

Life and the Art of Encounter of Sr.Apolina Barla



Sr. Apolina Barla in the year of 1986

Biographical Informations

Born	: 07.03. 1942 (age 83)
Pet name	: Junni
Feast day	: 9th February
Patron Saint	: St.Apolina
Parents	: Late. Mathias Barla and Salomi Topno
Place	: Dharnapur, Jharkhand
Tribe	: Adivasi, Munda tribe
Diocese	: Khunti & Mamerla Parish
Schooling	: I-V at Utkranit Taisera School VI-X at Ursuline Convent School, Naotoli
College	: Intermediate - Simdega College
Current living	: St.Mary's Convent, Agiamore, Jharkhand

MOTTO : "WORK FOR THE GLORY OF GOD"

Religious Life

Aspirantate	07.12.1973	At Barpeta Road, Assam
Postulancy	07.12.1975	At Barpeta Road, Assam
Novitiate	07.12.1976	At Peachlands, Shillong
First Vow	08.12.1977	At Peachlands, Shillong
Perpetual Vow	08.12.1982	At Peachlands, Shillong
Jubilee Year	2002	Auxilium Convent, Siliguri

Mission & the Place

St.Mary's Convent, Dibrugarh	Evangelization
St.Mary's Convent, Tetenbari	Evangelization
St.Mary's Convent, Borpukri	Evangelization
St.Mary's Convent, Agiamore	Headmistress & Boarding Assistance
St.Mary's Convent, Doomni	Headmistress & Superior
St.Mary's Convent, Babumahal	Pastoral Sister & Superior
Auxilium Convent, Siliguri	Under medical care
Ferrando Home, Bandel	Assistance
Marianiwas Convent, Boropahari	Evangelization
St.Mary's Convent, Kudda	Evangelization
St. Joseph's Convent, Pindari	Evangelization
St.Mary's Convent, Agiamore	Praying Ministry

Overview

We give thanks to God, the Almighty for the extraordinary life of Sr. Apolina Barla who has dedicated herself fully to her service. For 48 years as a Missionary Sister of Mary Help of Christians (MSMHC), Sr. Apolina has exemplified the virtues of faith, love, humility and obedience. She has been a pillar of strength, a beacon of hope, and a source of inspiration to countless people. With her compassionate heart, selfless dedication, and unwavering commitment to the mission, Sr. Apolina has been a true reflection of God's love in action.

At the age of 83, Sr. Apolina continues to embody the values of her religious vocation with grace and zeal. Her life of simplicity, humility, and service resonates with the words of St. Mother Teresa:

“Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love.”

Through her every word and deed, Sr. Apolina has sown seeds of faith and hope, leaving an indelible mark on the lives of those she has encountered.

Early Life and Family

Born in 1942 during India's fight for independence, Sr. Apolina Barla entered a world marked by challenges and uncertainty.

She was born in Dharnapur, within the Diocese of Khunti, Jharkhand. Her father Mathias Barla was a farmer and led a very simple life. He died due to ill health when she was eight years old; Sr. Apolina's mother Salomi Topno was a home maker and a pious woman. Her brother died less than fifteen days later after his birth. Sr. Apolina is the only daughter to her parents and was affectionately called as 'Junni' by her loved ones. Despite their poverty, her parents were deeply devout and hardworking, nurturing in her a strong foundation of Christian values.





Biographies of the family paint a picture of her as a girl: bubbling with energy, daring, and possessed of an exceptional love for work. After finishing her primary schooling at Taisera from Class I-IV, Sr. Apolina enrolled in Class V at Ursuline Convent School, Naotoli, Jharkhand, and studied there upto Class X.

From a young age, Sr. Apolina demonstrated an innate love for God and a deep sense of compassion for others. Her desire to serve the poor and the marginalized was evident even in her youth, as she began educating children in her village without expecting any monetary reward. The villagers, in turn, expressed their gratitude by offering her sacks of paddy, a simple yet heartfelt gesture of appreciation.



with her Mother

Sr. Apolina says, "When I was younger my mind was always filled with questions like what shall I do in the future?". One day, in answer to these questions, God found a place in her troubled mind through the person of Sr. Scholastica Topno MSMHC, the maternal aunt of Sr. Apolina who, was on her holidays. She was extremely happy over the consent of her aunt to take her along with.

After a month of secret preparation, the young Apolina set out towards Golaghat accompanied her aunt without the knowledge of anyone at home. And the young Apolina stayed in Golaghat as a house helper with much dedication and love. Unfortunately, the mind of this young girl was troubled and disturbed by the request of her beloved mother to return home. A year after, in obedience to her mother, the young Apolina left Golaghat for her home town painfully and gloomily.

After returning to the home town she desired to study and joined for Teacher Training Institutes, in Ratu, Ranchi for two years, and completed it successfully.



Decision to join Religious Life

Sr. Apolina's call to religious life was a gradual yet profound journey. After the completion of her TTC training, her mother wanted her to be a woman of family life. Sr. Apolina surrendered herself to the will of her mother. Thus the first holy step of marriage –the 'engagement' was taken place with a boy totally unknown to her. On the contrary, the Lord of her life wanted her to be the spouse of Him. The troubled young Apolina did not know where to turn. She felt that she lives with an enemy inside her. As young Apolina was bombarded with countless thoughts with overwhelming life situations, financial worries, leading to difficulty concentrating, and negative thoughts while making decisions reminding herself '**am not alone**' but God who created me is all along stood firm.

For the second time, the young Apolina was surrounded by God's grace and mercy through the person of Sr. Scholastica Topno MSMHC. Since then, she was able to overcome the battle in her mind with Christ. Inspired by the visit and the words of encouragement about the Assam Mission and the joy of serving as a missionary, the young Apolina felt a stirring in her heart to dedicate her life to God, and slipped away from the future life partner with whom she had the engagement of marriage. Sadly, her beloved mother became a barrier for the young Apolina in joining the Congregation. When Sr. Scholastica became the answer to all her concerned and confused situations, shedding tears and disobeying her mother, the young Apolina left home for Assam with a heavy heart. And today, her life echoes the words of St. Augustine:

"You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.

The joy of young Apolina doubled as she began her aspirantate in Barpeta Road in the year 1974 and Postulancy in 1975 in the same formation house at Barpeta Road.



Novitiate and Religious Profession

Sr. Apolina Barla entered the novitiate on December 8, 1976, in Shillong at Peachlands, under the guidance of Rev. Sr. Teresa Mathew and Sr. Carmela Lakra. Her novitiate years were a time of deep spiritual formation and growth, during which she wholeheartedly embraced the rules and charism of the MSMHC.

Reflecting on her novitiate, she shared, "I have learned to surrender my life to Jesus and to live for Him alone."



Sr. Apolina with her Novitiate friends



In 1977, she made her First Profession in the presence of Mother Rose Thapa, the then Superior General, committing her life to God's service and the mission of the Church.



Missionary Zeal and Passion

The words of St. Francis Xavier,

“Tell the students to give up their small ambitions and come eastward to preach the Gospel of Christ,”

encapsulate Sr. Apolina's missionary spirit. Her passion for spreading the Gospel took her to Assam, where she was appointed to her first mission station in St. Mary's Convent, Dibrugarh, in 1978. Amid the tribal communities and tea garden workers of Assam, Sr. Apolina Barla embraced her vocation with enthusiasm and determination.



She learned the Oraon (Kurukh) language to encounter people; she immersed herself in serving the marginalized, teaching catechism, and spreading the love of Christ.



Her mission extended to other regions, such as Tentenbari in the year 1979 to 1980, Borpokri in 1982, and Doomni after which she returned back to Kolkata province and worked in different mission stations such as Babumahal, Bandel, Borophari, Kudda, Pindari and Agiamore. Her very presence brought hope and transformation to the lives of many.

Life of Simplicity and Dedication

Sr. Apolina's life is a testament to punctuality for prayer, simplicity and dedication. She approaches every task, no matter how small, with care and love. Her oft-used words, “Sundar se karo re” (Do it beautifully), reflects her commitment to excellence and her belief that every act, when done with love, becomes a form of prayer.

She is a woman of discipline, ensuring that her personal and community prayers are never missed. Whether tending to the garden, preparing for Mass, or fulfilling her community responsibilities, Sr. Apolina embodies the words of St. Therese of Lisieux:

“Our Lord does not look so much at the greatness of our actions, or even at their difficulty, but at the love with which we do them.”

Transformative Mission in Babumahal

In 1991, Sr. Apolina was appointed as a Superior and Pastoral Sister to Babumahal Convent, in the Diocese of Bhagalpur, Bihar. The region was initially home to only a few Catholics, but Sr. Apolina's missionary zeal and unwavering faith transformed the community. She traveled to remote villages, preaching the Gospel and teaching catechetical songs, which attracted many to the faith. Under her leadership, Babumahal grew into a thriving parish, a living testament to her dedication and hard work. Even when faced with challenges, Sr. Apolina remained steadfast in her mission. Her life in Babumahal exemplified her commitment to the Gospel and her unwavering trust in God's providence.

Her Likes and Personality

Sr. Apolina's life is marked by her love for simplicity and her deep connection to nature and animals. She enjoys spending time in the garden, tending to plants with care and joy. Her love for music is evident in the way she uses catechetical songs to teach and inspire others. She is also known for her warm hospitality and her ability to make everyone feel valued and loved. Her unwavering dedication to patient and elderly care means a lot. Her genuine concern and support keeps her going above and beyond to ensure others well being.



A Visionary Leader and Dedicated Educator

Following the Preventive System of Don Bosco, Sr. Apolina Barla left an indelible mark on the schools and boarding houses where she served. As a strict yet devoted visionary headmistress in, Doomni, and Agiamore, and as an assistant in the boarding facilities of Ferrando Bandel Home, Borophari and Agiamore, she profoundly impacted the lives of her students.



The students of Sr. Apolina remember her with deep love and respect, cherishing the values and guidance she imparted.

She influenced and shaped the lives of countless individuals, leaving a lasting legacy of faith, dedication, and mentorship. The love, respect, and admiration of her students will forever stand as a testament to Sr. Apolina's remarkable contributions as an educator and mentor.

In gratitude to her whenever they meet, they always offer her something like sweets, clothing or any other sort of gifts etc with much love and joy in their face and would say “unke anusarsit se aaj hum ithna aage bade hai. Ve hame bytta karke sikathethe, jab thak hum nahi sikpathethe. Pyar ke sath sath hum logonko mar bhi milthatha. Unke dil me garibonke prathi bahuth pyar tha”, and Sr. Apolina completes their words by saying “Thik tab”



Cherishing the old memories with a student

25th Anniversary of the Religious Life

In the spirit of gratitude and reverence the 25th anniversary of the religious profession of Sr. Apolina Barla was celebrated in the year 2002 at Auxilium Convent, Siliguri. The Silver Jubilee commemorates a significant period in the life of sister who has dedicated a quarter –century to the service of God and humanity.



*with Sr. Ivy Joseph,
the then Regional
Superior*

Her journey began 24 years ago when she took her vows of Chastity, Poverty and Obedience. Over the years her dedication has been a beacon of hope and inspiration to many within her community and beyond.

Her ministries have spanned various fields, including education, pastoral care each undertaken with profound dedication and love. Her service exemplifies the ideal of witnessing to God's love through action.

Legacy of Faith and Love



As we celebrate the 48 years of faithfulness of Sr. Apolina Barla, who has rendered a great sacrifices in the Congregation of Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians, we honor a life lived in faithful service to God and humanity. Her legacy is of love, hard work, and unwavering faith. She has been a source of inspiration to her community and a true example of what it means to live a life dedicated to Christ.

Sr. Apolina's journey reminds us of the words of St. John Paul II: "Do not be afraid. Open wide the doors to Christ." May her life continue to inspire us to embrace our own call to serve with the same passion, dedication, and love.



Conclusion

The life of Sr. Apolina Barla, reminds us of the profound impact of a life lived in total surrender to God and in selfless service to others. Sr. Apolina's unwavering commitment to her vocation, her radiant faith, and her tireless dedication to spreading love and hope have left an indelible mark on all who have had the privilege to know her. Her life is a testament to the transformative power of faith, simplicity, and genuine love for God and His people.



Sr. Apolina's legacy is not measured in material accomplishments but in the countless lives she has touched, the hearts she has healed, and the faith she has nurtured. She courageously stepped into the unknown, taking the light of Christ to the farthest corners of society, especially to the poor and marginalized.

Her life serves as a powerful reminder to every religious sister and Christian that the mission of love and service transcends boundaries and challenges.

Lessons and Messages from Sr. Apolina's Life

Faith as a Foundation

Sr. Apolina's life underscores the importance of building a strong foundation of faith. She often spoke of the power of prayer and personal devotion in overcoming challenges. To her fellow sisters, she would say, "Never let go of prayer, for it is the anchor that keeps you steady in the storms of life."

Serve with Joy and Simplicity

Sr. Apolina's work, whether in the garden, the chapel, or among the people, was marked by a quiet joy and simplicity. She believed that every task, no matter how small, could glorify God if done with love. To her fellow sisters she leaves this message: "Let your life preach louder than your words. Find joy in every duty, for it is an offering to the Lord."



Perseverance in Mission

Despite facing illness, cultural differences, and the challenges of working in remote areas, Sr. Apolina never wavered in her missionary zeal. She demonstrated the value of perseverance, reminding others that it is through trials that faith is strengthened. Her advice to others is: “Do not be afraid to step into unknown missions. Trust that God walks with you, and He will equip you with the strength and wisdom you need.”



Fostering Community and Unity

Sr. Apolina believed in the power of prayer and unity within her religious community. She often emphasized the importance of mutual respect, understanding, hard work and collaboration. Her words to her fellow sisters resonate deeply: “Together, we are stronger. Support one another in love, mutual understanding and let the world see Christ through your unity.”

Inspires Others Through Love and Service

Her legacy teaches that Love and service is the most powerful tool for transformation. Through her gentle words, kind actions, and tireless service, she inspires faith in others and bring them closer to God. Her message is clear: “The greatest sermon you can give is your life. Love as Christ loved and you will be a light to those around you.”

A Model for All Religious Sisters

Sr. Apolina’s life is a blueprint for any religious striving to live a life of holiness and purpose. Her unwavering faith, her simplicity, and her selfless commitment to the Gospel invite others to reflect on their own vocation and renew their dedication to God’s mission.

To the Younger Sisters, She Offers this Encouragement

“Do not be discouraged when the path seems difficult. Remember that Christ carried His Cross, and through your sacrifices, you bring His love to the world. Be faithful to your calling, and God will work wonders through you.” To her contemporaries, she shares this reflection: “As we age, let us not grow weary in our mission. Let us remember that even in our weakness, God’s strength shines through. Be a source of wisdom and encouragement for the younger generation, guiding them in love and humility.”

A Life That Continues to Inspire

Let Sr. Apolina's missionary journey inspires us to ask ourselves: What legacy will we leave behind? Her life reminds us that it is not fame or wealth that matters but the love and faith we share with others.



May Sr. Apolina's unwavering faith, dedication, and love for Christ continue to inspire us and the broader community to live with purpose and passion. May her legacy encourage all of us to walk boldly in our faith, serve others selflessly, and live each day as a gift from God.

Continue the Legacy

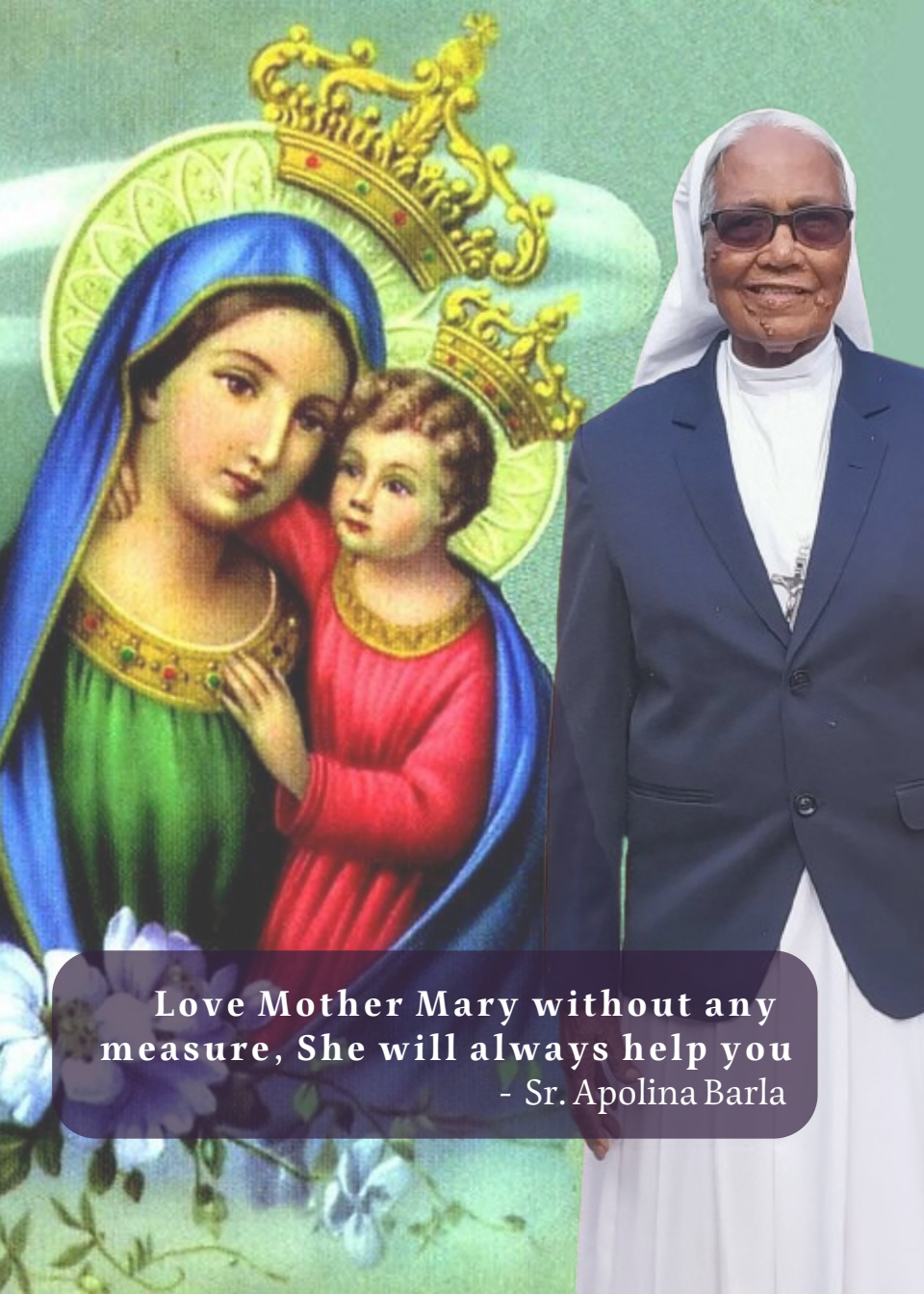
As the missionary journey of our dear Sr. Apolina continues towards Golden jubilee let's have a glance at :

1. 48 Years of Grace : Sr. Apolina Barla's Journey of Faith and Service
2. Beacon of Faith : The Inspiring Life history of Sr. Apolina Barla
3. Achievements : Life for God and His People
4. Honors : Selfless Love and Dedication
5. Living the Gospel : The Missionary Journey of Sr. Apolina Barla

Our dear Sr. Apolina has made every possible effort to live these loving words of our beloved Founder which follows:

“A religious must be ready either to teach or to go to kitchen, or to look after the cleanliness of the house or to stay in the play ground with the children, because we have only one desire, to please Our Lord and to do what pleases Him”





**Love Mother Mary without any
measure, She will always help you**
- Sr. Apolina Barla



Celebrating Life



**At Grand parent's day
celebration**

Compiled by

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