



Apostolic Carmel Sr. Maria Nirmalini, the head of the Conference of Women Religious India, meets with Abhijeet Dipke, the leader of the Gen Z movement in India, at a protest rally at Jantar Mantar, New Delhi, on July 23. (Courtesy of Maria Nirmalini)



by Thomas Scaria

[View Author Profile](#)

[**Join the Conversation**](#)

Mangaluru, India — October 14, 2026

[Share on Bluesky](#)[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)

Catholic nuns are supporting India's young people as they struggle to reform the country's educational system and hold the government accountable.

"We stand with the youth in their fight for justice," said Sr. Maria Nirmalini, leader of India's more than 100,000 Catholic nuns, as thousands of young people have demonstrated throughout the country since early June.

The 61-year-old Apostolic Carmel nun met the protesters in New Delhi to pledge her people's solidarity with the youth movement.

The youth movement was led by the Cockroach Janata Party, a satirical political movement founded on May 16 by Abhijeet Dipke, a political communications strategist and Boston University graduate.

Nirmalini said she met Dipke on July 23 at Jantar Mantar, the main protest venue in the nation's capital. She told Global Sisters Report that most members of the Conference of Women Religious India are also participating in education and youth empowerment activities. "Their anger is ours too," she added.

The first phase of the protests ended July 25 when the federal government conceded to the youth's demands, including the resignation of Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, 10 million rupees (US\$104,000) in compensation for 21 students who died by suicide following the cancellation of a national-level examination to select students for medical seats, and withdrawal of police cases against protesting students.

The youth resumed the second phase of the protests in the New Delhi streets on Oct. 2*, demanding the resignation of the chief election commissioner, who was blamed for removing over 130 million people from the voters list in India to support the ruling party.

The protests, backed by the opposition parties, later spread to other parts of the country.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India on Oct. 6 expressed their solidarity with the protesters who demand restoration of democracy, and strongly condemned the commission for deleting millions of voters as part of the Special Intensive Revision.

This is a "highly dangerous trend for our democracy," a statement from the Indian bishops said.

Nirmalini observed that most protesting youth, such as Dipke, were educated in church-run institutions that promote nonviolence, peace, brotherhood and other Christian values.

She said corruption and disruption prevalent in the educational system have hindered such efforts.

The immediate provocation for the youth's anger was the cancellation of the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test, which selects candidates for medical studies, because of a massive question paper leak. About 2 million students sat for the exam on May 3 after a year of hard work and preparation.

Following the cancellation of the exam, 21 students died by suicide.

"The youth are frustrated as their future seems bleak, with the education system politicized and examination manipulated," Sr. Severine Menezes, a youth animator in Mangaluru, southwestern India, told GSR on Aug 15, India's 80th Independence Day.

"They are still fighting for their true freedom and dignity even after 80 years of independence from colonial rule," said Menezes, a 58-year-old member of the Congregation of St. Ann of Providence.

Sidharth Jayakrishnan, a protester in Bengaluru, southern India, told GSR that many entrance tests and job opportunities were auctioned at open markets.

With more than 371 million people between 15 and 29, India has the world's largest youth population. Nearly 65% of India's 1.4 billion people are under 35.

"Youth can contribute substantially to the growth of India if they are trusted and involved. But they are belittled as cockroaches and parasites," Menezes said.

The nun was referring to remarks by India's chief justice, Surya Kant, during a court hearing on May 15, when he referred to jobless youngsters as cockroaches.

An upset Dipke formed his movement a day after Kant's remarks.

"Yes, we are cockroaches who can creep into every nook and corner and assert our presence, question the corrupt system and reject the authority who sidelines us," said Sajeesh Paulose, a Catholic who attended the protests in Bengaluru.

The movement gathered more than 22 million followers on Instagram in four days.

Advertisement

The Jantar Mantar protest first took a significant turn on June 18 when police forcefully removed Sonam Wangchuk, an education reformer. Wangchuk had been on a hunger strike for 20 days to demand justice for the student when he was detained.

Wangchuk's detention brought thousands to Jantar Mantar to march to the Parliament House on July 20. The police forcibly resisted the march.

Social media videos of the attack showed the police using batons with nails and screws to hit the protesters. They also used pellet guns, wounding many.

Several church groups, including the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India and the Conference of Religious in India, condemned the attack and pledged support to the youth.

The bishops' body expressed "profound anguish" over the attacks and called the youth "the true future of this nation, who took to the streets with legitimate demands for urgent accountability and reforms in our education system."

"We share your pain, hear your voices, and echo your righteous cry for a transparent and just education system," the bishops' statement said, reacting to the police action.

The Conference of Religious India described the police action as "unprovoked and unwarranted."

Presentation Sr. Dorothy Fernandes, a social activist, said the youth protest was a natural reaction to a "faulty education system, corruption and unemployment."

The youth's fight was not just for the minister's resignation but for their future.

"The Gen Z protest has given Indians a ray of hope and courage," Fernandes told GSR.

Nirmalini commended the youth for their spirit and resilience in India to shape a better future, not allowing caste or creed to stand in their way.

**This story has been updated to correct the launch date of the second wave of protests.*