

# Destination: Nepal



## She shares her light of **HOPE**

Rosina is 16. When left alone, she often screams and kicks furniture or anybody nearby. She is one of the youngest of 30 mentally ill patients under rehabilitation at the Ashadeep complex in eastern Kathmandu, Nepal. Sister of Charity of Nazareth Cecilia Simick, psychiatric nurse and director of Ashadeep, welcomed Rosina and assured her parents that with the help of the program the girl would calm down in a few days.

Ashadeep--Light of Hope--set among rice terraces, is the first and only therapeutic

program of its kind in Nepal and was initiated by Maryknoll priests. In 1993, SCNs became involved when they rescued six mentally ill women from the central jail and housed them within their convent premises. Later that year, 46 more mentally ill women from Kathmandu prisons were admitted.

Ashadeep can now care for 40 patients, male and female. The patients suffer from various mental problems: acute / chronic schizophrenia, mania, depression, alcohol and drug abuse, mental retardation, and other psychotic problems. Most of the patients are poor and cannot afford to pay for food or medicine. While seeing the patients, the doctor decides how much money the families can pay and adjusts the fee accordingly. Many cannot pay anything, especially those brought from the streets and the jail.

According to Sister Cecilia, the main hope for patients like Rosina is the love and concern that the center offers people of all castes, tribal groups and language backgrounds who are brought there. Inside the closed gates, patients help care for the vegetable and flower gardens. They are given hope for a normal life.

Rosina is lucky compared to many mentally ill people who get put into jail because there are no state agencies to treat them. Sometimes parents in Nepal keep their mentally ill children locked or chained up, out of sight. Rosina's parents could no longer handle her increasingly violent behavior. Sister Cecilia said the girl has been mentally disabled since birth, but only a year ago began doing strange things, like taking off her clothes. About three weeks after Rosina became uncontrollable, her parents brought her to Ashadeep.

The doctor wrote "MR," for mentally retarded, and "Schizophrenic" in her file. "We have to segregate her from others much of the time," Sister Cecilia said.

The ultimate aim for all treated, including young Rosina, is rehabilitation. Patients usually stay three months to a year, Sister Cecilia said, but three women who were rescued from jail when they opened the center in 1993 are still there. "This is their home," she said.

Ashadeep has changed the way society in Nepal treats its mentally-challenged over the years. There is newly found hope for them. If people now see someone looking deranged, abandoned and wandering Kathmandu's streets, they call Ashadeep.



TOP -- Cecilia Simick, SCN, in blue, shares smiles with some of her patients in Nepal. Also pictured is Shobhita Panthaladickal, SCN, in green.

TOP CENTER -- Sister Cecilia, right, stands beside a young film actress, chief guest at a cultural program for the patients at Ashadeep.

LEFT -- Sister Cecilia, left, and a patient stand in front of the Ashadeep complex.