News



Sr. Bibha Kerketta (Courtesy photo)

by Matters India

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A Catholic nun's first home visit after her religious profession has ended in a tragedy in the central Indian state of Chhattisgarh.

Sr. Bibha Kerketta was arrested on June 6 and jailed along with her mother and three others after her family organized a Mass in their home to thank God for her

profession in the Daughters of St. Anne congregation.

A group of Hindu fundamentalists, who barged into the house, accused her mother and others for conducting a healing session and insulting other religions.

However, Christian groups deny the allegation and say the evening Mass was attended by the nuns' relatives, friends and neighbors who are Catholics.

Kerketta took her first vows in the congregation based in Ranchi, capital of neighboring Jharkhand state, six months ago. However, she could come home at Balachhapar, a village in Jashpur district, only after a course in English and Hindi, a senior nun told Matters India on condition of anonymity.

The nun said the family had not conducted a healing session or preaching as the Hindu radicals alleged.

The arrested include Kerketta's mother and three others. "The police are searching for others who attended the Mass," she added.

The Dainik Jagran, a Hindi newspaper widely circulated in northern India, on June 7 reported that "the healing session and religious conversion" created a commotion in Jashpur, some 425 km northeast of Raipur, the state capital.

The report also alleged that a healing session was organized in the house of Hiramuni Bai, a resident of the Schoolpara lane in the village. Alerted about the religious program, Zila Panchayat (district council) president Raimuni Bhagat and four others came to the house along with activists of Hindu groups such as Bajrang Dal and Hindu Vahini, a youth group.

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A leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Hindu groups alleged that Kerketta, her mother and others in the congregation humiliated Hindu deities and incited the villagers.

On hearing about the tension, a police team led by office in charge Ravishankar Tiwari came and took the two groups to the police station for questioning.

After this, the police booked Kerketta, her mother and three others under various sections of the anti-conversion law of the state.

They were sent to a jail in Jashpur.

Their bail applications will be taken up on June 13.

Christian leaders in Jashpur said the five were taken to the police station and kept there during the night. The following day they were produced before the court.

One person, the nun's uncle who is visually challenged, was granted bail and others were remanded in custody.

Some 20 people who reached the house slapped the nun's mother and questioned her for becoming Christian. The intruders also threw away a copy of the Bible, a candle stand and a rosary found in the house.

The incident has frightened the local Christians, the Christian leaders say.

Editor's note: *This story was originally published at Matters India.*