanced understanding of rural challenges and resilience through direct engagement with farmers, artisans, marginalized communities, and grassroots institutions; they cultivated critical reflection on issues of equity, sustainability, and social justice, moving beyond theoretical knowledge to embodied learning.
Learning Outcomes for the Organizing team	The AICUF faculty and coordinators deepened their capacity to design and facilitate transformative, community-centered immersion experiences, strengthened partnerships with local change-makers like Fr. Sunil and the Medical Mission Sisters, and reaffirmed the role of experiential pedagogy in nurturing socially conscious graduates.
No. of Participants	21 Students and 2 faculty members
Faculty in Charge	Dr. Gilbi John
Documents Attached	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Attendance Sheet2. Geotag photographs3. Resume of resource persons if any4. Copy of remuneration paid if any5. Notice of the event6. Thank you letter to the resource persons