

Thousands attend nun's funeral in Pakur, Jharkhand, India.

Sister Valsa John laid to rest, witness reveals how she was attacked



Thousands bid a tearful farewell to Sister Valsa John, the murdered nun who was laid to rest at St Paul's Cathedral in Jharkhand's Pakur district yesterday while details emerged as to how she actually died.

The cathedral in the eastern Indian state was packed with mourners, while many more stood outside for the funeral Mass for the nun, who was hacked to death on Tuesday night.

The Mass was concelebrated by 50 priests.

Father Tom Kavalakatt SJ, director of the Social Action Centre at Kodm in, Dumka, delivered the homily, saying Sr. Valsa "had dedicated her life to poor people. She was the voice for the poor."

Two hundred nuns also joined members of Sr John's family, including her brother and two nephews, at the funeral.

"The poor have lost a benefactor. The religious sister was serving the poor, especially tribals, and fighting for justice," said Cardinal Telesphore Toppo of Ranchi.

He said her death brought "shame on the state," and demanded a high-level investigation to "reveal mysteries behind the murder."

Dumka zone Deputy Inspector General Vinay Kumar Pandey said Sr. John was a prominent social figure in Santhal Pargana, the village where she worked.

“For the past 12 years, she had been involved in social action in the region. She became known after she launched campaigns against displacement and pollution,” caused by mining companies, he said.

The tribal activist also ran a school, providing free education to 140 children. She also ran a dispensary offering free medicine to village people.

On Tuesday night, the nun was sleeping in the house of a villager called Sonaram Hembrom when around 30-40 people armed with crude weapons laid siege to the house.

“They pulled Sister Valsa from her bed,” Hembrom said yesterday.

“One of them stabbed her in the neck while another hit her with a sickle on the head. They continued stabbing her till she died,” he said.

Authorities are still trying to establish a motive for the killing and identify possible suspects.

Ajit Paul