Voices of Sisters
Ministry
Migration



Woman perform a welcome dance for the Kiran Niketan Social Centre's celebration of International Women's Day on March 8 in Sancoale, Goa, India. (Courtesy of Molly Fernandes)



by Sr. Molly Fernandes

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Kiran Niketan is one of the social centres started by the Congregation of the Sisters of Holy Family of Nazareth. It is in Sancoale, Goa, India, established in 1986 on a plateau contaminated by the Birla Zuari fertilizer industries.

Located at Lamani colony of Birla, Zuarinagar, Sancoale, Goa, the center is a ray of light to three slum areas of Birla. In the heart of the slums, it has completed 25 years of yeomen services to the marginalized and deprived migrants.

The slums of Zuarinagar are mainly inhabited by migrants from different parts of India who come to Goa in search of a better future. The males are usually involved in seasonal work on daily wages and some are employed in factories. Girl children and women are considered of little importance. Most girls are forced to drop out of school to look after younger siblings or take care of domestic chores, and many are given in marriage at a very early age.

Besides the celebration of national and international days, the center conducts regular programs for the underprivileged. Over the last two years, many programs were conducted to create awareness on COVID-19: best practices, health and hygiene, fundamental rights and free medical camps. These have helped the people survive the scare of the deadly disease.



Holy Family of Nazareth Sr. Phileshin D'Souza receives the Red Ribbon Award for the Kiran Niketan Social Centre's work with children and adolescents living with HIV. (Courtesy of Molly Fernandes)

Director Sr. Phileshin D'Souza proved her mettle during COVID-19, working on the front lines — standing tall, empowering and encouraging the dimmed spirit of the migrants and underprivileged. With the help of other Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth, volunteers, the Nirman nongovernmental organization, and the St. Vincent de Paul Society, she provided rations, masks and coaching classes for children even when the area was under quarantine and classified as a red zone.

D'Souza likes to quote, "Empowering women is a key which will build the future we want," and says that this is one of the aims of Kiran Niketan Social Centre.

To recognize and appreciate womanhood, the center celebrated International Women's Day on March 8 with the theme "Woman: a unique creation of God." To mark this day, various activities were held for women, such as handicraft, *rangoli* (painting on floors) and food dish preparation competitions, which let them present their talents, expertise and creativity.

Vanja Dwarki, one of the participants, said "The various competitions gave us the opportunity to exhibit our talents and gain confidence that we too can do something. We are very happy, as we never got such opportunity."

Altogether, there were 40 participants from the locality. We got three Jesuit priests to judge the competitions; they appreciated the hard work, artistry and gifts of the migrant women.



Three Jesuit priests judged handicraft and cooking competitions for the migrant women during the Kiran Niketan Social Centre's celebration of International Women's Day on March 8 in Sancoale, Goa, India. (Courtesy of Molly Fernandes)

Over the years, the center has developed 11 self-help groups. The first half of the day was spent exhibiting their talents and creativity, and the second half consisted of a stunning cultural program organized by the women in the groups.

Saroja, the president of the self-help groups, joyously said, "Through the self-help groups, we came to know a lot of things. Especially, we saw the talents and potentialities of a woman which were otherwise limited to household chores." She credited D'Souza for her encouragement and support, especially in letting the groups use the center for their activities and programs.

Devibai Rathod commented that the yearly exhibition and sale helps them exhibit their inner potential, and Laxmi Lamani, leader of one of the self-help groups, said, "The self-help groups made us self-reliant by collecting money and earning a saving on it. We also help the women in need and try to solve their problems."

Several dignitaries attended the program: Sr. Berna Rodrigues, the superior general of the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth; other sisters of our congregation; and several local women business owners. The women welcomed the guests in the Indian way, by putting *chandan* on their forehead and offering them a bouquet of flowers.



Rangoli artwork — paintings in the floor — created by the women of Kiran Niketan Social Centre in Sancoale, Goa, India (Photos courtesy of Molly Fernandes)

Noor Bi Shaikh from the Goan Domestic Workers Union, Porvorim Goa, gave an inspiring talk on gender inequality and domestic workers rights, making the women

aware of women's rights, the injustices done toward them, and the steps needed to overcome such injustice and violence in order to fulfil their dreams. She also promised help in times of need.

There are many other programs offered through the center. For example, AIDS awareness programs and regular checkups are held there, with AIDS patients directed to the AIDS Control Society for follow up. The Human Touch Foundation recognized Kiran Niketan Social Centre on World AIDS Day, Nov. 30, 2021, for its help in overcoming barriers and responding to the needs of children and adolescents living with HIV. They gave D'Souza the "Red Ribbon Award 2021."

The center also runs a dispensary where those testing positive for tuberculosis are kept on directly observed treatment; they come to the dispensary regularly for that treatment. The goal of the national tuberculosis elimination program is to eliminate TB completely. In appreciation for its role in monitoring TB patients and following up by providing directly observed treatment, the National Tuberculosis Elimination Programme recognized the center on World TB Day March 24.

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They were also recognized on Women's Day by the Junior Chamber International Dabolim, who honored D'Souza for her outstanding contributions to society in the field of social work.

"I feel for the struggle the girls and women go through, when they share their problems with me, and I want to lift them up to their deserved status," says D Souza.

I am moved to see our sisters engaged in frontier ministries, willing to work in unclean conditions, soiling their hands for the glory of God. I feel blessed to have them as members who are so promising, who walk that extra mile, and who are ready to journey — like the Samaritan woman who encountered Christ and went to the village to share her experience and became his close follower — and like the good Samaritan, who saw the need of the foreigner and cared for him.

"From the well to the inn," they move from passion to compassion. Having themselves been touched by the Lord, they move out of their comfort zone to be that merciful face of the Lord and fulfil his command, "Whatever you do to the least

of my brethren, you do it unto me" (Matthew 25:40).

Yes, in them I see the joy of being fruitful.