News
Ministry



Sr. Sufola Margaret Minj, an Oraon Indigenous woman from the Thakurgaon District in Bangladesh, is now in charge of a girls' hostel. (GSR photo/Stephan Uttom Rozario)



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The Catechist Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Queen of Angels, popularly known as Shanti Rani ("Queen of Peace") Sisters, are bringing benefits to the advancement of women's education and vocations by running girls' hostels in the tribally populated northern Dinajpur Diocese of Bangladesh.

Shanti Rani Sisters in Bangladesh are providing space for primary and higher education girls in 17 hostels, offering educational opportunities as well as cultural and religious education. Shanti Rani Sisters run 17 girls' hostels around the country, most in the Dinajpur Diocese. The hostels are operated at a low cost, but in special cases, girls are allowed to receive education for free.

"The moral education, cultural knowledge, religious education and academic education that I have received from Shanti Rani Sisters to shape my life is now applied in every aspect of my practical life," Sathi Terejina Tirki, an Indigenous Catholic, told GSR.

Tirki, 27, has worked as a nurse in a government hospital since 2021 and financially supports her family.

At the age of 5, Tirki moved to a Shanti Rani Sisters' hostel and was admitted to primary school. Her father died after two years of studies. Being from a very poor family, Tirki was taken home by her mother. After staying at home for a year, the sisters found her and brought her to the hostel.



Sathi Terejina Tirki takes care of her patients at a rural government hospital. (GSR photo/Stephan Uttom Rozario)

"How the sisters found me, a girl from a remote area, is not possible without the plan of God and the sincerity of the sisters. If they had not brought me, I would never have reached the position I am in today," Tirki said.

Sr. Sufola Margaret Minj, an Oraon Indigenous woman from the Thakurgaon District in the Dinajpur Diocese, was a boarder at a Shanti Rani Sisters' hostel during her early life, beginning her educational life there.

"I studied at the hostel," Minj told GSR. "I was in grade one then. When I saw the sisters, their clothes attracted me. It seemed to me that these sisters were direct representatives of God and that there was a touch of holiness in them."

Minj is now in charge of a hostel run by the sisters. "Happily I have experienced both hostel life and outside of hostel life. So I am very lucky that I got the responsibility of the hostel again. So it was the hostel that inspired me to become a sister."

About 15 years ago, 60% of the sisters in Minj's community were from hostels. That number has now decreased. Minj thinks that because families are smaller now, many girls finish their studies in hostels and instead of becoming sisters, they take on the responsibility of looking after their parents.



New students come to the Shantirani Hostel in Dhaka, Bangladesh. (GSR photo/Stephan Uttom Rozario)

Terki said she and many others who were in the hostel with her who studied nursing have now taken on the responsibilities of their parents and siblings.

"I, my younger sister, several girlfriends, and many of the elders who were in the hostel are now doing good jobs and looking after their families. Which would not have been possible had we not been in the hostel."

However, Terki thinks that one can preach the message of Christ and serve people without being a sister.

"First of all, I am serving people as a professional nurse," Terki said. "And, there are no Christian people in the hospital where I work, so when they found out that I am a Christian, they asked about our religion, I told them the word of God and still do. I am very happy about it."

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According to Minj, the education rate among tribal girls is close to 20% and the rate of child marriage is high. Hostels are the best place of hope for girls' education.

According to the Bangladesh Catholic Directory-2023, there are 72,000 Catholics in the Dinajpur Diocese and six types of tribes, mostly Catholic, in the area.

Dinajpur Diocese's Justice and Peace Commission secretary Fr. Antony Sen thinks that the sisters are not only invaluable in their role in educating girls but also in spreading the message of Christ.

"Now the Shanti Rani Sisters are going on a continuous mission, ministering to those who have been initiated into Christ. And to those who have not yet reached the message of Christ, they are listening to the word of God, giving service," Sen said.

Just as Tirki will never forget the contribution of the sisters in her life, she extends a helping hand to others when she gets the opportunity.

"I got my new life from the sisters, God, my parents, and then the Shanti Rani Sisters' contribution to my life. So I will help those poor people who cannot study through the sisters if I have the opportunity and ability." Terki told GSR.