



MOTHER

'COMPELLING, DISTURBING, WRITTEN FROM THE HEART' – *The Humanist*, London

TERESA

THE
UNTOLD
STORY

A R O U P C H A T T E R J E E



The popular tendency is to deify myths, gurus, and personalities without investigating the claims thoroughly. Mother Teresa is one such name. Does Mother Teresa deserve her reputation as the most charitable person who ever lived?

This book makes for a gripping but disconcerting read.

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– *The Irish Times*, Dublin

'EXPLOSIVE'

– *The Asian Age*

'WRITTEN WITH PAINSTAKING CARE'

– *The Telegraph*, Kolkata

'DR. CHATTERJEE TACKLES THE INACCURACIES, MISCONCEPTIONS, AND THE ELABORATE PROPAGANDA MACHINE ENACTED TO PORTRAY THE ALBANIAN NUN AS RELEVANT HUMANITARIAN . . .'

– Hemley Gonzalez, founder of Responsible Charity Corp

'MOTHER TERESA AT SOME POINT IN HER CAREER LOST CONNECTION WITH REALITY AND BALLOONED OUT OF ALL PROPORTION, SERVING THE CAUSE OF THE ECCLESIASTICAL POLITICS OF THE VATICAN RATHER THAN THE CAUSE OF SUFFERING HUMANITY. DR. AROUP CHATTERJEE DOES AN EXCELLENT JOB IN SEPARATING THE REALITY FROM THE LAYERS OF MYTH-MAKING'

– Dr. Ketaki Kushari Dyson, writer, translator, and researcher



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Dedicated to
Individualists, Iconoclasts and Single Issue Fanatics

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Contents

Introduction

1. ‘She rushes in to places where we would never go. . .’
2. Ecumenical with the Truth: Sainly Tall Tales
3. How the Myth Began – The Muggeridge Connection
4. How Journalists and Authors are ‘Doing the Work of God’
5. Calcutta
6. The Destitutes of Calcutta: A Profile
7. Mother Teresa’s Homes – Views from Within
8. Vatican Asks its ‘Great Friend’ to Write a Tome and Hollywood comes to Calcutta
9. Mother Teresa’s Accounts
10. The Politics of Mother Teresa
11. What Other Charities are doing in and around Calcutta
12. Calcutta’s Relationship with Mother Teresa
13. Death and Funeral
14. From ‘Living Saint’ to Saint

Annexure

Notes

Index

Introduction

Mother Teresa once made me cry. The year was 1988 and I was on one of my frequent visits home to Calcutta after moving to Britain in 1985. I was standing by the kerbside at Gariahat crossing, munching on the famous 'mutton roll'. I was looking at scenes I had grown up with: pavements almost obliterated by shops, people having to weave their way through hawkers peddling their fares, buses belching out black diesel smoke, tilted to one side by the sheer weight of passengers, trams waiting for a manual change of tracks before they could turn, and the familiar neon sign of an astrologer.

In the midst of all this, I remembered the 'Calcutta' as perceived by the West; Calcutta the metaphor, not the city. In my three years in the West I had come to realise that the city had become synonymous with the worst of human suffering and degradation in the eyes of the world. The imagined Calcutta contained a multitude of 'sewers and gutters' where endless numbers of dead and dying people lay; but they did not lie for long, as 'roving angels' in the shape of the followers of a certain nun would be seeking them. Then they would whisk them away in their smart ambulances. In my twenty-seven continuous years in Calcutta I had never

seen such a scene and neither have I met a Calcuttan who has. It hurt me deeply that such an erroneous stereotype had become permanently ingrained in the world's psyche. I felt overwhelmingly sad that a city, indeed an entire culture, should be continuously insulted in this way.

I am Calcuttan, born and bred, and our family has lived in the city for as long as it can be traced. I know Calcutta well, and many people who matter there, and many more who do not. The place has made me what I am, warts and all. My mother tongue is Bengali, the language of Calcutta, but I speak Hindi passably, which is spoken by a large number of the destitute of Calcutta.

I had no interest *whatsoever* in Mother Teresa before I came to England. A Westerner may find this difficult to comprehend, but she was not a significant entity in Calcutta in her lifetime; paradoxically, posthumously her image has risen significantly there.

I had an interest in the destitute of Calcutta during my college days, when I dabbled in leftist politics for a while. I also took a keen interest in human rights issues. Never in the course of my (modest) interaction with the very poor of Calcutta, did I cross paths with Mother Teresa's organisation – indeed I cannot even recall her name being uttered.

After living in the West for some time I came to realise what Mother Teresa and Calcutta meant to the world. It shocked and saddened me. In India itself, to say you come from Calcutta is considered 'trendy', as Calcuttans are believed, albeit wrongly, to be 'brainy and rebellious'. In India, Calcutta is – not entirely wrongly – stereotyped as a seat of effete culture and anarchic politics. There is an Indian saying that goes thus: 'If you have one Calcuttan you have a poet; with two you have a political party, and with three you have two political parties.'

The stereotype of Calcutta in the West did not irk me as much as did the belief that Mother Teresa had chosen to live there as its saviour. I was astonished that her name had become a figure of speech, invoked to qualify the extreme superlative of a positive kind; the idea being you can criticise God, but you cannot criticise Mother Teresa. In common parlance, doing the 'unthinkable' is qualified as 'like criticising Mother Teresa'. I have lost count of the number of times I have heard expressions such as 'that person would try the patience of Mother Teresa'. Such expressions would cause incredulity and curiosity in Calcutta, even amongst Mother Teresa's most ardent admirers.

Why I decided to do ‘something about it’, I cannot easily tell; as a person I am flawed enough to understand lies and deceit. Why certain people, themselves no pillars of rectitude, decide to make a stand against untruth and injustice is a very complex issue. I had support from my wife, raised as a Roman Catholic in Ireland, fed on Teresa mythology she felt angry and cheated when she went to Calcutta and saw how the reality compared with the fairy tale.

In February 1994 without any introduction, I rang Vanya Del Borgo at the television production company Bandung Productions in London. She listened to my anguished outpourings and, to cut a long story short, eventually Channel 4, a UK TV station decided to commission the film *Hell’s Angel* (shown on Britain’s Channel 4 television on 8 November 1994). This was the very first attempt to challenge the Teresa myth on television, presented by Western journalist and writer [Christopher Hitchens](#). I was disappointed that *Hell’s Angel* took a sensationalist approach (Hitchens refers to Mother Teresa as ‘a presumed virgin’). The film, however, caused ripples of interest and controversy, both in Britain and internationally.

Some might argue that since Mother Teresa is dead and therefore unable to defend herself against my charges, I should not besmirch her reputation now. However, criticisms of her peaked during her lifetime; apart from the November 1994 documentary, there was a stringent detailed attack on conditions in her orphanages in India (published in [The Guardian](#) newspaper, London, 14 October 1996). Charges of gross neglect and physical and emotional abuse were made. The article alleged her own complicity and knowledge in the unacceptable practices that occurred and still continue in her homes. In January 1997, various European television channels broadcast a documentary *Mother Teresa: Time for Change?* which was critical of her working methods and accusing her of neglect.

Mother Teresa should have answered such criticisms during her lifetime; she did not. Her supporters would say she was like Jesus; that she would not demean herself by protesting against denigration but merely ‘turn the other cheek’. Notwithstanding her image, she was a robust protester whenever she had a case. Shortly before she died she got involved in legal wrangles with a US bakery over the marketing of a bun; and more seriously, with her one time close friend and ally, the author [Dominique Lapierre](#), over the script of a film on her life. On both occasions, her Miami-based

solicitor was formally involved. She also chose to comment on the legal problems of her friends – she wrote an infamous letter of protest to Judge Lance Ito, regarding the prosecution (she perceived it as persecution) of her friend [Charles Keating](#), one of the biggest documented fraudster in US history.

The German magazine *Stern* (10 September 1998) published a devastating critique of Mother Teresa's work on the first anniversary of her death. The article, resulting from a year of research across three continents – 'Mother Teresa, Where Are Your Millions?' – concluded that her organisation is essentially a religious order that does not deserve to be called a charitable foundation; the order lodged no protest against these charges.

To the charges of neglect of residents, indifference to suffering, massaging of figures, manipulation of the media and knowingly handling millions of dollars of stolen cash, Mother Teresa never protested. Her responses were 'Why did they do it? It was all for publicity.' She was perturbed by the criticisms – so much so that after our 1994 documentary, she cancelled a religious mission to the Far East.

During her lifetime, I wrote to Mother Teresa numerous times asking for a formal interview with either her or one of her senior deputies. I had agreed to meet her in Calcutta or at the Vatican – mindful of her frequent trips there – or indeed, at any other place in the world. Despite her image – carefully nurtured by herself – of one who shunned the media and publicity, she had always bent over backwards to give interviews to sympathetic world media. In 1994, she spent a whole day talking to the magazine, [Hello!](#) But she did not even acknowledge my many requests for an interview. I had met her briefly on occasions in the company of a roomful of worshipful admirers, but I did not feel that was the time or the place to ask uncomfortable questions.

After two years of trying, when I failed to elicit any response from her or her order, I contacted her official biographers to ask whether they would answer some of the serious question marks hanging over her operations. All of them, barring one, replied, but only to turn me down. All of this happened while Mother Teresa was alive.

Many people tell me that Mother Teresa should be left alone because she did 'something' for the underprivileged: I do not deny that she did. However her reputation, which was to a good extent carefully built up by

herself, was not of a 'something' scale. I will reveal, that at least in Calcutta, that 'something' was quite little. Mother Teresa turned away many more people than she ever helped despite her claim throughout her life that she was helping everybody. My criticism against her is not that she did not address the root or causes of suffering and I am not for a moment suggesting that she ought to have done so, as I understand the particular religious tradition she came from. I am saying that there was a stupendous discrepancy between her image and her work, between her words and her deeds, that she helped by others of course, engaged in a culture of deception.

On one level, I need to tell the truth about Teresa became: I feel humiliated to be associated with a place that is so erroneously perceived to survive on Western charity. Perhaps the main reason why I want to tell this story is because, I believe, each of us has a duty to stand up and protest when history is in danger of being distorted.

I know I cannot change 'history' as pre-ordained by the powerful world media, but I can attempt to put a footnote therein. I would disapprove of my book being called 'controversial', as I see it as a book of hard facts, albeit disturbing sometimes.

Calcutta is now called [Kolkata](#) but as Mother Teresa achieved her iconic status as 'Mother Teresa of Calcutta' and remains known by that name in the world, I have used Calcutta rather than Kolkata.

1

**'She rushes in to places where
we would never go. . .'**

On 11 October 1995, prostitutes in north Calcutta came out in force; they cajoled and coaxed passers-by for money, but did not offer usual services. They made a strange and surreal impact in the midst of the hectic Calcutta street. The sex workers were collecting money for flood victims. In September, devastating floods had struck large areas of West Bengal state. The floods could not have come at a worse time because this was just before Durga Puja, the biggest festival of 70 million Indian Bengalis. Although in Indian terms, the number of casualties was small, with 200 dead and more than 3 million homeless, in villages surrounding Calcutta. In financial terms, the loss was estimated at Rs 1,050 million.

The stories of loss and suffering moved millions, including the sex workers. One of them, Uma Mandal, said to newspapermen, 'How can we call ourselves human if we don't come to the aid of suffering people in their hour of need? Those who have lost everything could easily be our family members.' Sankari Pal, who could not read or write, but had come to know of the devastation through television, said, 'Although I don't personally know anybody who's been affected by the floods, we are very much part of

a wider community, and so, it was almost natural for us to come out to help.’¹

The sex workers’ collection was only one of the many hundreds of collection efforts and relief measures organised by the citizens of Calcutta; schools, colleges, offices, businesses, restaurants and individuals all chipped in. Operations started in September and lasted almost six months. The only organisation that did not feature was the Missionaries of Charity (hereafter abbreviated as MC, which is how Mother Teresa called it), the multinational charity headed by the late nun, who has become synonymous with Calcutta in the eyes of the world. Mother Teresa’s absence in the relief operations was not conspicuous in Calcutta. Strange though it may seem to a non-Calcuttan, her order is not known to throw its lot in these circumstances. In Calcutta, she was known to undertake small niche activities, for which she was liked and her order is well regarded.

When the floods were raging in and around Calcutta, Mother Teresa was in the US like in most years, as she did not take kindly to Calcutta’s summer and monsoon. On 15 June 1995, she was touring the neonatal unit at St. Elizabeth’s Medical Centre in Brighton, [Massachusetts](#). Parents could not believe their luck when she left their babies her blessings and her hallmark, an oval aluminium ‘miraculous’ medal. She told the media, ‘I have 200 small babies in my hospital in Calcutta. This is a beautiful place.’² She however does not have any hospitals in Calcutta, nor for that matter anywhere else in the world.

Floods returned later in September and made 200,000 more homeless near Calcutta. Mother Teresa was still abroad. She returned to Calcutta for a brief period, but duty called her back to the US soon. During the aftermath of the floods, in December, when West Bengal was still reeling from the effects, Mother Teresa made a highly successful visit to [Peoria](#), Illinois. Catholic women of Peoria had donated at least \$300,000 to her causes over the years. She said her usual lines, which she had said hundreds of times before:

I was hungry and you gave me to eat,
I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink,
I was naked, and you clothed me,
I was homeless and you took me in,
I was sick and in prison and you visited me.

This is exactly what the Missionaries of Charity are doing, 24 hours.

Mother's stopover at [Peoria](#) was to oversee the renewing of vows by seven nuns of her order. After her speech, she made an announcement that she would present one of her oval medals to each of the 750 people in the cathedral. All were reduced to tears. Shortly after the medal ceremony, Mother Teresa left by a private aeroplane, as she had arrived, presumably to visit 'places we would never go'.

Disastrous floods struck West Bengal once again a year later, in August 1996, this time crippling the northern districts particularly. Yet again, MC were inactive; predictably relief was brought to the victims by other organisations, primarily the [Ramakrishna Mission](#) and the [Bharat Sevashram Sangha](#).

Although she never lifted a finger during the 1995 or 1996 floods, in an interview with [Lucinda Vardey](#), Mother Teresa mentioned working flat-out during floods in Calcutta. Characteristically, she did not provide any specifics. 'For instance, when a large area near Calcutta was flooded and washed away, 1200 families were left stranded with nothing. Sisters from [Shishu Bhavan](#), and also brothers worked all night, taking them supplies and offering shelter.'³ This could have been true on a specific and rare occasion, but this is definitely not the usual nature of the work of Teresa's order. The world, however, would assume from reading her interview that Mother jumped in headlong in natural disasters in and around Calcutta.

During the fifty odd years that Mother Teresa was doing charity in Calcutta, there were about a dozen very major floods in the region with hundreds to thousands dying on each occasion. The city itself was flooded quite a few times, paralysing urban life, and badly affecting the poor of the city; only during one of those floods, did Mother Teresa offer some kind of help.

On 13 July 1995, [Shahida](#), the 16-year-old mother of an infant, got badly burnt. Shahida lived in [Dnarapara slum](#), which surrounds Mother Teresa's [Prem Dan](#) centre in Calcutta. After a lot of effort, she managed to get admission to NRS Hospital, a state hospital; she was thrown out in three weeks. She could not afford private medical care, so she picketed Calcutta Corporation in protest. She put up in a tent in front of the Victorian red brick building and lay there a few weeks, while infection was seeping into

her burns. While her husband was at football matches and her father was busy selling fruit, her mother sat with her, cuddling the baby.

[Shahida](#) failed to move the hearts of the Calcutta Corporation officials. During her various representations for assistance, she approached Mother Teresa for financial help, so she could buy private care. Shahida appealed to her not because she was a natural port of call for helpless Calcuttans, but because she was one of many she approached. The appeal went up to Mother directly who asked her nuns ‘to look into the matter’.

Shahida was swiftly turned down by MC, because she was ‘a family case’, a clause regularly applied during the vetting of indigents by the MC in India; the organisation is ever watchful that ‘family cases’ do not slip in.

Finally Shahida’s fortunes turned. On 30 August, she was accepted by the Islamia Hospital, for free. The Rotary Club of Calcutta also made a financial contribution towards her treatment. She improved, and within days was throwing tantrums like any other 16-year-old. By this time, she had begun to make headlines, and the entire city breathed a sigh of relief.

On 21 October 1995, Shahida died, leaving behind a baby. Her death made the headline news in Calcutta, where pavement dwellers and slum dwellers are dispensable. Everybody blamed the government and the corporation, for their heartlessness and lack of facilities. Nobody pointed a recriminatory finger at Mother Teresa, as she was *not* seen in Calcutta as a saviour. The world however saw her as such, and Mother Teresa did a great deal over the last few decades to make the world think that way.

Shahida’s tragedy continued after her death, as she left behind her baby daughter Marjina. Marjina caught TB following year. The charity HEAL helped but MC were nowhere in the picture.⁴

Mother Teresa herself was far too busy for such mundane happenings in Calcutta, for the United States was preparing for presidential elections; in May 1996, she again found herself in Washington DC. On 1 June, she met the Republican candidate [Bob Dole](#) (US Catholics’ consensus candidate) to exhort him to run on an extreme anti-abortion platform. The intimate details of this private meeting is not known, but Mr [Dole](#) found the ‘living saint’ ‘inspirational’ and in possession of ‘a good sense of humour’, and of ‘not a bad business card’. Mother Teresa gave the Dole family ‘miraculous medals’ and also her signed business card.

Though frail and quite ill by now, she crisscrossed the globe at a moment’s notice for the cause of abortion. But during her long career, she

was remarkably uninvolved in disasters in India.

In December 1984, 3500 people died in [Bhopal](#) when toxic gas was accidentally leaked by the Union Carbide factory. It remains the world's worst industrial accident whose health repercussions continue to this day.

Mother Teresa, whose post-Nobel reputation within India was then very high indeed, rushed in to Bhopal like an international dignitary. Her contribution to the Bhopal disaster has become legendary: she looked at the carnage, nodded gravely and said, 'I say, forgive'. There was a stunned silence in the audience. She took in the incredulity of her audience, nodded again, and repeated, 'I say, forgive'. And left. Her comments would have been somewhat justified if she had sent in the MC to help in any way. But what she did was crass, insensitive and a gratuitous insult to the dead and suffering all of whom were poor slum dwellers.

MC do have a small and decent home in Bhopal, but their role after the tragedy was minimal. Mother did visit patients in hospitals and offer them flowers, while posing for international media.

The earthquake of 30 September 1993 in [Latur](#) is one of the biggest natural disasters in the history of India. Eight thousand people died and five million lost their homes. Two hundred NGOs rushed in to help, many worked on for a decade. Many charities rebuilt entire villages from rubble. The government put in a special grant of Rs 8 billion. The world obviously thought Mother Teresa had put her heart and hands into the operation, as it instinctively assumes that in any disaster in India, especially of that magnitude, she would have a presence, if not the biggest one. But MC never came to Latur. Mother kept herself busy with an American legal loophole. She came to Washington DC. to file a 'friend-of-the-court' brief for one [Alexander Loce](#), who was convicted of trespassing into an abortion clinic to stop his ex-fiancée from having an abortion; little did he know that he would have a 'living saint' as a character witness.⁵ While in Washington DC, Mother also took the opportunity to appear before the American people on television with the President and Vice President for the 1994 [National Prayer Breakfast](#). She mesmerised millions by expounding on charity, and on the evils of contraception and abortion. [Latur](#) was a world away.

Although Latur is a thousand miles from Calcutta, the Calcuttabased Hindu charity the [Ramakrishna Mission](#) and numerous Christian charities worked there ceaselessly. Indeed, the Calcutta *Statesman* did an intensive donation drive and collected more than Rs 10 million from its readers

which it handed over to the Ramakrishna Mission. In case one is thinking that MC would have helped if they had been given the funds, the truth is they do not do rebuilding or 'development work'. On 18 December 1995, when the editor of *Malayalam Manorama* handed over the keys to 163 reconstructed houses to the villagers of Banegaon at a ceremony at Killari, the epicentre of the earthquake, it did not even make headline news in India.

On 11 September 1995, 22 children died and a further 18 injured in an explosion hardly 60km from Calcutta in West Bengal's Howrah district, where MC Brothers have a largish centre. The children as young as 9 years old were making fireworks for the forthcoming festive season in an illegal factory. The factory solely employed children (1500 of them) who worked from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. for an average weekly wage of Rs 65 per week. In this particular instance, the children were making 'chocolate bombs' (so called because the individual crackers are wrapped in aluminium foil like pieces of chocolate). The explosion destroyed the large factory building and rocked the region. Children's bodies were tossed up in the air and landed in a nearby pond. The village of *Haturia* happens to be half an hour's drive from Mother Teresa's Howrah centre, where a large number of her Brothers learn to be good Christians. But MC had no involvement in the aftermath of the explosion.

As Mother Teresa spent such a large part of each year outside India, it was impossible for her to help out in India's problems and calamities. From 1978 till the year of her death in 1997, she spent all but one summer and monsoon in Europe and the US. Most of the subcontinent's problems and pestilences occur in summer and monsoon; Mother's schedule would be to leave India in June to return end-September or early October as the downpours of monsoon would give way to the mellow autumn sunshine.

If there was an emergency in Europe or the US, she would travel earlier than the usual June although 'emergency' for her did not mean the succour of suffering. For her emergencies meant abortion. In the springs 1981 and 1982, Mother was worried that the Japanese were getting too blasé about abortion and went to *Japan* to lobby with politicians. In April 1982 she met up with 230 members of the Japanese parliament (the Diet) and was almost successful in making abortion extremely difficult for Japanese women to access; a popular revolt in Japan prevented the change of law she wanted.

To give an idea of how infrequently the 'saint of Calcutta' was around in Calcutta, I quote two passages from her spiritual adviser Father *Edward*

Le Joly:

MT: *I am going to New York, Father.*

ELJ: What Mother, again to the US? You were there only a few weeks ago.

MT: *Yes, but I must go again. The first two priests of the Missionaries of Charity family are taking their first vows. They have finished their novitiate. The Archbishop has accepted to look after them.*

ELJ: So your family is expanding and once again the US shows the way.⁵

In the same book in a different place Le Joly writes:

October '86

ELJ: *Sister, is Mother in?*

S: No, Father, she is out. She has gone to [Rome](#).

ELJ: *What again to Rome, but she was there a few days ago!*

S: Yes, she is continually away.⁶

It is known that [Princess Diana](#) desperately wanted to meet Mother Teresa in Calcutta; nine times her office tried to bring the two together in Calcutta but nine times it failed because the nun was rarely there. Finally, when [Diana](#) came to Calcutta in February 1992 they did not meet as Mother got held back in [Rome](#). The two human symbols of hope and charity met twice, in Rome and in New York.

During her long stays in Europe and the US, she lost no opportunity to tell people that she hated every second of the time she spent away from the 'streets of Calcutta'. [Peter Dalglish](#), the Canadian charity worker found her addressing 'VIPs and luminaries' in New York: 'They hoped she would end her sermon with a smile, but she was glum during her entire stay in New York and announced she longed to return to Calcutta.'⁷ In actual fact, she returned to Rome.

For me, born and bred in Calcutta, it does not come as surprise as I know her order has no infrastructure. Indeed it had never been her intention to create an infrastructure for meaningful work, as she had frequently said, 'I'm not a social worker.' But what I find disturbing is that she remained

inactive when children were hurt or killed; this did not sit comfortably with her 'Child First' philosophy. But then, for her, the 'unborn child' was far more important than the actual child. Having gone through hundreds of her speeches I have wondered, when compared to the unborn child, if the actual child mattered to her at all:

Many people are very, very concerned with the children of India, with the children of Africa where quite a few die of hunger, and so on. . . These concerns are very good. But often these same people are not concerned with the millions who are killed by the deliberate decision of their own mothers. And this is what is the greatest destroyer of peace today – abortion which brings people to such blindness.⁸

Mother's inaction was not due to old age and exhaustion from hard work. She had her own priorities. When the Vice President of India came to Calcutta on a two-day visit in July 1996, Mother Teresa delivered him a letter. It was to protest against the demolition of a wall in Bandel Church and to urge the government to rebuild it.

The inaction of her order continues after Mother Teresa's death. In the 1999 Orissa cyclone (10,000 dead, 275,000 homes destroyed), the 2001 Gujarat earthquake (20,000 dead, 400,000 homes destroyed), 2004 Indian tsunami (20,000 dead) the order had nil to negligible presence. Unbeknown to the world, a Hindu 'holy' woman, Amritanandamayi Devi (popularly known as Amma) donated \$46 million to the tsunami relief efforts; she also gave \$1 million to the US after Hurricane Katrina (2005) and same amount to [Japan](#) after Japanese tsunami (2011).

2

Ecumenical with the Truth: Saintly Tall Tales

As Mother Teresa grew older, truth became more and more of a stranger to her. She inflated her operations and activities manifold in her speeches to journalists and supporters. Often her statements would have no connection with reality; she frequently made untrue statements while on television. She prevaricated even in her Nobel Prize acceptance speech.

Nobody ever questioned anything she said. Very likely she herself came to believe in her own lies. Even when she was consciously lying she had no qualms as she was doing it for her causes: to propagate her faith, and to banish abortion and contraception.

She told many so-called 'white lies'. These are harmless lies but not becoming of her stature and piety. [Tracey Leonard](#), the Catholic nurse who did long stints as a volunteer in Calcutta, describes an incident in her book where Mother Teresa had met her mother in Australia, prior to her meeting the nun in Calcutta:

She [my mother] met Mother Teresa and told her I was working in Calcutta. Mother nodded and said, 'Oh yes, I know her.' It certainly

made my mother feel better even if it wasn't the truth. Even 'living saint's tell the occasional white lie!¹

[John Unger](#), one-time president of the West Virginia International Trade Development Council worked as a volunteer in Calcutta in 1990. One day Teresa took Unger to a village where a woman with a baby approached the nun and said, 'Mother, in my village there is dying and disease. Can you help?' Mother Teresa threw up her arms and said she could not help, that she was only one person. It was/ is a common response from MC to the poor who approach them. But because this was said in the presence of an influential Westerner, Mother realised her behaviour was not in keeping with the image, so she later told Unger that she prayed about the incident all night. He was thoroughly impressed.² It is tough for an 80-year-old to pray all night – providing modest help would have been easier.

Mother told many Biblical-type tales about herself throughout her life. These were told again and again, hundreds of times. The same story would be retold as happening 'a few days' or 'a few weeks back' to a new audience. Particularly vivid was the story about the woman who was found in the gutters with worms eating everywhere into her flesh except her face; Mother and her Sisters had to individually extract the worms. The woman died with these words on her lips, 'I've lived like an animal, but I'm dying like an angel!' It is possible the story was made up, as angels do not have a divine connotation for Hindu women. Then there is the parable of Mother desperately seeking funds for a house in London then suddenly opening a purse and finding the exact amount! In her Nobel speech, she told the tale of 'about fourteen professors from United States from different universities' visiting her in Calcutta and one of them asking her, 'Are you married?' Unlikely an American professor would ask the world's most famous nun such a question. The object of quoting the supposed question was to give a spiel about her own holiness, then finish off with a call for Norway to outlaw abortion.

Only one parabolic tale was contradicted, by Mother herself, though one wonders if she would have contradicted it if she was shown in more heroic light. [Navin Chawla](#), her authorised biographer, writes:

I remembered a story I had read about her very first surgical case on a Calcutta street. According to this account, she had found a man

with a gangrenous thumb. Thereupon she said a prayer, took out a pair of scissors and cut it off. The patient fainted, falling in one direction, while Mother Teresa fainted in the other. When I delivered the punch line, Mother Teresa bent double with laughter. ‘A made-up story,’ she said, but thoroughly enjoyed the joke.³

Media exaggerated and often invented tales about Mother Teresa, but usually they originated from her. Let us take her comment that ‘on the ground floor of Shishu Bhavan [her orphanage in Calcutta] there are cooking facilities to feed over a thousand people daily.’⁴

During the 1990s I spent days on end in front of [Shishu Bhavan](#) with a video camera and I know what goes on there. The soup kitchen at Shishu Bhavan fed about 70 people a day, 5 days a week. The daily turnout was about 50 people for lunch and 20 for dinner. But charity did not come easy for the poor; they needed a ‘food card’ in order to get their gruel. The evening kitchen was not that fussy about the food cards, because the turnout was low. Mother’s soup kitchen ran on a far stricter regime at [Prem Dan](#), her other home in Calcutta. The production of food cards was mandatory here, possibly because Prem Dan sits in the middle of [Dnarapara slum](#) and there was the likelihood of getting overwhelmed. Here the number of beneficiaries was around 50 a day, 5 days a week, but only one meal was served daily. I have the close-up of a food card captured on video, with its days and corresponding boxes, which are ticked off by nuns.

The process of obtaining a food card was not transparent, like other functions of MC. They were originally meant for the ‘poorest of the poor’ and some in that category indeed had them. From 1994 till Teresa’s death in 1997 no new ones were issued. Predictably all Catholic families in the slum, who were not ‘poorest of the poor’ by any stretch of the imagination, had cards but often did not use them. Mother Teresa of Calcutta’s soup kitchens fed three times as many people in New York as they did in Calcutta.

From 1970s on, Mother Teresa used to make wildly different claims about her soup kitchens – she sometimes would be feeding ‘9000’, next minute it would be ‘4000’, then again it may change to ‘7000’. Chronologically these numbers do not correlate, as the three figures were given at around the same time.

Shortly after her Nobel, she told her friend and biographer [Kathryn Spink](#): ‘In Calcutta alone, we cook for 7000 people every day and if one day we do not cook they do not eat.’⁵ Although at the time, the MC kitchens cooked for a maximum of 500 people a day, and that included their vast army of nuns, novices and Brothers, most of whom did not have any charitable function. The ‘7000 people’ story was part of a fairly lengthy parable; similar to the one with ‘loaves and fishes’ of Jesus. Mother retold it numerous times, in various parts of the world, but never in Calcutta itself. In her own words, one version of the story ran as follows:

In Calcutta alone we cook for 7000 people daily. If one day we don’t cook, they don’t eat. One Friday morning, the Sister in charge of the kitchen came to me and said, ‘Mother, there is no food for Friday and Saturday. We should tell the people that we have nothing to give them either today or tomorrow.’ I was shocked. I didn’t know what to tell her. But about 9 o’clock in the morning, the Indian government for some unknown reason closed the public schools. Then all the bread for the school children was sent to us. Our children, as well as our seven thousand needy ones, ate bread and even more bread for two days. They had never eaten so much bread in their lives. No one in Calcutta could find out why the schools had been closed. But I knew. It was God’s tender care. I knew it was his tender loving care.⁶

I do not think an ex-teacher (Mother Teresa was supposed to have been one, though doubts remain if she really was) should regard the closure of schools as blessing from heaven: I find her priorities twisted.

On one occasion the ‘number of people that would not eat unless we fed them’ reached 9000: ‘You must know, just in Calcutta we feed 9000 people daily.’⁷ This claim caused embarrassment in even the devoted [Jose Luis González-Balado](#), who quickly added, ‘Mother Teresa is among those who least worry about statistics. She has repeatedly expressed that what matters is not how much work is accomplished but how much love is put into the work.’⁸

A few years later, the same [González-Balado](#) edited a book of Mother’s sayings: *Mother Teresa in My Own Words*, wherein he quotes her recounting the miracle of the bread and schools: ‘In Calcutta alone we feed

about 10000 people every day. This means if one day we do not cook 10000 people will not eat. One day the Sister in charge came to tell me. . .’

The Sikh soup kitchen at Amritsar feeds 100,000 (of all faiths) daily, and in the world the religion feeds 6 million every day.

When it came to extravagant claims, hagiographers and Mother outdid each other. They (rightly) believed if you kept on repeating a lie, it came to be regarded as truth.

Mother’s ‘big number’, which is the number of people that she had claimed in her Nobel Prize acceptance speech to have ‘picked up’ from the streets of Calcutta, does not stand up to scrutiny. Below is a list of time and place of various claims, and the number on each occasion she claimed to have ‘picked up’:

Time and Place	Number Claimed to have been ‘Picked Up’
December 1979, Oslo (Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech)	36,000
September 1978, Freiburg Cathedral, Breisgau, Germany (Speech as Special Guest at the German Catholic Bishops’ Conference)	36,000
February 1973, Sydney (Population & Ecology Conference)	36,000
February 1973, Melbourne	27,000

If I am asked how many she had actually picked up from Calcutta’s streets, my informed guess would be, somewhere between 500 and 700 people each year.

Almost none of the numbers would be picked up but brought to the homes by others. Her claim of feeding thousands was made in tune with the Biblical stories of Jesus. During the 1970s and 1980s, Mother Teresa’s soup kitchens in Calcutta fed not more than 150 people daily and only six days a week; thousands rolled off her tongue easily.

The figure '5000' has a particular fascination for Mother, no doubt because of its Biblical connotation. She once said, 'Today there is a modern school in that place [in [Motijheel slum](#)] with over 5000 children in it.'⁹ This appears in a book published in 1986. Earlier, in 1969–70, she had told [Malcolm Muggeridge](#), '. . .if we didn't have our schools in the slums, they are nothing, they are just little primary schools where we teach the children to love the school and be clean and so on. If we didn't have these little schools, those children, those thousands of children, would be left in the streets.'¹⁰

In 1969–70, Mother Teresa's primary 'schools' (more informal teaching rooms than schools) catered for not more than 200 children in Calcutta and even today the figure is not much more. '5000 children' was a calculated lie, especially as the school in Motijheel has less than 100 pupils. Only a handful of schools in the world cater to 5000 students from a single site.

During the fortnight following Mother's death, hordes of local and international journalists were scouring Motijheel slum for stories and reminiscences. For this was after all the most famous slum in the world - the one that launched Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Two journalists from *Ananda Bazar Patrika* spoke to Paltan Roy, a long term resident of Motijheel. Roy was saddened at Mother's death, but said, 'Back in the 1950s there were two schools here for a while, but one of them soon closed down. I have heard that Mother had done so much for the whole world, but our school here has remained exactly the same – the same single storey structure. Could Mother not have added another floor to it?'¹¹

Mother Teresa frequently said that her nuns 'pick[ed] up' people from the streets of Calcutta. She said it in her acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize: 'We have a home for the dying in Calcutta, where we have picked up more than 36,000 people only from the streets of Calcutta, and out of that big number more than 18,000 have died a beautiful death. They have just gone home to God.' Mother's 'big number' was wrong, but more importantly her basic premise of 'picking up' people was false. If the situation demanded, Mother put it more poignantly: 'Maybe if I had not picked up that one person dying on the street, I would not have picked up the thousands. We must think *Ek* (Bengali for 'One'). I think *Ek, Ek*. One, One. . .'¹² On another occasion, she said, 'They [Western volunteers] pick up all sorts of people for us, but they do it with a great deal of love.'¹³ A major source of disappointment for volunteers as they arrive to work with

her order in Calcutta is the realisation that they would not be a part of an angelic team that would scour the streets of Calcutta gently scooping up hordes of humanity as they go along. I know of instances when very young volunteers, disregarding official advice, have hired taxis and cruised along streets looking for people they could befriend and bring along to Mother's homes.

I find it sad that MC did not pick up babies, children and vulnerable women with children from Calcutta's streets, despite having the resources to do so. Once, when I was waiting in front of Mother Teresa's large home in [Rome's](#) Piazza San Gregorio al Celio, an ambulance arrived bringing in a man from a hospital. He had nowhere to go after his medical treatment was over, so he was allowed to stay in a Mother Teresa home. In Calcutta such an arrangement would be unthinkable.

The MC possess a small fleet of 'ambulances', many of them donated by businesses and individuals. These vehicles are painted to appear as ambulances and are fitted with red beacons; they are exempt from traffic regulations. But their sole function is to provide a taxi service for nuns. In my time, I never saw an 'ambulance' carry a patient or a destitute. Indeed, most of them do not have the provision to carry a stretcher, for the rails on the floor have been removed. The seats on the sides have been replaced by patterned sofas for the nuns to sit on. On 21 August 1996, I witnessed the surreal sight of an ambulance, donated by Federal Express (India), filled with live squawking chickens which were being transported to Mother House for the nuns' annual feast the following day! I have a photograph of this bizarre spectacle.

I am aware that many readers will not be fully convinced about Mother Teresa's nuns not picking up people from the streets of Calcutta; to say that they do not provide this vital function which is central to their image is tantamount to saying that the Pope (or Mother Teresa!) is not a Catholic.

I have therefore audio-recorded numerous telephone conversations with the Missionaries of Charity at their world famous home for the dying at Kalighat in Calcutta. These conversations were all recorded during 1995 and 1996. Here is one typical such conversation:

Me (pretending to be a concerned citizen): *Ota ki Mother Teresar home?*
['Is that Mother Teresa's home?' in Bengali]

Nun: Speak in English please. . . or Hindi.

Me: *There is a man [sometimes I changed it to a woman] lying in front of Ashutosh College; he is seriously ill. He is probably going to die.*

[Ashutosh College is walking distance from the home]

Nun: Yes, we have beds. Ring the Corporation ambulance, they'll bring him to us.

Me: *Yes. . . but. . .the line is busy. I've been trying for some time.*

Nun: They are always busy. You just have to keep trying ringing 102.

Me: *Can you not send an ambulance? He is not very far from you.*

Nun: We don't send out ambulances. We use the Corporation ambulances.

Me: *Can you not help him out this time?*

Nun: Look, I have told you, 'we do not have ambulances'.

(The voice becomes louder and the temper slightly frayed. At this juncture, the nun would usually disconnect the phone.)

Readers who have visited Mother Teresa's home for the dying in Calcutta will remember the 'ambulance' that stands at attention at the front door, like an emergency vehicle raring to go and attend to the sick and the dying. But it lies dormant all day until 3.45 p.m., when it briefly comes to life. It leaves the home for the dying to go to Mother House with a bevy of nuns; it returns a few hours later with a fresh batch of nuns: its work for the day is then complete. One of Teresa's high profile fans, former California Governor [Jerry Brown](#), was a regular traveller in Mother's ambulances during his stint as a volunteer at the home for dying: 'At 6 p.m. daily, I would get into an ambulance with half a dozen nuns and some volunteers and ride back to the Mother House for a half hour prayer and the saying of the rosary. Mother Teresa was always there.'¹⁴

The more senior nuns do not put up with the inconvenience of travelling with others in the ambulance mini bus – they get a taxi. I have photographs of nuns in taxis. The cost of a taxi ride could feed three children for a day.

The sight of nuns in taxis would not have irked me at all had I not read over and over again about the 'poor and humble' means of their travels with authors inspiring a Biblical picture like that of Jesus and his apostles trudging through the holy land. The official party line on transport is provided by Chawla in Mother's authorised biography: 'The Sisters travel as the poor do. They usually walk, or if the distance is far, use public transport.'¹⁵

The [misuse of ambulances](#) is naturally an issue in itself, for they could be used to relieve the city's creaking public health service. Instead of demanding that Calcutta Corporation provide her with ambulances, Mother Teresa could bring her resources to the aid of the city's cash strapped civic body.

The image of extreme austerity and 'humility' of the nuns that have been portrayed by Mother and her biographers is also untrue. It has been said that the nuns do not know what the inside of a shop looks like, so unworldly are they. Mother's nuns are frequently seen shopping in Calcutta's [New Market](#). I have got photographs of nuns buying basic cosmetics and also expensive Cashmere shawls. I have also seen nuns shopping in Gariahat in south Calcutta, an area of the city they had never ventured into previously.

I rang MC homes frequently during Mother's lifetime; often I was sternly told by the nun on the other side to speak in English *only*, as I kept breaking into Bengali and Hindi. In a recorded conversation on 7 October 1996, I started off in Bengali, but very soon realised that there was complete silence on the other side so I said a sentence in Hindi, in reply to which I was sternly told to, 'Speak in English.'

It is well-known that the majority of Mother Teresa's Calcutta-based nuns cannot speak or even understand rudiments of Bengali, the language of Calcutta; some of them, being from Bihar, speak Hindi, which is spoken by the majority of Indians. This is because the vast majority of the nuns (around 70 per cent) are recruited from southern India, which has a large Christian population, and who speak English as a parallel vernacular to their native Dravidian languages, which are totally different from languages in the rest of India. I have never met a 'poorest of the poor' in Calcutta who knows even a word of English.

Teresa's nuns do not require to communicate with Calcutta's poor as they do not go out into the streets or the slums to ask about their needs. But within the homes, residents' needs have to be met sometimes. Here, the job is done by carers speaking English, Italian, German, Spanish, Finnish, etc. on the one side, and by gestures on the other. Most of the grind in Calcutta homes is done by international volunteers. They do it to the best of their abilities, but many have told me of their frustration at not being able to speak to the residents.

It is not a requirement of MC nuns and Brothers to learn the local language, as their official language is English and a knowledge of English that allows a concrete understanding of the scriptures is deemed sufficient. They also move around frequently from one corner of the globe to the other, therefore learning the local lingo would not be worthwhile.

Mother Teresa herself was not fluent in Bengali! This may seem astonishing after her 70 supposed years in Calcutta, but she was surrounded by Westerners, Anglo-Indians and Christian southern Indians. She retained a prominent Balkan accent, and her Bengali was stilted and basic; she used stock phrases such as ‘I will pray for you’, ‘suffering brings you close to Jesus Christ’. If she had devoted her life to the city’s poor and mingled with them as she claimed, she would have become fluent in colloquial Bengali.

What then, of the claim by scores of her biographers that she had taught the Bengali alphabet to the children of Calcutta’s [Motijheel slum](#) in the 1940s when she was starting out in life as a saviour of the poor? This parabolic tale has been told thousands of times, as is here by her journalist friend, Franca Zambonini:

Her first project was a school, and it is not by chance that she has been a teacher for almost 20 years. She gathered some children [in [Motijheel slum](#)] in an empty space . . . she cleared the ground of grass and using a stick, she traced the letters of the Bengali alphabet on the ground. She ended her lesson with a prayer. The next day someone brought her a table and a stool. . . ¹⁶

It is possible she was a teacher’s help for a brief time. I have not been able to find anybody who was directly taught by Teresa. The [constantly](#) repeated story of her teaching in Bengali is entirely fictitious. She was a prolific letter writer, but nothing at all exists of her having written even a word in Bengali.

Apart from the myth of regularly ‘picking up’ people from the streets, the other serious misinformation she spread in her Nobel speech was about the decrease in the number of babies born because of her programme of [natural contraception](#). She claimed that 61,273 fewer babies were born in Calcutta in the previous six years because she was promoting natural contraception among the poor and the slum dwellers. This figure was pure invention. She also said that she was supplying fertility thermometers and

temperature charts to the poor. Patently untrue, but even if she was, none of the thousands of journalists present had the courage to ask her how many of the slum-dwellers could read and plot graphs in English. She also said that ‘the other day’ one of the poor came to thank her for teaching chastity and ‘self-control out of love for each other’.

The figure of 61,273 became 134,000¹⁷ by June 1981 in Washington DC. In 1982, during the Ian Gall interview for [Scottish Television](#), when Gall pinned her down (albeit with great deference) on her views on artificial contraception and her absolute opposition to abortion, she blithely came out with the monstrous lie: ‘In the last 10 years we had 1 million babies less in Calcutta [due to my method].’ The lie shut Gall up much to her satisfaction.

Mother Teresa did not have the Gandhian courage of sticking to unpopular beliefs and proclaiming them.

She frequently said that neglect by the family is the greatest poverty: ‘the poverty of love’. In her Nobel speech she spoke about it at length: ‘That poverty comes right in our own home, the neglect to love. Maybe in our own family we have somebody who is feeling lonely, who is feeling sick, who is feeling worried, and these are difficult days for everybody. Are we there? Are we there to receive them?’ It would, therefore, seem strange that she took almost a punitive line against those poor people seeking her help who had family of any kind, however distant or however poor. In the assessment of the MC, these people (who may be exceptionally poor and needy) are deemed ‘not destitute enough’.

I have here the essence of three telephone conversations with the Home for the Dying, which were recorded on 16 June 1995, and 3 and 8 October 1996.

Me: *I have a woman with me near Purno Cinema [close to the home] who is dying. Will you send an ambulance?*

Nun: We don’t send ambulances. Contact the Corporation. Where is the woman?

Me: *She is at my house.*

Nun: Why is she at your house?

Me: *Well, err. . . , she is my kind of aunt. . . a distant relative in fact.*

Nun: ‘Sorry, we don’t take family cases. She can’t come here.’

(The voice becomes loud and irritated)

Me: *But she is homeless and poor. I myself am pretty hand to mouth; I don't have the resources to look after her.*

Nun: That does not matter. Our rule is, we do NOT take family cases.

Me: *But, . . . will you not consider?*

Nun: I'm telling you, we do *not* take family cases whether she's poor or not.

Me: *What if I make a small payment?*

Nun: We don't have that system. We can't help you.

(At this juncture the phone was usually disconnected)

The refusing care to the dying or suffering, who may have a putative family member of any kind is one of the founding principles of the Missionaries of Charity. The rule was formulated by Mother herself many years back. Mother frequently said loneliness, isolation and rejection were worse than physical illnesses. But she rejected almost everybody, especially if she had a suspicion that they had a family member, even if the latter was non-involved. Since Mother's death, the 'family cases' rule has been relaxed in Calcutta somewhat.

Many a time when I had rung the home for the dying in Calcutta, the very first question I was asked was whether I was ringing about a relative. If the nun on the other side was not satisfied that I was unrelated to the source of my concern she would not continue the conversation any further. In [Rome](#), on the other hand, it is not asked of the destitute if they are a 'family case'; it is considered that if they request help, their family has rejected them and that alone would suffice.

Mother Teresa was habitually economical with the truth over the last half a century when talking about her operations. Journalists and authors with or without a vested interest have often taken cues from her when creating fantastic tales of charity. But when it came to fairy tales, it was Mother who took the wafer. And, the fictions of glory that others manufactured on her behalf had her blessings – 'Journalists can do the work of God' was one of her favourite sayings.

[Audrey Constant's](#) book on her life, written for children, is one of the manuscripts she personally corrected and annotated; the author herself said so in a personal communication: 'Sadly I have not yet met her [Mother Teresa]. . . When I wrote the story (which I did with the help of the Sisters

of Charity) Mother Teresa herself amended the manuscript and she wrote in a copy of the book and sent it to me. I will always treasure it.’¹⁸

This book makes some bizarre claims about the charitable functions of the Missionaries of Charity including that they have ‘122 leprosy clinics’.¹⁹ In Calcutta they had a single leprosy clinic, a weekly open air clinic on Convent Road with an average attendance of about 60 cases. The book also describes Calcutta as a city so overwhelmed by lepers that a special church has to be earmarked for them.²⁰ There was no such church.

In 1979, Mother Teresa wrote a famous letter to [Morarji Desai](#), the then prime minister of India. In her letter, she severely upbraided Morarji Desai for not outlawing abortion and then went on to say, ‘In Calcutta alone we have 102 centres where families are taught self-control out of love.’²¹ That is, natural family planning centres. I was unable to locate a single such centre. The claim was particularly outrageous, as she was writing to the prime minister, although admittedly he was far less of a celebrity than she was. Mother Teresa’s friend, the Calcutta-based priest [Edward Le Joly](#), 13 years later, gives the global total of her family planning centres as ‘69’.²² None is mentioned in Calcutta.

Mother used to pluck any figure she wished out the air. On 13 July 1977 she said in London to an assembly of her ‘co-workers’, a large and powerful international body of lay people who do a lot of the fund raising, ‘We spend Rs 20,000 a week just on food for the 59 centres we have in Calcutta.’²³ This was not just a slip of the tongue, as the ‘59 centres’ recurred, in this way : ‘In Calcutta alone we have 59 centres. . . The Sisters travel everywhere with a rosary in their hands.’²⁴

In 1977 Mother Teresa had four centres in Calcutta, and presently her order has eight, not counting her three large nunneries in the city. So what should we make of her ‘59 centres’?

Another of her outrageous comments was: ‘We deal with thousands and thousands of very poor people in Calcutta. As you may know, there are over 10 million people in that city, but up to now I am not aware of one woman among the very poor who has had an abortion.’²⁵ She said this frequently during her lifetime. The reason for this grotesque lie was twofold: first, she wanted to display to the world how much Calcutta’s ‘very poor’ were wedded to her ideology, secondly she was implying that she had the means of looking after the unwanted children of millions of poor women. There

would be about half a million 'very poor' women in Calcutta, most of them of child bearing age. Mother Teresa knew hardly anything about these women, especially what they thought about abortion. Moreover, her order does not have a single maternity home or mother and baby unit.

A handful of Calcutta's poor women carrying unwanted babies were pressurised by MC to continue with their pregnancies. These women were looked after by the Association of Medical Women in India (AMWI) Hospital, a government run maternity hospital, situated close to Mother House. The hospital had thirty beds, and many of them were occupied by 'Mother Teresa's women'; these women received support until delivery at the hospital, and their newborn babies were cared for by MC before being adopted. MC did not fork out a paisa towards the upkeep of 'Mother Teresa's women', but food was sent in from time to time.

Abortion is widely available in Calcutta, virtually on demand. Of all groups, 'very poor' women are most inclined towards abortion though they are restrained by lack of access to services. Having made many thousands of women around the world give up abortion, maybe she considered it a personal failure that she was singularly unsuccessful in Calcutta, so she chose to misinform.

Among all of Mother's hyperboles and prevarications 'Bring me all your unwanted children' was the only claim about her operations in Calcutta which had a germ of truth in it. However, the children have got to be completely and utterly unwanted. To illustrate, I shall relate my own recent experience at Mother's [Calcutta orphanage, Shishu Bhavan](#). The entire episode was captured on video.

On 30 August 1996, at around 5 p.m., I found a small commotion in front of Shishu Bhavan's entrance. A 'very poor' woman, Noor Jehan (name slightly changed at her request), was wailing at the top of her voice. She had with her, her two children, both girls, the younger one about 10 months and the older about 2-years-old. The 10-month-old was suffering with diarrhoea and was ill; the 2-year-old was miserable, fed up and was lying on the pavement screaming.

I asked Noor Jehan what the matter was. She told me that she had been thrown out of her slum home near the Calcutta docks by her violent husband the night before and she had arrived at Shishu Bhavan at 10 p.m. hoping to get some help for her children. She had been let in by the night porter and had been allowed to sleep in the courtyard. They had even given

her a sheet for her children. Promptly at 5 a.m., however, she had been thrown out on to the pavement with just a cup of tea. From then on she had been alternately pleading and demanding to be let in so that the children could have something to eat and somewhere to sleep.

Noor Jehan's entreaties for help were not entertained by the nuns. The door remained firmly shut in her face and the baby's hungry wails were ignored. The local shopkeepers took pity on the woman and gave her some tea and bread; somebody brought some milk for the children. By the time that I arrived at 5 p.m., a small crowd of about a dozen people had gathered and had turned quite hostile towards the nuns. After a lot of loud banging, a nun appeared at the door. I asked her why they would not give the woman and her children some food and shelter for that night only. The nun explained that they could do that, but only after the mother had agreed to sign over all parental rights to her children to MC. In other words, a 'form of renunciation' had to be signed, or in this case to be imprinted with the impression of Noor Jehan's left thumb. I presumed the children would then, in due course, be adopted by a good Catholic family in the West although the nun did not actually say it.

Noor Jehan became hysterical at the mention of 'signing over' her children, and told the nun what she thought of her clearly and loudly. About 7 p.m., Noor Jehan left Shishu Bhavan, disappearing into an uncertain Calcutta night, probably to go back to her violent husband. She left without much bitterness; as a poor woman in India, she was used to doors slamming shut in her face. She knew that the rich and powerful always rejected the poor. She knew that her children's existence was borrowed. However, she did not know how the world rejoiced every time Mother Teresa said, 'There is always room for another child in my home.'

When Noor Jehan and the shopkeepers were shouting their loudest at the nuns through the closed door of the orphanage, an Eastern European woman who looked like a volunteer, walked up the pavement and knocked on the door to be let in. I cornered her and asked her whether given Teresa's image and finances this sort of treatment of a poor woman with children was acceptable, and why a helpless mother should be asked to relinquish the rights to her children in order for them to be fed and helped. I also asked her to let the woman in and feed her children. At this, the volunteer got irritated, and told me that I was hassling her when I ought to be grateful that she was in my country helping my poor. I replied that I was grateful, but

was questioning Teresa's obvious cruelty and matching it with her own pronouncements. The volunteer got more irate and promptly left us. I implored her not to come back to India to help 'my people'. Two years later, I realised the woman in question was the Canadian-Croatian [Ana Ganza](#), who subsequently wrote a semi-authorised biography of Teresa called *Journey of Hope*. After her book was published, I wrote to Ganza, reminding her of the (videoed) incident outside [Shishu Bhavan](#) and inviting her thoughts and comments on it. She never replied.

Stark distortions of facts in Mother Teresa's statements or speeches were evident during the decade 1975–85. After the mid-1980s, she became more subtle in her methods since the media were doing most of her work for her.

When she came to London in April 1988, journalists stuck to her like limpets. For two successive nights, she took them on walkabouts to London's 'Cardboard City'; an increasing population of homeless people living in cardboard boxes under Waterloo Bridge. The media convulsed with devotion, when she said:

It hurt me so much to see our people in terrible cold. . . my eyes were full of tears [A man] looked up and said, 'It's a long time since I felt the warmth of a human hand.'²⁶

Her performance was so impeccable that even the normally sceptical British were impressed. She cleverly concealed from media the specific purpose of her London trip: to put pressure on Prime Minister [Thatcher](#) and British MPs to support [David Alton's](#) bill to reduce the time limit of abortion from 24 to 18 weeks (banning abortion completely was not on the agenda). Her trip had been funded and sponsored by anti-abortion groups.

Even when she emerged from a meeting with Thatcher in the company of Alton (UK's only 'single-issue' anti-abortion MP) she could not bring herself to tell the truth. She told journalists that she told Thatcher that she wanted a house for the homeless or else she'd bring them to sleep in Parliament!²⁷ Alton, on the other hand, spoke categorically about the meeting's specific anti-abortion agendum, 'We know her involvement at a very personal level at this crucial moment will be a decisive factor.'²⁸ (It was not.)

Mother Teresa went to such lengths to hide the real purpose of her London visit because she knew abortion was not a burning issue in British society where majority supported it. She could have alienated the British had she gone on her usual virulent anti-abortion rant. The theme of homelessness was a safe emotional string to pull.

But six years previously in August 1983, she had gone to Ireland to join Prime Minister [Charles Haughey](#), to campaign against abortion. This time there was no midnight walkabouts amongst [Dublin's](#) homeless, of whom there were plenty; as the Irish population at the time was overwhelmingly anti-abortion she chose not to waste energy on creating a smokescreen. It is sad that a person, so loved for being honest and truthful by the world, regularly resorted to such political subterfuge.

Mother Teresa frequently said, 'We depend solely on providence. We don't accept government grants. We don't accept church donations. . .' ²⁹ In the [Scottish Television](#) interview, she made the same claim.

This is a very incredible statement indeed since 95 per cent or more of the buildings of the Missionaries of Charity have been donated by either governments or by the Catholic Church. How she got her first and most famous home from the Corporation of Calcutta has become folklore, quoted numerous times in various biographies:

And the same day I went to the municipality and asked for a house. I said I only wanted some place where I could bring these people, and the rest I will do myself. The official of the Calcutta Corporation took me to this place, a part of the Kali temple, and he said, 'This is the only place I can give you' and I said 'this is just the ideal place.'

As far as I am aware, in the first few years, Calcutta Corporation used to give her a small sum of money also for each resident treated at the home so it was therefore called 'Corporation of Calcutta: [Nirmal Hriday](#)', indicated by a sign written in both English and Bengali which hung in front of the home until, I believe, the early 1970s.

[Kathryn Spink](#) admits in her book, 'They [Corporation] granted her, provisionally, a monthly sum of money and the use of the pilgrims' dormitories attached to the Kali temple.' ³⁰

Mother Teresa's home in Dum Dum, near Calcutta airport is also built on land donated by the West Bengal government. The Missionaries of

Charity ran a small refugee camp, on the land during the [Bangladesh](#) war in 1971. After the war ended, the government allowed Mother Teresa to keep the land; the building was funded by a Catholic foundation, which announces itself on a marble plaque inside the home. Mother also chipped in with some of the money she got from the John F Kennedy Prize; hence the name '[Nirmala](#) Kennedy Centre'.

One of Mother's newest homes in Calcutta, in Tangra, is not on government or church donated land; she rents the land from the government. According to Fr. [Le Joly](#): '. . .the government had given her a very large property for the nominal rent of one rupee [half cent] a year.' Now why does she rent, rather than outright own it? In her own words, 'It is good that the ownership of the land remains with them,' said Mother, always practical-minded, 'because if the roads need repairs they will have to do them, as it is their property.'³¹ All very good, but the biggest building on this property has no charitable functions, but is the residential quarters for trainee Brothers. This is another example of how the state of West Bengal and the city of Calcutta are unknowingly subsidising the Missionaries of Charity and its religious activities.

When lies are peddled, slip-ups will occur, as happened in [Malcolm Muggeridge's](#) book *Something Beautiful for God*. On page 32, Muggeridge says, '. . .she has never accepted any government grants in connection with her medical and social work', only to quote her on page 103, 'We are trying to build a town of peace on the land that the government gave us some years back, 34 acres of land.'

Another slip-up happened on 14 January 1992, in a video-taped (and widely distributed) speech to staff at the [Scripps Clinic, California](#): 'We don't accept government grants, we don't ask the church for maintenance, we're completely dependent on divine providence.' But in the course of the same speech about twenty minutes later she said, 'With the help of government we are creating rehabilitation centres for them [lepers]. The Government gives me land, I buy material for building. . . and I pay them to build their own homes. . .' I do not think Mother Teresa ever gave any actual money to anyone poor or needy; it was against her principle. But the statement went down well with her audience.

In June 1997, Mother Teresa was asking New York's Mayor Giuliani to give her a building so she could extend her AIDS home and also asked for

free parking permits for her nuns. She got the latter immediately.

Many of the MC buildings have in fact been donated by governments and the church. Their first building, where Mother House now is, was bought by funds provided by the Archbishop of Calcutta. It was bought at a knockdown price in 1951 as the Muslim owner was fleeing India in a hurry after the partition of the subcontinent: 'The largest figure he [Archbishop] could propose was less than the worth of the land on which the house was built; but miraculously the offer was accepted.'³²

Two of her other buildings in Calcutta, one by Sealdah railway station, and the other on expensive [Park Street](#), were donated by the Church but neither has a charitable function. In various other parts of India, such as in Agra, Mother's homes are situated within the compounds of Catholic churches. In the United States, the Church has bent over backwards to give her property. Her home for AIDS patients in New York's exclusive Greenwich Village (657 Washington Road) is in a former presbytery. In Italy, almost all her operations are run from church premises, and many of these do not have charitable activities. Her nunnery in Cagliari in Sardinia adjoins a church and when I visited it in December 1996, I found the structure being renovated by the government department that looks after historical buildings.

And yet, people will continue to believe 'We don't accept government grants; we don't accept church donations. . .' as this has been uttered by the holiest person of our time. It was a major theme in some of her obituaries.

She said in Carmelite Church in [Dublin](#) in 1979, 'The Sisters go out at night to work, to pick up people from the streets. . .'³³ They do not. Such statements are so untrue, one is at a loss to address them. Sisters retire to bed early at about 8 p.m.; a major earthquake will not bring them to the doors, at least not in Calcutta. I have numerous recorded telephone conversations where I was trying to have somebody admitted to the home for the dying in Calcutta in the middle of the night, and the Sisters kept insisting that I brought the person at 9 a.m. the following morning. Indeed, until a few years back, the home for the dying did not even have a nun staying there overnight; the building was left to the mercy of sweepers and local anti-socials. Mother agreed to provide two nuns for the night after intense agitation by some volunteers.

I cannot say that Mother Teresa was continuously callous and calculating about misrepresenting her charitable activities from time to time

she became extremely agitated, especially with people who were close to her, that she should be represented in such an extreme charitable light. When, for instance, [Edward Le Joly](#), first wanted to write a book on her, she erupted:

Do it, do it. We are misunderstood, we are misrepresented, we are misreported.

We are not nurses, we are not doctors, we are not teachers, we are not social workers.

We are religious, we are religious, we are religious.³⁴

This is not the only time she had made a similar statement. But world media assumed that she was so humble and self-effacing that she was consciously underselling herself. Predictably, in Father Joly's book, her message does not come across; he eloquently speaks about her charitable functions.

I wrote to MC numerous times asking for an interview with either Mother herself or one of her senior nuns to address some of the glaring distortions of truth emanating either from her. I have never received any reply.

On 22 April 1996, I managed to find her authorised biographer [Navin Chawla](#) at [Nehru Centre](#), London addressing a public meeting about Mother's work chaired by [Nicholas Wapshot](#), editor of the magazine section of *The Times*. I asked Chawla a number of questions from the floor to do with inflation of facts and figures and the total disconnect between reality and fiction. Chawla said that statistics were not important. I asked then why Mother Teresa regularly quoted numbers and figures when statistics were 'not important to her'. He made no convincing reply and the meeting was prematurely terminated.

Mother Teresa herself was primarily responsible for the misrepresentation of her activities. She did get periods of guilt and remorse that she should be cast as such a figure of charity, but she would soon lapse into her usual mode: 'If there are poor on the moon, we will go there'. She was, after all, human. I regard her as history's most successful politician. And her service for her political party, the Vatican, was selfless.

3

How the Myth Began – The Muggeridge Connection

There would be no Mother Teresa without [Malcolm Muggeridge](#).

During his long life, Muggeridge (1903–90), a journalist and an author, was in the unique position of having major access to both printed media and television, in Britain and the United States. It was Muggeridge who ‘discovered’ Teresa and it was owing to his incessant efforts that Mother Teresa built up a public profile in early years. It is true that Mother Teresa will be remembered long after Malcolm Muggeridge is forgotten, but it was he who brought his own clout (and initially, that of the BBC) to create the worldwide phenomenon that we know today. Five weeks after Mother Teresa died, *Catholic Times*¹ made an unstinted acknowledgement of Muggeridge’s role in making her known: ‘[But for Muggeridge] perhaps even now no one would have heard of her. Maybe she would have been like the vast majority of giving souls whose works are only known to “clients” and to God.’

As the myth of Teresa owes its origin to the efforts of Malcolm Muggeridge, it is essential to know Muggeridge the man.

He had early ambition to be a priest but changed his mind and travelled to south India to teach English where we spent three unhappy years (1924-

27). He travelled to Soviet Union in 1929 and on his return wrote *Winter in Moscow*, an anti-Semitic diatribe. Five years after the end of World War II, he wrote in his diary:

[Jews] never quite make terms with life . . . liable to [be] highly destructive – two great destroyers of Christian civilisation; Marx and Freud, [Jews] always and irretrievably strangers in a strange land – never assimilated, bringing woe. . . In a manner therefore, Hitler’s mania was justified – he justified it.²

Five years after the death of Hitler, he wrote that liberal values were a bigger threat to Christendom than was Hitler.

Muggeridge came to Calcutta in September 1934, as the deputy editor of *The Statesman*, the country’s major English language newspaper. He was, by now, a well-known journalist in Britain. His decision to come to Calcutta was prompted by financial problems, which he hoped to resolve with the salary of £1,500 a year. Back then, Westerners, especially the British, came to Calcutta in pursuit of wealth, quite the reverse of the post-Teresa culture of coming here to succour God’s poor. Calcutta, then, was a bit like the Middle East with style. During Muggeridge’s brief tenure at the newspaper, Sister Teresa was an unknown 25-year-old nun within the cloisters of Calcutta’s Loreto Convent, and the two never met. During the 1970s, when Mother Teresa was well-known in the West, but hardly an entity in Calcutta and India, *The Statesman* did its best to raise her profile in India. This newspaper makes no apologies for its colonial heritage and till recently had a fawning attitude towards purported white saviours.

Muggeridge’s eighteen months in Calcutta was the unhappiest period of his life, according to his own account. When his wife Kitty arrived, he introduced her to his Indian mistress and Kitty told him she was expecting the child of another man. They visited poet and Nobel Laureate [Rabindranath Tagore](#) who Muggeridge referred to as ‘the old fool’.

Kitty went on to have her baby and brought him up, but he tragically died young in an accident. Muggeridge, by now a devout Christian, did not attend the funeral.

Before he left Calcutta in September 1935, he found time for another affair – with the talented artist [Amrita Sher-Gil](#) – who he ravished at night

but savaged in his diaries during the day, partly because she was half-Jewish.

After he made his film (*Something Beautiful for God*) in 1969, Muggeridge turned increasingly against Calcutta, as he realised that his protégé was not a star in her adopted city whose citizens had far more interest in Marxism than Christianity. In his biography by the Canadian Ian Hunter (*Malcolm Muggeridge: A Life*) published in 1980, Calcutta of the 1930s is described thus: 'Above the city, like a cloud, hung the stench of death in all the world uniquely pungent in Calcutta, where street sweepers dragged the night's corpses to the side of the road, there to be stacked up like packing crates and carted off.' Hunter had never been to Calcutta, but wrote the book with his subject's cooperation. If he had read Muggeridge's diaries of his time in Calcutta during 1934–35, he would have found no mention of poverty or death. Apart from nonstop womanising, he was having a jolly time at the races, at parties or sauntering around in his friend Goswami's Rolls Royce.

He spent the better part of 1956 organising a disruption campaign (funded by CIA funnelled through a Polish Catholic organisation) against the prospective visit to Britain by the Soviet leaders, Marshall Bulganin and General Secretary [Khrushchev](#). The pair had visited Calcutta earlier in the year and had drawn unforeseen crowds in the city.

The way Mother Teresa was brought to the notice of Muggeridge was thus: one day, in March 1968, he was phoned at home in Surrey by [Oliver Hunkin](#), the head of BBC television's religious affairs programme. Hunkin asked him if he would interview, for the BBC's Meeting Point series (a religious slot), an 'Indian nun' called Mother Teresa, who was visiting London. It is not known how Hunkin had heard of Mother Teresa. Muggeridge was delighted with the offer, as, according to his biographer, 'from this time, the mid-sixties religion was to be Malcolm's theme to the exclusion of almost everything else.'³

When Hunkin phoned Muggeridge in March 1968, the latter had just returned from a religious lecture and television tour of the United States; he was now a darling of America's formidable religious Right. His intolerance and fanaticism alienated him from the British establishment, although television producers here liked him for his ability to provoke and instigate. Christ and 'lechery' were now his main topics of discourse.

If he had lengthened his spring 1968 American tour by only two weeks, Mother Teresa would have remained an unknown nun forever.

When [Oliver Hunkin](#) asked Muggeridge to interview 'the Indian nun from Calcutta', he was aware that Muggeridge had lived and worked in Calcutta for a year, albeit more than thirty years back! He was therefore, to Western eyes, a Calcutta expert, although according to Muggeridge himself, 'Though I was nominally living in Calcutta, I was not really living there at all. It was extraordinary how, as a sahib in India, this could be done.'⁴

Muggeridge and Mother Teresa first met at a convent in London for the interview (the first of Mother's innumerable TV appearances) in March 1968. He discovered that she was in fact Albanian, not Indian. This delighted him, as he was a champion of Catholicism in Eastern Europe and was connected with shadowy Catholic groups that worked behind the iron curtain, financed with money laundered by the CIA and the Vatican. It also fulfilled his other criterion of a European (albeit just) doing charity amidst the dark races.

The interview left Muggeridge well short of overwhelmed. He was not yet aware of Mother Teresa's special brand of Catholicism, as she did not speak about her stance on abortion and contraception (It was the only occasion in which she appeared on television outside India, but did not rant about the evils of abortion.). He quizzed her on why she was not doing more to spread Christianity and chided her for letting the side down. She replied, 'Everyone, even the Hindus and the Mohammedans, has some faith in their own religion, and that can help them do the works of love.' A disappointed Muggeridge asked in faint disgust, 'Is that enough?'

The interview was broadcast on BBC television in May 1968. Viewers liked it as Mother Teresa spoke from the heart, and sent in a lot of money (£9,000), without being asked to. People were impressed by the frail and shy nun who was doing her best in a faraway land with minimum funds.

Delighted with the response, BBC repeated the programme soon afterwards. People sent in more money, and the total amount donated following the two screenings came to about £20,000. One reason people were impressed by Mother Teresa was because she did not make any apologies for her Christian faith. This was the high sixties, the decade of drugs and Hare Krishna, when Christians in the West were suffering from guilt and a lack of fulfilment; people were flocking to India looking for spiritual salvation. But here was a Christian woman in India who was not

tugging at Eastern mysticism. Muggeridge, however, was deeply critical that Mother Teresa was not doing enough to spread the word of Jesus among heathens. She soon started doing that as much as the conditions in India would allow her, mindful of the fine line she had to tread.

The two screenings of the BBC Meeting Point interview caused a ripple which quickly died down. Muggeridge soon found out more about Mother Teresa and her ideals, through mutual acquaintances and also by direct correspondence. He became frenzied: at last, he had found a Christian person who fitted the bill exactly; a dyed-in-the-wool conservative, uncompromisingly opposed to contraception and abortion. But crucially she was also a charity worker, which would appeal to a wide audience.

He decided that the best way to bring his new-found heroine to the attention of the world would be through a television film, and soon persuaded BBC to agree to a film on his protégé, to be shot in Calcutta.

Mother Teresa herself was initially reluctant about the film, but Muggeridge put pressure on her through a mutual friend, [Cardinal Heenan](#) of London. She agreed, but was not overenthusiastic: *'If this TV programme is going to let people understand God better, then we will have it.. . .'*⁵ To Muggeridge, she wrote, *'Let us now do something beautiful for God.'*

The rest is history. Following Mother's cue, Muggeridge called the film *Something Beautiful for God*, and a year later wrote a book of the same name, which became a bestseller, and is still in print. He donated the book's royalty to Missionaries of Charity. The film launched the career of Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Even in those early days, he had foreseen the saleability of Teresa as a potential saint and had appended 'of Calcutta'. The 'of Calcutta' suffix, in those very early days, was a cunning idea of Muggeridge's; it captured public imagination and stuck.

The film was shot in March 1969, over a period of five days. The day that had been scheduled for most of the filming turned out to be a day of *bandh* (general strike) in Calcutta. The practice of *bandh* is a tool used by all political parties as a display of strength. The Calcutta of 1969 that Muggeridge arrived in to shoot his film was quite different to the one he had left in 1935. Much of the city was now a battleground between the hard left, moderate left and the centre-right.

Although fictitious gruesome slums were not built for his film, the city was presented in a negative light. A scene shows Calcutta as a smoking wasteland with a corridor in the middle illuminated by a shaft of light,

along which Mother Teresa walks serenely. Another scene (reproduced in the Woody Allen film *Alice*) shows Mother with a blind Indian girl, rubbing her fingers repeatedly over the child's eyes. Soon the child's facial expression changes from sadness to an angelic smile – this was a crude reproduction of the story of Jesus using mud and spit to give sight to a blind boy. It is significant that Mother Teresa, even in her first 'documentary', had no compunction in imitating Jesus, despite her initial reluctance. When it came to publicity, she was a born natural.

Muggeridge adopted a unique line to enhance the film's appeal and make it the subject of international discussion. He said that an 'actual miracle' had taken place during the filming. The story, according to him, was: he asked the cameraman [Ken Macmillan](#) to shoot inside the home for the dying, which was 'dimly lit by small windows high up in the wall', with film meant for outdoor filming. Macmillan did that and he also shot some footage outside, of the residents sitting in the sun. Now the 'actual miracle', according to Muggeridge, was this; 'In the processed film, the part taken inside was bathed in a particularly beautiful soft light, whereas the part taken outside was rather dim and confused.' And he gave us the reason for this anomaly:

I myself am absolutely convinced that the technically unaccountable light is, in fact, the 'Kindly Light' Newman refers to in his well-known exquisite hymn, . . . made visible round the heads of saints. I find it not at all surprising that the luminosity should register on a photographic film . . . I am personally persuaded that Ken recorded the first authentic photographic miracle. It so delighted me that I fear that I talked and wrote about it to the point of tedium, and sometimes irritation.⁶

Neither [Ken Macmillan](#), nor *Something Beautiful's* producer and director [Peter Chafer](#) claimed that there had been any 'photographic miracle' in Calcutta, although when put under increasing pressure by journalists, or the Catholic Church, Chafer would wriggle out with the quizzical reply, 'The whole of my television life with Muggeridge has been a series of miracles and bizarre, inconceivable happenings.'³⁶ He also wrote, 'I am no authority on miracles, but suspect that in this case they rest, like beauty, in the eye of the beholder.'⁷

It was not until 1994, however, that Ken Macmillan, the cameraman, went public about the ‘miracle’. He said:

We had some new film from Kodak that we hadn’t tried before. When we saw the final print, I was going to say three cheers for Kodak, but Muggeridge turned round and stopped me . . . Then the same day, I get all these calls from newspapers in London asking me about the ‘miracle’ in Calcutta.⁹

In 1971, Muggeridge claimed that a shadowy figure (that of St. Paul) appeared in a religious film he was making in Turkey. But at the same time, he was a sceptic when it came to suffering caused by the American atom bomb: he was dismissive of vaporised humans in Hiroshima.

From March until *Something Beautiful* was screened on primetime BBC TV on 5 December 1969, Muggeridge whipped up frenzy in both Britain and the United States, amongst the public and the media by constantly lecturing about ‘the first authentic photographic miracle’. In such a situation, curiosity drove many people to watch the film. The week it was scheduled to be shown, *Radio Times* (a BBC publication), Britain’s only television magazine at the time, carried a large feature on Mother Teresa by [Cardinal Heenan](#) (who, incidentally, had never been to Calcutta). The article, titled ‘Loving Someone to Salvation’, introducing Mother Teresa to viewers, said that she ‘took them [the dying destitute] to her own home’, and also that owing to her influence ‘refined Indian women who ten years ago thought that it corrupted them to touch an untouchable now gather them lovingly in their arms’. Both points were made up. The myth making had begun in earnest. That particular issue of *Radio Times* also carried a photograph of Mother Teresa, but she was not shown in her usual ‘humble’ or charitable postures, that is, either bending down with folded arms, or clutching an orphan; instead she was shown sitting regally in a high chair. The chair was never seen again as it was not considered humble enough.

The film was well-received in Britain, but in America it created hysteria. The Teresa myth was well and truly born. The days of white Christian guilt were over.

Americans, with their deep faith and belief in miracles, have been the main propagandists of the Teresa myth industry. Amongst the US presidents, Mother Teresa had the greatest admirer in [Ronald Reagan](#), who

was also a staunch fan of Muggeridge. During the 1970s, Reagan was attracted to Muggeridge for his Bible thumping on the US television, and the Teresa connection enhanced the attraction manifold. Muggeridge was now feted all over the world, but particularly in the US, as ‘the man who discovered the “living saint”’. He was recruited by the far-Right American Catholic tycoon William F. Buckley, Jr. (who urged that homosexuals be branded on their bottoms), presenter of the television show *Firing Line*. Muggeridge appeared frequently on *Firing Line*, informing Americans about Mother Teresa and the ‘miracle of lights’. The Catholic establishment and, more broadly, the alliance of the world’s ultra-conservatives, were always grateful to Muggeridge for ‘discovering’ (or inventing) Mother Teresa.

President Reagan remained particularly grateful. In a weird show of gratitude, he once sent a limousine from London’s US embassy to Muggeridge’s home in Surrey carrying just a signed photograph of Mother Teresa with him and Nancy in tow, emerging from White House’s diplomatic gate. In Reagan’s essay on abortion, Muggeridge was quoted liberally.

Mother Teresa gave [Ronald Reagan](#) her ultimate certificate: ‘*I did not know you love your people so much.*’ Though Reagan never claimed he loved the poor.

Following Muggeridge’s film and then the book of the same name, and their worldwide publicity, Mother’s Nobel Prize became a certainty, the culmination of an unstoppable process. Nevertheless, Muggeridge soldiered on ceaselessly, writing to established contacts, finding new contacts, creating more media publicity, writing and talking endlessly in articles, books and on television about his heroine. Way back in 1971, when he was celebrating the launching of the book in London, he said, ‘*When she wins the Nobel Prize, . . .*’¹⁰, which surprised even Mother’s friend and biographer [Eileen Egan](#). According to [The Daily Telegraph](#),¹¹ his groundwork ‘was an important element in winning Mother Teresa the Nobel Peace Prize.’ Another biographer and close friend, the Spaniard [Jose Luis González-Balado](#) remarked, ‘During the 1970s, the pen and microphone of Malcolm Muggeridge, a British journalist made Mother Teresa famous in the West, not only in Catholic circles but in wider society. As a consequence, she is awarded. . . the Nobel Peace Prize.’¹²

A strong Catholic lobby exists in the Peace Prize machinations, and in it Americans play a big role. During the cold war, it helped for the Nobel Peace nominee to be orthodox and embrace right-wing ideology. Mother Teresa never tried to conceal her ultra right-wing credentials. That she came from [Albania](#), the only Stalinist regime in the world at the time (which officially embraced atheism) helped her a great deal. Giving the Nobel to an orthodox Catholic nun from Albania would belittle the Albanian regime and socialist governments worldwide; roughly on the same principles Sakharov had been given the Nobel four years before her, in spite of his involvement with the Soviet hydrogen bomb. It is likely that Calcutta's passion with Marxism was also a factor.

Mother's friends and supporters waged a veritable war in their campaign to win her the Nobel. They recruited three influential American senators, [Pete Domenici](#), Mark O. Hatfield and [Hubert Humphrey](#). [Domenici](#) was a pious 'family values' Catholic with eight children who in 1996–97 voted against employers providing 'family and welfare leave', against government regulations for nursing homes for the elderly, against government funding of retirement and in favour of Medicare cuts. Devout [Senator Hatfield](#), a former fundraiser for Mother Teresa, also voted in favour of Medicare cuts. Both were vehemently anti-abortion and Domenici supported the possession of guns. Hatfield, who went all the way to Calcutta to see Mother Teresa a couple of years after her Nobel, was notable for being the subject of two ethic probes against him, in 1987 and 1992, for 'receiving improper gifts' related to his position in the Senate Appropriations Committee. Former Vice President [Hubert Humphrey](#), the celebrated Commie-basher, was noted for his trenchant support for the continuation of the Vietnam War. These people were close to Mother Teresa and were personally blessed by her. They eased her path towards the Nobel.

Another very powerful and war-hungry man was Mother Teresa's strong ally in her bids for the Nobel Prize – [Robert McNamara](#), US Defence Secretary during the Vietnam War. Incidentally, McNamara came to Calcutta as president of the World Bank shortly after he left his federal post. Visiting Mother Teresa was not on the agenda, as she was unknown at the time outside the Catholic world. His visit is still remembered in Calcutta as all roads from the airport were blockaded by Vietnam War protesters and he had to be airlifted and deposited on the roof of the American consulate. He nominated Teresa three times for Nobel – unsuccessfully in 1975 and 1977,

and successfully in 1979. I find it strange and distasteful that the Peace Committee accepted nominations from the prosecutor of one of history's most brutal wars (Towards the end of his long life McNamara became a semi-pacifist.).

Despite the machinations by the world's most powerful conservatives, Teresa had two abortive attempts at the Nobel – in 1975 Sakharov beat her to it, and in 1977, she was beaten by Amnesty International. Why she failed on those occasions is not clear, but even the Catholic Church admitted that too many 'spontaneous' letters kept arriving at the Nobel committee's doorstep in [Oslo](#), their candidate looked too well-sponsored for her own good and detracted from her 'humble' image. According to Mother's biographer [Eileen Egan](#), 'someone jokingly remarked that half the nuns of Spain had taken pen in hand.'¹³

The successful 1979 crusade was run professionally, like a sleek political campaign; indeed, many of the people who ran it were top guns in the US Republican Party. It is interesting that none of Mother Teresa's nominators or endorsers in any of her three Nobel attempts were from Calcutta, or indeed from India. This was not because she was unpopular there, but because she was not important enough. A Calcuttan would have been embarrassed to write a letter in support of a person who was such a small presence, for a prize as grand as the Nobel.

The 1979, the campaign was coordinated by Muggeridge. It is possibly true that the prize did not mean much to her personally, but it was crucial to her insofar as it catapulted the profile of her Church and helped her disseminate medieval and dangerous values, such as artificial contraception was evil – coming from a Nobel laureate such pronouncements carried import. Also following Nobel, her veneration reached such a height that every word of hers was accepted as ultimate truth by media and public. Mother quickly realised this and increasingly when describing her work she crossed the border between reality and fantasy.

Muggeridge still remained a nominal Anglican, although he directed enormous venom against the liberal culture in the Anglican Church. Mother Teresa wanted her special friend converted and kept up gentle pressure on him to come to Catholicism. She never forgot her debt to him and never underestimated the value of the media, especially television, after the success of his film.

In 1982, after a great deal of intellectual posturing, Muggeridge became a Catholic surrounded by media. Mother Teresa, unfortunately, could not attend. He died eight years later and by then he was rehabilitated by the British who now lovingly called him St. Mugg. Although a substantial section of the British media to this day remember him as a hypocritical sanctimonious bully.

It is disconcerting that a man as prejudiced as Muggeridge was allowed such power in an organisation such as the BBC, and in other equally powerful media organs. He was known to be deeply anti-Semitic, prejudiced and a hypocrite. He tried to use his position to stop other people from using contraception while having extramarital affairs himself. He was a supporter of the Vietnam War and of other American military actions. He cast doubt on suffering in Hiroshima; he participated in CIA-funded clandestine activities. He believed Christianity should conquer inferior people with sword and Gospel. Media are supposed to be neutral but biased Muggeridge influenced opinions of millions through media. He himself admitted about Teresa's work in Calcutta; 'Criticism is often directed at the insignificant scale of the work she and her Sisters undertake. . . statistically speaking, what she achieves is little, or negligible' and also, 'the old fashioned methods allegedly used, are pointed to as detracting from her usefulness'. In the next breath, he (and Mother Teresa) were justified in exaggerating her scale of work, because, in his view, 'Christianity is not a statistical view of life.'¹⁴

I am not surprised that a rogue and hypocrite like Muggeridge was attracted to Mother Teresa: the first row of her fan club was drawn from brutal dictators, bigots and charlatans. They propped her up and nourished her. These people would not expend time and money without getting something back. It is not that they changed dramatically after coming in contact with her: Muggeridge's bigotries, for instance, became even more entrenched after the Teresa association; he now almost justified them as having saintly sanction.

I am not suggesting that Mother Teresa, like Muggeridge, was driven by malice and paranoia. But there is something to be said for a person being known for the company they keep. Moreover, each respected the other's values and ideals.

4

How Journalists and Authors are 'Doing the Work of God'

Although very often misled by Mother Teresa or her Sisters, the stories that journalists themselves have told over the last fifty years about the operations of the Missionaries of Charity are quite outrageous. Why did they do it? It was not often for their own gain, financial or otherwise. One could understand when the Catholic media did it; or when people like [Malcolm Muggeridge](#) or [Dominique Lapierre](#) did it; but the biggest and most consistent lies were told by journalists without any obvious self-interest. There is an East–West element in all this. I believe that in this age of racial equality and political correctness, it is comforting for a white person to know that there is a corner of the world called Calcutta which can be portrayed as the white man's ultimate burden with impunity and without guilt.

Moreover, many journalists were embarrassed or even afraid to voice the tiniest criticism of Teresa. It would not go down too well with the folks back home and cause recriminations and might even cause the journalist's whole career to be put at risk.

[Dr Robin Fox](#), editor of *Lancet*, one of the world's foremost medical journals, went to Calcutta in the autumn of 1994. He and his wife worked

for a few days at the home for the dying, [Nirmal Hriday](#), as volunteers. They were deeply shocked, for he faxed an article to his offices in London which appeared as a special feature.¹ His criticism of Teresa was restrained (of reluctant but 'had-to-be-done' variety) and I feel the strongest phrase was that she preferred 'providence to planning'. But he could not help comment on the lack of proper pain control medication in a so-called home for the dying.

But even the normally sceptical British establishment would not have it. They could have ignored it, because after all, it was unlikely that [Lancet](#) would be read by the ordinary man in the street. The entire British journalistic community descended on [Dr Fox](#) like a pack of hyenas. I am talking of secular and often anti-Catholic journalists here.

Two weeks after the article appeared, Dr Fox told me on the phone, 'It is impossible to do any work, the phone just doesn't stop ringing; I regret ever writing anything critical of Mother Teresa.' He also refused to publish a Letter to the Editor I had written, and refused to give me an interview. Such is the power of Teresa.

A lot of things were said against Dr Fox and his wayward attitude. More serious journalists said again and again that he was so naïve: that he was applying Western standards to India. Most definitely he did not do that, but the British public needed to be reassured that all was well with the East-West paradigm.

What Dr Fox said in Teresa's defence was however quite remarkable. He said whatever Mother Teresa's deficiencies were, it was she who was responsible for making Calcuttans aware that people ought not to die on the streets! It was only following her instructions that the citizens realised that they ought to ring the Corporation for an ambulance if they found anybody moribund on the streets. This to me sums up Westerners' attitude towards Calcutta. People there are of such sub-human mental capacity that it took an Albanian (European) Catholic nun to make them aware of rudimentary human sentiments. As it happens, Calcutta's first home for the dying (in Liluah) was founded long before Teresa was born.

Dr Fox must have seen with his own eyes the level of deprivation around Mother Teresa's home. Did he have any explanation why Mother Teresa, who was supposed to have inspired the entire city's population, was unable to affect any changes on her doorstep?

It is true that Mother Teresa received criticism in small measures in the British media. But whenever that happened, there was always a balancing act. A faltering criticism that might appear somewhere would be appended by substantial praise – the confession after the sin, if you wish. For people of a certain generation, even mild but unequivocal criticism of the nun was unthinkable. [Dr Fox's](#) comments about Calcuttans were a result of the same mindset.

The left-liberal UK daily *Guardian* was possibly the first newspaper in the world to publish a detailed, thorough and factual account of neglect in Mother Teresa's homes, entitled *Is Mother Teresa Neglecting Children?*² A week later, the newspaper, through its [Bel Littlejohn](#) column proffered its ritual apology, at the same time attacking Mother's critics, thereby closing the topic (*italics not mine*):

There are no CDs in her homes, no woks, no Extra Virgin Oil, no French films on video. . . I suppose the lady thinks, in her Almighty way, that these basic commodities are *just that bit too good* for her lowly clientele. Mother Teresa *ignores all Western medical advice* and in her high handed arrogant way *can't bloody well be bothered to put factor 15 sun-lotion on her face*. . . we leading columnists of [The Guardian](#) are doing our level best to make this ailing world get well soon. Opinions are our first-aid kits, paragraphs our pills, words our syringes, photo by-line our bandages. . . Unlike Mother Teresa, who, when she is not forcing the sick to lie down in her homes, just swaggers around the chat-show circuit looking 'holy'.³

It was difficult to believe that this was from the same newspaper which had been so factually critical just a few days before; talk about self-flagellation! Strangely enough, in trying to be droll and sarcastic, the columnist hit on the truth inadvertently more than once. First-aid kits, pills and bandages were indeed much more difficult to come by in Mother Teresa's homes than opinions and paragraphs (i.e. prayers); new syringes were not to be found there at all. Most of Mother's time was indeed taken up by going around the world talking to journalists, looking 'holy'.

When I was asked by the leftist British magazine [New Statesman](#) to review [Anne Sebba's](#) slightly critical *Mother Teresa; Beyond the Image* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1997), they also wanted me to review a book

called *Mother Teresa; Her Life Her Work Her Message* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1997) by the Spanish journalist [José Luis González-Balado](#). González-Balado is part of the Teresa book-factory that churns out repetitive, indeed sometimes exact copies of her mythical biography under slightly different names. This particular volume was clusters of paragraphs lifted from other books, not even masquerading as a new biography. And yet I had to review it in a serious magazine in order to ‘balance’ Sebba’s book.

Despite Teresa’s propaganda for five decades being unchallenged and unexamined, serious journalists still felt the need to ‘balance’ when it came to reviewing a book which was neutral about Teresa.

When reporting on Teresa, almost always journalists and writers went to Calcutta with pre-set agenda. The popular American magazine *Ladies Home Journal* sent [Daphne Barak](#) to Calcutta in 1996 to have a ‘rare conversation with one of the world’s most admired women’. In her article Barak revealed that Mother Teresa had tuberculosis in 1946, a hitherto unknown and possibly untrue revelation. Barak mentioned ‘thin mattresses and threadbare sheets’ at the Kalighat home. When Mother said she wanted to die at Kalighat, Barak asked why she wanted to die in such a ‘terrible place’!

Predictably enough, when it came to images about Calcutta, Barak did not let her readers down. All the chilling stereotypes were there. Possibly through an editorial oversight Barak’s negative comments made it to the final print, submerged though they were in a sea of eulogy. It was obvious she was struggling with herself. She was not quite impressed with what she saw, but she was brought up to believe Teresa’s charity was beyond compare. Most importantly, her editors and readers would not countenance any criticism of the ‘living saint’.

A young journalist’s job became very difficult in the circumstance. Many fooled themselves that they did not see the best of Teresa’s work, that the ‘living saint’ was too modest to display her best work. It was indeed difficult to convince even the most hardened cynic that all the publicity could emanate from such level of work in Calcutta. ‘*There must be more to it than this, I must be missing something,*’ many would say.

Shortly after her preposterous claim in *LHJ*, Mother did indeed almost die. In August and then in December 1996, she was very ill, but, on both occasions, checked into the city’s [Woodlands Clinic](#) and [Birla Heart](#)

[Institute](#). She ‘spent’ in her few weeks at the Woodlands, the equivalent of a lower-middle class family’s entire life’s income. She never paid a paisa as her costs were waived off by both clinics.

I wrote to [Ladies Home Journal](#), following her astronomically expensive treatments, contrasting them with her fantastic claims I also pointed out her previous treatments at [Gemelli Hospital](#) (a preserve of the Roman rich and princes of the Catholic Church), and at [Scripps Clinic](#), California, which Daphne Barak should have been aware of. I asked if, under the circumstance, it was honest journalism to publicise that Mother Teresa was so humble that she wanted to die like the poor in her ‘terrible’ home. I got a courteous reply from ‘the editors’ saying that they ‘cannot offer a comment’.⁴

In a lengthy 2,500 word article in Florida’s influential [Tampa Tribune](#), the freelance journalist [Anastasia Stanmeyer](#), meticulously described what she found to be Mother Teresa’s daily activities:

Mother Teresa slips into an unadorned room and leans against the back wall as 140 nuns in white kneel before her, silent, lost in prayer. The 82-year-old holy woman, under 5 feet tall, bends over a book clutched in both hands and begins reading aloud a prayer in a low, strong voice. She pauses after each line, and the nuns, most of them Indian, repeat the words in unison. . . ‘There are many people all over the world who are in deep poverty,’ she says, ‘Each person must help. We must do one thing at a time.’ . . .she has survived two heart attacks and a bone disease that knots her spine, hands and feet. . . Poverty for her is freedom, not a penance. . .

As the sisters continue their daily tasks, Mother Teresa slowly makes her way down a hall, coughing and pressing a handkerchief to her mouth. She disappears into a room, then emerges about a half-hour later to talk to visitors. With prayer book in hand, she walks towards the handful of guests. She speaks quietly to each person, her grey-blue eyes twinkling like a child’s. She firmly grasps each outstretched hand in both of hers. One man asks her to say a prayer for his dying mother. She nods, then blesses and gives shiny pendants of the Virgin Mary to him and other visitors. She hands out slips of paper with a prayer and photograph of her. ‘This is my business card,’ she says jokingly, doling out small cards that read,

‘The fruit of silence is prayer; the fruit of prayer. . .’ Her mission is to do all she can for the poverty-stricken. Family values, she tells another visitor, are the best way to overcome problems in the world. . . She turns to leave, and visitors press money into her hands. She acknowledges it with a faint smile and walks to the chapel again, a solitary figure crouching against the wall. She stoops over a prayer book, mouthing the words in silence as her index finger touches every line.⁵

This was quite a typical day in the life of Mother Teresa when she was in Calcutta. She also prayed between 4 and 6 hours in the day at Mass, and in adoration and contemplation. It is obvious there was absolutely no actual contact with the poor in Mother’s schedule, though there was a lot of talk about them.

I wrote to [Ms Stanmeyer](#) asking her why a perceptive journalist like her chose to propagate the received myth when it was apparent that Mother Teresa was more preoccupied with religion than charity. I also asked the question that, if Mother called the streets of Calcutta ‘home’, was it not odd never to have found her at home? I quoted from her article ‘She believes the more a person has, the more one is occupied and the less one gives’ and asked whether this could be applied to Mother Teresa. I also asked whether distributing one’s own photos was a humble and self-effacing act befitting her perceived image. Only after two reminders, did I receive a belated reply:

I see her as a woman who was trying to help as much as a single person can do, and I’m not here to criticise that. . . Just observe and write about it, and personally, I appreciate all that she has done. . . I’m not Catholic, but am Christian, but that doesn’t matter to me. . . As far as dishing out photos of herself, this isn’t something she felt too comfortable about.⁶

I sympathise with journalists like [Stanmeyer](#). Their aim was to publish something on Mother Teresa but the agenda was set before they arrive in Calcutta. Newspapers and magazine editors would have told them what they wanted, what to ask the ‘living saint’ and what photos to take. Once they arrived and looked at the shambolic work, it would need immense

courage and, above all, independence to say anything remotely critical. Even if they did, it would not make it to the final print, as readers would be upset, but most importantly, newspaper and magazine proprietors would be outraged. In the United States, there is another problem; the immensely powerful and easily outraged Catholic and fundamentalist Christian groups would cut off advertisements. So, one can well understand why hardly any editor would risk their livelihood to publish anything critical on Mother Teresa or her order.

After Mother's death, *Forbes Magazine*, the journal of the super-rich, published a eulogy⁷ by [Rita Koselka](#), who had volunteered in Calcutta, possibly in 1995. She said that, to point out that Mother offered no medical care was 'stupid criticism'. She also claimed that the gleaming white mansion opposite the Hindustan International Hotel belonged to Mother's order. In reality, it belongs to the Sisters of Charity, a totally different order and is a home for solely Christian widows and widowers. One can imagine how much money flowed into the Missionaries of Charity coffers after Koselka's feature was published.

Teresa veneration is particularly acute in the US where it spills out from the media and permeates deeply into the country's political establishments (of both major parties). She enjoyed exceptional rapport with Ronald Reagan, who was her comrade in the campaign against abortion. [Hillary Clinton](#), on her first official trip to India in 1995, went almost straight from the airport to her orphanage in Delhi. [Molly Moore](#), covering the trip for *Washington Post* summoned up enormous courage to report: 'At Mother Teresa's orphanage, babies who normally wear nothing but thin cotton diapers that do little but promote rashes and exacerbate the reek of urine, had been outfitted for the morning in American Pampers and newly stitched pinafores.'⁹ [Moore](#) faced a barrage of angry readers' letters for her ever-so-slightly uncomplimentary comments. Apparently, the First Lady was not greatly impressed by the orphanage but she kept quiet.

Mother Teresa was given the US Congressional Medal (presented to her by two arch rivals, Jesse Helms and Jesse Jackson) and finally, the US made her an Honorary Citizen, a rare honour indeed, shortly before she died. By contrast, the British political establishment was never quite bothered with her. [Mrs Thatcher](#) reluctantly posed with her a couple of times despite the 'caring' image that such a photo would portray. As mentioned previously, the Iron Lady was less than impressed with Mother's trip to Britain and the

public comments made about London's homeless in stark contrast with the political debates made on anti-abortion laws, behind closed doors.

During his 1997 trip to Calcutta, to address the meeting of the confederation of Indian Industries, British Prime Minister, [John Major](#) did not visit the ailing Teresa; indeed in his long speech, there was no mention of Calcutta's most famous citizen. Contrast that with Clinton's actions; he went to India in 2000 as President but did not have the opportunity to visit Calcutta. After his presidency ended, he came to Calcutta (on 7 April 2001) for six hours and literally went straight from the airport to Mother House. He placed a bouquet of white gladioli on Mother Teresa's grave, prayed and had a private meeting with the most senior nuns. Then he went to the orphanage, where children sang in praise of the 'fair-haired sahib'; a toilet had been refurbished here to prepare for his arrival. He had wanted to visit Coffee House in College Street, once the fountainhead of India's intellectual thought and of violent anti-American actions, but that was vetoed by security services.

Britain's *Independent* is a liberal, non-religious and thoroughly respectable newspaper, which also prides itself as iconoclastic amongst British mainstream organs as the only declared anti-monarchist daily. But, when it came to Teresa, all sense of proportion was thrown to the wind. On 28 November 1996, the newspaper led with the front page headline 'Mother Teresa: I Want to Die'. The accompanying feature was by [Andrew Gumbel](#), the paper's [Rome](#) and Vatican correspondent. Mr Gumbel was writing from Rome, although it never said so in the paper and one got the impression that his reportage was the result of first-hand experience in Calcutta.

The news feature respectfully reported how the deeply humble Mother Teresa resented sophisticated medical treatment for herself, but admitted that there were 'armies of doctors fighting round the clock to save her life'. 'According to her close friends and associates, she would much rather the doctors left her alone,' readers were informed on page one column one. In truth, at no time in her long life did she refuse any medical intervention. Gumbel wrote because Mother had 'one foot in heaven', she was 'feeling dismayed and a little embarrassed' at being alive. The day after the newspaper headline (on 29 December 1996), Mother Teresa had an angioplasty, her third one, which reflected her exceptional desire to carry on. She was supposed to have punched her fist in the air after coming round from anaesthetic following the procedure.

The Independent went on to say that Mother had to be almost wrenched against her wishes ‘from the ramshackle Woodlands Nursing Home, to the state-of-the-art Birla Heart Research Institute.’ Strange! Only four months previously, the Sunday edition of the same newspaper had described the same Woodlands as a ‘clinic as good as any in London.’¹⁰ On that occasion, however, the correspondent was physically in Calcutta rather than Rome.

Mr Gumbel, in trying to give readers an idea of Mother’s goodness, holiness and charity, extensively quoted one Jim Towney [Towey], ‘a former seminarian with her order, who has known her for 11 years and maintains daily contact with Calcutta’ (Jim Towey happened to be Mother’s US attorney.). I do not think a Catholic paper could have bettered *The Independent’s* perverse adulation.

I wrote a letter to the editor pointing out how much the ‘reluctant’ saint’s stay at the ‘ramshackle Woodlands’ had cost and how much more she was going to be charged at the [Birla Heart Institute](#); that her daily expenses were coming to substantially more than the monthly salary of an Indian bank manager, but my letter never made it to print.

I have made an example of *The Independent* because, on the whole, it is a firmly Left-liberal newspaper with a strong sense of ethics and proportion. But even a rational and fair organ would throw truth to the wind when it came to Teresa. They would probably justify it by saying that she deserved it!

During her illnesses, media took the opportunity to boost Mother up even more. In 1983, when Mother was in [Gemelli Hospital](#) in [Rome](#), her doctor came out and faced the press. He gravely informed them that she had refused to take painkillers because ‘she wants to offer up her sufferings to God.’⁸ But took them she did; she never refused painkillers as many a nurse at the Woodlands would tell you. She had a low threshold for and frequently complained of pain, especially being injected: no different from most humans. Nonetheless, her Roman doctor’s words were faithfully reported, the following day, in every newspaper in the world.

[Reuters](#) circulated a photo that appeared in the world media on 5 December 1996. It showed street children in Calcutta praying for Mother’s recovery after her third angioplasty. A similar photo, again put out by Reuters, had appeared on 24 August 1993. This time, it was taken outside a hospital in Delhi. Both pictures had children grasping huge portraits of the nun, beautifully mounted and framed. Did it not occur to journalists that

poor children do not carry expensive framed photos of old women unless paid to do so?

It is interesting to record Teresa's gratitude to Calcutta's nurses, doctors and medical establishments following her recovery. In her Christmas 1996 newsletter to her co-workers, she said:

So many people prayed for me: tiny children and great-grandmothers, humble workers and heads of state, people of all faiths and nationality. . . I don't know why all this has happened this year, but I am sure of one thing; that Jesus does not make mistakes. . . It was Mary, our mother, who helped me back in Mother House. . .

There was no mention of the round-the-clock medical attention that brought her back to life from the brink of death so many times.

In the domino effect of the myth propagation, Reuters news agency played a crucial role. They have been the biggest disseminator of untruth in the last few decades, as they did at the Nobel ceremony (8 December 1979), when they declared that Mother Teresa went to get her prize in the Norwegian winter 'wearing no socks in her sandals and with her thin Indian sari covered only by a black sweater'. At the Nobel ceremony in [Oslo](#), numerous pictures showed her ascending the steps of the Aula of the University of Oslo in a heavy fur coat that came down to her ankles. Some of the pictures were taken by [Reuters](#) themselves.

I gather from Reuters' in-house magazine that they gave her a substantial donation in December 1996. They went to Calcutta to hand it over to her. Should Reuters not know about the queries and questions that are hanging over Mother Teresa's accounts? Would they donate money to a deeply Hindu, Islamic or Buddhist charity that did not publish its accounts?

In respectable newspapers, I have read countless times that Mother Teresa used to live '*in the middle of a teeming Calcutta slum*'. Surprisingly [Hello!](#) magazine was slightly more accurate: 'The grey, four storey Victorian building at 54 Lower Circular Road, is set in the heart of a Calcutta slum, in a narrow alley, awash with grit and grime.'⁹

She did live in a rather foreboding four-storey building with her nuns. The building is typically 1970s. It was not the lap of luxury, but slum it was not. It stands on a point on Lower Circular Road where the road is 35 metres wide. The 'narrow alleyway' is not entirely fictional, as this is where

Mother House's side entrance is, which is the doorway most commonly used. Mother House sits across Bamboo Villa, a multi-storey building that houses income tax offices. Numerous homeless people slept in the grounds of Bamboo Villa, but they would not dream of asking MC for help. The environs of Mother House are not among the most salubrious in Calcutta, but in no way do they even approach those of a slum. Mother House does not have any charitable function. It is used for residential, religious and administrative purposes only. Mother herself never claimed that she lived in 'the heart of a Calcutta slum'. It was pure media invention.

Misreporting on Mother Teresa is equally rampant in India. On 14 September 1996, *The Asian Age*, a daily newspaper published simultaneously from a number of Indian cities and London, printed a list of Mother Teresa's charitable ventures.

Three and a half months later, on 31 December 1996, *India Today*, India's most popular weekly magazine, which is highly regarded by the middle and upper classes, did the same. Both *The Asian Age* and *India Today* always supported Mother Teresa whenever she was involved in a controversy of any kind, to display their 'secular' credentials. It is obvious there is a lot of confusion in Indian media about the real nature and breath of MC's work. They usually collected their 'data' from hearsay, foreign media, MC propaganda, Teresa's Western fans, etc. rather than by objective fact-checking.

MOTHER TERESA'S OPERATIONS AS PUBLICISED BY TWO INDIAN ORGANS

	<i>The Asian Age</i>	<i>India Today</i>
Published	1 September 1996	31 December 1996
Number of Countries of Operation	95	120
Homes for Lepers, Drug Addicts and AIDS patients	750	48
Mobile Homes	1100	Does Not Mention
Mobile Clinics	Does Not Mention	1103

Both publications gave the same figure for ‘malnutrition centres’ stating there were 100; Mother Teresa did not operate a single dedicated malnutrition centre in India.

Around the same time that two Indian publications told us about Mother Teresa’s 100 malnutrition centres, severe malnutrition occurred in Amravati district of Maharashtra state. From July to September 1996, many hundreds died there of malnutrition and ancillary diseases. Twenty-five thousand children suffered malnourishment. MC were nowhere to be seen, despite the fact that this is the sort of region that they love to work in, as Amravati is in the [Melghat](#) tribal belt. Also the region is not far from Nagpur, where they have a presence. Ever since Christian missionaries arrived in India, tribals have been their prime targets for conversion, and Mother Teresa expended a lot of effort and money on tribals to lure them to Catholicism. [Pope John Paul II](#), during a brief visit to India in 1986, after meeting her in Calcutta, went straight to a remote tribal area in Bihar and addressed a public meeting.

A few years back, I chanced upon a little anthology called *The Meaning of Life* (Virgin Books), wherein the editor had prevailed upon the great and the good from all over the world to write in a few words on the meaning of life. Mr Gubbin was so overjoyed that he had received a personally handwritten note from Mother Teresa, that he printed a facsimile of the letter in the book, accompanied by a brief life sketch of the ‘living saint’. I found that Mother Teresa had been described as having had ‘medical training in Paris’. I did not think much of it, as this was a light-hearted volume by an amateur anthologist. To my amazement, I later discovered that Mr Gubbin had obtained his information on Mother’s ‘medical training’ from some of the world’s most respected biographical dictionaries: *The Cambridge Biographical Encyclopaedia*, *Chambers Biographical Dictionary*, and the *Chambers Biographical Dictionary of Women*.

I wrote to Professor [Crystal](#), and to Larrousse, the publishers of the *Chambers* dictionaries, pointing out that they had got Paris mixed up with Patna, a town in India, where Mother Teresa had spent a few weeks with some American nuns as she was starting out in life, learning certain basic nursing skills, such as bandaging, etc. I got swift replies. Professor Crystal wrote, ‘I’ll take [your points] into account at the next available opportunity, and I’m grateful to you for drawing my attention to them.’¹⁰ [Melanie Parry](#) wrote, ‘I have noted your comments and the entry will be corrected in any

future edition of the “Dictionary of Women”, and in the “Chambers Biographical Dictionary”.’¹¹

Mother Teresa often said, ‘Even journalists can do the work of God.’ She sometimes got exasperated by the fuss they made of her, but she was fully aware that she needed them. As [Kathy Ward](#) of Ireland’s *Sunday Independent*¹² remarked in an otherwise sympathetic article, ‘There is no doubt that she has sought publicity. . .’

Teresa’s manipulation of media was perfected by years of practice and unquestioned acceptance by the latter. She was a ‘natural’. On 29 June 1986, Mother Teresa was at the plush Omini Hotel in Miami to speak at an anti-abortion meeting sponsored by wealthy Americans. Sixteen hundred people had paid for the privilege of her presence. In order to get maximum publicity for her anti-abortion cause, Mother played her card. She refused to eat breakfast with her guests, saying, ‘I don’t want your abundance. I want you to experience the joy of loving. I have seen people die for the lack of a glass of water.’ She followed this up with a trenchant attack on abortion. She thus ensured that, what would have been local news in Miami and Florida, became a worldwide headline, along with her anti-abortion tirade of course. Even *The Sun*¹³ in faraway Britain found space to tell its readers: ‘Teresa Snubs Meal with the Wealthy’. The same Teresa who had arrived in Miami travelling first class (for free).

Mother became so adroit at playing games with media that she did it from her hospital bed as soon as she was barely able to speak, after recovering from her third heart surgery. One day (14 December 1996), finding that media were present, Mother said to a woman, the wife of another patient, ‘*Why don’t you go and get some old sarees for the poor?*’ Thrilled Reuters reported with the headline: ‘Mother Teresa Continues Charity Work from Hospital from her Sickbed’.

[Reuters](#) told us that the woman, possibly quite a wealthy lady, brought in ‘100 sarees, 50 new for weddings for the poor and 50 old sarees.’ She was obviously not prepared to let such a chance of achieving international glory, however momentary, slip. I presume Reuters were not aware that Mother Teresa did not distribute clothes (new or old) to the poor in Calcutta, except to a few at Christmas. I also remember the sign in Italian I had seen on the door of her nunnery (no charitable functions here) in Vittoria in Sicily. ‘*We Do Not Accept Clothes, Thank You*’. This is to stop

locals from bringing in old clothes to the doors of the order so they could be passed on to the poor in Calcutta.

As well as the parable of sarees, there was another story circulated by Reuters on 5 December 1996: 'Mother Teresa Seeks Foster Homes for 4000 Children'. The story went on to explain how Mother Teresa, as soon as she had regained minimum strength after her heart surgery, was arranging for adoptions for her charges from her hospital bed. The report also added, 'The effects of old age and the life of hard work in Calcutta's slums have left Mother Teresa with kidney troubles and weak lungs.'

For the world media, this is an ever recurring motif – that Mother spent all the time God sent toiling away in the slums of Calcutta. In fact, she had not been seen inside a Calcutta slum for the last twenty-five years of her life. The last time she did any hands-on work was during the 1971 [Bangladesh](#) War. Senator Edward Kennedy, who visited the MC relief camp, was impressed. There is also some record of her coming out and distributing food during the 1978 floods. Since then, she hardly ever crossed the portals of a Calcutta slum, especially after her Nobel, when she started criss-crossing the globe with monthly frequency.

It is difficult to provide the positive evidence for a negative, but considering Mother was one of the most photographed people in the world; her every move, mood, action, quiver of eyebrow, facial wrinkle was photographed innumerable times. Her hands, holding rosary beads, a particular favourite with her fans, were pictured thousands of times. I can remember three purely pictorial biographies of hers. [Hello!](#) has a few hundred photos of hers in their archives. Amongst these galaxy of photos, can anyone come up with a single picture of the 'saint of the gutters' actually 'working in the slums of Calcutta' in the last three decades of her life? I know it for a fact that Western media were disappointed because they could not film the 'saint of the gutters working in the gutters'. There are photos from the 1970s showing her serving food to residents in [Nirmal Hriday](#), but no photograph exists showing Mother Teresa working in or even visiting a Calcutta slum.

The American photographer [Mary Ellen Mark](#) ('voted the best American woman photographer of all time') did an extensive photo feature on Teresa that appeared in *Life* in July 1980 (in a slip-up her 'care' was described as 'rudimentary'). She spent a lot of time with her subject in Calcutta but could not catch her in a slum. The best she managed was a

heavily stage managed shot with a Nirmal Hriday resident. The *Life* photographs are gruesome and unethical, showing full frontals of semi-naked men and women in various states of indignity; I doubt if Mark asked their permission to take and print these. Disturbingly, these photos are now on the Internet. I wrote to [Mark](#) asking if it was ethical to show people from the third world in such states. 'Are they human beings or just faceless objects for making saints and award-winning journalists?' I asked. I did not receive a reply. Mother Teresa was fully aware what sort of photos were being circulated in and for her name. Such practice had her blessing, because it was after all, for a good cause; she firmly believed that, because she was particularly special to God, she needed such publicity. The means were immaterial to her. Mark, naturally, completely exonerated the 'living saint': 'I don't think Mother Teresa even noticed me when I was there. She's not the sort of person who had an awareness for doing things for a photographer.'¹⁴

[Charles Glover](#) said, in *The Daily Telegraph*, while covering Mother's visit to an Oxford religious conference, that she was 'taking time off from her work among the destitute of Calcutta this week.'¹⁵ In reality, on the rare occasions when she was seen at all in Calcutta, she was actually taking time off from her international travels. What is curious that Western journalists (particularly in Italy and the US, the two countries she virtually lived in), never wondered how she managed to work so hard in and for Calcutta and when she was practically a resident overseas.

In her self-propagation before journalists, Mother was sometimes crass and sometimes subtle. [Peter Dalglish](#), the Canadian founder of Street Kids International, and an ardent fan of hers, travelled with her on a plane in Sudan:

Mother Teresa gave me her passport and asked me to fill out all the forms for her. I asked her how much money she had in her possession. She said she had none. I asked again. Surely she had some money in her purse, the only item she was travelling with. 'My son,' she replied, 'I have not had a cent on my person in 30 years.'¹⁶

Mother behaved quite differently when there was no potential of publicity. Let us take the incident of 21 August 1993. She had been invited

to present artificial limbs to a thousand handicapped villagers near Calcutta although needless to say, she had made no contribution towards the limbs. The organisers, a fledgling secular charity of Calcutta, called [Anandalok](#) had paid for them. They had hoped that bringing Mother Teresa as a guest to their ceremony might raise their profile in India and abroad. Mother accepted the invitation, which delighted [D.K. Saraf](#), Anandalok's secretary. What happened next can be best described by quoting from a letter to the editor that Saraf wrote to a national newspaper:

On the day of the function, at 4 p.m., she sent a message that she won't be able to attend on account of her illness. The news disappointed me and the villagers. . . But next morning, much to my shock and disbelief, I learnt from a newspaper report that Mother Teresa had left for Delhi to receive an award to be presented to her by the Government of India. I could not help writing a letter to her, in which I stated that, since a thousand poor and handicapped villagers came to receive not only artificial limbs but also her blessings, she should not have changed her programme on pretext of illness. I also humbly added that for a lesser mortal like me, a government award meant a lot but she was too great to attach such importance to it. In fact, I believed that she was above all kinds of material awards. Mother's reply was prompt. She said she forgave me and promised to pray for me to the Almighty.

In my letter, I had uttered a simple truth and all I had wanted to know was why she preferred receiving an award rather than giving her blessings to the poor, hapless villagers. All I got in return was the assurance of being forgiven. I cannot help asking myself this question: 'What did Mother Teresa forgive me for?'¹⁷

Mother herself could be forgiven for making the right decision when faced with the choice between attending an artificial limb donation ceremony in a forgotten village near Calcutta and going to Delhi to collect the [Rajiv Gandhi](#) Memorial Award from [Sonia Gandhi](#), Rajiv's widow and at the time a practising Catholic. The former ceremony would have been attended by a couple of journalists from the local press. The Rajiv Gandhi award ceremony, on the other hand, was attended by the international media. It was transmitted by world media and was repeatedly shown on all

Indian media. Mother also enjoyed a special relationship with the Gandhi family, which was probably just that bit more special than she would have had with the limbless villagers. The Gandhis are the closest India has to a royal family.

The public perception is, of course, that Mother Teresa did not care about royals, prime ministers, dictators, and other heads of state. The media assiduously conveyed this message, but again the trend was started by Mother herself. In 1973 in an interview with [Paul Dacre](#) (then of the *Daily Express*) shortly after she received the Templeton Prize from the Duke of Edinburgh, she said, 'I can't bear these occasions. With all respect to your Prince, I'd much rather be amongst my dying and lepers.'¹⁸

After her Nobel Prize was announced, *Newsweek* did a full page article on her which stated that she did 'regular visits to the sick and the dying poor: she washes their bodies, cleans their toilets and empties their bed-pans.'¹⁹ All this was utterly untrue. The article also said that the hostility towards her from Hindu priests went away in the 1950s when she treated a temple priest suffering from [cholera](#). This oft-repeated tale is possibly untrue. I have spoken to a number of elderly Kalighat priests who are sympathetic to Teresa and none of them could recall the incident. The same *Newsweek* article and also a number of other media (such as *Boston Globe*) said, following her Nobel, that she would build another leprosarium in Calcutta with her prize money but this never happened.

The American international magazine *Time* has been one of her strongest propagandists. In 1975, they had her on their cover with the words 'living saint' emblazoned across. It was *Time* which popularised the title 'living saint'. During 1999, *Time* ran an Internet poll to select the 'person of the century'. From the beginning, Mother Teresa was trailing below the 10th position. When she was alive, she regularly topped 'person of the year' polls run by various US magazines, hence *Time* blatantly tried to influence readers by putting up her photo (alongside three others who were all men) and almost goading people to vote for one of them. Despite such machinations, she finally came 13th.

For Western media and public, preserving the status quo regarding Calcutta's image is important. It is comfortable to believe there is a faraway disgusting place called Calcutta where there was a fairy tale (white Christian) angel called Mother Teresa. Why let discordant facts interfere with this pretty picture? Even intellectuals subscribe to this model; I shall

quote from Robert Weil, one of the world's most [St Martin's Press](#), New York. After reading some sample chapters of this book, he turned it down, saying:

In the end, I feel that certain things are better left unsaid; while Mother Teresa's accomplishments may indeed be illusory, I still applaud the ideals that she, perhaps not unhyprocritically, represented, and millions in the West, a society ravaged by excess materialism, were still able to connect with the philosophy she preached. Alas, she or her order was not able to live up to the standard that she preached, but she remains a hero, albeit tainted, to millions in America alone. . . so much so, that I do not feel I would be the best editor to launch this work.

This, from a man of otherwise sound judgement and who wields immense independence in his chosen field, and the world.

Often media's indulgence of her amounted to criminal connivance, as happened on 19 March 1980; the previous evening, Mother Teresa's hostel for homeless women in Salisbury Road in London's Kilburn area had caught fire and ten women were burnt to death. Three others were seriously injured while jumping out of the top floor. Agreed, this was barely three months after Mother had received her Nobel, and that her reputation was at its peak, but should that have stopped the media from highlighting the gross deficiencies in the home? *The Sun*, although mentioning that there were no fire escapes, carried a picture of the statue of the Madonna that stands outside the home, with the caption, 'Silent Witness – A Window Ledge Statue at the Hostel'; it also carried a picture of Cardinal Basil Hume, saying that he had 'appealed for prayers'. Mother Teresa's greatness was commented upon: '[the dead women] were forgotten outcasts until Mother Teresa, famous for her work with India's poor, befriended them.' It was not reported that the hostel did not even possess a fire extinguisher. The only fire extinguisher that had been used to fight the flames was brought in by George Agathangelou, owner of the nearby La Rochelle hotel.

One can only imagine the reaction if such an incident had occurred in a home run by the council, or by some other charity such as Dr Barnardo's or Alcoholics Anonymous. I think the reaction would have been substantially

different if the home had belonged to any other Catholic organisation – I can imagine the tabloid headline: ‘Towering Nunferno’!

It was touching to see *The Times* doing their bit in trying to absolve the Missionaries of Charity of responsibility: ‘But there was dispute yesterday about the hostel’s precise status and whose job it was to enforce fire regulations.’²⁰ There was an inquiry into the fire, although the Missionaries of Charity did not run an internal inquiry. No compensation was ever paid by the organisation to the injured, or to the relatives of the dead.

Mother Teresa was understandably upset about the deaths, and she said many special prayers, but one would have thought she might have travelled to London to speak to her traumatised nuns, or to give solace to the relatives of the dead, but her reaction was nonchalant. She did not send individual messages to the relatives of the dead. The nun who would travel ten thousand miles to stop a single abortion (‘Abortion is murder of the child by the mother’), was not moved by the murder of ten innocent lives.

Journalistic memory is astonishingly short. Thirteen years later, in March 1993, London’s Lambeth Council was ravaged by the British press for refusing to allow Mother Teresa permission to open a refuge for the homeless. She had worked out plans for converting a disused magistrate’s court into a dormitory with 33 beds, a dining room, and a chapel. The Council turned down the proposal ‘because the hostel was not of decent standard.’²¹ Hell broke loose in British media; the Labour-run Council was branded ‘out of touch’. ‘How dare you question a living saint?’ – This was journalists’ punchline. They were deeply grieved that Mother Teresa was said to have been ‘upset’ by the decision. Nobody for a moment recalled the 1980 fire in Kilburn, nobody asked why such a large chapel was needed in such a small refuge.

A British family was devastated and its life turned upside down by Mother Teresa’s lack of respect for life. Eighteen-year-old Eilidh Boadella had received a ‘calling’ while working at a Devon bookshop: *Muggeridge’s* book on Teresa fell off a shelf and Eilidh saw a page which she interpreted as a message to go and work for Mother Teresa. So she left her home on 17 March 1980, much against her parents’ wishes, and on the following day she perished in the fire in Kilburn which was entirely preventable. Eilidh was the only daughter of the English poet Elsa Corbluth and the renowned psychotherapist David Boadella, who now runs his institute in Switzerland.

Very likely the fire was started by an alcoholic woman who had a history of fire setting.

Eilidh's parents remained sympathetic to Teresa and her work for some time after their daughter's death until Dr Boadella found out that the fund they started to 'rebuild the mission' was not being utilised properly. Elsa Corbluth wrote to me to say that she regreted that Eilidh's tombstone has 'co-worker of Mother Teresa' written on it. Elsa Corbluth and Dr Boadella were not impressed with the letter they received from Mother Teresa after their beloved daughter's death; they found her cold, patronising and perfunctory in her remarks about 'Jesus taking her'.

Elsa continued to campaign for safety in hostels and started writing to Lord Dean of Beswick, a member of the House of Lords. Lord Dean made a lengthy speech in the House of Lords on 25 April 1986:

The problem and dimension of some of the horrors that were taking place were drawn to our attention by an incident that occurred at a women's home in Kilburn, London. I have a letter from the mother of a girl who died in a fire there. In Committee, I had the poignant duty of reading the letter of the mother of an 18-year-old girl, who had done well in her education and was planning to get married two years later, but who had opted to do voluntary work in society (as many young people do, although they do not get credit for it). The girl left her home in Abbotsbury in Dorset and within 12 hours of leaving she and nine other women were dead as a result of a horrendous fire which, as your Lordships may remember, took place in Kilburn. That shows the sort of thing that is happening. An incident may go out of the news, but the people who have lost dear sons and daughters do not forget. I frequently receive unsolicited letters from that woman. She wants to know what we are doing to prevent someone else suffering the same trauma and loss. I shall read a letter that I received from her only about two weeks ago. . .

Interestingly, Lord Dean did not mention Mother Teresa in his speech.

In another incident that happened in 1986, journalists were sadly deficient in highlighting the tragic death of two [Tanzanian](#) children who were killed by Mother Teresa's plane. On 11 October 1986, the private jet she was travelling in, skidded off the runway near Dodoma in Tanzania

killing five people, including two children and one of her nuns, who were watching the plane take off. Mother Teresa attended the funeral of her nun before resuming the rest of her travel, but said nothing about the (Muslim) children, aged 8 and 12. She did not meet the dead children's relatives nor did attend their funerals. Media were overwhelmed with relief that 'Mother Teresa Escapes Unhurt'. The (nameless) children got a bare mention in their reports, neither was it mentioned that their families never got any compensation.

I have found that generally perceptive and quite cynical people became completely bereft of judgement and discernment when it came to Mother Teresa. Take the case of [Jonathan Agnew](#), the sports writer and BBC's former cricket-commentator. When the international ban on the [South African cricket team](#) was lifted, the first international match they played was in Calcutta in November 1991. Agnew was one of the international journalists who covered this historic tour. Mother Teresa, not one to let the opportunity of this momentous publicity go by, behaved with her usual canniness. Writes Agnew:

Mother Teresa opened the doors of one of her missions for the dying. . . The tiny building was packed with players, officials, television crews and, worst of all, dozens of South African supporters who behaved like a group of sightseers spotting [Princess Diana](#) outside Buckingham Palace. The diminutive figure of Mother Teresa moved among hordes of jostling people, her hands pressed gently together. . . She paused to distribute yellow prayer cards. The South African players and management were individually introduced to Mother Teresa. . . Moments later, even her eternal patience was stretched to the limit when a TV camera was thrust only inches from her nose. Immediately, she began to shoo everybody outside. If the South African entourage felt even a little ashamed, they certainly did not show it, . . .²²

Who should have been ashamed – the South Africans or the 'living saint'? – is a question I'd put to Agnew. It is repulsive and criminal to let loose a whole cricket team with an army of journalists, officials and supporters in a 'home for the dying'. What were these 'objects' lying in the home? They were nothing but fodder for making a saint. Mother Teresa

shooed the crowd out because she knew that she had enough footage by then; she could now go back to being a humble 'living saint' who detested publicity.

The journalistic connivance with Teresa's disgraceful behaviour is equally disturbing. What is surprising is that the British, unlike the Americans, are essentially a sceptical irreligious people not much moved by holiness, posturing, saintliness, etc. But even they lost their rationale when they faced Teresa.

Because Mother Teresa was often around in Calcutta during the winter months, she often met up with the visiting cricket teams. [Keith Fletcher's](#) England team met her in January 1982. After receiving an undisclosed donation, she gave a rousing performance:

'Cricket?' she says, *'Is it played this way?'* And she flaps a wrist in an over-armed mime: *'Or is it this way?'* and her arms essay a baseball swipe. You are not in awe anymore and you are laughing with her and want to call her 'Luv.' Without the slightest corniness Mother Teresa of Calcutta, and the world, tells [Bob Taylor](#) of Derbyshire, and England. . .²³

Only once was American newspaper bold enough to publish something which was not dripping with gushing praise for the 'living saint'. Back in 1983 *Boston Globe* published a 7000 word feature by [Sylvia Whitman](#) (the American author and historian) who was then a major at Harvard University. Whitman worked as a volunteer in Calcutta for two months in 1982; in her feature, she tries her best not to be critical of Teresa but one does not have to be a psychologist to gauge the true sentiment:

. . . I swabbed black plastic sheets with rags and water. In the morgue off the kitchen three shrouded corpses lay stacked on shelves under a little picture of crucified Jesus that said, 'I'm on my way to heaven.' . . . No nun ever asked my name or told me what to do or where to find anything. They did not believe in information. If [Dr Jack Preger](#) had welcomed volunteers I might have left Mother Teresa's then and followed him on the rounds in the bustees. . . Amongst Westerners, he was somewhat of a local celebrity. . . At [Prem Daan](#) we had only four towels, so we had to wring them out

before slapping them on the last few bodies. Some women tried to sneak through by stripping and then lining up to be clothed. . . Because of a shortage of underwear, we gave them only to women who dragged themselves along on the floor. Out of modesty or madness, some started punching as we tried to persuade them to put on a short cotton 'jama'. . . The favourite [breakfast of the residents] was US Civil Defense glucose biscuits, expired and forwarded from the bomb shelters, crumbled into milk. Because we did not have enough aluminium mugs, the last person to be served always panicked, afraid that there would be nothing left. When we rinsed the cups by the pump, women came out to scoop out any leftovers. The transfers from the home for the dying always complained that the food was better there; everyone was always hungry. . . We heard stories about the Home for the Dying, Mother's favourite house, about pouring ether into a wound. . . Out back we scrubbed the plates with soap and ash and bits of coconut fibre, as rice and curry slopped over the Sisters' flip-flop sandals down into the gutter, where a patient occasionally came out to defecate. . . In the sick and crippled ward of [Shishu Bhavan](#), the children ate a snack at three in the afternoon and dinner at five, and then they sat on potties. . . [Some children] just crawled around, building thick callous pads wherever their twisted limbs touched the cement floor. . . One day, a child named Ekka pointed to a pink stuffed rabbit, a plastic duck, and a couple of other hand-me-down toys in a glass cabinet under a statue of Virgin Mary. After I took out the toys, a Sister came over and closed them back up. 'No, no the children will break them' she said. 'They're there for them to look at.' . . .'

'At any one time there were about thirty Western volunteers with the Missionaries of Charity in Calcutta; widows, nurses, electricians, Christian booksellers, shop clerks, or students. Some stayed for a year, some for a day; one student from Oregon volunteered for a week to see "to see if Mother Teresa was for real or not, if she's on an ego-trip". Because I always rooted for the former Sisters who married priests, truck drivers or lepers, I was both amazed and horrified when a [Western] volunteer joined the Indian aspirants to the order. The rest of us led a double life, capped by a Thursday afternoon tea at [Sunita Kumar's](#) with delicate slices of orange

chiffon pie served on cocktail napkins. . . In two months in Calcutta, I saw Mother Teresa three times. She was often checking up on her 280 houses all over the world or giving speeches. . .

One morning, a priest gently chided the Sisters at Mass because he missed a certain enthusiasm when Mother was away. . . One day, in the courtyard of Mother House, a man who claimed to have waited five hours to see Mother Teresa reverently scraped the feet of every Sister who passed by. Mother came out and swept him gently towards the door. "Please listen to the Sister when she tells you not to come," she said. "I cannot see everybody." "But I don't want money," the man said. "You haven't given me anything." After the Indian left, a woman [very likely a Westerner] in dress pants and a tropical blouse posed beside Mother while her nervous husband snapped his camera, with and without flash. Mother shooed away another man flapping stapled papers by her hand. "I have to go to the airport now," she said, looking very old, tired and crosshatched with wrinkles. . . At [Shishu Bhavan](#), a child named Goutam whose legs polio dangled like a marionette's due to Polio, used to shinny up the bars inside the windows using just his arms. From there, he stared out into the courtyard, where men were usually unloading bags of US soy-enriched bulgar from a truck painted with the words "Touch the leper with compassion". . . I got permission from a Sister to take Goutam out for a walk. . . People were right when they called Mother Teresa's organisation a "Band-Aid" operation. Of all the volunteers, the nurses and doctors are the most frustrated. . . They worried more about germs than sins and they found the Sisters not open to criticism, however constructive. 'Mother doesn't want to be perfect,' a German volunteer said. "It would be easy to have a doctor come train novices, but that's not the point." . . . One day at [Prem Dan](#), when I was about to rub scabies lotion on a woman covered with little pus domes, a postulant [trainee nun] waved me away: "Don't touch her," apparently the woman had chicken pox or something one of the postulants had caught. Within a few days I saw that if I didn't touch her no one else would. . . Mother Teresa saw God's mystery and not man's complicity in the pains of the poor, never making any connections between [Sunita Kumar's](#) villa and the tarps pitched over the sidewalk Park Circus. . .'²⁴

Whitman's feature spews a lot of spleen against the West Bengal authorities who, at the time, were trying to curtail volunteering by Westerners in Christian or Hindu extremist organisations. She was almost arrested and thrown out of Calcutta. And predictably, she lionises Jack Preger without actually working with him; a common reaction in volunteers disappointed with Teresa. Although non-complimentary towards Mother Teresa's work, she implies that she was doing the best in the circumstances, calling the nuns 'children of God'. Her description of Calcutta is also Biblical, generally hinting that it is impossible to achieve any results in such a place with the best will in the world. Mother Teresa's order runs small homes with finite number of people; there should be no justification that inmates should not have enough towels, underwear or aluminium mugs. I have seen shiploads of these sorts of items arriving at Calcutta port as donations. Whitman skims, but does not address the issue of the disappearance of toys that she must have known were sent from abroad in huge quantities. These were sold off to the local shops. Also a vast amount of clothes destined for the poor found their way to the Calcutta street markets, as any street trader would tell you.

Whitman lucidly describes how Mother Teresa dealt with ingratiating Indians who did not matter. She had little time for them and barely masked her contempt. However, she would be all over Indians who were important in her publicity.

Khushwant Singh, the maverick Indian journalist, raconteur, socialite and political animal (later MP) was asked by *New York Times* to do a feature on her in 1973. Singh wrote to Mother and promptly got a reply; she agreed to cooperate leaving aside her 'I hate publicity' posturing. Singh spent three days with her when she personally took him around her homes whilst regaling him with stories from her life. She said she frequently relied on 'miracles' for funds and provisions. She told him of a time when the order ran out of quilts and she was about to tear open her own pillow (Singh and his readers seem to have believed that she could provide numerous quilts from a single pillow), when suddenly miracle arrived in the shape of an official who was about to leave Calcutta and had brought his quilts and pillows for her. At the end of his three-day journalistic mission, Mother even dropped Singh off at the airport: *'As I was about to take leave of her, she said, 'So?'. . . 'Singh's feature was predictably gushing.*²⁵ It is evident that even in 1973, six years before her Nobel and only four after the

[Muggeridge](#) film she was a consummate user and performer when it came to media.

Some eighteen years after she wrote her *Boston Globe* article, I caught up with Sylvia [Whitman](#). I simply wanted to know what the general reaction was to her criticisms in a country that venerated Teresa so intensely. She showed initial interest but as soon as she got to know my strong anti-Teresa stance, backed off. This reaction is not uncommon from Westerners: *We white folk can occasionally criticise our own Western icon if we so wish, but as an Indian you should be quiet and thankful for what you get.*

Shortly after Mother Teresa died in September 1997, I was contacted by [The Sunday Times](#) (London). Somebody there got wind of my work (probably by reading my website) and felt there was a 'story' in it. I was pleasantly surprised. This was the first time a mainstream conservative newspaper was taking an alternative interest in the former 'living saint'. I was asked to send written and photographic materials to [Stephen Grey](#), the newspaper's South Asia correspondent in Delhi. I did so, making it very clear that all my photos were taken during Mother Teresa's lifetime. Mr Grey got interested and travelled to Calcutta to do a personal on-the-spot reporting. He rang me from Park Hotel in Calcutta (I believe in mid-November) and we had a half an hour chat about various avenues he could pursue to do his feature and whom to interview, etc. Mr Grey stayed in Calcutta almost a week and at one point he suggested we did a joint feature, which I never thought was a serious possibility. His article was published in the newspaper on 7 December 1997 and described in harrowing detail how the poor were being rejected from the doorsteps of Mother Teresa's homes. He wrote about a rag-picker woman called Shona sitting at the door of the home for the dying, almost barricading it; asking for food or other material help. A man called Laltu Saha was quoted as saying that the nuns had threatened to call the police when he brought a dying man and insisted for him to be looked after. Grey quoted Sister Priscilla, 'number three in the order' as saying, 'Most beggars are much more comfortable in the streets than inside a room full of beggars.'

Grey recounted the heart-rending tale of a 80-year-old woman called Ammaji ('half-paralysed and visibly distressed') who was taken by an MC vehicle ('number 7123') and dumped in a middle-class area. A woman called Polly Banerjee was quoted as saying, 'I saw, to my horror, two

people carry the woman out of the [van's] side door, leave her on the footpath and drive off.' The middle-class residents now called the police and took the initiative of having the woman readmitted 'after some argument'. [Sister Nirmala](#) (Mother Teresa's successor) was quoted as saying that they could not accommodate everybody and Ammaji was feeling 'homesick'.

Grey also described what he saw in the orphanage, commenting on a 'wailing child, shuffling around', wanting attention, but 'nobody responded'. He was perturbed that each cot in the infants' wing contained '*two clamouring babies*'. 'There were no volunteers in the infants' wing, only hired maids and some sisters, who were putting religious music on a tape recorder.' He also commented on the total absence of toys.

But predictably, the article repeatedly exonerated Teresa, putting all the blame on her successors. It was headlined: *MOTHER TERESA'S HEIRS ACCUSED OF DUMPING SICK*. He cited interviews with various people; with the poor, and with those who had been close to Mother Teresa, including a Catholic priest, who all said that the organisation had become dysfunctional since her death, prior to which things were so much better, or almost perfect! I can quite believe that Indians would say such a thing, as they would not want to upset a sahib, especially a British one. As the Tory [MP Bowen Wells](#) told me, 'It's difficult to know what Indians actually believe because they tell you what you want to hear.' Three hundred years of colonial rule has engendered in the Indian a complex craven attitude, which is quite unique. The poor that Grey had interviewed would assume that any Westerner would be a follower or a devotee of Teresa and, hence, would be averse to any criticism of her. Even if they had said something critical, the interpreter would likely suppress it, worried that they might not be hired again as a sahib would not want to interview the 'wrong kind of poor'. I have seen this happen.

It was immature to put all blame on 'heirs', barely eight weeks after Mother's death. Fact remains that all the gruesome practices are a direct legacy of the 'living saint'. Indeed, there have been some substantial improvements, especially in the orphanage, since her death, such as the playing of music – Mother was not keen on nursery rhymes and sing-along music. Also toys are seen nowadays. Mother Teresa did not encourage toys for children, probably because she thought Jesus did not have any (although Jesus, whose father was a carpenter, probably had lots of toys). Even if we

accept that the organisation took a real dive only eight weeks after the death of the founder, what does it say about the founder's integrity?

There is a disturbing racist innuendo in putting all blame on 'heirs'. Even when Mother Teresa was alive, I heard many a volunteer (particularly the American evangelical white supremacist types) express the opinion that, without a European at the helm, the Indians would make a hash of the show once Mother died. Unfortunately many Indians, who have a deep inferiority complex share and publicly air this view, especially in the company of a sahib. They think that such an opinion would please the sahib, and Indians (of whatever class and educational background) are wont to ingratiate sahibs.

It is possible that Missionaries of Charity might cease to exist in a few decades' time, but that would be due to the fact that, without the glamour of Teresa, the rich and powerful would not prop up this deeply flawed organisation and also the media would have lost interest in it.

On 27 August 1996, when Mother Teresa was seriously ill, an article appeared in *The Times* (London) which voiced grave concern about Calcutta's future once she died. The author, [Christopher Thomas](#), the paper's India correspondent, was writing from Delhi although the paper claimed he was in Calcutta at the time. Calcutta was, as usual, portrayed as the ultimate white man's burden. Thomas mentioned Mother's 'vast industry of good works'. There was a chilling feel of apprehension suggesting that the city was on the brink of a catastrophe faced with the demise of its sole saviour. Interestingly, Stanley Stewart writing in *The Sunday Times* (16 November 2003) described Calcutta as 'India's most elegant city' and remarked that its poverty was 'no more acute than that seen in other Indian cities.'

Calcutta carries on in its own inimitable way. The absence of Teresa has made no impact it. In the last couple of decades, Calcutta has fared the best amongst the four Indian 'metros' in most parameters, such as power supply, cost of living, crime. It also has the lowest infant mortality rate out of the four and the lowest HIV infection rate. These improvements have mainly come since Teresa's death.

On 18 September 2000, a Teresa nun called [Sister Fransisca](#) was arrested by Calcutta Police for the unlawful confinement of four children and deliberately burning the hand of one of them, seven-year-old [Karabi Mondal](#). On 4 September 2000 she had accused the four girls (who were

sisters) of stealing money and had repeatedly pressed a hot iron rod on Karabi's hand. The girls were being looked after in a day-centre the nuns run in North Calcutta for children of poor people. Since Mother Teresa's death, the organisation has moved away from the strict 'no family cases' policy and has been making some effort to look after the general poor with families. On the evening of 4 September 2000, Kabiram, the girls' father had gone to the day-centre to collect his daughters, but was told that they would be staying overnight for extra training and teaching. During the night, Fransisca systematically terrorised the four children and repeatedly burned Karabi.

Unfortunately for the Missionaries of Charity, the girls' father Kabiram, a rag-picker and pavement-dweller in Calcutta's Grant Street area was not one of Mother's meek and 'beautiful poor'. He immediately went to Bowbazar Police Station and lodged a complaint. Following investigations, the police arrested (and later bailed) Fransisca. She initially tried to deny the allegation, but [Sister Nirmala](#) intervened and asked her to confess. The case came to court nine months later and, on 30 June 2001, Sister Fransisca was convicted and given the option of a small fine or a two-month prison sentence; she paid the fine.

One should be realistic and accept that in an organisation the size of the MC, such unfortunate incidents would occur periodically, but Fransisca was one of Mother Teresa's first associates and was known to be particularly vicious. Cold-blooded cruelty is not unusual amongst Teresa nuns in Calcutta. Sister Nirmala was rightly criticised in the local press for not sympathising with the children and, instead, praying for Fransisca 'who was passing through such difficult times.' But she brought Fransisca to the police station and accepted full responsibility on behalf of the organisation. Later, she again was in court when the sentence was passed and abjectly apologised to all concerned.

To their credit, the Catholic media (at least in the UK) reported the conviction: [Catholic Times](#)²⁶ had the news as a headline. But world media totally blacked it out. The news of the torture appeared as a minute news item on the BBC world service website. I do not think the news of conviction and sentencing was reported at all. In contrast, about the same time as [Fransisca's](#) conviction, there were half-page photos in many major newspapers around the world of former President Clinton receiving a bouquet from a girl in [Shishu Bhavan in Calcutta](#).

It is not entirely true that Mother Teresa had not been criticised at all in Western media before the last five years of her life. In Britain, she faced robust criticism, for the first time, in *The Observer* of 3 May 1992. This was two and a half years before our documentary was shown on British television. It was factual unstinted criticism by the author [Mary Loudon](#), who had worked as a volunteer at the famous home for the dying in Calcutta, but the piece went totally unnoticed by British media and public alike. I believe this was because Ms Loudon's criticism of Mother Teresa was not ideological, but based on the appalling practices she had witnessed: she alleged severe neglect and described customary activities such as the washing of old needles in cold water. The media knew that any attack on Ms Loudon would not only be indefensible, but would actually be counterproductive by recirculating the story, hence the silence.

Following Ms Loudon's piece in *The Observer*, I was expecting a plethora of investigative reports, and teams of journalists despatched to Calcutta for 'on the spot' accounts. But nothing happened; the world media, which found time to camp in Calcutta for months over the election of Mother's successor, were utterly unimpressed.

Whenever gentlemen and ladies of the press and television disparaged Mother's critics, they invoked Germaine Greer and her subjective comments about 'religious imperialism', and [Christopher Hitchens](#) and his personal attacks; Ms Loudon was never mentioned.

Two and a half years later, Ms Loudon appeared in our *Hell's Angel* documentary where she recounted harrowing accounts of neglect in Mother Teresa's homes and said that the home for the dying reminded her of scenes from Nazi concentration camps. In the months following the documentary, when the film was regularly demolished by sanctimonious journalists around the world, nobody ever mentioned Ms [Loudon's](#) factual account in it. The entire thrust was against [Christopher Hitchens'](#) personal attack, and who can blame them for that.

[Paul William Roberts](#), the British-Canadian author of successful travelogues in the mid-1990s, is amongst a very few who ever made an honest appraisal of Mother Teresa (in a travel book). He came to Calcutta in July 1992 to interview her. While waiting at Mother House courtyard for the interview, he found a nun desperately struggling with a young woman, very likely a new convert, learning to read the Bible. Roberts remarks:

Surely the Bible wasn't the best book for beginners? . . . Lower castes and harijans had always been conversion fodder. . . 'Who wants to see Mother?' a crackly old voice snapped. I looked up to see the curtain covering an inner door briskly swept aside by a tiny, robust figure clutching an enormous bone rosary in her hands. Mother Teresa was clearly good at making entrances. She also seemed far less shy and frail than she did on film, with some impressive warts on her nose. At eighty-two she was certainly more vigorous than many people half her age like me, and there was a certain tenacity in her manner I had not expected. She gripped my hands firmly with hers, saying, 'Very kind of you to come all this way. What do you want? . . .'

PR: I asked if Catholicism was important to her.

MT: *'It is important to everyone,' she replied. 'Not just me. . . Once someone begins to seek God, through his grace, then he must look in the right places. Otherwise he leaves the road. . . Oh yes,' she said sternly. 'Christians are the light of the world.'*

PR: 'What makes a saint, do you think?' She brightened at the mention of this topic.

MT: *'There is a great price to be paid. You must renounce everything. You must overcome many temptations. . . And always sacrifice, sacrifice, sacrifice. . . The poor are God's gift to us. . . In your country there is spiritual poverty; that is an even heavier burden, you see. It is so hard to see God's love in your country.'*

PR: 'Well, at least we aren't fishing babies out of garbage cans. Not often. . .'

This seemed to raise her hackles. [Mother did not like being contradicted.]

MT: 'What is suffering?' she demanded. *'It is nothing! But when suffering is sharing the pain Christ himself endured, it is the most wonderful thing; a beautiful gift, you see. The suffering relieves the sin; that is why it is such a beautiful gift'*

PR: 'That is pretty much the way the Hindus view karma, isn't it?'

MT: *'To be a saint, means tearing away anything that is not God from yourself, every false desire. You remove it and purify the heart. You give up your own will, all the pretty things you want, and you live the will of God.'*

PR: 'But if your concern is the poor, there are so many contradictions in your faith that ignore the real situation. You are against contraception and abortion?'

She tut-tutted, the rosary zipping through her busy fingers with noises like a hectic pool table.

MT: *'It's not 'for' or 'against'. [God] hears the scream of the unborn child killed without even a chance of entering the world.'*

PR: 'But there's no room for them in the world. Isn't that half the problem. . .?'

MT: *'Jesus tells us that the Father takes care of all the tiny things in creation; the insects, the birds, the trees.'*

She kept harping on love. It suddenly occurred to me that she did not care about the poor at all, except as a way to achieve her own spiritual fulfilment. The thought surprised me with its irreverence.

PR: 'Are you consciously trying to be a saint?'

MT: *'I share the passion of Christ,' she said, looking at me angrily, beads clacking. 'If you wish to share this with us, you come to the service in our chapel this evening. . . to praise God with us. Then you will see what we do here.'*³⁰

Roberts asked her about the (then current) US Presidential candidate Jerry Brown, who had volunteered for her in Calcutta.

MT: *'Brown? There are so many volunteers. Let them all come. . . They must be willing to work'*

PR: 'To suffer, you mean?'

MT: *'It is all for the love of God.'*

PR: 'Is it Mother? Or is it just more vanity, . . .?'

She rose abruptly, glaring at me. Her feelings weren't hurt, I felt, but her pride was. 'Thank you,' she muttered, hastening back through the curtain from whence she'd appeared.

Before he left Mother House, Roberts met an American volunteer who had been working with the order for nine months. He asked her if she was disillusioned. She screwed up her eyes, shook her head, sighed and then

said, 'Yeah. But that's okay. I wanted to believe in fairies once, too.' . . . 'So, no Saint Teresa?' She said 'No Santa Claus, either. . .'²⁷

[Walter Wüllenweber](#) of the German magazine *Stern* is another journalist who had the courage to write a detailed and factual critique of Teresa's activities. He went to Calcutta in September 1997 for the nun's funeral and was utterly unimpressed by the order's work. He became almost obsessed for the need to tell the world the true story. His editors were not enthusiastic, to put it mildly. They cited bad public relations, lawsuits and a hundred other reasons for him not to go ahead. He was determined, and doggedly pursued his research over three continents. In the end, the editors relented and 'Mother Teresa: Where are Your Millions?'²⁸ was published on her first death anniversary. Though hard-hitting and vivid, large chunks of the original article were deleted by editors and lawyers. This just shows how determined a journalist has to be to take on even the legacy of the 'living saint'.

Occasionally Mother Teresa has been compared, usually by her critics, with [Albert Schweitzer](#), the other purported white Catholic saviour of the twentieth century, although nobody would claim that Schweitzer achieved the iconic status of Teresa. There are, however, more differences between these personalities than there are similarities.

We have to remember that Herr Schweitzer was a man before the mass television era, and before the age of jet travel. He could not, even if he wanted to, appear in millions of American homes, by joining the [National Prayer Breakfast](#) Meeting, with the country's president and political hierarchy. He did not make monthly trips to the Vatican, with whom he did not enjoy a passionate relationship, as did Mother. Consequently, the Vatican's wealth, power and publicity machinery were not brought to his aid during his lifetime.

[Schweitzer](#) was also racially prejudiced, and I do not think anyone can say that about Teresa. He was remote and often arrogant.

Unlike Schweitzer, Mother was supremely obliging to the glitterati, both international and Indian. A few years back, the Indian winner of the Miss Universe title found herself being side-lined by the better known Miss World, so she arranged a photo shoot with Mother Teresa and quickly found herself in many of the world's major newspapers and magazines. Mother was very kind to the moguls of the Indian film industry and appeared with

many of them. I shudder to think what Herr Schweitzer's response would have been had he been approached by Marlene Dietrich or Marilyn Monroe for a photo shoot.

But more significantly, Schweitzer did not appeal to the lowest common denominator. Tabloids and *Hello!* magazine, had they existed in his day, would not have touched him with a barge pole. He was a tetchy, gruff Teutonic man who had a passionate interest in Bach. He had more interest in Catholic theology than in chanting 'Love' like a mantra.

One of Mother Teresa's major appeals was the fact that she was 'a little old lady' or a 'simple Albanian peasant woman', although she herself always denied that she came from peasant stock. As her official biographer Navin Chawla repeatedly told an audience at London's Nehru Centre (on 22 April 1996), Mother Teresa got perturbed and offended when the sobriquet 'Albanian peasant woman' was applied to her. We Indians understand how important class structure is, so Chawla had particular sympathy with his subject on this issue. He said that Mother had told him that her family were originally Venetian merchants who emigrated to Albania. It is ironic that the woman who glorified poverty for other people, and had portrayed the city of Calcutta to be one mass of slums and lepers, should be so touchy for herself to be portrayed as coming from 'simple' stock.

Peasant stock or not, she looked supremely frail and vulnerable. By her sheer appearance she brought a lump to the throat and aroused one's protective instincts, even in the more ruthless amongst us including tabloid Rottweilers.

Was Mother an expert and casual liar? No one can tell if she believed in her lies or consciously lied. As she herself saw it, it was not for narrow personal gain, but for the greater good; it was for serving God's higher purpose; that higher purpose was not serving the poor, but spreading the message of her kind of God, and about the murder that was abortion.

The perceived notion that Mother Teresa detested or at least was oblivious of publicity has no bearing in truth. Mother's friend, spiritual advisor and biographer Father Le Joly once said, 'The media are Mother's best propagandists, diffusing her ideas and ideals.'²⁹ Elsewhere he also said:

Mother Teresa's success owes much to her remarkable ability to obtain collaboration from every side. . . She also used all the modern

means of mass communication. The media made her known and made her work possible. They made her first a state, then a national, and finally a world figure. . . She was a good subject for the cameraman.³⁰

And Mother intuitively knew which publications to fete. Incredible, but true, that she knew the publicity potential of *Hello!*.

That journalists and authors have little or no inclination to find the truth about this icon of our times is illustrated by the description of Mother Teresa's father's profession in different biographies. I shall give an incomplete list of the various professions the late [Nikolas Bojaxhiu](#) was said to have had, according to his daughter's biographers (who were her close acquaintances). He was a 'chemist' (according to [Georges Gorée](#) and [Jean Barbier](#)), a 'building contractor and wholesale importer of food' ([Eileen Egan](#)), or a 'doctor's assistant' (David Porter).

I appreciate that it is not important in the grand scheme of things whether Mother Teresa's father was a baron or a busker. But if biographers cannot get a simple checkable fact relating to a living person right, how can we expect to tell them the truth when it comes to important issues on either Mother Teresa or Calcutta?

It is particularly pernicious when grotesque lies appear in books for children. In a comic book called *Mother Teresa, Missionary of the Impossible*, written for Italian children by [Paolo Gherlardini](#) (whose literary skills are generally employed in translating exploits of Ninja Turtles) published by the Gruppo Editoriale Sirio Milan (1997), Mother Teresa is shown, surrounded by cowering villagers, fighting off tigers in an Indian jungle with a burning log. When asked whether he had let his fantasies run away with his senses, Gherlardini blatantly said, 'Probably that did not happen, but this is the sort of thing readers like. And Mother Teresa might consider it a compliment.'³¹

I have written to all of Teresa's accredited biographers numerous times, asking for an interview; I had mentioned in my letters that I wished to address some glaring distortions of facts. [Lucinda Vardey](#) and [Kathryn Spink](#) replied, but only to turn me down. [Eileen Egan](#) never replied.

Lucinda Vardey wrote, '. . .I feel I cannot cooperate.'³²

Kathryn Spink wrote, 'I am more inclined to be complimentary about a friend and mentor of many years, I feel there might be a conflict of interest

in our meeting.’³³

I sent numerous faxes and letters to [Navin Chawla](#), her only accredited biographer in India. He ignored all of them. In the end I caught up with him (on 3 December 1996) at London’s [Nehru Centre](#). He refused to grant me an interview, citing the ‘conflict of interest’ clause like Spink. He was however gracious enough to sign a copy of the pictorial biography he was flogging.

One of the best-selling Teresa authors through the 1990s was [Sue Shaw](#). Though hers was not an authorised version, [Harper Collins](#) heaped copies in bookstores which sold fast. With rare honesty Ms Shaw told me³⁴ she was not a Catholic and had no particular interest in Mother Teresa. She wrote the book simply because she was contracted to do so by the publishers. She had never met Teresa or visited Calcutta. When I pointed out to her various errors, distortions and inaccuracies both about her subject and about Calcutta, she expressed deep regret, saying she merely took her information from other accredited biographies. She said she had hoped that the editors at the publishers would do the needed corrections! The domino-effect of myth making goes on.

I have almost solely dealt with the myth as propagated by written media. Even more telling untruths have been broadcast through television and film, whose impact is far more vivid, permanent and widespread. Numerous ‘documentaries’ have been made on Teresa, mainly by her friends and followers, and transmitted worldwide. The notable one amongst them was made by the sisters Ann and Jeanette Petrie. Mother, despite her humility, had no problems allowing the film crew to shadow her for almost a year.

How effective and far-reaching Teresa’s propaganda machinery was can be guessed by the fact that this ‘documentary’ was shown at [United Nations General Assembly Hall](#) on 26 October 1987 during celebrations to mark the organisation’s 40th anniversary. Not every member of state was entirely happy, as the film was largely veiled Catholic and Vatican propaganda. But they kept quiet, as nobody would be seen to say anything against the ‘living saint’. And, indeed, she herself was there and addressed a thousand dignitaries about the virtues of humility, charity and the blight of abortion. She was introduced by [Javier Pérez de Cuéllar](#) as ‘the most powerful woman in the world.’ She said in her speech:

When we destroy the unborn child, we destroy God. We are frightened of nuclear war; we are frightened of this new disease [AIDS], but. . . Abortion has become the greatest destroyer of peace.

The 'documentary' begins with a typical Calcutta street scene and depicts nuns going about their duties. And lo and behold, they suddenly chance upon a dying man! And they tenderly lift him up to carry in their ambulance for the long journey back to [Nirmal Hriday](#). But what a coincidence; this 'random' street has in the background the hazy outline of Nirmal Hriday shimmering in the sunshine.

The American author Ada Calhoun wrote an OpEd for [New York Times](#) (12 July 2014) expressing dismay why Teresa had not been declared a saint and wrote of her experiences in Calcutta while the nun was there: 'hordes of dying people' collected by nuns in 'makeshift fleet of [rickshaws](#) around Calcutta's streets.' I wrote to Ms Calhoun a number of times asking her if she had any photos of this collection of the destitute and also any of Teresa actually helping or succouring a poor person. In reply, she blocked me on Twitter.

5

Calcutta

In January 1912, [King George V](#) visited Calcutta. In 1911, the capital of Britain's Indian Empire had been shifted from Calcutta to Delhi for political and geographical reasons, and the King himself had laid the foundation stones in the wilderness of what was going to be New Delhi. The King-Emperor's visit to Calcutta had partly been to salve bruised sentiments in the former capital. But Calcuttans were unperturbed: they did not feel that their city had lost status, as they remained convinced that Delhi, despite the new epithet 'New', would continue to be a sedate backwater in the tradition of 'made to order' capital cities, such as Ottawa or Canberra.

In retrospect it is obvious that the transfer of capital affected Calcutta adversely, but the city, nonetheless, continued to thrive and, according to historians, reached the acme of aesthetic, cultural and commercial states in the 1930s. It was then the 'wealthiest city between [Rome](#) and Tokyo' and was still very much the 'second city of the British empire'. It was into this Calcutta that, in 1929, the teenage Albanian nun [Agnes Bojaxhiu](#) (as Mother Teresa had been baptised) stepped out of a ship from Ireland.

She did not come to do charity, but to lead a religious life with the Loreto Sisters in Calcutta, in whose cloisters she remained until 1948. Within a few months of Sister [Bojaxhiu's](#) arrival in Calcutta, a Nobel Prize

came to the city; Calcutta University's Professor of Optical Physics, [Sir Chandrasekhar Raman](#), won the Nobel Prize for physics for 1930. This was the second Nobel to come to the city; the first being in 1913, when [Rabindranath Tagore](#) won it for literature.

In one of Mother's most popular biographies, however, a different story is told. Commenting on Mother Teresa's 1979 Nobel Prize, it says, 'It was the first time an Indian citizen had ever been given the award, and a chorus of praise swept round the world.'¹ Such a lie is understandable; if the truth were told that Calcutta, even before Teresa had properly unpacked her bags there, had already had two Nobel Prizes, it would defeat the agenda. After all, this is a place, according to Mother Teresa's friend and 'second self'; Father [Georges Gorée](#), is an 'abscess of the world' where 'in the dustbins, the drains, under the bus seats there were living foetuses given to dogs to eat. A little boy, whose mother had tried to kill him, still had the strangle marks on his neck.'²

Mother's special friend Gorée's disgusting comment is another example of the Catholic obsession with foetuses. In reality, if a baby is abandoned in Calcutta's streets, it always makes front page news, as it does in any other city in the world. I'd encourage readers to search the archives of Calcutta's English daily on www.telegraphindia.com to discover where Calcutta's abandoned babies are taken to. Extremely rarely would the MC accept such a baby. On 18 October 2000, a baby girl was found abandoned in Sitanath Road in a garbage dump in northern Calcutta; the following day all newspapers reported the news on their front pages. The baby was not taken to a Teresa home, but to Marwari Relief Society Hospital. A dozen childless couples came forward to adopt the baby and, in due course, she was adopted. A year later, many of the city's newspapers reported on the baby's first birthday.

It is assumed the world over that, when Agnes Bojaxhiu stepped out of a ship in Calcutta, the young woman left a life of plenty to come to a savage and desperate city. The reality was different. Mother Teresa was an ethnic Albanian from the Balkan city of [Skopje](#). Her family had always lived with instability being Catholics in a Muslim majority area. She, like many Catholic women of the region, became a nun, partly to escape poverty and persecution. After World War II, [Skopje](#) became part of Yugoslavia. After the disintegration of Yugoslavia, Skopje is now the capital of Macedonia. Skopje was a violent place and young Agnes's father was murdered. Even

now tension runs high between ethnic [Albanians](#) and Macedonians. Albanian economic refugees are everywhere in western Europe. In just one week, in March 1997, 12,000 economic refugees fled Albania for Italy across the Adriatic. This was the largest such movement of people in Europe from a country not at war.

Mother Teresa considered herself Albanian, but with the proviso that her family was ‘of Italian descent’, but she did not explain the Italian connection. It would be unfair to compare the material conditions of Calcutta of the 1930s and those of Albania, but their difference in social development may be exemplified by the fact that Albania, until the late 1990s, was the only country in the world where, by official decree, poetry was obliged to rhyme.

The writer [Rumer Godden](#), who is best known for her book *The Black Narcissus*, which later made into a Hollywood blockbuster, had this to say about life in Calcutta in 1929:

For a while I tasted again how beguilingly pleasant life in Calcutta could be. . . [my husband] used to go out early on Sunday mornings to one of the Country Clubs,. . . Sunday lunches were usually prawn curry – Calcutta’s prawns were delectable – after it, there would be a long siesta until it was time for the cinema.³

Calcutta prawns are still delectable, and the colonial clubs still exist, but it is now exceptional to talk about them, just as it was exceptional to talk about poverty in Calcutta (which very much existed) in the 1930s. Rumer Godden herself illustrates the point: despite not mentioning poverty in Calcutta in her earlier writings, she suddenly ‘remembered’, during a spate of controversy about Mother Teresa in 1994, that all she saw in Calcutta in her youth was poverty. She had been back in Calcutta in August 1994 for a few days to take part in a documentary about her. In the same year during a media controversy about Mother Teresa’s work and worth, she was one of the establishment worthies who came forward to defend the living saint. She blithely said that she saw no poverty in Calcutta in 1994 which she assumed was due to Mother Teresa (without visiting any of her homes)⁴; Calcutta loses even when it wins!

Apart from the transfer of Capital in 1911, the two other watersheds in Calcutta’s decline came at the partition of India in 1947, and lastly during

the 1971 civil war in the erstwhile East Pakistan, which resulted in the creation [Bangladesh](#). Both these latter two events caused huge influx of refugees to pour into Calcutta. In my opinion, Calcutta's darkest hours were between the late 1960s and 1977. The beginning of this period saw the births in the city of numerous extreme left wing groups whose only aim was to destroy the 'system' and each other. [Indira Gandhi](#), the then prime minister of India countered the threat from the extreme left by raising and arming a black-shirt style force of hooligan youths. They were given carte blanche in whatever means they adopted in order to counter the leftist threat.

After [George V](#), the next British monarch to visit Calcutta was [Queen Elizabeth II](#) in February 1961, accompanied by her husband. The Queen and Duke stayed in Calcutta for four days during which time they visited a steel plant, an agricultural fair and Victoria Memorial, the grand marble monument to Queen Victoria.

What is noteworthy in the royal itinerary of 1961 is the complete absence of anything to do with 'charity', 'aid', 'slums', 'lepers', 'Save this' or 'Help that'. It is also worth noting that by this time Mother Teresa had been an active charity worker in the city for thirteen years, but it was only after another eight years that she was suddenly 'discovered' by [Malcolm Muggeridge](#) from the BBC. Yet, when one reads accounts of Calcutta of the early 1960s in Mother Teresa's biographies, one gets the impression that the city was already one big necropolis with streets lined with dead and dying people where Mother Teresa was functioning as the sole roving angel.

[Queen Elizabeth II](#) met Mother Teresa for the first and only time on 24 November 1983 during the Commonwealth Summit in New Delhi, when she presented the nun with the coveted Order of Merit. All of British media went gaga how Mother Teresa met the Queen in a 'darned grey cardigan'⁵ and when Mother said, 'I hope the queen doesn't mind, but my habit isn't very clean. I didn't have time to change'⁶, she reduced the hardened media persons to tears. [The Daily Telegraph](#) made this unique discovery; 'The Queen last met her during her State visit to India in 1961.'⁷ This is untrue, but I am not surprised that a British journalist would find it unthinkable that the Queen of England would have gone to Calcutta in 1961, but not met Mother Teresa. The Queen's press secretary wrote to me confirming that the two did not meet in 1961.⁸

Thirty-one years to the day after [Queen Elizabeth's](#) visit, another 'queen' came to Calcutta; it was none other than the late 'Queen of People's Hearts', [Princess Diana](#). It was primarily a personal visit although the tab was picked up by the British taxpayer, as there was an ostensible 'official' part to the trip, to lay the foundation stone of the new British Deputy High Commission building on Ho Chi Minh Street. Diana stayed in Calcutta for two days and the rest of her engagements showcased to the whole world Calcutta's poverty and desperation. She visited the MC orphanage, the so-called hospice and also a leprosy hospital (not run by MC though the world assumed it was).

A week before she even landed in Calcutta, the now extinct *Today* newspaper predicted, 'No doubt her eyes will moisten as she sees first-hand the scale of deprivation that has turned the inner recesses of Calcutta into a haunt of the lost, where beggars roam and babies are left to die.'⁹ The only occasion Diana's eyes moistened in Calcutta was when she lamented not meeting her icon in the city (Mother was at the [Gemelli Hospital](#) in [Rome](#) having a rest).

Note the striking contrast between the total themes surrounding Diana's visit and that of her mother-in-law – the Queen. Is it possible that a city can sink so low in mere 31 years that its entire perspective would change from normalcy and elegance to total squalor and wailing poverty? The latter image is due to the Teresa association no doubt, but capitulation of Indians before her aura is equally responsible. Why did no one in Calcutta protest about Diana's programme exclusively showing the degraded side of their city?

[John Keay](#), author of books on India and the Raj, remarks:

'It is hard now to imagine the city as the gay and elegant capital of the East. Few places can have gained quite such an opposite reputation in the space of a couple of centuries – like Regency Bath turning into the Bronx. Contemporary drawings. . . show spacious Palladian mansions, wide thoroughfares and stately gardens bordered by the blue waters of the Hughli river. . . it [life in Calcutta] was all intensely exciting like a combination of Paris in the naughty nineties and the Klondike'.¹⁰

I have, here, reproduced from various editions of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* over the last two centuries, entries under ‘Calcutta’. The 3rd edition (1788–97) describes Calcutta thus:

Calcutta, a city of 500,000 inhabitants, is but a modern city, built on the site of a village called Govindpur. It is elegantly built,. . . Calcutta’s flourishing state may, in a great measure, be supposed owing to the unlimited toleration of all religions allowed here; thus the Pagans being suffered to carry their idols in procession, the Mahommedans not being discountenanced, and the Roman Catholics being allowed a church.

The ‘unlimited toleration of all religions’ still exists and Mother Teresa knew it and cynically exploited it.

The 9th edition of 1875–89 describes ‘Calcutta’ thus:

. . . a city of 892,429 souls, whose 1872 maritime trade amounted to 52½ million pounds sterling, with an excess of export over import of 11 million sterling. . . From this time [1773] the history of Calcutta presents a smooth narrative of advancing prosperity. . . A great park (*Maidan*) intersected by roads and ornamented by a garden, stretches along the river bank. The fort rises from it on its western side, the state mansions of Chowringhi with Government house, the high court, and other public offices, line its eastern and northern flanks. Several fine squares, with large reservoirs and gardens, adorn the city and broad well metalled streets connect its various extremities. . . The drainage works are on an equally effective scale. The main sewers are underground, and a pumping station is maintained at an annual cost of £3000. An ample water supply, improved drainage and other sanitary reforms, have rendered Calcutta the healthiest city in the East, – healthier indeed than some of the great European towns. English civilisation has thus enabled Calcutta to remain the political capital of India.

Calcutta was until the early twentieth century, the ‘*City of Palaces*’. This was official; it was not a title bestowed upon the city by Calcuttans themselves, but by the world. The epithet was first used in the 1780s and soon became a regular description of the city in everyday speak. *Thomas*

[Twining](#) (of Twining's Tea fame), who arrived here in 1792 was one of the first to use it:

Turning suddenly to the north, at the end of [Garden] Reach, the 'City of Palaces' with its lofty detached flat-roofed mansions and the masts of its innumerable shipping appeared before us of the left bank of the Ganges. A range of magnificent buildings. . . ¹¹

The title 'City of Palaces' caught the public imagination back then, just as 'City of Slums' or Mother Teresa's connection later seemed to do. George Bennet and Daniel Tyerman, two missionaries of the [London Missionary Society](#) arrived in Calcutta on 15 April 1826. They wrote:

Now the far-famed city of Calcutta burst upon our sight with imposing grandeur, from its vast extent and the magnificent style of its buildings. . . Well may Calcutta be called a city of palaces. . . Few cities in the world will strike the untravelled stranger from England with more astonishment than Calcutta. ¹²

In the entire world, Calcutta's reputation is now the worst in the United States, but this is how the American author [Katherine Mayo](#) was describing the city in the 1920s, even though she is now remembered in Indian academic circles for her antipathy towards India and everything Indian:

Calcutta, second city in the British Empire [after London],. . . big, western, modern, with public buildings, monuments, parks, gardens, hospitals, museums, University, courts of law, hotels, offices, shops, all of which might belong to a prosperous American city;. . . Rich Calcutta, wide-open to the traffic of the world and India, traffic of bullion, of jute, of cotton – of all that India and the world want of each other. . . Decorous, sophisticated Calcutta, where decorous and sophisticated people of all creeds, all colours, and all costumes. . . talk good English while they take their tea and ices and listen to the regimental band. ¹³

As Calcutta's charm grew with the British, the tale of the 'black hole', a small dungeon that had been used to hold British Prisoners of War in 1756, was forgotten for most, although it remained a compulsory chapter in

history books for generations of British schoolchildren, well into the 1970s. Since Teresa's ascendance the phrase 'black hole' has been used as a metaphor for Calcutta, but this was a small room where a number of British men and women perished during the 1756 siege of the city, when the British and the Nawab of Bengal were fighting over the city's control. Most Indian historians are emphatic that the 'black hole' incident did not happen at all and that it was invented by the British to make the annexation of the province more ethically acceptable. British historians, not necessarily radical or Leftist ones, are of the view that the 'black hole' incident has been wildly exaggerated, that not more than 43 people died, and that too accidentally.

It is a testimony to the powers of Western media and propaganda that 'black hole' became such an instantly recognisable image of suffering on the British side during the Raj, whereas the Jallianwala Bagh incident in Amritsar, where in April 1919, 350 unarmed men, women and children were mowed down in less than ten minutes on the orders of Brigadier Reginald Dyer, paled into obscurity.

The growth of modern international travel has seen the growth of a multi-million dollar industry of travel books and travel writing. There is a profusion of such books in India. Most of them have been written by Westerners, who have claimed to have become experts on India after a couple of months in that difficult and inscrutable country. Quite often, publishers have enlisted the help of 'Indians', usually expatriate ones, that is, Westerners with Indian names. It is not, therefore, surprising when I find significant factual errors and reinforcement of Western stereotypes about Calcutta in travel guides on India.

The most glaring errors are evident in the most popular travelogue of all; the *Lonely Planet India* guide. This travel book, which sells in millions, is particularly unkind and wrong about Calcutta. I have quoted from the 1996 edition, the last one before Mother Teresa's death. Its 'Calcutta' chapter starts off with:

Densely populated and polluted, Calcutta is often an ugly and desperate place that, too many people sums up the worst in India. . . Furthermore, Calcutta has been plagued by chronic labour unrest resulting in a decline of its productive capacity. . . Calcutta is not a good introduction to India and is best visited after you've had a

chance to get used to some of the country's extremes. Hindustan Motors is just one of the several major industries that have given up on the city and have transferred their operations to other states. The situation is summed up by the city's hopeless power-generation system. Electrical power in Calcutta has become so on-again off-again that virtually every hotel, restaurant, shop or small business has to have some sort of standby power generator or battery lighting system. The workers are blamed, the technicians are blamed, the power plants are blamed, the coal miners are blamed, even Indian railways are blamed for not delivering the coal on time, but it's widely pointed out that [Bombay](#), for example, certainly doesn't suffer the frequency and extent of power cuts that are a way of life in Calcutta.

I do not know of any would-be traveller who would not be put off by this unique introduction, but the ultimate insult is added thus: 'Don't let the squalor of first impressions put you off this city. There are a lot of jewels to be discovered and they're not far from the surface.'

Pollution is a real and burning issue in Calcutta today and a number of pressure groups and NGOs (and to an extent the government) are doing the best they can to address the problem. Maybe Mother Teresa, who gave the impression that she ran the city single-handed, could have done something for pollution in Calcutta, but she was not interested. As long as she made publicity exploiting the city, she was content. Even the trees outside her Mother House were maintained by Economic Transport Organisation, owners of a fleet of trucks.

She once gave a letter of commendation to a company which dealt with air pollution:

Dear Mr Ghosh and all of SMG Group

God love you for all your efforts to fight against air and noise pollution. In doing so, you are serving both God and neighbour. You serve God by taking care of His creation, and you serve neighbour by making the world a cleaner and healthier place for all. Keep the joy of loving God and neighbour in your heart and spread that joy to all you meet.

Let us pray.

M Teresa M.C.¹⁴

SMG Group refused to confirm or deny if a donation had changed hands.

About Hindustan Motors (makers of Ambassador car), *Lonely Planet* was wrong but prescient. It was going strong in 1996 and was very much in Calcutta, but as demand for this sloth and portly mascot of India fell in the last decade the company folded in 2014.

Needless to say, *Lonely Planet India* had a glowing reference to Mother Teresa in their Calcutta chapter, where she was introduced as ‘Saint of the Gutters’; but her biographical sketch was factually quite inaccurate. In the book’s ‘Facts for the Visitor’ chapter there were details of how to contact the Missionaries of Charity if one wished to work as a volunteer.

This enormously popular travel book was a global advertisement for the squalid side of the Calcutta, partly factual, but mainly mythical. It was also an international billboard for Mother Teresa. Facts were not the strong point of this book, which has almost become the *de rigeur* of mainly young people travelling to, or even learning about, India. I have not consulted *Lonely Planet India* after Mother’s death, but I do not expect any material change in their information and attitude. In 1996 I wrote three times more to the main editors in Australia pointing out their numerous factual errors but they made no changes.

Most travel books published in the United States on India are equally factually wrong, but the most damaging is *Frommer’s Frugal India Guide*, also primarily aimed at the young. Its Calcutta chapter of its 1996 edition started off with: ‘Everything you have heard about Calcutta is true.’ What it fails to mention is that the author Jan Aaron had done just that; she wrote about the city from hearing about it. She had never been there! She describes Calcutta as ‘an enormous rambling city [like] a stage set’ where ‘the inhabitants of a 1000 different villages act out their lives’. Calcutta is actually quite a compact city. Its congestion and pollution do make me wish it were a village.

On 13 October 2014 UK’s *Daily Mail*, one of the world’s highest read tabloids, did a list of world’s ten worst cities and put Calcutta in top spot! I made an official complaint (the Indian government should have done so)

which was upheld. It was obvious the journalist who wrote the piece had not been to Calcutta but had written from pre-conceptions.

There are entrenched and mind-boggling myths about Calcutta in the public mind all over the world. I have here addressed some of them.

Myth No.1: Calcutta is the most populous city in the world, at least in India.

Fact: Calcutta is not even the most populous city in India. Delhi is, narrowly followed by Mumbai. In the current list of world's ten most populous cities, Calcutta does not feature, though two are from India. During Teresa's latter years Calcutta was the world's ninth most populous city, sharing with Seoul.

Myth No. 2: Calcutta is the city with maximum number of slums in the world, at least in India.

Fact: Calcutta is not even the slummiest city in India. In Mumbai slightly over half of the population lives in slums, in Calcutta about 33 per cent, and in Delhi and Madras (Chennai) about 30 per cent. Many more in each city live in desperate accommodation, possibly much worse than slums. About 5 per cent in each city are wealthy, enjoying a lifestyle comparable to the well-off in the West.

Myth No. 3: Calcutta is a perpetually hungry place. There is hardly any food in Calcutta.

Fact: Any Indian, from any part of the country would tell you that an average middle-class family in Calcutta spends the highest in absolute and relative terms on food compared to its counterpart in any other Indian city. Good food is central to the life of even relatively worse off Calcuttans.

Calcutta's state, West Bengal, is one of the most fertile tracts of land anywhere in the world: the swampy environ that makes it damp and malarial is the very reason why its alluvial soil is exceptionally productive. Although one of the smallest of Indian states (comprising 2.6 per cent of the total Indian landmass), it has been the biggest yearly producer of rice in India for the last 30 years, annually producing more than 20 per cent of the

national yield on an average. It also produces 30 per cent of the nation's potatoes. The world's finest tea is grown in the foothills of Himalayas north of Calcutta; Darjeeling Tea, the 'champagne of teas' is exported only through Calcutta.

I am sorry to sound like a bulletin from the Soviet era, but this business of omnipresent hunger in Calcutta, a pet theme of the Catholic publicity machinery and indeed the media at large needs to be addressed. The fact is that a middle-class Calcuttan eats extremely well compared to his or her counterpart anywhere else in India. The poor Calcuttan is probably less hungry than poor in other metros, as the cost of basic food is lower than in other cities.

The agricultural produce of Calcutta's hinterland was fabulous, and in 1813 the British colonialist Charles Stewart said, 'The province of Bengal is the most valuable acquisition that was ever made by any nation.'¹⁵ According to Sir William Jones writing in the eighteenth century, Bengal was '*this wonderful country that fortune has thrown into Britain's lap while she was asleep.*'¹⁶

Calcuttans are particularly fond of fresh water fish, and the city consumes more fish than the other three 'metros' (that is, Delhi, Mumbai and Madras) put together. Fish is central to the culture of West Bengal, which is the only state in India to have a Minister of Fisheries.

Calcutta's image as a foodless city with a perpetual famine is farthest from the truth, and unless one spends some time with an average middle-class family in Calcutta, one would not be able to appreciate how untrue the perception is. Inflation is linked to hunger in the third world, and in a survey of what the rupee was worth in 1996 compared to its value in 1982, Calcutta not only did better than Delhi, Madras and **Bombay** (in that order), it also fared slightly better than the national average.¹⁷

What Mother Teresa has achieved, especially over the last quarter of a century, is to bring people to Calcutta from all over the world, looking particularly for poverty. Indeed, the majority of foreign 'tourists' that I have met in Calcutta over the last decade belong to this category. Pre-Teresa, people coming to Calcutta were not geared up to homing in on the poverty theme. In 1949, the French filmmaker **Jean Renoir** (son of the painter Pierre-Auguste) was describing the city as '*a good copy of a suburb of London*',¹⁸ although then, two years after partition, the city's urban

problems were acute and there was a lot of squalor around. But visitors were not primed to look for them.

Even so, at least in the last decade, many of the ghouls looking for the worst aspects of Calcutta have been disappointed, especially if they have already visited other parts of India, unless they were really assiduous. The travel writer [Steve McClarence](#) describes the experience of one such 'tourist', Michael from the United States, who he met in Calcutta:

Michael is out of sorts over breakfast. Things are not going according to plan. He has come to Calcutta to find poverty – Sure, there are beggars, he says. Sure, there are people sleeping rough. But quite frankly, it's not real poverty, is it? It's not – he toys thoughtfully with his poached egg – it's not swollen-bellied poverty. . . [Calcutta] has the image of the most desperate city on earth, a place seething with humanity and inhumanity, where you have to pick your way over the dead and the dying. A place approached with trepidation, a human jungle where people have been predicting catastrophe over the half a century.¹⁹

Later on in the day, Michael is described as having attained his nirvana:

Michael, from New York, is a changed man. After breakfast, he told a taxi-driver to find him real poverty. After half an hour, they found it. Real squalor. Real swollen bellies. Michael beams over the mulligatawny. He is well on the way to finding himself.

I have lost count how many 'Michaels' I have met. Their influx sharply increased since the book and the film [The City of Joy](#) made their appearances.

Sadly taxi drivers in Calcutta have become guides for conducted tours of the city's direst poverty, as they are simply satisfying a demand from the handful Western and Japanese tourists that visit the city. Till about 2000, cabbies who served the city's airport would routinely asked any young Western passenger which of the slums he or she would like to visit; [Pilkhana slum](#) in Howrah, which is actually the 'city' in *The City of Joy*, was said to be a must in the itinerary of the Western 'tourist' to Calcutta. The city, which until the early part of the twentieth century was a focal point of the greatest empire in history, and which the young [Lord Curzon](#),

before he became the Viceroy of India, called 'the worthy capital of an Empire not far smaller in size than entire Europe',²⁰ has come a long way!

There is often a sense of incredulity among people all over the world if Calcutta is described as bordering on normal. The biographer of [Dr Will Pickles](#), the first president of the Royal College of General Practitioners describes the latter's experiences in Calcutta:

They reached their destination Calcutta in December [1912] and Will found it a delightful place to be in; dining at the Bengal club, dancing at the Saturday club, attending race meetings, polo matches and the weddings of two or three of the passengers. . .²¹

The biographer is by now shocked beyond belief. 'Calcutta' is mentioned, but where is the imagery? He quips in, '*. . .and the horrors of the poverty and disease in that city do not seem to have impressed themselves upon him at all.*' There are two facts to note here: a) [Dr Pickles](#) went to Calcutta when it was officially the '*city of palaces*' and b) the biography was written in 1970, shortly after Mother Teresa was catapulted to stardom by [Muggeridge](#).

I have here some glimpses of Calcutta's perception in Western written media over the last few years, picked out entirely at random. I have quoted from British newspapers, but I am told the image is even worse in the United States:

'70,000 may be dying on the pavements tonight' [The Daily Express](#)²²

'The poorest, most depressed part of India', (full of) 'fetid pools and teeming slums' [The Times](#)²³

'One of the world's poorest cities' [The Times](#)²⁴

'City of slums, pollution and Mother Teresa' [The Sunday Times](#)²⁵

'The world's worst slum' [The Independent on Sunday](#)²⁶

Now, is Calcutta one of the poorest cities of the world? Calcutta was one of the richest cities in the world until quite recently (the mid-1930s) although its decline was steep. But it still costs more to rent office-space in Calcutta than it does in London. A quick search on the Internet would tell

you that the ten poorest cities in the world are all in Africa, with Monrovia (capital of Liberia) officially being the poorest.

Needless to say, these adorations of Calcutta have been mostly made in the context of Mother Teresa, and most often by people who never visited the city. Even if the journalist in question would go to Calcutta and discover that the reality did not fit the image, he or she saw no reason to change the pre-written script. The horror film image of Calcutta makes good copy. This is what the editors want, and finally, this is what the readers want to read. Also, as we all know, the most gripping stories are those with contrasts; the 'all dreadful' versus the 'all divine'. This is the stuff fairy tales and fantasies are made of.

Hell is more salubrious than Calcutta – that is the message explicitly propounded by Mother Teresa and her biographers. I quote here from a popular biography where the author, quoting an unnamed volunteer, describes a scene in the home for the dying:

When we washed [the leg] down, green flesh, bone and muscle dropped off. The foot was no more than a skeleton and you could see right through the leg up to the knee. A crow came down and picked up a bone that had fallen from the foot – they were hungry too.³⁹

Anybody who has ever dissected a dead body would tell you how difficult it is to wrench bone from bone, even in a cadaver; the small bones of the foot are especially strongly attached to each other by tendons and ligaments. For bones to drop from a body, especially a living one, it would require another one of Mother's miracles. Bones dropping from feet, and crows picking them up, might happen amongst special effects in films, but not in real life. The author of the book in question, [Sue Shaw](#), told me personally that she had never been to Calcutta.

Journalists and authors even got angry when they travelled to Calcutta and found neither the city nor the 'living saint' matched their preconceptions. They would then vent their anger at the city and its citizens. Catholics found Calcutta's disdain for Catholicism difficult to handle.

The Jesuit priest [Paul Chetcuti](#), who went to Calcutta to work for Mother Teresa, was none too impressed by the population's lack of faith,

especially the poor's: 'What struck me most, seeing these men and women walking these squalid streets, was how easy it is for man to lose his humanity. . . I have seen men who were hardly better than beasts.' Unable to contain his anger against Calcutta, he said, 'It is not easy to describe what a person sees in Calcutta. The city seems to me like an open ulcer.' He goes on and on how, in Calcutta, he realised even Christ had descended into hell, how Calcuttans did not possess the 'divine spark' and were 'no longer a temple of anything at all', with 'their eyes emptied of all expression and content.'²⁷

Catholics who get angry at Calcutta's poor regard for their faith should realise that poor Calcuttans would have converted in droves if Mother Teresa had really delivered.

Western readers would be aware that, even when Mother Teresa is not being discussed, 'Calcutta' is invoked as a metaphor to convey squalor and poverty of the ultimate kind. In the popular film *In the Name of the Father* (1993) hunger-striking IRA prisoners were shown to daub faeces all over the walls and ceilings in their cells. They allowed only a Catholic cardinal to interview them. The cardinal later told media that he had been shocked at what he saw and such level of human degradation he had only seen in Calcutta! In the Woody Allen film *Alice* (1990) when Mia Farrow announces to William Hurt that, in order to find herself, she was going to Calcutta to work for Mother Teresa, a stunned Hurt takes a good minute to get his speech back and then blurts, 'But there are 10,000 unknown diseases in Calcutta!'

One of the most egregious articles about Calcutta that I ever read appeared in the *Irish Independent* on 22 December 2004, written by Vincent Hogan, a sports correspondent. He went to the city on behalf of the Irish charity Goal. His piece started with: 'The smell invades your senses even before the plane door opens. . . . a stench that pierces the fuselage. . . The drive-in from the airport showcases the poverty. . . The filth of Calcutta is indescribable. Closer to the city centre, one compelling image prevails. On every street, bodies lie sleeping. Filthy, anonymous, forgotten. This is the city of the homeless. Five million of them.' Of course the saviour of Calcutta is Goal's chief executive 'John Uncle' who is a VIP to the citizens. He takes care of all the city's needs. Hogan then drives to the 'docks area' where 'the air is putrid with the excrement of wild black pigs and dogs that roam freely. . . There are no houses here. . . people fight for space with rats

and occasionally snakes. These people are illegal immigrants, unwanted and seemingly unseen by a government that insists its poor are merely being punished for immoral past lives. . . Calcutta just delivers nightmares.’ He hardly mentions Calcutta without calling it an ‘infernal city’.

Calcutta’s airport sits in the middle of lush green fields surrounded by coconut trees. The drive-in from the airport is along a road which has multiple car showrooms, supermarkets, middle-class housing estates, giant food malls and some street vendors. The drive is pleasant and quite uplifting. I do not even know what Hogan means by five million ‘homeless’ people. I did write to him asking for an explanation but did not receive a reply. Calcutta’s ‘docks area’ is inhabited by conservative Muslims and nobody has seen a pig there in decades. There are no snakes in Calcutta, due to pollution and urbanisation. No Indian government would dream of using karma as an excuse for poverty, and particularly the then Marxist government would deem it beneath contempt even to contemplate such a view.

Does anybody know a startling fact? That back in 1845, when cross-border aid for international disasters was unknown, where did Ireland’s very first international aid for the potato famine come from? It came from the ‘Calcutta Committee’ which raised £14,000. The contribution came from British colonials, Irish ex-pats and from mainly ordinary Calcuttans. It was very first instance of an international aid effort for a disaster in a distant part of the globe. But a man as ignorant as Vincent Hogan would not be aware of this.

Interestingly, though Hogan portrays white Christians as saviours of Calcutta, he has nothing to say about Mother Teresa’s contribution in helping the poor. Teresa does get a mention but only when he visits her grave and finds ‘serenity’.

Following this vicious feature, even normally indifferent Calcuttans were moved to protest to the *Irish Independent*, but failed to elicit any reply after a hundred emails. If such an unjust slander had happened against a city in another country, say in a small Latin American nation, there would be protest from official quarters, I am sure. India simply does not have the vision or the courage to undertake even a minor protest.

An interesting fact about Calcutta is that its inhabitants are comfortable in their city. Lots of them live in crushing poverty, but there is definitely no rush to escape. If Calcutta is the ‘poorest most desperate, hungriest’ part of

the world, or even India, has anybody known any refugees to come *from* Calcutta? Most of Calcutta's problems are owing to people flocking *to* Calcutta. From time to time, Indians escape poverty in India in boats, trucks or even hanging on to the undercarriage of aeroplanes; has any single one these economic refugees ever been from Calcutta? When have Calcuttans moved *en masse* from their city to another part of India? Amongst the hordes that emigrated in the 1960s and 1970s from Calcutta's doorstep in [Bangladesh](#) (many of them actually went through Calcutta airport and seaport) to England, how many from Calcutta or West Bengal were encouraged to join the masses of the unwashed? Interestingly, Bangladeshis in the United Kingdom are being increasingly called 'Bengalis', due to the fact that Bangladeshis and Bengalis in West Bengal use the same written language, Bengali. There are major cultural differences between these two peoples, the predominant one being that Bangladeshis are overwhelmingly Muslim whereas Indian Bengalis are mainly Hindus.

The travel book [Fodor's India](#) (1996) makes the point succinctly:

Many say that Calcutta is a dead city. Yet hundreds throng to Calcutta each day from neighbouring states. Are they scavengers feeding on the mortal remains? No. They come in the hope of opportunities for a livelihood and survival. They do get them and settle down. They are not scavengers and Calcutta is very much alive.

So much for facts; when it comes to fiction however, Calcutta is always at the receiving end. [The Simpsons](#), perhaps the most successful comic serial of all time has a convenience shop owner called Apu, who while speaking with an exceptionally prominent south Indian accent, is depicted as an economic migrant from Calcutta. In one episode, he is poignantly shown to be escaping poverty in Calcutta. I wonder if amongst the hundreds of thousands of American convenience shop owners, a single one is from Calcutta. American universities have thousands of Calcutta University alumni on their teaching rolls.

The then British Prime Minister John Major came to Calcutta on 9 January 1997 bringing with him 50 heads of British businesses, who, between them, controlled 20 per cent of Britain's GDP. The British trade delegation dined, danced and stayed in luxury, except for a brief interlude of

a visit to a slum where British taxpayers' money was being spent. Media therefore had a single focus: *The Financial Times* printed only one photograph of John Major's Calcutta trip: that of the Majors' visit to a slum. The BBC 6 o'clock News also started off with 'In the slums of Calcutta' and a clip of the slum scene. *The Daily Telegraph* carried the same photo. *The Evening Standard* summed up Major's trip as 'from the slums of Calcutta to the Khyber Pass'. For the present generation it is just not possible to get 'slums' and 'dying' out of the reckoning as soon as 'Calcutta' is mentioned. This situation has prevailed due solely to the Teresa connection.

I wrote to [Norma Major](#) shortly after she came back from Calcutta, asking her what she thought of the negative press coverage, and if she had any thoughts on why Londoners, for instance, who, only a century back, had had closer ties with Calcutta than say, Leeds or Cardiff, do not nowadays mention Calcutta other than to run it down. She replied:

I am sure you understand that we had no control over the way the media chose to report [our visit]. Our own positive attitude to Calcutta and its future is illustrated by our decision to visit the city. . . More widely, you may well be right that a stereotyped and misleading view of Calcutta is widespread. I do not think this is just a British phenomenon. . . But there is a confidence [in Calcutta] about the future which augurs well.²⁸

Remarkably, Mother Teresa did not feature in any way in the Majors' visit, not even mentioned in his lengthy speech. I did ask Mrs Major whether she saw any evidence of Mother Teresa's activities in Calcutta. I was expecting a positive reference but in her reply she made no mention of her.

In UK, Calcutta surely does not have the extreme low image as it does in the US, but considering the close ties the city had with the country even in living memory, the prevailing attitude betrays both lack of gratitude and of historical awareness. Much of British wealth in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries flowed through Calcutta. In 1899 [Kipling](#), on witnessing British business activity in Calcutta, called it a 'divine, heavenly place to loot.' Thousands of Brits, both ordinary and not so ordinary, were born there; such as [William Makepeace Thackeray](#); [Sir Cliff Richard](#) (his

father was a catering supervisor in the railways); the actress [Merle Oberon](#); Clare Duchess of Sutherland; Alison Blair to name but a few. [Vivien Leigh](#) was born not far from the city, and her parents were active in the city's dramatic circles.

When Robert Clive, the virtual founder of the British Empire in India, died in 1774, his fortune was estimated at £1 million; most of it was made in Calcutta. Gladstone's third and favourite son Harry made an enormous fortune in the city. One of Charles Dickens' sons tried to make one but was unsuccessful and lies buried in the city's [Park Street](#) cemetery.

Life in Calcutta for the British community was not merely about making money, it was also about lifestyle. An advertisement for a new apartment block on a typical Sunday in *The Statesman* from the 1930s shows a smartly dressed British couple gazing at each other over a wishbone. She asks, 'I'll tell you my wish. I wish for a really nice English home, with refined society, an artistic suite of rooms, beautifully cooked English fare, good service, nice grounds and no more worries.' He replies, 'Then your wish is granted, dear, as all you wish for is right here in Calcutta.'

The city's wealth was so legendary that it made it to literature. In the Irish playwright Sheridan's *A School for Scandal* (1777), the poor uncle comes from Ireland, whereas the mega-rich one arrives from Calcutta. In *A Busy Day* by the female playwright Fanny Burney (1752–1840), the heiress is from Calcutta. Contrast that with the metaphor that the word 'Calcutta' is nowadays used in books, films and conversation. In Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes*, the author describes squalor by invoking 'Calcutta'. In the [Oscar](#) winning film *Traffic* (2000), Michael Douglas says 'like Calcutta' when making a reference to begging. The list is endless. I have no doubt that Mother Teresa is directly responsible for this calumny, although Calcuttans must equally share the blame for not defending the honour of their city.

On 13 June 1999, the BBC broadcast a 'docu-diary' entitled *Scrutiny*. It was a fly-on-the-wall account of six British MPs' visit to India and [Bangladesh](#) in March 1999 on a fact-finding mission regarding the allocation of funds from the UK's Department of Overseas Development. While in Calcutta the film showed the MPs touring Sonagachi, Calcutta's notorious red-light district, and a slum in the Kasba area. In both British funds had been spent. The film trawled through poor and deprived Calcutta and interviewed a number of very poor people; but the words 'Mother

Teresa' or 'Missionaries of Charity' were not once mentioned throughout. It showed the MPs interviewing a prostitute called Bobbi who said that she went into prostitution because she could not afford the last year of her high school. If she had, she said she would have perhaps set up a small tailoring business.

Soon afterwards, I interviewed five of the MPs who went on that trip (The Labour MP Ann Clwyd declined my request for an interview.). I asked the MPs three questions: a) Whether they thought Mother Teresa's organisation had a gigantic presence in the city, especially amongst the poor who they met. b) Regarding Bobbi's case, when she gave up her studies, Mother Teresa was in her prime; did they wonder why she did not go to her for help when her image is the poor and desperate of the city rushed to her for help. c) Had what they saw in and of Calcutta lived up to the city's image?

The Conservative [MP Bowen Wells](#) told me²⁹ that he had been to Calcutta numerous times, the first time in 1955 when he was in the Royal Navy. He also had a family connection with the city; his great grandfather was the captain of a pilot ship that plied the Hooghly River. He said that he had found conditions in 1955 (less than decade after partition) pretty awful. He maintains that every time he has visited Calcutta, he had found the city better than the previous time.

Indeed, he had met Mother Teresa in 1984 when she had taken him around one or more of her homes. No, he did not see for himself her nuns working in the slums he visited or in the streets, but he had always *believed* that Mother Teresa had done a huge amount such as picking up people from the streets and housing them, etc. He also stated that he did not find Mother Teresa providing any schools for the slum children he came across. Regarding Bobbi's case, that she could have gone to Mother Teresa, did not cross his mind. He said that he found (in 1984) Mother Teresa very efficient in getting the city's municipal authorities to do a lot of the work on her behalf. About Calcutta, he did not agree with me that the city had become synonymous with Mother Teresa and slums (many older generation British, who were around during the Raj, still have a positive image of Calcutta). He also said that he found the city's Raj architecture fascinating; he was particularly fond of the Maidan and the Botanical Gardens. It seems West Bengal's erstwhile Marxist government had an unlikely champion in Mr

Wells who said he found its 'ideas on agriculture and land reform really quite sound.'

Dr Jenny Tonge MP (Liberal Democrat), now Baroness Tonge, told me³⁰ that, in the three days she was in Calcutta, a lot of her time was spent waiting in traffic jams. She said she visited one 'quite gruesome slum' and also another slum which was being 'admirably rejuvenated' by the West Bengal government. She said in the three days of numerous meetings and discussions the words 'Mother Teresa' were not once mentioned. She did not come across a single nun in the slums or anywhere else. She said she was impressed with the work of the West Bengal Sexual Health Project which Bobbi and hundreds of other sex workers belonged to, and which the British government is part-funding. She said she had never believed Calcutta to be synonymous with Mother Teresa and, although she had heard a lot about her, was not quite sure what she did. She agreed Calcutta did have a very poor image, but she had herself found the city quite pleasant (barring the dreadful traffic) whose city-centre could have been the centre of any English city.

The Labour MP Piara Khabra emigrated to Britain from the Punjab in India in 1959. He visited Calcutta for the first time in 1999 with the delegation. He told me³¹ that he had heard a lot about Mother Teresa and believed she helped a large number of people. But no, he did not see any of her nuns in the slums and deprived areas he visited; neither did he see any evidence of her work.

The Conservative MP Andrew Rowe had a strong connection with India, both personal (he visited the country eight times) but mainly through his wife, who ran courses in community-based rehabilitation, where the trainees were often NGOs from India. Mr Rowe missed the Calcutta leg of the parliamentary delegation's 1999 Indian trip but he told me³² that, from what he had heard from his wife, he did not have a great regard for Mother Teresa's work. Mr and Mrs Rowe are strong Christians (Church of England) and sponsor a slum project in Delhi. He said that Mrs Rowe had found Mother Teresa's 'standard of care pretty depressing.' He said he did not exactly know what Mother Teresa did, but was aware that she was not interested in rehabilitation or development work. He also said that the three state governments in India that managed the UK's aid money the best were West Bengal, Orissa and Andhra Pradesh.

For Labour [MP Oona King](#) (now Baroness King), this was the third visit to India and the first to Calcutta. In 1986, as a teenager, she had spent six months in the country travelling as a backpacker. She said³³ she had seen as much poverty in Delhi as she had in Calcutta but ‘people do not associate Delhi with poverty. Calcutta has become an “icon of poverty”.’ She said she did not see any evidence of Mother Teresa’s work while in Calcutta but insisted that she respected her. She said she vividly recalled photographs of Mother Teresa clutching a child; whether the picture was genuine altruism or a publicity stunt she was not interested. It is interesting that the most sympathetic and indulgent to Teresa was the youngest of the MPs, Oona King, who had grown up in the full glare of the nun’s publicity blitz.

No discussion of the denigration of Calcutta is complete without reference to [Kipling’s](#) well-known quote ‘the city of dreadful nights’; whilst Kipling was not at all fond of the city he did not describe Calcutta as such. ‘The city of dreadful nights’ was his description of a red-light district of the city where he was much taken with a prostitute called Dainty Iniquity.³⁴ Kipling’s dislike of the city was owing to its the cosmopolitanism and fusion of East and West in learning and culture. Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936), born in India, was a die-hard racist who believed that Western learning and culture ought to be the sole preserve of the white races. Once he went to Calcutta’s legislative chambers and heard a local *babu* quoting John Stuart Mills, which made him apoplectic. On noting that Calcutta Municipal Board had many non-whites in it, he remarked, ‘. . .men of the breed born and raised off this surfeited muck heap.’³⁵

Kipling was also an entrenched anti-Semite and believed that much of the world’s woes were caused by Jews. He heaped scorn on Einstein’s theory of relativity and described the scientist thus: ‘one Einstein, nominally as Swiss but certainly a Hebrew. . .’³⁶ He was an admirer of Mussolini.

In April 1919, Brigadier-General Reginald Dyer killed, in cold blood, 350 unarmed Indians in the Punjab, many of them women and children. As he was being tried in London, *The Morning Post* newspaper started a defence fund for him. The first contributor was Kipling.

So, this was the sort of man that [Rudyard Kipling](#) was. He was probably a good enough writer, but many people maintain that a man with such a world view should never be given the Nobel Prize for literature. It should

be a compliment to Calcutta and Calcuttans that a person such as Kipling disliked them.

Ian Finlayson, writing in *The Times*, noted that a man such as Kipling, brimming with ‘misogyny, chauvinism and racism. . . instead of being awarded the Nobel Prize for literature, would today be more likely locked up at Her Majesty’s pleasure.’³⁷ Interestingly, Kipling’s ‘city of dreadful nights’ (incidentally a phrase not his own but plagiarised from the poet James Thomson) quote was made in 1888, but was unknown until Mother Teresa became prominent in the world. During the author’s lifetime the city continued to be known as ‘the [city of palaces](#)’.

Even if Kipling had said terrible things of Calcutta, why should it become the defining description of the place? Is there any city in the world which some prominent person somewhere had not said nasty things about? Does that then become almost the logo of the place? Do passages on Einstein open with ‘Albert Einstein, who the Nobel Prize winning author Kipling described as. . .’, etc.?

During the spring of 1996, the British thespian [Tim Pigott Smith](#), who played the leading role in the Raj television fable *The Jewel in the Crown*, which so captured the public imagination in Britain and the United States in the 1980s, presented an eight part television series on Calcutta called *Calcutta Chronicles*. He told me that initially he was a bit surprised that in all the series, Mother Teresa did not get a mention. I asked him if, on going to Calcutta, he found any evidence of Mother’s activities. His answer was a surprised and emphatic ‘*Well, No—ooo!*’

[Pigott Smith](#) said that he had to look very hard to find really gruesome slums that fitted with the ‘Calcutta’ metaphor. He said:

I just don’t know why Calcutta’s got this image. I found a normal city which has borne up very well despite the incessant propaganda, and despite mass migrations. . . I hold the media largely responsible for the image Calcutta has acquired. Just the one slum in [Bombay](#) that goes on for miles and miles is the whole length of Calcutta for goodness’ sake. . . And yet, if you ask anybody here [we were chatting in London] what they associate with Calcutta, they’ll all say slums and Mother Teresa. It’s like this: if you take a deprived area of London, and constantly tell the world that only that part represents the whole of London; that is what has happened to Calcutta

unfortunately, for whatever reasons. . . We wanted to get away from the Teresa stereotype so I was pleased she was not mentioned in our series. However if we had decided to show her or her nuns, it'd be simple; they'd have loved the publicity. . . And I feel, we Brits have also let Calcutta down rather badly.³⁸

Non-poverty seeking Westerners who have been to Calcutta and been surprised by its normalcy have told me how detrimental Mother Teresa has been to the city's commercial prospects. I know of countless small businesses in Britain who have been turned away by the city's negative image. How much revenue the city has lost thereby can only be imagined.

A good guess can be made of the money the nun lost the city from visitors and tourists that did not visit it, scared away by imagery of rotting limbs piled high. Till Teresa's death in 1997 about 3 million tourists visited India annually. At a conservative estimate about 20 per cent or 600,000 of them would have visited Calcutta, had it not had the dreadful image. As it happened, about 85,000 foreign visitors (less than 3 per cent of the total) visited Calcutta each year till 2002. Assuming every visitor at the current rate would have spent about \$500 in the city, the amount the city had lost came to about \$258 million annually. The Teresa bandwagon really took off in the mid-1970s, so in the 25 years before her death, she lost the city something in the region of four and a half billion dollars, allowing for inflation, etc. In the last few years, the number of foreign tourists to India is running at about 7 million per annum. Predictably post-Teresa, the proportion coming to Calcutta has more than doubled but is still a puny 6.2 per cent. If we accept that Calcutta with a normal image would have drawn 20 per cent of visitors coming to India, the city would have drawn 1.4 million tourists annually. Assuming each person would have spent \$1000 we can guesstimate that the city is currently losing almost \$1 billion annually due to tourists shunning the city. And this is a very conservative estimate. To this figure should be added a similar or much higher amount, which is the revenue lost due to international businesses not coming to the city or not even considering it due to its negative image; the total loss in my estimation is at least \$25 billion. Balance that against the \$450,000 her order spent in the city annually in its heyday (see Chapter 9), totalling in the last 4 decades to \$18 million.

The difference is too fabulous to calculate or even contemplate. Citizens of Calcutta – will they ever rise up and demand that Vatican pay them tiny weeny compensation, at least in the shape of a hospital or a school? I am not holding my breath.

6

The Destitutes of Calcutta: A Profile

Calcutta, like all Indian and Third World cities, has many a destitute. The Teresa publicity brigade has reduced them to Biblical creatures, but they are real people with real problems in a real city.

In my view, not all pavement dwellers are destitute, and conversely, many non-pavement dwellers, such as many living in slums or indeed a large section of the lower middle-class population living in the so-called houses are bordering on destitution.

Numerous studies have been done on the pavement dwellers of Calcutta, some by the city authorities, but mostly by academics, both national and international.

Currently, there are about 70,000 pavement-dwellers in Calcutta. During Teresa's active years, the number was 55,000. Between March and June 1987, the Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority ([CMDA](#)) carried out a person-to-person survey of Calcutta's pavement dwellers and put the total at 55,571. A similar figure was reached at by other independent surveys of the time. Shortly after the [Bangladesh](#) war in the early 1970s, the number of pavement dwellers reached its peak: I suspect crossing 100,000.

In a survey¹ of 10,841 pavement dwellers in 1975, [Dr Sudhendu Mukherjee](#), then Deputy Director of Planning, CMDA, found them to have the following occupations:

Beggar	22.0%
Casual day labourer	23.4%
Hand cart puller and coolie	6.5%
Rickshaw-puller	7.3%
Hawker	3.1%
Rag-picker	4.8%
Regular day labourer	8.6%
Vegetable seller	3.6%
Maid servant	4.2%
Others	16.5%

In another survey² of 33,743 pavement dwellers, Dr Mukherjee found 98 per cent of them to have emigrated into the city, but mostly from its hinterland, the rural areas of West Bengal. Nearly 33.2 per cent came from outside the state, mostly from Bihar (about 20 per cent of the total number). Before they emigrated, most were agricultural labourers. It is notable that only a minority of pavement dwellers were beggars and most were working.

An academic study was done (by [Dr Sumita Chaudhuri](#)) exclusively among beggars of the Kalighat area of Calcutta, and a book of the research was later published as *Beggars of Kalighat, Calcutta* (Anthropological Survey of India, Calcutta, 1987). The study was undertaken in the mid-to-late 1970s, Teresa's heyday. She had by then got many major awards, and Nobel was soon to come. The study showed a large percentage (about 40 per cent) of the total beggar population to be children under 15. There were more women than men in the cohort: most women were either widows who had become destitute after their husbands' death and had migrated from villages, or married women who had fled their violent husbands in the villages. There were also married or cohabiting women as part of a beggar couple.

In Dr Chaudhuri's survey, about 50 per cent of the population had come from rural West Bengal, 20 per cent from the neighbouring state of Bihar,

20 per cent from [Bangladesh](#), and the rest from other parts of India. Chaudhuri put the total number of Kalighat beggars as 3,000.

The Kalighat beggars cooked in the evenings at about 8 p.m. They also received some food from the temple. Kalighat was Mother Teresa's home territory, but here she never had a soup kitchen, though MC has them in many obscure corners of the US.

Mother Teresa's order does not offer any shelter to the beggars of Kalighat (or elsewhere in Calcutta), although it has many hundreds of night shelters throughout the world; indeed, worldwide, the provision of night shelters is its commonest charitable function. Considering there were 1200 children among the beggar population of Kalighat, it was callous of her not to offer these children (and their mothers) shelter at night. Contrast this with what she claimed repeatedly in speeches around the world.

I have consulted numerous documents and studies on Calcutta's urban problems and in none of them do MC get a single mention, even in Mother's immediate pre or post Nobel years. But it is quite incredible that even in Kalighat, a place which she put on international map, the order is so passive and unknown among destitute.

Mother Teresa had the resources to bring education to the children of Kalighat destitute, but she did not. Her order did some token teaching there (on the roof terrace of [Nirmal Hriday](#)), but a lot of time and effort were spent on Catholic brainwashing of Hindu and Muslim children.

She made the outrageous claim that she taught 'thousands of children' in Calcutta. She said it back in 1970–71 when her operations in Calcutta were on an even smaller scale than they are now. She said to [Malcolm Muggeridge](#):

For example, if we didn't have our schools in the slums; they are nothing, they are just little primary schools where we teach the children to love the school and be clean and so on. If we didn't have these little schools, those children, those thousands of children would be left in the streets.³

It is relevant that MC do not have a single proper structured school in Calcutta. There are 10,000 'poorest of the poor' children in Calcutta, and with Teresa's wealth she could have educated at least half of them from primary to high school level, but she did not even try. The much maligned

Calcutta Corporation is the biggest provider of primary education Calcutta's poor children. It runs 350 free primary schools and about 40,000 poor children attend these annually.

In the mid 1990s, a school for the poor, run by a Catholic organisation, was started near Mother Teresa's [Prem Dan](#) home. It is situated in the Auxilium Church (inaugurated 1995) in Calcutta's Tiljala area. Incidentally, this church is the biggest construction project ever undertaken by any Catholic organisation (including MC) in Calcutta. It is surrounded by slums and rises high and bright incongruously in the wastelands of Tiljala. It is known that the money for the project (more than \$20 million) came from Italy. Mother Teresa could have asked the money spent to be diverted to worthwhile projects, but she gave the construction her blessing and developed a close relationship with this church. She prayed there frequently, although was rarely, if ever, seen in Calcutta's main Catholic Church in Murgihata. On her 85th birthday (her last), she took the Croatian ambassador to India to this church for a prayer session. After the disintegration of Yugoslavia, she became exceptionally close to Catholic Croats. It should be remembered that, during the World War II years, Catholic Croats unleashed a reign of terror on other religions and were known to be more barbaric than German Nazis.

The Auxilium Church does run a school for the children of surrounding slums, who are mainly Hindus and Muslims; the hour-long prayer session that the children must undergo daily is entirely Catholic. They are not given the option of praying to their own faiths or of opting out. The school also has a small residential section, but this is solely for Catholic students. The Auxilium Church (and therefore by proxy, MC) are creating enormous psychological pressure on the poor residents of Tiljala to convert. The carrot displayed is so overbearing that few do not feel the temptation. There are other organisations working in the area, but they do not have the financial prowess of the Catholics.

In Mother Teresa's own small classroom-type activities, prayer is also solely Catholic and no other faith is allowed to be discussed or even uttered. Contrast this with Mother's frequent statements around the world that she encouraged all faiths.

But we need to know how a slum (or a *bustee*) is defined in Calcutta. The Calcutta Municipal Act 1951 (and 1980) describes a *bustee* thus: 'an area containing land occupied by or for the purposes of any collection of

huts standing on a plot of land not less than seven hundred square metres in area.’

It is obvious, therefore, that a slum can be quite a small area containing shacks: a tenth of the size of a football field. Calcutta, unlike Mumbai, does not have vast slums.

How many slums does the so-called ‘slum capital of the world’? Just under 1000 – a figure that has remained constant since 1972. Slums constitute 6 per cent of the city’s surface, so we get a situation where 35 per cent of the population is living in 6 per cent of the space.

What is life like in a ‘dire Calcutta slum’? Through the 1970s, Jean Racine, French academic and one time director of the French Cultural Centre in Calcutta, did detailed surveys of many of Calcutta’s slums. He produced numerous academic works on Calcutta’s destitute, including a detailed study of the dire [Maniktala slum](#). One of his tables is reproduced here:

Socio-economic Survey of Maniktala Slum, Calcutta⁴

Population	4279	Male	2270; Female	2009
Sex Ratio		F:M	=	885:1000
Size of Area				3.92 hectares
Population Density				109,158 inhabitants per square kilometre
Dwelling Units	255	Households		837
Household Size		Most households (47.8%)		had 3 to 5 people
Employment Status				
	Not looking for jobs (too young, too old, or women with small children)			63.12%
	Employed			26.97%
	Underemployed			4.51%
	Unemployed			5.40%
Trading establishments				44

Small industrial establishments	148
Main activities among industrial establishments	
Tailoring	55%
Jewellery (trinkets)	14%
Hosiery	27%
Carpentry	4%

Finally we come to 'Facilities'. In that category the following came to light:

Medical Facilities (not provided by MC)	NONE, except a mobile van twice a week
Water Points (total 142)	1 per 30 people
Toilets (total 221)	1 per 19 people

Slums have become a permanent aspect of Indian cities. There are, however, on-going programmes to improve their conditions. Back in the 1960s, the city authorities in Calcutta had the impossible vision of 'slum eradication', that is, replacing the huts or shacks with pre-fabricated units, but it was realised that Rs 2 billion would have been necessary. Hence the more realistic, but equally difficult programme of 'slum improvement' was adopted. Work is carried out in fits and starts depending on money available. Much of the money comes from international loans and grants.

In 1973 [CMDA](#) took on [Chetla Slum](#) (on Govinda Addy Road) as a pilot project for improvement. As a result 100 'sanitary latrines', 4688 feet of sewer pipes, 9000 feet of water pipes, 500 feet of surface drains, 91 bathing platforms, 82 water points were installed. The Teresa propaganda machinery tells us 'nuns go into slums in pairs, rosary beads in their hands' to improve the lives of slum dwellers. This is sheer insult to Calcutta's needy and reduces them to non-humans. It takes more than rosary beads to help Calcutta's poor. The per capita cost in Chetla was a modest Rs 195, some (or all) of which MC could have contributed, but that would be beyond their reckoning. They have never 'adopted' a Calcutta slum, unlike the [Ramakrishna Mission](#), which adopted the Rambagan slum.

The [Chetla slum](#) later received direct funding from UK government. British Prime Minister John Major visited it on his trip to Calcutta in January 1997.

MC have had seventy years of association with Calcutta, during which they have never involved themselves with any slum development programme.

Personal accounts from the destitute of Calcutta

My own surveys with Calcutta's destitute (all recorded on video) were done in four localities of Calcutta; along a stretch of Lower Circular Road (A.J.C. Bose Road) where Mother House and [Shishu Bhavan \(the orphanage\)](#) are situated; in Kalighat and Tiljala, in the immediate vicinities of [Nirmal Hriday](#) and [Prem Dan](#), respectively; and in the city centre, where most of Mother's Western volunteers tend to stay. These were mostly undertaken during 1995–96.

Mother House: Calcutta

Visitors to Mother House in Calcutta till 1998 would have seen a small collection of beggars who sat at the mouth of the alleyway that leads to the main door. Amongst these regular beggars are [Pamela](#) and her friends. They are among the small group of Anglo-Indian beggars in Calcutta, and it is thought (by MC) that they beg because they are too lazy to work. They were poor, but not Mother's 'poorest of the poor'.

Pamela and her friends commuted from Canning, some fifty miles south of Calcutta. They were Christians through ancestry and fluent in English. They chose Mother House as their beat because they would be able to converse with the Westerners who came in unending streams, bringing devotion and money. It was a strange sight that the very doorstep of Mother Teresa, purportedly the world's biggest benefactor, was surrounded by people loudly protesting that they had nothing. I wonder if Mother's Western visitors have ever reflected on this, even through their mist of denial.

I interviewed Pamela (on video) for the first time on 21 October 1995. She was begging on Mother House's doorstep with a 12-yearold boy called Prem; she was quick to point out that they were not related, so that alms should be received separately.

I asked the pair why they were begging at the door of Mother House, to which Pamela cryptically replied, ‘Where to beg?’

AC: How do you earn your living?

Pamela: *I eat by begging.*

AC: Where do you get medicines from when you’re ill?

Pamela: *I have to buy them of course.*

AC: Does Mother Teresa help you?

Pamela: *Nothing. . . nothing.*

(Prem also quipped in at this point, *We get no help.*)

AC: What do you think of Mother Teresa?

Pamela: *Mother is a good lady, but Sisters are no good. Mother asks the Sisters to help, but they won’t.*

Prem repeated the last sentiment.

I interviewed Pamela again almost nine months later, on 12 July 1996, again right in front of Mother House; on this occasion Prem was not there, but she had been joined on the pavement by a woman with a small child. Their names were Michelle and Jessica, also from the Anglo-Indian community in Canning. Today, there was activity going on in front of Mother House, as two truckloads of goodies shipped from Milan were being unloaded.

Michelle’s baby Jessica (whose 3rd birthday I was told, was only six days away on the 18th) was ill. She had fever, which according to her mother, kept ‘coming and going for two days.’ She also said that she had given her, Baby ‘Aspro’, which she had bought.

At this point, the Nepalese Sister Aquinit, who was one of those who was overseeing the unloading of crates, came and mildly reprimanded the women for talking on video. This bit has not been filmed.

AC: Have you asked the Sisters for help?

Michelle: *They tell us to go to [Shishu Bhavan](#) [the orphanage, which is five minutes’ walk away] but when I go there they chase us away.*

AC: Why?

Michelle: I don't know why. I am happy to buy medicines for my baby. But the Sisters stop the foreigners from giving us money.

A few weeks later, on 24 August 1996, I interviewed (on video) three boys, Rafiq, Raju, and Viki who used to perpetually hang out in front of Mother House. They knew all the Sisters well and also Mother, who would recognise them. Rafiq, an orphan, was disabled in having a hunchback but was fully mobile. They slept in the grounds of Bamboo Villa, an office block across the road from Mother House. In 1996 the boys ranged in age from eight to fifteen. They went to the Samaritan school for free, as somebody had arranged for their free education. They had a lot of friends amongst the Anglo-Indian community and spoke reasonable English.

Here is their tale:

The Sisters have never helped us. They never give us anything. There are a lot of foreigners coming to see Mother Teresa – we ask them for money. But the Sisters don't like that. They tell us off for asking the foreigners for money. Nowadays they call the police regularly and report us for pestering their guests. The police from [Park Street](#) police station come and threaten us. Thankfully we have not yet been in prison, but soon it will happen.

Mother Teresa is okay [Viki said Mother was 'good'] but we hate the Sisters, particularly we don't like Sister Aquinit and Sister 'Bonet', the one who is tall with buck-teeth and glasses.

Curiously enough, these children who hungout just outside Mother House, were noticed, even through the mists of her devotion, by [Marina Cantacuzino](#), who went to interview Mother for *Hello!* magazine. She wrote, 'Outside the door, local children beg from Western visitors, but the sisters insist they should not be given money.' "These children have been helped by Mother and put into school but they just go back on the streets", one explains.'⁵

I wrote to Ms Cantacuziono giving her the true picture of how the children are regularly picked up by the police at the behest of the nuns, and I am happy to say she did not contest my views. She wrote back, 'You have obviously researched your material thoroughly and extensively and I am in

no position to argue with anything you say. If my article in [Hello!](#) glossed over certain important issues, it is because of the type of magazine it is.’⁶

A common sentiment amongst the destitute around Mother Teresa’s homes in Calcutta is ‘Mother is good, but the Sisters are terrible.’ For example Sister Aquinit, who in 1995–96, had the job of policing the front of Mother House, earned a lot of undue opprobrium from down and outs, although nobody can say she is a compassionate soul.

But messengers are getting shot here. Rules of the organisation, such as using Mother House as a purely administrative centre, not entertaining beggars at the door, not accepting a child until its rights are written away by the parents, were all formulated by Mother herself. I have seen Mother being accosted by beggars as she was about to enter Mother House, asking for food and clothes. Mother would smile at them, bless them and grandly say to the Sisters, ‘Why don’t you give them something?’ Then she would whisk away.

The beggars would now clamour for money, or for blankets, and the Sisters would be put in an impossible situation. Giving of money is totally banned by the organisation. They cannot give out blankets, or food, or anything from Mother House. The nuns are seen as harsh and mean, to be defying orders from above. Mother Teresa did not help the already low morale of her Sisters by her hypocrisy. She did not have the moral courage to say, ‘Sorry, we don’t work like that. You shouldn’t be begging here.’ But she just could not stop playing to the gallery.

I interviewed a number of beggars and street children on Lower Circular Road, within a kilometre of Mother House and the orphanage. Except in the immediate vicinity, none of them had heard of Mother Teresa!

Tihar Ali was a young achondroplastic man (a genetic disorder limiting growth) whose family lived in a village called Krishnanagar. He lived on the pavements of Mullick Bazaar, barely 200 metres from Mother House, and begged in the nearby streets. He went back to his village from time to time to see his family. He had never heard of Mother Teresa.

Another Lower Circular Road beggar was Gouri, although she was not a regular. She used to appear periodically. She sat in front of Circular Road Baptist Church, 150 metres from Mother House underneath a big sign that says ‘Calcutta – Jesus Loves You’. She came from [Bangladesh](#) in the mid 1980s. She had never heard of Mother Teresa.

Sheikh Rafiq was a double (leg) amputee from a train accident. He sometimes begged on Lower Circular Road. He had artificial legs given to him by the charity Rehabilitation Centre for Children. He had heard of Mother Teresa but had never had the chance to ask her for help.

A mentally ill beggar called Bhutnath who I interviewed right in front of Mother's orphanage also had not heard of Mother Teresa. He told me God looked after him, but he spent Rs 10 for food daily.

Directly opposite Mother's orphanage, at the junction of Lower Circular Road and HK Konar Road, is a rubbish tip, which attracted two dozen children every day, who rummaged through rubbish. They were poorest of the poor and had never been to school. All of them, however, got free food from the orphanage, which came without any strings attached.

On 15 August 1996 (Indian Independence Day), I interviewed some of these poverty-stricken children. I spoke to Bideshi, a thirteen-year-old rag picker who, though a Hindu, sported a crucifix, given to him by a Western volunteer. He said, 'The Sisters don't help us at all, except for occasional bowls of *khichuri*.' Bideshi's mother had TB, and he tried to have her admitted in [Prem Dan](#) (not an appropriate place for a TB patient). He said that there was some kind of animosity (or power struggle) between Sister Lee at Prem Dan and the Sisters at the orphanage, which made it difficult for his mother to get any help.

[Nirmal Hriday: Kalighat](#)

As I have mentioned frequently, the squalor surrounding Mother's flagship home in Kalighat is unimaginable. On 4 September 1996, I interviewed (on video) an elderly destitute widow called [Bimala](#) on the very steps of Nirmal Hriday. She was sitting there watching the world go by. The steps are a popular resting place for the Kalighat destitute. Originally from the town of Diamond Harbour near the Bay of Bengal, Bimala moved to Calcutta many years back when her husband died, to join some beggars from her home town who were already here. When I asked her if the Sisters helped her, she first thought I was pulling her leg. 'Why are you asking silly questions? Why should they help us? Haven't they got other things to do?' She assumed I was on the Sister's side so she vented her venom: 'You can go and tell your Sisters they bugger us' She went on:

If you really want to know what the Sisters give us, it's 'cinder' [Bengali idiomatic expression]. They only 'oil the greasy head'. Nobody helps us. From whatever I earn from begging, I buy food, and when I am ill, I buy medicines. Previously they gave away the food that would be left over from the home, but now they take it away in their van ['ambulance']. Previously there was a kind Head Sister. More and more they are getting Sisters who are more destitute than us. I won't be surprised if one day they come out and ask us for alms!

Prahlad was a Kalighat beggar who worked near the home for the dying. He had leprosy for 20 years. He had no complaints against the Missionaries of Charity, but complained that they stopped their leprosy clinic at Kalighat (in the mid-1980s). Now he had to travel 8 km to [Maniktala](#) to the [TLM Hospital](#) to get his tablets.

I spoke to another person called Debraj Parmar who lived across the road from [Nirmal Hriday](#), and moved around in an invalid chair, donated by a political party. Though not a poorest of the poor, he finds it difficult to make ends meet. The house he lived in was not much better than a slum. When I asked him if he ever thought of going to Mother Teresa for any sort of help, he was genuinely surprised. 'Why would they get involved?' he asked.

Prem Dan Home: Tiljala

I did most of my interviews in Tiljala, not the least because this is where Mother's largest home, [Prem Dan](#), which adjoins the [Dnarapara slum](#), is. The slum is pretty dire, with a population of 15,000. Not all of my interviewees were jobless, poorest of the poor, and I tried to include a cross-section of the needy from the area.

I had an eye-opening and disturbing interview with a young woman named [Baby Khatun](#), on 20 July 1996, on the steps leading from 4th Bridge down to Prem Dan. Although a slum dweller, she was feisty and strident and not quite a 'poorest of the poor'. I was aimlessly filming Prem Dan from atop 4th Bridge, when she came up to me and said, 'I wish you'd stop taking pictures of that awful place.' She initially assumed that I was in some way connected to MC, but still went on, 'It's called Prem Dan, but never gives any *dan* [help].' I asked her why. She said:

The Sisters are only there to feather their own nests. They are absolutely awful. Poor people are always shoed away from their door. They regularly pinch stuff that is meant for the poor. Every Christmas lot of clothes that come from abroad; this is also the time that the Sisters get their yearly visits from their family members. Some of the clothes are distributed in the slum, but most of the clothes and goodies are sent away with the nuns' relatives. Sometimes they take away so much stuff that they would have to hire taxis. And, a lot of the food ration that is meant for the poor is also sold. The rice, the wheat, the maize; all sold to the local shops.

I was now truly incredulous, and expressed my genuine surprise at the revelation. But a man who had been listening to our conversation butted in and said that the practice had been going on for some time and was common knowledge in the area. This was the first time I became aware of pilferage by Mother Teresa's Calcutta nuns, but later realised this was common knowledge among destitute they purported to help.

[Baby Khatun](#) also said that she used to go to [Prem Dan](#) for sewing classes, but was barred by the nuns for being cheeky. She said that she had had an argument with some of the nuns over Catholic prayers which she refused to take part in. The argument heated up and she alleged that she was slapped by a nun, locally known as 'kali' (or 'dark') Sister. Later on, she got hold of 'kali' Sister outside the home and roughed her up.

Baby told me that she got angry when Westerners were shown around by the nuns and given a different picture; she said that she was desperate to tell them the real state of play in Mother Teresa's home. She was frustrated that she could not speak English. She also alleged that nuns would put up a show of charity if important Westerners were visiting, and might give slum-dwellers gifts of new clothes or food in front of cameras. She also made the extraordinary allegation that these clothes would sometimes be taken away once the delegation had left.

The only help the slum dwellers around Prem Dan got was the monthly distribution (given away on the 1st of each month) of 3 kilos of scrap paper per family. Instead of throwing away the paper Mother was gracious to give it away so that the poor could sell them at Rs 5 per kilo.

There were luckier families. The dozen local Catholic families got various kinds of help, such as monthly food rations and also employment at

Prem Dan.

A leper called Kamol who sometimes begged near the city centre at the junction of [Park Street](#) and Chowringhee told me on video that the Brothers at the Titagarh leprosarium (Gandhiji Prem Niwas) were misappropriating materials meant for the poor. He got a pitiful 2 kilo wheat per month, but was grateful that medicines were free. He faced no pressure to convert during his ten weeks at the leprosarium but it was obvious to him that Catholics were treated better.

I soon realised that the knowledge of pilferage in Mother Teresa's organisation was much more common than I had thought, at least in the Christian charity circles. [Dr Jack Preger](#) (OBE), the Catholic who had worked for Mother Teresa as a volunteer before he founded his own '[Calcutta Rescue](#)', told me in a taped interview that he had heard that there is 'some misappropriation of money. Some people among the religious, I am told, send money orders back to their villages. . . could be allowances of course.'⁷

It is a universal perception within the slum dwellers surrounding Mother's homes that the nuns 'look after their own'. I heard it countless times. It was said not from bitterness, but with resignation. Kurban, a tannery worker who lived with his young family in a shack on the northern edge of 4th Bridge, told me, 'Many volunteers come from America. They don't know that you have to be a Christian to get any help from the nuns. However, last Christmas my children got new clothes.'

Kalua, a neighbour of Kurban's, worked part-time as a tempo driver, and lived with his wife and four small children in a shack. He had heard of Mother Teresa. 'She's the boss of the Sisters,' he said. He never received (or asked for) any help from them. He was quite dismissive. 'You need a card to get meals or any kind of help. They only help their own.'

Fakir, a helper in a butcher's shop in Bright Street, had not heard of Mother Teresa, although he lived literally a hundred yards away from [Prem Dan](#). He was not critical of the Sisters. 'They give meals to some people. You need cards, but I don't really know how you can get a card. I haven't really tried for one, but I have heard that you can't get them anymore. Which is understandable, as there are too many people.'

I managed to trace a couple of the handful of Catholics who live in the slum. Rabi Gabriel Roy told me that his grandmother was employed at Prem Dan. I also interviewed Ashish Gomez (no relation of the Gomez's

who helped Mother set up her organisation in 1948) in his own hut, which is in the better area of the slum. They are by no means the 'poorest of the poor'; Ashish's dad Albert Pinto worked as a motor mechanic, and his mother Namita also worked when she could. However, the whole family had been given food cards.

Sadhan Sen was a jovial man who was a well-known character in [Dnarapara slum](#). He ran a tea stall in the depths of the slum, which he set up when he came over from [Bangladesh](#) in 1973. He told me that he once did go to the Sisters many years back, to ask if they could help with his elder son's polio deformity. 'They were quite polite to me,' he said. 'They said that I did not qualify for help because I was an able man who had some kind of livelihood.'

The teenagers of Dnarapara are hostile to MC. It is not an uncommon sight to find groups of boys between ten and fifteen years of age milling around in front of Prem Dan's entrance banging on the iron door, generally trying to heckle the gatekeeper; often they would throw stones from their catapults at the door. I spoke with some of them, who were all slum and street children. Their names were Sohan, Kanu, Mohammed Ayub and Babu Malhotra. All had heard of Mother Teresa: 'We've heard she's kind,' they said. 'But the Sisters are *haraami* [bitches]. They have some widows and orphans in their home, but we are not orphans, so they'd never help us.'

Books on Mother Teresa frequently say that her nuns and Brothers patrol Calcutta's railway stations scooping up destitute. Many years back, they used to be seen occasionally in Howrah station, but currently there are no regular visits to the city's stations. They have never been seen in Park Circus station which shares a wall with [Prem Dan](#). I interviewed all the regular beggars at Park Circus station, who worked during Teresa's final years.

Among the platform beggars, who begged literally in the shadow of the high Prem Dan wall, were two men called Abdul and Muzarali, and a woman called Anurjan. They came to beg at the station in 1992. They had heard of Mother Teresa. 'We've heard she helps people. We've never had the opportunity to go to Prem Dan; we've heard you need a card to get help,' they said. Karim, another 65-year-old platform beggar said, '*The Sisters never help anybody.*'

The over-bridge at the station was given to women beggars. Until 1995, an old and very ill woman called Jyman Bibi used to sit on the over-bridge.

She never heard of Mother Teresa. She never received help from anybody. Jyman Bibi died in January 1996 and her place was taken by another old woman called Golabjan. She came from a village called Jibantala in southern West Bengal. At night she slept in the station. She had a grown up son back in the village. She could not tell me how old she was, but she looked about seventy and was quite unwell. She had not heard of Mother Teresa.

There is a government run (free) primary school, Dr B.R. Ambedkar School, for very poor children in [Dnarapara](#). The school shares a wall with Prem Dan. I have interviewed some slum dwellers in the school itself. Needless to say, the Missionaries of Charity MC have never given them any help, for example, writing paper or leftover food. Shamsundar, a poor tannery worker who came from Bihar in 1993 with his family, told me that he had heard of Prem Dan, but never had the occasion to go there for help. 'I've heard they don't really help people. When my child is ill, I pay for his medicines.'

4th Bridge, before it was widened, always had a number of street children playing on it. Their ages ranged between four and fifteen. I spoke to all of them, and only the oldest children had heard of Mother Teresa.

'A Day in the Life of a Destitute' from *The Sunday Times*

During much of 1993, [The Sunday Times](#) ran a page where the daily routine of a celebrity was told in his or her own words; 'A Day in the Life' of a person. After going through a motley of major and minor celebrities, they wanted to cover the day of a destitute and which place in the world comes to mind when you think of destitute?

A correspondent was therefore despatched to Calcutta who told the story of one Monara Khatun, a 21-year-old migrant widow, who lived 'on a bridge on Tiljala Road, near Park Circus, Calcutta.' The story of her life (or day) was heart rending, and the newspaper also poured scorn on the ordinary Calcuttans:

'We [Monara and children] walk to Park Circus, Mullick Bazaar, or the posh houses of Ballygunge to rummage through the rubbish. . . In summer the heat melts the road, which sticks to your feet. In Ballygunge the big white houses have beautiful gardens with big dahlias in flowerpots standing in stiff rows. Often we see the *burra*

memsahibs saris waddling around the verandas bossing servants. They get into their shiny cars and whoosh past us at the gate. They call me *khurchera* (dirty). I hate them! At least I *earn* my food.’⁸

Readers were predictably moved by Monara’s story. *The Sunday Times* set up a ‘Calcutta Fund’ and within a month £30,000 poured in. Mother Teresa did not get a mention in this account of one of Calcutta’s seriously destitute: a vulnerable single mother with children. But, what the interviewer [Vanya Kewley](#) conveniently forgot to tell readers was that Monara was a neighbour of Mother Teresa’s: the ‘*bridge on Tiljala Road, near Park Circus*’, where she lived, was none other than 4th Bridge, adjacent to Prem Dan. Also conveniently omitted was that Mullick Bazaar, where Monara went to rummage through rubbish, is barely 200 metres from Mother House. The waste generated by Mother House (with its 200 residents) attracts a lot of destitute. This is the only charitable function emanating from this particular building.

I agree that most of the ‘burra memsahibs’ of Calcutta would consider Monara dirty and shove her aside if accosted by her; Mother Teresa would have considered her ‘beautiful, like Jesus’, but the end result would be exactly the same.

The Indian Museum, Calcutta

One of the more popular places where beggars in Calcutta hang out is in front of The Indian Museum, at the junction of Sudder Street. One of them is Shibu, who came to Calcutta in 1962 from Bardhaman, a town about a hundred miles away. He has severe limb deformities and cannot stand up from the crawling position. He said, ‘I have heard Mother Teresa helps poor people, but I have never had the reason to go to her. But I have heard she helps only people from Orissa [a state in India to the south-west of West Bengal].’ He had been given an invalid chair by [Jack Preger’s](#) charity.

Another regular from the same museum area, Akhtar Ali Mollah, is a middle-aged beggar who has severe spastic leg deformities. He begged in the prostrate position and was unable to stand up or walk. He had heard of Mother Teresa but dismissed her with ‘Would she ever look after us? She’d only help the rich.’

Both Shibu’s and Akhtar Ali Mollah’s allegations against Mother Teresa, though untrue, reveal the depth of cynicism amongst beggars in

Calcutta who had heard of her.

The Grand Hotel

A bit further north from the museum is another favourite begging haunt: underneath the portico of Grand Hotel. The regular beggars of Grand Hotel come from the extreme south of West Bengal, south of Canning. During the latter part of 1995, a familiar sight would be the eight-year-old Salima Khatun carrying her two-year-old brother Mona. Mona had severe dropsy which became progressively worse. Eventually the two-year old had an abdomen like a pregnant woman's. Mona had caught the attention of some Mother Teresa's volunteers, who are a familiar sight in this part of the city. The volunteers took Mona to Mother's orphanage where he was admitted for a fortnight, before being thrown out to the streets.

Another regular in the Grand Hotel arcade was Bimal, a ten-year old with severe limb deformities. He was often seen crawling on the pavement, shuffling after people asking for money. He had heard of Mother Teresa, because he spent a fortnight in one of her homes. Like Mona, he was carried by some volunteers to the home where he was reluctantly admitted but soon asked to leave. Teresa volunteers keep to a small area of the city and they frequently pass along the Grand Hotel arcade. Before coming to Calcutta, they had been saturated with propaganda about nuns scooping the likes of Mona and Bimal off the streets, so they sometimes muster courage to pick somebody up and take them in a taxi to a home or orphanage. Such an act is not looked on kindly by the nuns but they grudgingly acquiesce for a period.

Other beggars under the Grand Hotel arcade included Rohima and Khala Bibi, both of whom had heard of Mother Teresa, but neither had ever been to her to ask for anything.

Lufthansa Porch

In the same part of the city, a bit further south, I once met a young man called Mohammed Akhtar, under what was known as the 'Lufthansa Porch'. He was not a regular there, but was occasionally seen. He was paralysed from the waist downwards. He came from Bihar in 1989 to beg in Calcutta. In 1993 [Calcutta Rescue](#) gave him an 'invalid car', an arm-driven tricycle. Not only had he heard of Mother Teresa, but had also tried to see her on two occasions. He said, 'But the Sisters said she was not available, and asked

me to leave.’ Akhtar never went back to the Missionaries of Charity MC after that.

Since Mother Teresa’s death, I have not been on the streets with my camera or tape-recorder. In my interviews, it was never my intention to get the poor of Calcutta to talk ill of Mother Teresa. My objective was to find out how many had ever heard of her, and how much she meant to them. I let them talk spontaneously, and my questions were open ended, for example, ‘Who helps you when you are ill?’ The only closed question I asked was ‘Have you heard of somebody called Mother or Ma Teresa?’ I was keenly searching for anything positive to be said of her and, on the rare occasion it was, I have reproduced it faithfully.

The allegation that Mother Teresa helped only the rich has no basis in truth. Although it could mean that she helped only Christians who already got a lot of help. Undoubtedly, there was a gulf of difference between help given to the Christian poor and the non-Christian poor. Also, if a poor person or family converted they were given special treatment, which is understandable. I have no reason to doubt [Baby Khatun’s](#) allegation of widespread pilferage by the nuns, which seems to be common knowledge.

While she was writing her marginally critical biography of Mother Teresa, the British author [Anne Sebba](#) came to my house to watch my video recordings. She wrote:

‘Over a period of days, Chatterjee took his video camera and talked to the largely Muslim slum dwellers about Mother Teresa. . . Fakir, a butcher who has lived for four years in a slum. . . said, ‘. . .Free food from Mother Teresa? You can’t just queue up for that. You need a card. I can’t get one.’ Next, Chatterjee asked two men sitting against a wall very close to the building itself if they received food from [Prem Dan](#). ‘No,’ they said. ‘We hear she helps people but it’s a card problem. We don’t know how you do it.’ Chatterjee spoke to a tea-stall owner, to a man from Bihar and to beggars, and the answers were all the same. No, they do not receive any help from the Missionaries of Charity because you need a card. A van driver who had lived in the same slums for twenty years said. ‘They’ve never helped us. They help only Christians. She has special provisions for Christians.’ When Chatterjee took his video camera to the streets of

central Calcutta and asked beggars outside the Oberoi [Grand] Hotel what they knew of Mother Teresa it was clear that misconceptions were rife. One leper insisted that there was no use asking her for help as she wouldn't help people from Andhra Pradesh, while another in a wheelchair said Mother Teresa only helps people from Orissa. A dwarf, begging on Lower Circular Road, insisted that he had never heard of Mother Teresa even though he was almost outside the Mother House as he said it.'⁹

It might appear odd that 90 per cent of my interviewees were Muslims in a city where 15 to 20 per cent of the population are so. There are two reasons for this anomaly; some are refugees from [Bangladesh](#), but mainly the reason is that Muslims are disproportionately overrepresented amongst the poor in India.

My interviewees are all real people; they appear in their real names. And all the interviews I have quoted here are on video. Many have now passed away. Some of them, such as Bimal, the crawling boy outside the Grand, were well-known characters.

There is no reason why anyone else should not take a video camera and an interpreter and take to Calcutta's streets and find out what the current population of destitute think of MC and their founder.

7

Mother Teresa's Homes – Views from Within

MC have many homes and centres in many parts of the world; at the last count, the order had a total tally over 600 buildings. Numerically this is impressive to the casual observer. For instance in the remote nation of [Papua New Guinea](#) (whose population is a third of that of Calcutta) they have eight centres. But all of the eight are nunneries. In the past they had a shelter for battered women in the capital Port Moresby but this was scrapped to make more room for ‘candidates’, that is, trainee nuns. At the end of ‘training’ candidates are shipped to the Philippines to become ‘novices’.

The only alleged charitable function that MC perform in [Papua New Guinea](#) is ‘visits’ which is a thinly disguised euphemism for ‘Come to Jesus’. MC teach catechism to the local indigenous people and in this remote corner of the world there is no reason to be discreet about it. In India they have to be careful. ‘Visits’ is the most commonly performed so-called charitable act of MC taken as a whole in all their centres.

Catholicism and its propagation were Mother Teresa’s driving force for her reluctant charitable functions.

Nirmal Hriday, Calcutta, The Home for the Dying Destitute

It all started with this establishment, Mother Teresa's first and most famous home, founded in 1952. The home for the dying in Kalighat (one of the oldest quarters of Calcutta) has become a byword for care and compassion in the world. The propaganda was started by [Muggeridge](#), but as Mother Teresa's fame grew, world media have picked up the tab.

I have spoken to a few hundred people who worked as volunteers in Kalighat. Indeed, I have worked there myself; sharing a shift with the famous Andy, the Australian youth, who came to work for a few weeks in the early 1990s, but quickly realised that God had called upon him to stay on in Kalighat. He often gave induction lectures to new volunteers.

Conditions at the Kalighat home were/are dire, as even most die-hard Teresa fans would admit. They make the volunteers angry, including the Catholic ones. But how they react or deal with their frustration and disappointment would make a psychologist's brain tingle. Denial, adopting an over-enthusiastic defence of shoddy practices, reaction formation – they are all there. There is frequently skin-deep racism – what more do these people deserve? But even devout Catholics told me on numerous occasions that they resented they could not spend more time with residents, as they had to do mundane tasks like washing dirty clothes by hand, which could be done by washing machines if Mother had allowed them.

The impression had been given again and again, mostly by Mother Teresa herself, that she ran an extensive operation at Kalighat. This she did by repeating ad infinitum that she 'picked up thousands'.

Nirmal Hriday is a small square single storey building, each side of which measures 30 metres, even on the outside. It is not much bigger than a standard municipal swimming pool. It is not noticeable if you are not looking for it. When I came to the West and was bombarded with stories of Mother Teresa's tremendous operations next to the temple, I just could not visualise the building; I had to go back and locate it. Partly the reason for the building's obscurity is that it is covered completely on all sides by shops.

But Mother's official biographer deliberately creates the misconception that Nirmal Hriday is like a Mughal monument. One has to stretch one's imagination very far to thus imagine the shabby rounded roof with a stick on top:

[It] is ivory in colour and from its roof rise eight bulbous, fluted domes topped by delicate spires. The structure, in the shape of a quadrangle, is built around a large inner courtyard after the manner of the traditional *serai* or hostel for merchants or pilgrims.¹

The Australian Catholic nurse, and Teresa acolyte, [Tracey Leonard](#) describes the building in her book:

Beside this impressive structure [of the temple], the bland yellow-brown Kalighat building with its single storey barely rates inspection. Cluttered stalls attached to its outer walls further reduce its visual impact.²

If Nirmal Hriday is small on the outside, it is even smaller on the inside. It has two longitudinal rooms, one for men, the other for women. The rooms are small, each measuring not more than 17 metres by 6 metres. It is far far from a 'gleaming oasis in the teeming slums of Calcutta'.

Many Western journalists have told me that the first thing that struck them on arrival at Nirmal Hriday, even before they entered its dark interiors, was its smallness. And the place caters to a tiny number of residents at any one time. Former California Governor; Jerry Brown, writing in *Life* (April 1988), somewhat coyly mentioned the number of residents, 'Inside the House of the Pure Heart were two rows of metal cots for about 50 men.'

Even [Pope John Paul II's](#) visit to the home could not rustle up a good turnout. Reporting on the visit, UK's *Daily Telegraph* remarked, '[The Pope] served dinner to the dying and the destitute who are its patients and blessed all 36 of them.'³

There are forty-five places, not beds, in each of the men's room and women's rooms. In MC lingo there are three kinds of sleeping apparatus: beds, 'MC beds', and pallets. A 'bed' is what we understand by a very basic hospital bed. MC have 'beds' in their European and American homes. 'MC beds' are the regulation 'Missionaries of Charity beds' which is the most common type of bed used by the organisation worldwide. It is shorter and narrower than the standard bed, and stands about a foot high from the ground. 'Pallets' are strange contraptions which enhance residents' suffering and thereby bring them closer to Jesus; Mother possibly preferred these for this reason. Pallets are five and a half feet in length and barely two

feet across; they stand six inches from the ground. Very often the middle part of the mattress, laden by the negligible weight of the person above, touches the ground, as the pallet is sprung with the minimum possible springs. It has a thin (about two inches thick) mattress wrapped in blue polythene; no bed-sheets were used when Mother was alive. World War I stretchers resemble pallets but the former were more sturdy.

There is about a foot between one pallet and the next, and should a person lying in one happen to stretch their arms, they would find themselves hitting their neighbour. To maximise the use of space, pallets are not placed perpendicular to the walls, but at an angle, and the two rows of them look like fish bones growing out of the spine in the middle, which is the aisle.

Tracey Leonard says in her book:

Several more beds are crammed into the remaining space at either end of this ward to bring the total bed capacity of fifty-one. The beds are made of metal and are long and narrow. . . The beds themselves are only 13 centimetres above floor level and about 40 centimetres apart. Above each bed is a number.⁴

During Mother's time, residents in Nirmal Hriday were forced to lie on their pallets, and not allowed to get up and walk around the room. They were not even allowed to stand up and stretch themselves, unless invited to do so by a volunteer. Should the men happen to stand around and loiter for even a moment, the 'ward boy' Anthony, would gruffly order them go back to their pallets, and should they hesitate, a hard shove from him would result. During daytime, Anthony did not have direct command over the women's room, where the regime was less strict, and where some loitering was tolerated.

Anthony deserves some discussion in the context of Nirmal Hriday, as he was an important person therein during Mother's lifetime. 'Ward boy' is a peculiarly Indian concept, and most Indian hospital wards have one. Ward boys are usually illiterate men who look after the menial business of a hospital ward, such as cleaning the floor, carrying the bedpan. Ward boys often become enormously powerful, much more so than doctors or nurses. In most Indian government hospitals, ward boys often operate a complex network of corruption.

In Nirmal Hriday, Anthony did not do any menial tasks as these were done by the volunteers. His job was policing the residents and ensuring that dossers did not get in. I saw him literally kicking out people trying to get in.

Dossers and drug-abusers got in frequently, despite Anthony and the best efforts of the Singapore-born Sister Luke, who was the home's supremo for almost two decades. I believe she has now moved on.

[Tracey Leonard](#) describes [Sister Luke's](#) strict no-nonsense approach of getting rid of residents ('attempts to cull the numbers') as follows:

This always occurs in the mornings and most patients are alert to a sudden change in atmosphere. Men who were animated and chatty only minutes before are now moaning and groaning, shivering under their blankets in the mistaken belief that this will save them. No amount of pleading and wailing can reverse her decision. . . ⁵

I appreciate that people have to be removed from any institution. But the world mistakenly believes that Mother Teresa was incapable of pushing anybody away from her bosom into the 'streets of Calcutta'.

Mother Teresa frequently used to voice her anguish about the isolation of the individual in society, especially in the West, calling it 'the poverty of the West'. She often railed against the faceless, nameless society where the individual quickly loses identity. But in her flagship home Nirmal Hriday, individuals were not identified by their names, but were assigned numbers, painted over their pallets. Any photograph of the cavernous interior of the morbid place would show these numbers, which glow distinctively in the dark.

Nirmal Hriday does not have any windows; it used to but now they are blocked. There were four tall French windows in the men's room, and the same number in the women's. The windows got blocked up during the 1950s when refugees from the erstwhile East Pakistan (now [Bangladesh](#)) set up shops on the pavements of Kalighat. These pavement shops now completely surround Nirmal Hriday, and the only bit that is uncovered is the front door. A small triangular slit is left at the top of each window through which air, light (and the incessant din of Kalighat) enter the rooms.

Mother Teresa could do precious little if people decided to wrap her building with pavement stalls, but it was up to her to ensure that minimum standards were maintained. The West Bengal government was aware of the

deteriorating conditions around the home many years ago and offered her an alternative site to relocate her operations, but she turned down the offer. She had great sentimental attachment to Kalighat.

She could, of course, relocate (or extend) her home for the dying to the Archbishop's Palace in Calcutta. This mansion that sits on expensive [Park Street](#) (renamed Mother Teresa Street) is valued at \$30 million. Whenever she saw large buildings in the presence of journalists, Mother lamented 'if only I could use that for my poor people!' During a visit to Ethiopia, she said at a press conference that she had asked the country's rulers to give her the former emperor Haile Selassie's palace so she could turn it into a home for the poor; 'You could help clean the rooms,' she told journalists. She could have started with the redundant buildings her own church possesses in Calcutta. She also famously told [Malcolm Muggeridge](#) how she detested Calcutta's fine buildings, including the marble monument, Victoria Memorial. She 'positively glowered' at it, and 'It would, she said, just do for her.' There are numerous instances where Mother Teresa turned the best part of any building into a chapel or a church and relegated the inferior area for the poor.

Inside Nirmal Hriday there was a large notice. It was 1.5m by 1m in size and hung on the wall almost opposite the front door. It contained instructions for volunteers. Instruction 'B)3. CARE OF GLOVES' gives details on the reuse of gloves. Disposable latex gloves were not thrown away but washed and reused here. There are also detailed instructions on the use and 're-use' of hypodermic needles:

1. C) Care with Needles

1. All Needles Should Be:

- a. Recapped Immediately (not recapping needles after use is the #1 way that caregivers are infected by patients)
- b. Put in a Steriliser
- c. Thrown Away in a Bin with Tight Lid

1. All Needles Should be Handled as if Infected

1. Do Not Use the Same Needle or Syringe on Another Patient without Disinfecting it First

It is well known that the #1 way that caregivers are infected by patients' infections is actually through the dangerous practice of recapping of

needles: there is a concerted campaign all over the world to stop recapping. MC advocated recapping, because they are a law unto themselves.

Fortunately for the volunteers, the risk of needle-stick injury through recapping was theoretical; recapping and sterilising were not practised; neither was the option of 'thrown away in a bin with a tight lid'.

What was practised at Nirmal Hriday during Mother's lifetime, routinely with needles is item C3, that is, the [re-use of needles](#) after washing them with water or dilute surgical spirit. This they were doing proudly, openly and blatantly since the inception of the home. They did not re-appraise their practice with the advent of AIDS. Mother herself was fully cognizant of the heinous practice of reusing needles.

Hepatitis B infection is widespread amongst the Indian poor, and at least 20 per cent of the destitute population of Indian cities are carriers of this disease. It is almost certain to be passed on by a shared needle which has been washed and re-used numerous times. Hepatitis C, another more deadly needle-borne infection is also likely to be highly prevalent in the population attending Nirmal Hriday.

Needles are infrequently needed in Nirmal Hriday. Disposable needles are cheap; furthermore Mother was sent large consignments of needles from all over the world (Prince Charles brought a box for her when he came to see her), which lay unused in her warehouse. She was theologically obsessed with bringing people closer to Jesus through suffering (except her own self). If the Indian government had any spine or any regard for its own poor, it would have charged her with manslaughter for causing needless life-threatening infections.

[Tracey Leonard](#) was frustrated about donations of needles and other similar things going to waste:

The equipment supplied is usually IV sets, syringes and needles, catheters, scalpels, and boxes and boxes of gloves (none of which we ever seem to use.)⁶

The biography of [Dr Jack Preger](#) (OBE), the Catholic who heads the charity [Calcutta Rescue](#), and who had worked with Mother Teresa before he went on his own, is scathing about mother's needle-sharing policy:

Yet if it is medication that they [Nirmal Hriday residents] want, their request is less likely to be favourably received. . . medical attention to the poor is low on the agenda. The priority is quite clear: the worship of Christ and the propagation of the faith. . . Certainly no painkillers are administered to patients; belief remains firmly vested in the intervention of the Almighty. . . examples of medical malpractice at Kalighat would horrify Western observers. For example, needles for injections are simply rinsed in cold water after use and simply passed from one patient to the next. And patients with TB are not isolated, despite the highly contagious nature of the disease. . . When it came to her own health, Mother Teresa was less complacent, and reluctant to rely on the power of the Spirit alone. She had the best doctors flown in from overseas, to have a pacemaker fitted by highly skilled heart-surgeons, and recuperate at [Woodlands](#) Nursing Home, the most exclusive private clinic in Calcutta, and certainly not Kalighat.⁷

Western volunteers I spoke to at Kalighat were perturbed by Mother's needle-sharing policy, but most kept quiet. Mother Teresa imparted the subtle message that Calcutta deserved or offered no better. Nuns said so bluntly. This was probably why, when Mother was hospitalised either at the [Woodlands Clinic](#) or the Birla Heart Research Institute, strict orders were given to volunteers not to visit these places. The order did not wish them to witness the gulf between the cares and treatments received and given by the 'living saint' in Calcutta itself.

[Tim Stillwell](#) of London, who worked as a volunteer at Kalighat in 1989–90, stated that what struck him about the place was the residents' 'total lack of dignity'. He said he had travelled to Calcutta with tremendous hope in his heart that he would see a home which lacked many basics, but made up with love and dignity. But he returned disappointed on all counts. To begin with, the place 'looked like a concentration camp,' he said. He said that the people who went there were 'better off on the streets', partly because the 'standard of healthcare was atrocious', but mainly because they were treated so badly by the nuns.

Stillwell agonised that the residents were mainly Hindus, whereas the religious icons were solely Catholic. So, one day 'I bought some postcards of Hindu gods and goddesses, and stuck them on the walls with some tape

above some of the residents' pallets.' The men really appreciated his gesture and said thanks with their smiles. They touched their heads on the photos. But the next day Tim found that the pictures had been removed. When he asked why, he was told by the nuns that the walls had to be kept clean.

Stillwell described Nirmal Hriday at the time being 'thick with western European volunteers', who were smitten by the 'glamour of Mother Teresa'. He also said that he had expected, from general preconception and from reading *The City of Joy*, that on arrival in Calcutta he would be 'set upon by regiments of armless beggars'. He found such fears unfounded.

Mr Stillwell wrote a letter to *The Guardian*⁸ describing some of his experiences at Nirmal Hriday. I interviewed him⁹ following the publication of his letter.

MC show not a jot of consideration for non-Catholic religions in Nirmal Hriday or in any of the other homes or orphanages, despite Mother Teresa's many statements to the contrary. One of the order's former nuns, [Susan Shields](#), says:

In the homes for the dying, Mother taught the sisters how to secretly baptise those who were dying. Sisters were to ask each person in danger of death if he wanted a 'ticket to heaven'. An affirmative reply was to mean consent to baptism. The sister was then to pretend that she was just cooling the person's forehead with a wet cloth, while she was in fact baptising him, saying quietly the necessary words. Secrecy was important so that it would not come to be known that Mother Teresa's order was secretly baptising Hindus and Muslims.¹⁰

Mother herself had once got carried away and admitted that she was converting by stealth. On 14 January 1992, after her heart surgery at [Scripps Clinic, California](#), she made a lengthy speech to doctors and nurses (captured on video which was widely distributed but is currently made unavailable) in which she gloated about [secretive conversions](#):

Something very beautiful. . . not one has died without receiving the special ticket for St. Peter we call it. We call baptism ticket for St. Peter. We ask the [dying] person do you want a blessing by which

your sins will be forgiven and you receive God. They have never refused. So 29,000 have died in that one house [in Kalighat] from the time we began in 1952.

To loud guffaws from her audience she went on to say that she was 'cheating heaven'. Nobody asked if she was cheating defenceless residents, trampling on their beliefs and dignity. She was a supreme politician and communicator. She knew that conversion, secretive or not, would go down well with an American audience, who are overwhelmingly practising Christians. She had the gumption never to talk about conversion in India. To deceitfully convert a defenceless dying person, and then brag about it, requires low scruples of monumental proportions.

Mother Teresa said many times she was supremely respectful of all religions. One of her oft-repeated lies was that she gave each resident who died under her care an appropriate funeral. In truth, she merely handed over the bodies to the municipal corporation. Dead bodies were/are not treated with appropriate respect. During her lifetime at least, that there was no refrigeration in the morgue.

In February 1992, when [Princess Diana](#) visited Kalighat, her personal protection officer [Ken Wharfe](#) had to do a security check of the morgue, in case the princess wanted to peek in. He writes:

The mortuary attached to the hospice run by Mother Teresa's Sisters of Charity is the most appalling place I have visited in my life. Indeed the hospice itself was effectively a mortuary.¹¹

[Tracey Leonard](#) describes the morgue as a place 'where the line between the living and the dead was sometimes uncomfortably blurred.'¹² She recounts an experience when she found a living person in the morgue (a Brother had wrongly diagnosed death) who had to be brought back out.

[Dan Leighton](#), an anthropology graduate from Cambridge University, volunteered at Nirmal Hriday for seven months in 1990 when he was 17. He was part of a large volunteer-group, and the trip was part sponsored by Calcutta's Grindlays Bank.¹³

When Leighton arrived at Nirmal Hriday, he was greatly disappointed with the conditions there. His complaints were politely dismissed by Sister [Luke](#). After working for some time, Leighton's team became even more

critical. He knew that he could not change long-standing working practices, but one practice that really irked them was that of washing the dishes in the same place as the soiled blankets, which often had faeces on them. ‘The shit would come off the blankets on to plates’ was how he put it. He found it disturbing that this was an unnecessary and entirely remediable hazard. He and his friends continued to cajole Sister Luke (who he found a ‘caring and understanding person’) and in the end the nun relented: a small concrete enclosure was built for the washing of plates and glasses. Leighton is enormously proud that their brief visit to Nirmal Hriday effected this permanent and positive change.

During Mother’s life-time plates and glasses were not washed under running water, because she did not invest in an electric pump for the home. They depended on the municipal water supply, which is not sufficient to cater to a home for a hundred people. Water pressure is low and off-on. Most households and organisations install a pump which pulls underground water on to an overhead tank, thereby producing running water from taps. MC stored the erratic corporation water in ground-level open tank and used this stagnant water for all their cleaning tasks.

The washing of dishes in stagnant water at a place like [Nirmal Hriday](#) is risky practice, because TB and other infections are common here. Furthermore, the minimum possible amount of washing powder was used in Mother’s life-time: three parts of (sterile) ash was mixed with one part of washing powder to produce the grey powder that was used to wash dishes.

Dan Leighton told me that they were told to wash needles in cold water. They insisted on washing them in surgical spirit instead. Mr Leighton thinks that their use of dirty needles is indicative of the fatalistic ‘Does it really matter?’ culture, prevalent at the home. He also said:

The Sisters have little or no medical training. Much of the medical and nursing work is done by the volunteers. They do get a regular stream of volunteers, who are nurses or doctors, but that is just by chance; I wonder what will happen when Mother Teresa dies and the glamour fades away. Once the steady supply of volunteers dries up, they would need to have some sort of system in place for ensuring that even the current medical standards, which are less than basic, are maintained.

Commenting on the communal shaving of the residents' heads at Nirmal Hriday, Leighton said:

Lice can be a problem, so I can see where the MC are coming from. The men do not seem to mind, but women are not keen to dispense with their hair, as hair means so much to Indian women. I can remember an elderly woman who did not want her head shaved, but had no choice. She became so embarrassed about her smooth head that she used to walk around with a 'nappy' round her head.

People were often held down and their heads shaved as soon as they came in. Since Mother's death head-shaving is not universally practised.

[Dan Leighton](#) also said that during his seven months at Nirmal Hriday he never saw nuns touching the residents or talking to them. This was left to the volunteers to do, despite the language barrier. Leighton felt that the notion of lacking in equipment and amenities, but making up these deficits with love did not hold true in Kalighat:

Prayer equals care: that's the essence of Mother Teresa's philosophy which is difficult to comprehend for most. Missionaries of Charity do not have any vision, nor any management structure; they are just stumbling along from day to day. They have no understanding, whatsoever, of palliative care, and I wonder if they are even aware of the concept. Love and care for these people are issues too important to leave to God alone; and I am speaking here as a believer.

Sister Ursula of the Medical Missionaries of Mary, who appeared in a BBC documentary on Mother Teresa (*Everyman*) a few days after her death, also made the point that prayer was so important to the order that nuns might suddenly drop a spoon that a child was being fed from, when the hour for prayer came.

It is the residents' good fortune that nuns do not bother with them at Nirmal Hriday. Most of them are indolent, naive and unaware of nursing and medical basics. [Tracey Leonard](#) writes:

Unfortunately Jesus is not the one giving out the medication or administering injections to patients. His helpers have a lackadaisical

approach to matters medical. I have seen them give the steroid Prednisolone instead of Paracetamol, because both start with the letter 'p'. Whenever I yell at them and accuse them of murdering patients they simply smile and tell me that it is all in God's hands.¹⁴

Many nuns are outright cruel. Many people who live around the Kalighat area have told me that, given any opportunity, some of the nuns would terrorise residents and would not desist from hurting them. They are afraid to go on record because of the innate Indian fear of saying anything negative against a white memsahib (the founder of the order). One Kalighat priest, [Debi Charan Haldar](#), who lived and worked close to the home, did go on record and gave this interview to a local magazine:

But many Sisters belonging to the Missionaries of Charity are very harsh towards the patients at Nirmal Hriday. Almost every night we hear heartrending cries from these old patients. I suspect the Sisters indulge in physical torture. Mother Teresa rarely visits Nirmal Hriday these days. And when she does, the Sisters ensure that Nirmal Hriday looks spick and span. I fear that after Mother Teresa's death, the Missionaries of Charity might fall apart. I have two complaints against the organisation; a) the patients deserve better treatment by Mother Teresa and co., and, b) by admitting healthy people looking for a few days' of free meals, they are encouraging scrounging and laziness.¹⁵

[Dr Richard Dean](#), a practising general practitioner in London, went to Calcutta as a volunteer in 1980 (a few months after Mother's Nobel) and stayed for a few weeks. This is his account:

My visit was organised by a Catholic students' organisation at Cambridge University where I was studying medicine at the time. Consequently, my accommodation was arranged with the Brothers at Howrah [Calcutta's suburb across the river]. They have a twenty-five bedded home for destitute in Howrah attached to a Brothers' house, both sitting over a large compound. The Brothers were mostly Biharis, and quite a good number were from Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Hardly any were from West Bengal. Fortunately this didn't

cause a problem in that particular area, as in the adjoining slum, most people were migrants from other states. Practically all the Brothers spoke good English.

There was a chapel in our yard. I had to get up at 4 a.m. every day for religious discourse, then a long mass would follow. I was supposed to help out with the Brothers in a general way. A large quantity of food grain, such as rice and wheat, I think most of it was a gift from the US, was stored in the compound. But there was no policy on distribution. The problem was that the slum dwellers knew that the rice was rotting in there, and every month there would be a mini riot at the home. About a hundred slum dwellers would burst in through the gates, grab some rice and wheat and go away. There was also drugs stored in the place – sent as gifts from abroad. Most medicines were 10 to 20 years old, but Brothers routinely used them. They did not have any medical or nursing training but they regularly carried out medical treatments, which were erratic, if not dangerous. They would use drugs without knowing what they were for. Needles were never replaced; they were more appropriate for catching fish than treating people. The tips became fish hooks and it was a job to give injections as you'd have to struggle to get the needle in and another to get it out. I was traumatised just using them; I shudder to think what the patients may have felt.

The Brothers themselves had the best possible medical treatment. Every month they went to a gleaming new American run hospital in the centre of Calcutta [Assembly of God Church Hospital] and had chest x-rays. Their single day's treatment would cost more than what they spent on residents in a month. I told the Brothers that they should stop having expensive check-ups and divert the money to the poor. I found all this difficult to reconcile with Mother Teresa's image and sayings. Mother Teresa herself said frequently that her nuns and Brothers lived exactly like the poor. My final crunch came when I found this man, a rag picker, with the biggest hydrocele [an accumulation of fluid around the testes] I had ever seen. It reached down from the groin to his knees. I took him on, as it were, and asked the Brothers if they would finance his treatment. The Brothers plainly said no. 'If we do it for one, we have to do it for thousands,'

they said, I have heard this particular sentence repeated umpteen times by the Missionaries of Charity in Calcutta.

One day I took the man to the swanky hospital that the Brothers went to, and was told by the doctor there that he was not welcome. So I spent a whole day queuing at a government hospital and came away with some Furosemide [diuretic].

On the whole I'd describe my experience with the Missionaries of Charity in Calcutta as 'horrific'. I suppose I was particularly shocked because it was so much short of what I had been expecting. I had assumed it would be an open door set up where everybody was welcome. What I found was so utterly different.

I actually left the Brothers towards the end of my stay. I found some Hindu organisations who were doing excellent work with far less resources.

I can say that my experience with Mother Teresa's organisation was partly responsible for me eventually leaving Catholicism.¹⁶

I have interviewed more than a hundred men and women who worked as volunteers at [Nirmal Hriday](#), mostly when Mother was alive. The vast majority were critical. The accounts above are not amongst the most critical I encountered. I have decided to quote [Dan Leighton](#) extensively because he frequently went public with his views. He wrote quite an intimate letter to [The Guardian](#)¹⁷, and also appeared in a documentary entitled *Mother Teresa: Time for Change?*¹⁸ which was shown on European television networks during 1997. I have quoted from [Tracey Leonard's](#) book because she is Catholic and a Teresa fan: she so impressed the Sisters that, at one point, was encouraged to become a nun. She did two prolonged stints in Calcutta in the early 1980s.

In Mother's authorised biography (the only posthumous one to be authorised), [Kathryn Spink](#) notes:

There were those trained doctors and nurses who came to work there, on a voluntary basis who were horrified at the failure to observe the kind of fundamental rules of hygiene that would protect the Sisters from infection and the 'patients' from contaminating each other.¹⁹

The first emphatic public criticism of Mother Teresa's work appeared in *The Observer* on 3 May 1992. It was made by [Mary Loudon](#), the author, who volunteered at Nirmal Hriday. She wrote:

When I was in Calcutta, I went to work at the most famous of Mother Teresa's monuments to human dignity: the Home for the Dying at Kalighat. Because I had already been working in the city for some time, I naively imagined myself to be immune to shock. How wrong I was. The home at Kalighat consists of two rooms. Each with around 40 patients in stretcher beds, sandwiched between pieces of green plastic and small, scratchy blankets. On admission, the patients' heads are shaved, their clothes removed, and any possessions confiscated. Patients wear a knee-length Western-style overall that ties at the neck and gapes open at the back. No underwear is provided.

There is nothing for the patients to do, and nowhere for them to go. . . The fact that the food is nutritionally inadequate and always the same, the water disease ridden, and the volunteers largely unable to speak Bengali is of little importance. . .

I don't know if she [a dying woman with TB] had any family. If she did, they would almost certainly not have been allowed to see her, because families are strongly discouraged from visiting their relatives at the home. What I do know, or at least I was told, by an American doctor working at Kalighat, was that she might have lived if she had received some hospital treatment. Yet Mother Teresa's policy is not one of intervention. . . God decides who lives and who dies. People are better off in heaven than in the operating theatre. Thus, instead of using her influence and income to finance a properly equipped hospital, Mother Teresa and her Sisters continue to give aspirin to patients with cancer, linctus to those with TB, and glucose drips with old needles rinsed in cold water to those in comas. And everyone, regardless of creed, gets a good Catholic funeral.

When we made our film (*Hell's Angel*) two years later, Ms [Loudon](#) said in it:

My initial impression [of Nirmal Hriday] was of pictures and footage of places like Belsen that I had seen. The patients' heads are shaved, and they lie in First World War stretcher beds. There is no garden, there is no yard; there is nothing for the patients to do, nowhere for them to go, they can't even sit. . . there are no chairs, there's nothing. . . The only painkillers used were Aspirin, and, if you were lucky, some Brufen. . .

Once, I asked a nun who was washing used needles under a cold water tap why she wasn't sterilising them. She said there's no point. . . My boyfriend worked in the men's room and he was looking after a young boy who had some kind of problem, I forget exactly what, which an American doctor volunteer told me was entirely treatable. I asked the nuns why they were not taking him to the hospital, why they weren't doing something as simple as calling a cab and taking him to the hospital, but they said that was not how they worked; 'If we do it for one we have to do it for everybody. . .'²⁰

Ms Loudon's anxiety about whether the woman with TB had any family was misplaced because, if she had, she would not have been allowed a place at Nirmal Hriday.

The very first, albeit timorous, criticism of Mother Teresa's practices in Calcutta appeared, rather surprisingly, in the British Catholic weekly *The Tablet*, in the same week that she went to Oslo to get her Nobel. It was written by an anonymous 'English Catholic doctor in Calcutta' who had worked as a volunteer for the Missionaries of Charity. It is likely the doctor in question was [Dr Preger](#). He wrote:

The enormous publicity she has attracted recently in the West, will, no doubt, yield a bountiful harvest in cash and kind. Some of this could be used to upgrade her medical programmes, where necessary; although Mother herself resists the idea of them developing into hospitals. [Volunteers] could be employed in maintaining round the clock surveillance of patients. If she is to avoid the kind of criticism levelled at [Albert Schweitzer](#) in Lambarene she may have to concede that the medical care of her adult patients will have to be revised.²¹

In the eighteen years from Nobel till death, she became more arrogant, reckless and unaccountable. Care deteriorated. [Paul Chetcuti](#), the Maltese Jesuit priest who went to work at [Nirmal Hriday](#) in the early 1980s, wrote a slim volume:

In the life of the Missionaries of Charity, more importance is given to prayer than to actual work. . . I remember one occasion, while working in the home for the dying, when I went in some agitation to tell Sister that a man was on the point of death, the first question she put to me was, 'Have you prayed for him?' To pray is the first thing to be done, even before considering what is needed from a medical point of view. Mother Teresa refuses, on principle, to make any of her works of charity into an institution. For example, she refuses to have hospitals. In her Home for the Dying in Calcutta, she refuses to employ a full-time doctor, and is happy simply to have the free service of one or two doctors who volunteer their time. She refuses all sophisticated equipment in her homes, even a simple microscope which could be useful in the rapid diagnosis of certain sicknesses. In her eyes, this would be the first step towards the establishment of an institution for sick people. . . an institution might not serve necessarily the poorest of the poor. Anyone who does not grasp this point will probably be shocked at the rudimentary level of treatment available in the homes of Mother Teresa. . . It does not matter if they do not have the necessary vaccine for the treatment of this woman,. . . God will take care of this sick woman. . . this trust in God seems carried to excess, but it is the touchstone of the whole work of Mother Teresa. Her favourite saying is, 'If God wants something, it will be done.'²²

It should not be overlooked that there was/is a gulf of difference between the standards in her homes in the West, and those in India. If the 'poorest of the poor', whatever their nationality, are equal in the eyes of her God, why were they not equal in her own eyes?

Chetcuti's comment about relying on donated stuff and not paying for anything to help the poor is true. Teresa was obsessed with freebies, a mentality which came from a lifetime of receiving shiploads of donations from all over the world. She was philosophically opposed to spending even

small amounts to buy medicines or equipment to save lives in India. She never made a donation during major natural disasters in India.

Another Jesuit priest, [Freddie Lane](#) made a 'pilgrimage to Calcutta' in 1997, a few months before Teresa's death. He was 'invited to give a retreat to the novices of the Missionaries of Charity by Mother Teresa.' His trip was funded by parishioners in Liverpool. Despite India having the largest number of Jesuits in the world, Mother Teresa had to invite an exotic priest from Liverpool! Did it not occur to her that parishioners' money could have been better spent by sending food, clothing or medicines?

After visiting Kalighat, Lane wrote:

Whilst I was there [in Calcutta], I heard of some criticism levelled at Mother Teresa and her nuns for the low level of treatment they gave to the people they served. To do the job properly they need far more money than is given to accomplish this.²³

More money? How much does it cost to provide clean water, proper beds, and new needles?

On 8 March 1984, [Christies](#) of Amsterdam auctioned a private art collection to raise more than £30,000 specifically for the home in Kalighat. I am not aware if any of the money was spent on the home, as no improvements were undertaken in that year. £30,000 would have, at least, ensured a lifetime's supply of clean needles.

[Sam Westmacott](#), the British freelance journalist, worked as volunteer at both the home for the dying and the orphanage in Calcutta in 1996. She wrote an extensive account of her experience in *The Daily Telegraph* (London). Westmacott remains an admirer of Mother Teresa. *The Daily Telegraph* is a conservative organ which staunchly supports the Teresa cult. I am quoting from Westmacott's account, which even *The Daily Telegraph* had to concede, was 'in many senses, disturbing':

As I arrived on the first day, a man died in front of me. I stood transfixed but no one else noticed. I wish someone had been there to hold his hand. . . His death seemed a lonely business. . . [Residents] had nothing to do but sit on their beds. It was easy to understand the criticisms of Mother Teresa's methods. Hygienic they were not. Rubber gloves were re-used after minimal sterilisation and aside

from basic medicines there were little nursing equipment, not even for cleaning patients' grotesque bed sores. I could not understand why the volunteers were not shown basic nursing techniques, such as turning the patients regularly to prevent sores. I asked Sister Dolores why time and money were not spent on improving the medical care. . . She said, 'It would not be comfortable for them if it was chrome, sterile and full of white sheets. Often people want to give us washing machines but that is not doing God's work. God's love is experienced through action with our hands, our feet. When you give everything with your whole body, you receive it all back.' . . I asked why they did not make use of the professional skills of the volunteer doctors and nurses. 'We do', she said. 'But they have to learn our loving untrained way. . .'²⁴

Westmacott's disappointments at [Nirmal Hriday](#) were compensated when Mother 'mingled among the volunteers, placing her powerful hands on our heads' at Mother House. Why was she not mingling with the destitute? – was the question no one dared ask.

One of the US universities that organises and funds volunteers for MC is Wake Forest University in North Carolina, founded on turgid Southern Baptist ethos. They call these volunteers '[City of Joy Scholars](#)', who are short-listed from a large number of applicants. [Frank Sherman](#), a former student, wrote extensively about his experience with MC in Calcutta but admitted he had nothing to say when asked in what way the trip changed his life and what he learned from it. It took him all of six months to realise he witnessed 'love' on the trip.²⁵

Sam Gladding, professor at Wake Forest, wrote about his experience on the same trip:

One of my daily jobs was rinsing out the boys' clothes with cold well water. . . In between jobs, we played with the children. . . [In Kalighat] I literally became physically sick. I felt fortunate only to be nauseated and I found myself being attended to lovingly in a way that gave me both peace and comfort. I wondered if the clients we were serving had similar feelings.²⁶

I managed to meet up with [Jessica Davey](#), the bright young woman who founded 'City of Joy Scholars' in 1993. She told me²⁷ that as a child she saw a documentary on Mother Teresa and, since that day, going to work for her in Calcutta became a constant dream. When I questioned her about the style and ethos of Mother's work, Davey was not complimentary. She said her work was merely 'a band-aid operation' and commented that even an unknown local organisation called Ankur Kala which she used to pass on her way to Mother House was doing a more useful job than the celebrity nun. She criticised Mother's emphasis on suffering and critically commented on an incident in the US when the nun had carpets and televisions removed from one of her American homes. Nonetheless Davey remains a fan of the nun. Such is the power of the halo.

Many devout volunteers returned annually to work for Mother. The British medic [Dr R.C. Smith](#) was one of them, who volunteered between 1979 and 1981. Here is a letter he wrote to *The Times*:

When I arrived at the home, the nun in charge said: 'Oh good, I've been praying for a doctor and you've come. I'm going on retreat tomorrow and you're in charge.' It was a totally overwhelming experience, with little equipment and no trained staff. . . I remember one young man, of about 18 years, who was admitted with meningitis and later developed pneumonia. I made the diagnosis and prescribed antibiotics (supplied through the generosity of doctors and pharmaceutical companies). . .²⁸

It is again obvious MC would not pay for antibiotics for a moribund teenager: if donated medicines were not available he would have been left untreated. I wrote to [Dr Smith](#), asking him if basic pathological tests were undertaken, and what he thought of the diabolical treatment regime at Kalighat compared to that received by Mother Teresa herself.

Here is the reply I got from Dr Smith:

I am quite certain that Mother Teresa would prefer to die like the poor, but if she has been offered treatment at the [Birla Heart Institute](#), then she would accept it. She has always taught that it is right to accept gifts as the giving benefits the donor as much as the recipient. . . Furthermore if Calcutta doctors were seen by the public

not to be doing their best for her there would be a lot of trouble for them. No, I do not think she could have done any more for the medical facilities in Calcutta than she has done. . . And I do not think that the rest of the world is so naive as to believe that ‘Kalighat type care’, as you put it, is the best Calcutta can offer the population in general.²⁹

Dr Smith lamented that pathological tests were not done as the local labs would not do it for free.

[Dr Mary Poplin](#), Professor of Education at Claremont Graduate University, California volunteered in Calcutta for a couple of months in 1996 and here is the account of her experiences:

For example, during my stay in Calcutta, a group of European women arrived for a two-week stint as volunteers. They immediately were confronted with a young handicapped girl who had considerable lung congestion. Where, they wondered, was the respiratory therapy machine? Surely, given Mother Teresa’s fame, such equipment was available? Informed that the home did not have such equipment, the volunteers began to protest. One healthcare professional was so distressed that she left after a couple of days. The Missionaries of Charity, one learns, resist owning anything, even medical equipment that is not widely available to the poor. (Telephones are one of the few exceptions to this rule.). . . Mother Teresa is often depicted in the media, especially upon her death, as a great humanitarian, a superior social worker. But she was not humanistic, rather, she was godly. . . Many writers have depicted Mother Teresa as someone who saw the poor and responded sympathetically to their needs. . . I myself saw a child who had struggled for months to stay alive, evidently healed after a night of prayer. Prayer, not medical or physical work, is the first task of the Missionaries. Prayer is their method, their technology. . . Similarly, I have read criticism suggesting that, at the end of her life, Mother Teresa got the best of health care and technology while the poor around her went without. To the best of my knowledge, she got medical attention (not necessarily the best) primarily when she was unconscious and unable to protest. . . In fact, I took with me to

Calcutta offers of best medical assistance to her. One of the inventors of the latest pacemaker wanted to donate one to Mother as well as the medical services to replace her old one. Through another sister she refused politely, saying she couldn't accept special privileges. [She already had the best pacemaker fitted and a replacement surgery in 1996 would have killed her instantly]. . . . During my stay I had an opportunity to talk to Mother Teresa about Hitchens' book. 'Mother, there are people who write in books that you are one of the wealthiest women in the world, and you don't need any more money,' I said. She looked at me, at first quizzically, and then nodded in recognition. 'Oh yes, the book. I haven't read it but some of the sisters have. It matters not; he [the author] is forgiven.' One day, for example, I was helping the sisters with the laundry. 'Someone should donate a washing machine for all these diapers and clothes,' I said. A sister immediately replied, 'Oh no, we don't need a washing machine; Jesus helps us wash, love helps us.' Washing diapers was never quite the same for me again.³⁰

Professor Poplin also tells some brazen untruths in his article, such as MC never refused anybody who came off the streets, or that the nuns lived in the 'poorest neighbourhoods' or used 'poor public transportation'. It is bizarre to suggest that Mother Teresa had her various sophisticated and expensive treatments all under a state of coma! Angioplasties, CT scans, pacemaker fitting, cataract surgeries, are complex procedures that require the patient's full co-operation. It is not generally known that Mother Teresa used to wear a spinal brace; even that was made for her specially in the US by the [American Professional Bracing Inc.](#) An Indian-made brace was not good enough for her.

Dr Poplin has also made the unusual claim that Teresa had caused, during her lifetime, 'more significant miracles' like cease-fires!

[Dr Mary Poplin](#) is a professor in an internationally reputed institution. She teaches and trains young minds. Possibly in her chosen field she is able and logical, but when it comes to Teresa all judgement goes out of the window. That an academic can make such apologies for an uncaring nun and tell such blatant untruths is disconcerting to say the least. I would like to see the learned professor's reaction if a vet approached her ailing dog or canary with a 'night of prayers'.

I emailed Dr Poplin, asking her if what she saw in Calcutta met her expectations. She wrote back: 'I am not sure what you mean when you say, did it meet my expectations? I went to understand why she said her work was not social work but religious work. . . As far as having an influence on Calcutta, I did not see they had that much influence in Calcutta.'³¹ I also asked if, given Teresa's financial clout, there was any need for washing and reusing needles in [Nirmal Hriday](#), or putting six or eight babies in a cot at [Shishu Bhavan](#)? She chose not to reply.

It is extra-ordinary how white non-Catholics propped up Teresa! Call it racism if you wish, but I blame Indians for allowing this to happen.

Mother once became slightly unstuck in New York when she tried to apply her appalling standards. The novelist [Anthony Burgess](#), who was present at the inauguration of her hospice for AIDS patients in New York at Christmas 1985, found her 'ignoring civic regulations on fire, hygiene, garbage collection'.³² When a city official wanted to examine the electrical wiring, she drove him out with: 'It's not your business how we do things here.' It was obvious her nuns 'had no idea what AIDS was. 'God will provide,' Mother Teresa kept saying.'

God did not provide, corporate donors did, and they were happy to do so in Calcutta also, but Mother did not think the Indian poor were worthy of minimum dignity.

Mother's Teresa's Calcutta Orphanage (Shishu Bhavan)

According to Mother's biographer [Eileen Egan](#), 'By 1958, there were ninety children at Shishu Bhavan.' Now, in the same building, there are three hundred. A separate extension has been built for a hundred handicapped children.

It is a common sight to see five to eight children to a cot. There is no space between individual cots. Bottles and beakers are communal and are passed from one child to the next. When the *ayahs* feed older children with a spoon, they do so with the same spoon from the same plate, and the spoon is passed in rotation from child to child.

When babies' bottoms are wiped after they have been to the toilet, the same cloth is used to wipe a roomful of babies.

In Mother's time children were expected to defecate under the sky into an open drain that had a wooden plank placed over it. The plank had holes in it about a foot apart from each other, and the excrement dropped through

the hole into the household drainage system. The nuns however, enjoy proper, clean toilets. Children in Shishu Bhavan often have infectious diseases, and their stools would be hothouses of infectivity. Putting their faeces in the household drainage system not only places the orphanage at a health risk, but jeopardises the health of the entire neighbourhood. Also, washing of clothes was done immediately beside this faecal drain.

Dan Leighton, who had worked for some time at the orphanage, described his frustration to me (and also to *The Guardian*³³ in a letter) when he found a boy dragging his legs across the floor. He told the Sisters that the boy had broken his leg, but they insisted that he had polio and so nothing should be done. Later it turned out that the boy had indeed broken his leg; the boy is now crippled for life and must rely on charity.

Peter Taylor, a devout Christian and former British Airways steward who had worked in Mother's homes for many years, described (with photographs to prove his case) his experiences in the documentary, *Mother Teresa: Time for Change*:

Much needs to change before the Missionaries of Charity can be considered a proper aid organisation. You can see the discoloration on the side of his face [he pointed to the photo of a boy] which I am sure could only have been inflicted by beating. . . In my view Vincent [another resident of the orphanage, who had developed a festering wound] got into that condition by being left for too long in linen contaminated by his own faeces and urine. Vincent lay in this condition for protracted periods, including when the nuns were at Adoration. And when I pursued the matter with a Sister who I could name, I was told it is the will of God. . . Vincent later died.

In the documentary, Mr Taylor showed two pictures of a boy who was left shackled to his bed because he was unwilling to wear the new clothes he had been given. He said, 'So here we have two pictures of a little boy. In one picture he's bound by the wrists to the side of the crib. In the other picture, he's bound hand and foot outside the crib. This time he's bound behind his back.'

Taylor alleged that the basic emphasis of the organisation was faulty. He said:

One of the Sisters, in whom I had some confidence because of the way she conducted herself, told me that she was, within a week or two, to go on a training course. . . the training was in three parts and when I asked her what the parts were she told me: the three parts are prayer, number one, extra prayer, number two and more prayer, number three.

Taylor also gave an extensive interview to [The Guardian](#) where he said:

Mother Teresa's line is that she is giving 'low level care'. It's not. It's neglect. . . Can they [the children] put up with the crushing boredom of just sitting, or lying in a bed and waiting? With a small number of children, the neglect was particularly bad, and was entirely unnecessary and avoidable. . . some children suffer incredible pain and, when you challenge the nuns, they say it's the will of God. . . they weren't even following basic nursing, such as turning patients every few hours to avoid bed sores. Most of the suffering could be relieved by just keeping the children clean and dry. Mother herself has said the work is not the vocation, prayer is the vocation. When the prayer bell rings, the Sisters all go off to pray, leaving the wards to the care of poor, untrained 'ammass'. Some beat the children, and the nuns say it is the will of God. They need a shift system for prayers so that they can supervise ammass. . . There are cases where there are only two possible descriptions: criminal neglect and criminal assault. It's most unsatisfactory to say they can't stop it because the nuns are too busy. Why can't you pray while you dress a wound or change a nappy? You can't leave children in profound pain and pray to God.³⁴

Some of Taylor's experiences were at Asha Daan, Mother's [Bombay](#) orphanage, but the conditions and morale in Calcutta are identical. He described the case of a blind girl called Minu who he had met at Asha Daan. He found two doctors in England who offered Minu free treatment, and arranged for her air tickets and passport. He flew to Calcutta twice to ask Mother's permission so Minu could be flown to England for treatment. The second time Mother Teresa refused to speak to him and said through an intermediary that his plea should be dealt at a regional level.

‘Sometime later’, said Taylor, Mother Teresa came to [Bombay](#), and I raised the question of Minu. She said she’d pray about it. When I caught up with her a little later, I was told no decision had been reached. On another occasion she came to Asha Daan, and I asked again, the first thing she said to me was, ‘Your company is the only one that doesn’t give me free tickets.’ Then she added, ‘We have to be careful, there are so many bad people about.’ I said I had offered to pay for a Sister to accompany Minu but she didn’t reply.’³⁵

Some months later Taylor finally got the go-ahead, but when he turned up to collect Minu, he was told that Mother had changed her mind.

Demanding free (first class) airline tickets became the norm for her. [Kathy Ward](#), from Ireland’s *Sunday Independent*, had the following experience when she went to interview her in Calcutta: ‘She took my hand, looked me straight in the eyes and said, ‘Tell the Irish authorities I want a free flight. If they give me a free flight I will come over.’’³⁶

[Sam Westmacott](#), who I have quoted earlier about her experiences at Kalighat, had this to say in *The Daily Telegraph* about her experiences at the orphanage:

Although disturbing, Kalighat did not shock me as much as [Shishu Bhavan](#), the home for children. I found ignorance among the carers and a dire lack of equipment. There were not even enough bottles and beakers to go around. Hundreds of young children were either confined in rows of cots or played with a few building bricks in a vast and empty hall. . . I saw no one encouraging constructive play or learning. I was told they are taught, but I did not see that happening. Another building on the campus houses about 200 handicapped children. . . the permanent staff were ignorant of their disabilities and resisted attempts to introduce corrective therapies. Microcephalic children and those with cerebral palsy lay flat on their backs in their cots or on the floor with their legs scissored and their arms contracted. When a British therapist began propping them up, working their limbs and feeding them in an upright position, (which is essential if they are to improve their condition), she met angry opposition from the staff. She was told to lay the children and drop the food into their mouths. . . But I knew of the many who had

offered to teach them [the nuns], who had shown them how to feed properly, who had tried to change the bad habits and had been ignored. Since I was staying only for a few weeks I decided against colluding with bad practice. I did not go there again.

On 1 August 2005 horrific images of neglect and abuse were shown on British television (repeatedly) on Sky News. I was interviewed as part of the documentary. The investigative journalist Donal Macintyre entered an MC Calcutta orphanage (Daya Dan) with a secret camera. He showed children unattended on toilets for long periods, children with hands tied while being fed, and also a child who was tethered to a cot with a rope for the night. Macintyre alleged lack of soap, also nuns crushing medicines with dirty hands. The footage was shown to a British expert on care of needy children (Martin Gallagher) who said this was a breach of the children's human rights. The point I made on the programme was that it was shameful that the Indian government was so much in awe of an Albanian nun that it for decades had allowed the abuse of its own citizens. Surprisingly the *Calcutta Telegraph* (3 August) showed rare courage in reporting on the programme and reprinted a photo of the child tied to the cot, but added that MC would accept 'constructive criticism' and reform. It has not.

[Sally Warner](#), an Australian volunteer, who worked in several of Teresa's orphanages from 1997 onwards, has provided me with a written account of her experiences. She alleges callousness, severe neglect and widespread pilferage of toys by nuns. In Thiruvananthapuram (Kerala) she found the cots without mattresses or pillows. She was horrified that simple measures, like adequate soap and running water, were not provided for people working with babies. She had to wash her hands in a 'plastic basin with floating soap scum'. She remembers a boy called Anil, who had foot deformity which could have been corrected but who was left to languish and suffer a life of disability. Like Sam Westmacott, she also alleges that children were not picked up but were fed on their backs.

In Madras, she found the nuns having a separate kitchen and dedicated cook for themselves which served 'delicious food' whereas the children's diet was deficient. Indian workers not belonging to the order had inferior eating arrangements. As a white woman, [Warner](#) was expressly told by the nuns to join them for meals and never to eat the workers' food. Warner

bought some toys and toys also arrived as donations, but they disappeared fast, some locked in cupboards.

She saw the Superior at Madras slap two workers in her presence without any shame or remorse. The workers did not understand any other language, Warner was told. A child named Carti had a toy broken on him by a Sister. Another toy was broken on a woman who worked in the kitchen.

A girl named Princy with a cleft palate was eighteen months old and despite Warner's daily pleas that she ought to be operated on immediately, was never considered for surgery. She will grow up with permanent (but avoidable) disabilities. A mute pre-teenage girl did children's washing in an upstairs room, though Warner had been assured previously by the Superior that she would be sent to a boarding school.

When a new-born called Maria was admitted, the Superior decided that she was not to be fed from a teated bottle as there was an epileptic child in the room and teats were passed around and not properly cleaned. The Superior insisted that epilepsy was contagious. Consequently Maria was fed so badly that she died in two months.

Warner then moved on to the Delhi orphanage where she ran into a Superior called Sister Takla. Takla was so mean spirited that even the other nuns disliked her, Warner alleges. Despite donations of paints from Berger Paints, children's rooms and areas were not painted but instead the convent and chapel were redecorated. She feels that children's areas were kept intentionally grim in order to make shocked Europeans part with on-the-spot donations. Posters were not allowed on the walls, and a Mickey Mouse number chart Warner used to hang would be removed regularly. The only pictures allowed on the orphanage walls were those of Teresa and Jesus.

Warner moved on to Calcutta, arriving when a major flood had struck surrounding villages. There would be poor people begging outside Mother House. Nuns declared, '*They* know we never give anything from Mother House.' Indeed, in the regular briefing of volunteers, the advice (which came from Mother herself) not to give to beggars was reiterated.

Although, all white volunteers were served breakfast (as much bread, bananas and tea as they could consume) after the 5.50 a.m. mass, Indians could have breakfast only if they attended mass. This was blatant racism. Indians who looked poor were barred from entering Mother House.

In the Calcutta orphanage, Warner met with the familiar dispiriting scenario. In one room (barely 100 sq. m) there were forty children with various disabilities. The small play yard was locked. An Australian volunteer had donated a plastic paddling pool in 1999 which disappeared quickly. Teaching was minimum or non-existent. Nuns did not even know how old a child was.

Warner complained repeatedly to nuns and also went on a petition campaign collecting a large number of statements from volunteers (who were often devout Catholics) asking respectfully for certain minimum changes to be made. She was ignored and once even threatened.

The Scandal of Monidyne

During Teresa's lifetime, the powdered milk for babies and toddlers at Mother's orphanages (at least in Calcutta) was 'Monidyne', a brand manufactured by the Belgian company Belgomilk. Belgomilk has a strong Catholic bias and Monidyne came specially packaged for MC in a special tin. The tin was emblazoned with the message that Belgomilk was supplying the product especially for Mother Teresa. Indeed the tin was also painted in her colours; blue border on a white background. The company told the world how noble it was in helping the ultimate humanitarian.

In truth, Monidyne was not a powder for babies at all! Its composition leaves one astounded. The fat content of standard tinned milk is 22 to 23 per cent whereas Monidyne is merely 7.25 per cent fat. In a standard baby-milk, the carbohydrate content (about 23 per cent) should be almost entirely lactose with no sugar (as in sucrose). Monidyne contains an amazingly large amount of sucrose (25 per cent). Lactose content is minimal: 9.6 per cent; starch is 38 per cent. Monidyne contains four vitamins, whereas any standard milk would contain more than a dozen vitamins. It does not have absolute essentials like folic acid, vitamins K, B12 and C or D. The Indian baby milk Lactogen contains more than 20 vitamins and trace elements. Imagine how much the babies who are already deprived and malnourished would suffer if deprived of these essentials. Because of the large sugar content, Monidyne tastes like a rich cake-mix. It's thick and turgid. The large starch content has a twisted logic as it stops too many bowel movements. But then again, babies would not have diarrhoea in the first place if hygiene was not so poor in the homes.

Babies need very carefully balanced milk-feeds if not breast-fed. Their systems cannot handle unusual combinations; they become dehydrated, malnourished and rapidly ill if given even a subtle variation of the ideal. It would not be an exaggeration to say that many babies would die if fed solely on Monidyne before weaning age. I am told that Teresa orphans were sometimes fed Monidyne on its own, sometimes mixed with Indian Lactogen. Mixing of powder milks is a callous and dangerous practice. If Monidyne was given to babies in a Western nation, it would cause a national scandal. In orphanages in Calcutta, run by other organisations, only Lactogen is used and this is carefully measured. But Mother Teresa was entirely above all scrutiny. Even in death she has remained so.

HOW MANY 'HOMES' DOES MOTHER TERESA'S ORDER HAVE?

This is a very relevant question. How many times have we read the following 'slug' that is generated by news agencies such as [Reuters](#): 'Mother Teresa called Saint of the Gutters, who has 650 homes in 120 countries.

The official Missionaries of Charity statistic, at the time of Mother's death, was that they had '567 homes'. As I have explained with the case of Papua New Guinea; nobody, least of all a journalist, has ever bothered to check out how many of these 'homes' are housing the needy, and how many are nuns' dwellings. The public image of a 'Mother Teresa Home' is one where rows upon rows of the severely indigent lie serenely, and are ministered at all hours by angels in saris. The reality is different.

The following is an incomplete list of 'homes' which are not homes, that is, which do not have the poor or the needy living in them. I have cited some of the closed down homes as they are still included in the organisation's official statistic:

Calcutta

1. **Mother House**: Purely administrative and religious centre. Has a large hostel for nuns and novices. Four storeys high. Mother Teresa lived here in a spartan room when she was in Calcutta.

1. **308 Upper Circular Road**: A purely contemplative centre in the midst of Sealdah, one of Calcutta's most congested parts. A very large

house with extensive lawns and gardens (value c. \$800,000); the only such house in Sealdah. The nuns here are in utter contemplation, and shut themselves away from outside world.

1. **90 Park Street, Calcutta:** A religious centre, called a 'formation centre' for novices. This large grey four-storeyed building has a market value of \$1.5 million and is used exclusively for non-charitable purposes.

1. **16 Hari Mohan Datta Road, Calcutta:** Nunnery only.

1. **Chinsurah (Calcutta suburb):** Another contemplative home for nuns. Chinsurah is an area with many problems where a charitable centre would have been welcome. Until 1991, the Chinsurah contemplative nuns used to live and pray in the spacious Armenian Church in the township, but as Armenian and Catholic Christian faiths are not quite compatible, she moved her nuns to a brand new three storeyed house (market value \$100,000). No charity work is undertaken by the Chinsurah centre.

1. **Two flats (costing \$50,000 each) in Udayan Condoville on the Eastern Bypass in Calcutta:** These were given to the Missionaries of Charity by the West Bengal government as a goodwill gesture a month after Mother Teresa's death, but when I checked last they were locked up and unused. Very likely, they are meant to be nuns' dwellings.

7 & 8.

The centres on Pipe Road: Nos. 12 and 51: According to Mother's biographer [Kathryn Spink](#), 'at the Pipe Road centre, five professed Brothers share the upbringing of no less than 35 boys'. No. 12 Pipe Road is now purely a Brothers' house. No. 51 has been sold.

Darjeeling

1. Contemplative nunnery

Pokhara, Nepal

1. Contemplative nunnery

London

1. **Bravington Road:** Nunnery only

1. **Southall:** Nunnery only

1. **East End:** This house, on Edwin Street, closed down about 1996. It was rented from the Springboard charity in 1977. Such is Mother's clout that she managed to rent a house from a charity that houses the needy, to house only her nuns. I am told that the nuns left rent arrears.

Manchester

1. **Brothers' house attached to St. Malachi's Presbytery:** Located in a severely run down area of Manchester. No charitable function.

Liverpool

1. Nunnery only

Glasgow

1. Nunnery only

Livingston(Scotland)

1. Nunnery only

Cardiff

1. Nunnery only. The nuns visit the elderly sometimes.

Rome

1. **Via Cassilina:** Nunnery only. Mother usually stayed here when in Rome.

1. **Tor Del Fiscale:** Houses trainee priests called the Missionaries Fathers of Charity; an order quietly founded a few years back. A lot of the Missionaries of Charity's funds are now spent on training priests.

1. **Vis San Agapito:** Contemplative Brothers' home.

Grosetto, Italy

1. Contemplative home

1.

2. Sicily

3. Nunneries only

4. **Palermo**

5. **Vittoria**

6. **Catania**

Sardinia

1. Nunnery only

Amsterdam

1. Nunnery only

Belgium

1. **Brussels:** Nunnery only
1. **Ghent:** Nunnery only

Germany

1. **Berlin:** Nunnery only
1. **Mannheim:** Nunnery only
1. **Eastern Berlin:** This house closed immediately after reunification.

Sweden

1. **Forsa:** Contemplative nunnery. This is in an area which saw a lot of Italian immigration in the last century.
1. **Stockholm:** Nunnery only. This place is in a flat in a lower middle-class suburb of the city. Occasionally the nuns might help the Catholic charity 'Caritas' in their soup-kitchen, which would give the Swedes the impression that the nuns themselves are helping the poor.

Barcelona (central), Spain

1. Nunnery only - although they do operate a decent soup-kitchen

Malta

1. Nunnery only. The nuns do prison visits, taking the catechism.

United States

1. **New York: Union Street, Bronx:** Contemplative home
1. **New York: Brooklyn:** Contemplative home
1. **Dallas, 2704 Harlandale Avenue:** Nunnery only
1. **Lafayette, Louisiana:** Nunnery only
1. **San Francisco: 29th Street:** Formation House for novices
1. **Chicago (South Alport):** Contemplative home
1. **Manahoy City, Pennsylvania:** Contemplative home
1. **Alhambra (suburb of Los Angeles):** Contemplative home

1. **Washington DC 5th Street SE:** Contemplative home
1. **San Diego:**Contemplative home
1. **Plainfield, New Jersey:**Contemplative home

Canada

1. **Vancouver:** Nunnery only
1. **St Paul:** Nunnery only. As per conversation I had with Sr Mariosa on 5 January 1999, nuns' only activity is taking religion to Native Canadians (in the vicinity of this oil-rich town) so they may convert.

Copenhagen

Nunnery only, opened 1996

Reykjavik, Iceland

Nunnery only, opened 1997

The list above is incomplete. In my estimate, about 150 of MC centres have residents staying in them. Some of the homes listed above (none of the Calcutta ones) have small soup kitchens that run 3 to 6 days a week. A contemplative home is one where charitable work is prohibited. In a nunnery occasional charity may be allowed.

I hope people who send Mother Teresa money realise that the majority of the money is spent in the upkeep of nuns and Brothers, and in the training of priests. The board may come free, but it is not cheap to maintain five nuns in Iceland. Taking the catechism to people was charitable in Mother's definition, but is not so according to the vast majority of the world's population.

Most people, the world over, think that Mother Teresa, though a devout Catholic herself, first and foremost saw herself as 'a friend of the poor' and never brought religion into the equation when there was charitable work to be done with the needy. Her own repetitive statements have reinforced this false image of her.

Evidence tells us otherwise. She never compromised religion for the sake of charity. In the early 1980s she met up with the Queen of [Bhutan](#) to ask permission to open a leprosarium in the Himalayan kingdom. The Bhutanese are fiercely protective of their Buddhism and are worried that money and temptation from other religions would sweep them away. We do not know what exactly happened in the meeting but Teresa was declined

permission to open her home. There can be no doubt that she wanted a strong Catholic element in the home which worried the Queen enough for permission to be declined to such a celebrity. A few years later, the Christian (Anglican) charity, [The Leprosy Mission \(TLM\)](#), opened the [Gidacom \(leprosy\) Hospital](#) in Bhutan. TLM is a sensitive charity which keeps its Christianity on a low profile. If Mother loved lepers so much, would she not go and help them at *any* cost?

In Colombo, Sri Lanka, her home soon closed after flaring religious tensions. The same thing happened in Vietnam, where she was asked to leave. Vietnam does not have a problem with Catholicism as such, as Christina Noble (a Catholic) runs a high-profile orphanage there.

She arrived in Belfast in 1972 amidst much fanfare to open a convent. Her friends proclaimed she would bridge the gap between the warring Catholic and Protestant communities. In reality she caused more tension and, a few months later, was asked by church authorities to shut shop and leave.

Two years after her Nobel, Mother met the King of Nepal and asked him a very special favour. This time her wish was granted. She got the unique permission to open a home for destitute within the precincts of Pashupatinath Temple, one of the holiest of Hindu temples. The 'home' consisted of two small barely lit tunnels, each housing about 25 destitute. The tunnels were dire, claustrophobic and so low that the residents could not sit up straight. Interestingly, MC have a lovely, clean and spacious home for destitute close by. So, why did she choose to house these unfortunate souls in the dank tunnels rather than put them in her other proper home? The reason was simple: she used the poor as pawns in her lifelong obsession with Catholic one-upmanship. No doubt she gloated that she had encroached into the boundaries of a flagship Hindu temple. That fifty poor Nepalese suffered to satisfy her Everest-high religious supremacy meant nothing to her.

In 1991, [Peter Dalglish](#), the Canadian founder of Street Kids International, met Mother Teresa in Khartoum. He showed the nun his projects with the city's street children, 'and explained how the kids were acquiring skills that would allow them to get a job.' Her response was, 'But are you teaching them the Bible?'³⁷

Homes, orphanages, soup kitchens and whatever else token operations she reluctantly ran were all thinly disguised veneers for propagating an

extreme right-wing brand of Catholicism which is anti-contraception and rabidly anti-abortion.

8

Vatican Asks its 'Great Friend' to Write a Tome and Hollywood comes to Calcutta

A film was made on Mother Teresa's life while she was alive, called *Mother Teresa: In the Name of God's Poor*. Despite her outward show of humility she desperately wanted a biopic to be made during her lifetime, though she was not happy with this particular film. She died a month before it was released.

The film was shot entirely in Sri Lanka during April-May 1997. [Geraldine Chaplin](#), playing the title role, has never been to Calcutta, nor have most of film crew. Almost all the characters speak with a strong Sri Lankan accent.

The film is an obscene attack on Calcutta, in vintage style of [Dominique Lapierre](#), who wrote the script and coproduced the film. Making the film became an obsession with him and took him 15 years to finish. This devout Catholic Frenchman has a vendetta against the city. Teresa is shown in the film as an angel, walking the distasteful and unfriendly streets of Calcutta. Apart from the awful gutters and sewers that she encounters, the people in the city are shown as almost satanic who put constant impediments in her

path. She pleads constantly with folded hands before an unsympathetic police commissioner so he does not remove garbage from [Motijheel slum](#), as that would rob rag-pickers of their living. Then she goes on to picket a public hospital so they would accept a dying woman for treatment. Both incidents are entirely made up.

She also comes up against innumerable bureaucratic hurdles put up by the corporation. Hurdles occur for other people trying to do good work in India, but Mother Teresa never faced them, even in her earlier days. Indeed, when she did face religious opposition, while trying to open a Catholic mission (her home for the dying) in a Hindu temple, the two people that instantly came to her aid and gave her every possible help, including financial assistance, were West Bengal's then Chief Minister [B.C. Roy](#) and Calcutta's then police commissioner. The main tone of the film is to show Hindu Calcuttans in a mean, ungrateful light. Teresa is shown to be mistrusted and almost mistreated in the city, despite the angelic work that she is doing. In truth, at the time she was treated with indifference, but never mistreated.

Although a Frenchman, Lapierre often likes to depict dark races' white saviours as Americans – a direct feeler to Hollywood. Here, the saviour is one Harry Harper, a fictitious American journalist, played by William Kat. He helps Mother in many ways, and takes personal risks. Many say Lapierre projected himself in the guise of [Harper](#) the hero. The film ends abruptly on her being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979.

Readers will wonder why a film about Mother Teresa 'of Calcutta' was shot 2000 km from the city. Many would presume the obvious: that Calcutta is not the sort of place that you would expect a film crew from Hollywood to go and stay; that the place is all slums, and does not even have a hotel, or running water or electricity. One surely would not expect [Geraldine Chaplin](#) to stay in a shack, and, quite conceivably, shooting in Calcutta could be held up by a pile of rotting corpses blocking the way of the camera trolley.

Calcutta, as it happens, has an active film industry. In comparison to [Bombay's](#) vast commercial 'Bollywood', it is tiny, but it is one of the world's major centres for 'art' films. Films from Calcutta have brought back rare awards such as The Golden Bear from Berlin or The Golden Lion from Venice. Satyajit Ray, cinema's all-time maestro was a Calcuttan through and through, and received, among other numerous awards, the Special Jury Prize at Cannes, and an [Oscar](#) for lifetime achievement.

The reason Lapierre did not shoot in Calcutta in 1997 were threefold: first, because he fell out with Mother Teresa at the time and it would have been uncomfortable shooting in the city with actors posing as her nuns near her home. Secondly, in Sri Lanka, he could, with impunity, degrade Calcutta as much as he wished. But most importantly, the film-makers and actors did not wish to be humiliated and harangued as their colleagues were six years earlier, during the filming of *City of Joy*, when Hollywood attempted such a distortion of the truth about Calcutta in Calcutta itself.

Hollywood did manage to execute their 1991 *City of Joy* project, but only after suffering a thorough bruising, and only by using its enormous international clout and financial prowess. Before they came to Calcutta, they had expected a sub-human city full of dead or dying creatures. Hollywood was taught a very severe lesson in Calcutta.

The film *City of Joy* started off as a book of the same name by [Dominique Lapierre](#). M. Lapierre, a wealthy pious Catholic, enjoyed close relationships with Mother Teresa, [Pope John Paul II](#) and with the uppermost echelons of the Catholic Church.

Before he wrote his *The City of Joy* (published 1985), Lapierre wanted to script a celluloid 'epic' on Mother Teresa. The project received the blessings of both Mother and the Vatican. Shortly after her Nobel, and buoyed by the success of *Gandhi*, Hollywood was keen to make a similar venture on the 'living saint'. Actors [Edward Fox](#) and [Martin Sheen](#) (Catholics both) agreed to write off their fees (or donate them to Mother Teresa), and [Meryl Streep](#) and [Jane Fonda](#) were approached to play the big role. Later, Jane Fonda publicly declined the role. [Richard Attenborough](#), the director of *Gandhi*, agreed to direct the film. The potential film was the brainchild of Lapierre who spent a lot of time and effort (unsuccessfully) trying to bring the project together.

Mother Teresa had always been the darling of Hollywood, and enjoyed a personal relationship with many stars. Indeed, Martin Sheen himself describes¹ meeting her in [Rome](#) in early 1991 when he was unsuccessfully trying to meet the Pope; Mother quickly had the papal meeting approved. I cannot remember her ever helping any poor person get a private audience with the Pope. Why the project for the blockbuster epic was mothballed is not entirely clear.

Possibly out of frustration at the failure of his epic film project, Lapierre wrote his magnum opus *The City of Joy* (published 1985). The book's

success exceeded his wildest expectations. But as he was writing it he kept working on the film. The Pope gave him a private audience over the script, during which Lapierre found him 'full of encouragement'. Mother, normally known to be intensely publicity shy, gave the Hollywood mega project her whole-hearted blessing, and Lapierre issued a statement from his St. Tropez home: 'Mother Teresa gave me the exclusive permission to write the film of her life and work.'²

It also emerged that 'humble' Mother wrote to Prime Minister [Rajiv Gandhi](#) (possibly in 1988) asking permission that the film on her life could be made in India. Permission is required in India for foreign films to be shot there, although prime ministers had never before been approached. Mother had close rapport with Rajiv and [Sonia](#) and got an affirmative answer by return of post.

Lapierre came to London (January 1991) to talk to [Glenda Jackson](#) about the title role. Ms Jackson did not like the script, but said she would consider the role if it was revised. In mid-1991, Lapierre suddenly dumped his Hollywood mega-venture. His 1997 film starring [Geraldine Chaplin](#) was second best – a consolation prize.

He has never made it public why the big project fell through. One reason was Hollywood was not convinced that the venture made commercial sense. But the main reason was that by March 1991 he felt threatened in Calcutta and had to flee the city. In his own words: 'One night, the French Consul General called to urge me and my wife to move quickly out of our residence. The Chief of Police had just informed him that a big demonstration was going to take place the next morning in front of our guest house, and that 'things might get nasty.'³

In February 1991, *City of Joy* had started filming in Calcutta, and in the words of [Jake Eberts](#), the producer: 'The six years spent in getting the film to this point begin to seem like a picnic compared to what we encounter in Calcutta. The cast and the crew are faced with riots, firebombs, government protests, lawsuits and crowds marching in the streets.'⁴

Mother Teresa, sensing that her friend Lapierre had become *persona non grata* in Calcutta over *City of Joy*, now quickly distanced herself from his proposed epic film. Ostensibly the reason given was that she had all of a sudden discovered that the film would be 'too commercial'. She was always sensitive to hostile sentiments in Calcutta, and played her cards accordingly, like the consummate politician that she was. Lapierre, when asked why

Mother had suddenly withdrawn her consent from the film, said, ‘. . .The real reason I just don’t know. It’s difficult to understand.’⁵

The book and film *City of Joy* are discussed here in some detail, as they occupy a central place in the cult of lies, myth-making and slander that have become central to the propagation of the Teresa propaganda.

In the book, Lapierre weaved his tale around some real and some unreal characters, giving his fiction a verisimilitude of reality. There are real people, such as Mother Teresa, who make numerous appearances. There are her nuns, some of whom appear under their own names. And there are numerous landmarks, streets and squares of Calcutta. Only the slum (which is the ‘city’ in *The City of Joy*) appears under a fictitious name, but Lapierre has admitted that it is based on the *Pilkhana slum* in Howrah. Although on the back cover Lapierre says that the City of Joy is only a ‘sector of Calcutta’, he makes it very clear in the book itself that his descriptions of depravity apply to Calcutta as a whole. He has convinced his readers that he has portrayed the real Calcutta.

His hero is one *Stephan Kovalski*, a Polish Catholic priest, who he describes as a ‘white apostle who had come from the West to live among the world’s most disinherited people.’⁶ The Kovalski character is based loosely on Mother Teresa herself (partly), although I am told that a Catholic priest of that name really did exist, but not necessarily in Calcutta. The predominant view is that Kovalski is an alter ego of the Swiss Catholic priest Gaston Dayanand, who runs a home 70 km from Calcutta, and is a close friend of the Lapierre couple.

No degradation is low enough for the ‘City of Joy’, where ‘corpses of dogs, rats, scorpions, and thousands of cockroaches. . . float around in the foul sludge. . . several goats and a buffalo drifting through the alleyways with bellies inflated like a balloon.’⁷ A city unparalleled in wretchedness and wickedness is portrayed. Lapierre describes a scene where one of his main characters, the young idealistic American surgeon *Max Loeb*, amputates the arm of a leper, dutifully assisted by a Mother Teresa sister: ‘Neither Kovalski nor Sister Gabrielle had time to catch it [the arm] before it fell onto the ground. . . It was then that he witnessed a scene that would haunt him for the rest of his life: a mangy dog carrying off in its mouth a human arm.’⁸ Most of Lapierre’s ‘goodies’ are white Catholics while the ‘baddies’ are native Calcuttans. The pure at heart noble savage living in the ‘City of Joy’ slum is Hasari Pal, the rickshaw puller and the book’s parallel

hero, who addresses [Stephan Kovalski](#) as ‘Stephan Big Brother’. Non-Catholic Christian priests who are not deferential towards Kovalski are portrayed as corpulent, callous and heartless.

Landowners in Calcutta are repeatedly referred to as ‘fat Bengali landlords’. The only Bengali who is good has ‘a job as an instructor in one of Mother Teresa’s training centres for handicapped children.’⁹ I would like to know where such a training centre is. Calcuttans are so evil that they even question Mother Teresa about her accounts. These were in the early days (the 1950s) when she used to get a grant from the government towards her home for the dying and her orphanage: ‘. . .a meeting was held in the government building. A dozen bureaucrats in dhotis [typical Bengali attire] examined the nun’s account books. They asked questions, quibbled over details and criticised.’¹⁰ Apparently, what the government was recommending was that she spend a higher sum of money on her orphans than she did. Mother was outraged: ‘ ‘You think you can demand that I spend thirty-three rupees on the children you sponsor,’ she exclaimed indignantly, and she left the room.’¹¹

Lapierre tells the story of a fictional leper woman called Meeta, who is beaten by Calcuttans and sold to a brothel but then rescued by Mother Teresa’s order.¹² Lapierre constantly calls Calcutta ‘the inhuman city’, ‘damned city’, ‘an ogress’ etc. Mother Teresa herself is quoted as saying, ‘In this city even the dogs are treated better than human beings.’¹³ Though this is true of all Indian cities Calcutta is more tolerant of the poor than are others. Indeed, all the destitute in the book are migrants who fled their native states.

The other main character within the book, Max Loeb, a surgeon in Florida, living in ‘a paradise like Miami’¹⁴ reads about Kovalski’s noble work in Calcutta and decides to fly out there on a whim. He is duly warned by his multi-millionaire father, whose ‘dislike [for India] turned into revulsion when it came to Calcutta, a city synonymous. . . with misery, beggars, and people dying on the city’s pavements.’¹⁵ Nonetheless, Dr [Loeb](#) arrives in Calcutta, shacks up in the [City of Joy](#), and being the ‘great white daktar [doctor]’¹⁶ soon finds himself treating ‘cancer, severe heart conditions, mad men, blind men, the mute, the paralysed, the deformed’, not to mention armies of lepers. That he was a super specialist thoracic

surgeon back in Miami is only small detail, as primitive Calcuttans must have primitive ailments.

Lapierre's City of Joy slum has its own leper colony, although the real [Pilkhana slum](#) has no such. [Kovalski](#) wondered as he looked at the lepers, 'Were those skeletons consumed with gangrene, whose closed eyes were covered with mushrooms, really human beings? Those breathing corpses whose crackled skin oozed out a yellowish liquid? The sight was nothing in comparison with the stench.'¹⁷

Lapierre, like Mother Teresa is as much obsessed with foetuses as he is with leprosy. Calcutta, being godless and depraved, does a flourishing trade in human foetuses. Lapierre tells us that touts in Calcutta pay poor women to have abortions so that 'the embryos and foetuses [may be used] either for scientific work or in the manufacture of rejuvenating products for a clientele of privileged people in specialised establishments in Europe and America.' He informs us that the foetuses leave Calcutta 'for Europe or the USA, via Moscow on the Soviet airline, [Aeroflot's](#) regular flight'.¹⁸ So Lapierre contradicts Mother Teresa's famous statement: 'Among the very poor women in Calcutta, I do not know of one, a single one, who has had an abortion.' He describes a heart-rending scene where a woman who is seven months pregnant, decides to sell her foetus for Rs 2000, and dies in the process. The person arranging the transaction, a middle-aged Muslim woman, a Calcuttan to boot, is shown snatching the money away from her fingers after she dies. I am not claiming that the underworld in Calcutta is morally above a trade in foetuses, but it simply does not happen. It is technically not possible to put foetuses in glass jars and send them as cargo in normal crates via Moscow on Aeroflot, and have meaningful use out of them at the other end.

There is a whole chapter in the book devoted to Mother Teresa. She is portrayed as inhabiting a detached, elevated world. Lapierre tells blatant lies about her Home for the Dying, such as 'There is no door in the imposing sculpted porch. Anyone can enter at any time.'¹⁹ There is no sculpted porch, and the small door is always kept tightly shut. Gatekeeper Anthony regularly was seen during Mother's lifetime, beating away the poor with a stick. Mother Teresa is described as despatching 'commandoes of Indian Sisters out into the city, their mission being to open seven more dispensaries. One of them set herself up in the slum where Mother Teresa had first tended the poor. Lepers flocked there in hordes.'²⁰ Explaining why

this dispensary no longer exists, Lapierre does the obvious: he blames Calcuttans for being unsympathetic to suffering. It was they who forced her to close it down, he says. In any case, Mother Teresa never had seven dispensaries in Calcutta.

According to Lapierre, after most of her dispensaries were closed down, Mother Teresa decided that 'Several small white vans bearing the symbol of the Missionaries of Charity would one day patrol the enormous city to bring treatment into the most neglected areas.'²¹ This never happened.

Throughout the book, Lapierre makes jibes at Calcutta's main business community, the Marwaris, who also happen to be orthodox Hindus. Hasari Pal, the rickshaw puller, describes an encounter with a Marwari passenger thus: 'He was a Marwari. . . In the absence of a whip, he bombarded my ribs with kicks that were particularly painful because he was wearing slippers with hard pointed toes.'²² A physically impossible act to perform in a moving rickshaw.

An angry and outraged Lapierre also pours scorn on one of India's biggest tycoons, the late [G.D. Birla](#) (a Marwari): '. . .as fat as G.D. Birla, Calcutta's celebrated multimillionaire.'²³ But Mother Teresa was constantly beholden to the Birla family. The [Birla Heart Institute](#) not only saved her life more than once, it also did it for free. Her first trip abroad in 1960 was funded by the Birlas. G.D. Birla was the biggest financial benefactor of Gandhi in his freedom movement. He also helped [Tagore](#) found his university.

Lapierre ridicules the lavishness of Calcutta's [Belle Vue Clinic](#), owned by the Birlas. What he does not tell us is how many scans (gratis of course) Mother Teresa had there. One of her most memorable pictures from 1996 was one where she was being transported, with oxygen prongs in her nostrils, from [Woodlands Clinic](#) to Belle Vue for a specialised scan. This was the time that a section of Catholic top brass said she was possessed by the Devil and needed to be exorcised.

'Stephan Big Brother' contracts [cholera](#) while saving Calcutta and friends beg him to go to the Belle Vue. The French consul even agrees to fund his stay. But he refuses, opting instead to go to a diabolical 'hospital for everybody'. Thankfully, the flesh and blood Mother Teresa had more sense than our fictional and fictitious saviours.

The poor are shown as wretched but holy: 'they may not have anything to eat, but they've managed to get hold of bread and wine for the

Eucharist'. He [Stephan] thought of the first Christians of Rome's catacombs.'²⁴ Wine is an utterly unknown entity in Indian slums, even amongst Christians.

A major theme in Lapierre's book is Calcutta's wickedness and evil. It charts the grim actions of a mafia family who are also devout Hindus. Indeed, virtually the only rule shown to exist in Calcutta is the rule of the mafia: they meticulously bisect a girl's face from ear to ear for defying the clan godfather, a scene touchingly reproduced in the film. Lapierre has contradicted himself here, as elsewhere he said: 'Fear is by and large a stranger to Calcutta's streets. A young girl can walk along. . . any of the main thoroughfares in the middle of the night without the slightest fear of being attacked.'²⁵ Unfortunately this is not true.

In case Westerners going to Calcutta ever wondered why, contrary to the publicity, Mother Teresa was so low profile in the city, Lapierre has a simple explanation. It is due to the innate wickedness of the citizens who did not let her blossom. He describes an incident where, many years back, Mother Teresa was turned away by some people when she wanted to start a small home for destitute in the middle of a residential area. There was violence: 'A wall was erected to block Mother Teresa and the Sisters. . . When supporters of Mother Teresa's work tried to remove the barrier, there were beatings.' Mother was very upset; she said, 'I am sorry for you people. Later on you will regret it.' '. . .One could picture her shaking the dust of that locality from her sandals.'²⁶

An almighty fight breaks out between the Calcutta mafia and the good slum dwellers who want a leper clinic: '[Kovalski] himself went out down to Mother Teresa's house to collect three Sisters who were to nurse the lepers.' In the thickness of the bloody and holy battle, 'at Kovalski's side, Mother Teresa's Sisters began to recite the rosary aloud.' Scenes are described where a 'child of four or five' has his hand blown away, and a 'teenage boy plunge[s] a knife into a woman's stomach.'²⁷ Needless to say, no battle has ever been waged in Calcutta over the founding of a leper colony involving Teresa's Sisters or anyone else. Frustrated that the leper colony could not be built, Kovalski approached Mother Teresa for a 'leper bus' which she readily agreed to, organising a bus to be sent every Wednesday to the City of Joy and bring with it three of her Sisters. Sadly, in real life, no regular bus comes to Pilkhana or to any other slum in Calcutta.

There are other examples in the book of Indians stopping generous Westerners from changing their wretched lives, such as when [Max Loeb's](#) father arrives from Miami wishing to buy the City of Joy slum and convert it into a modern housing estate, Max points out that, alas, in India, foreign nationals are not allowed to do such noble things.

Calcutta, says Lapierre, is 'a city which, according to connoisseurs of such matters, practised a multitude of rackets with a degree of art and imagination that would turn Naples, Marseilles or New York green with envy.' It is not surprising therefore, that Calcutta's biggest charity the [Ramakrishna Mission](#), is a racket. In the aftermath of a massive cyclone that he describes, monks from that charity arrived in the stricken areas. Parents entrusted their little children to these monks to take them away and look after. They never saw their children again, as 'these purported monks were pimps'.²⁸ With a clever play of words, Lapierre covered his legal tracks well here, as he says, 'The people in question wore the ochre robes of the monks belonging to the mission of Ramakrishna, the Bengali saint who in the last century preached mutual aid and love between Hindus and other communities.'³² His defence was that he meant these people were only masquerading as Hindu monks. This is the depth to which Mother Teresa's friends would stoop, in order to revile anything decent about Calcutta.

I am not claiming that Hindu monks are above procuring children for prostitution, but there is no basis in reality that [Ramakrishna Mission](#) monks were ever involved in such a scandal. The low slander against Ramakrishna Mission was done with Vatican sanction.

The Ramakrishna Mission did protest and got a two-page grovelling letter of apology from Lapierre. He said the usual things, that is, how much he respected Ramakrishna and [Vivekananda](#), and how much he valued the work of the Mission. He also had the temerity to enclose a cheque for Rs 100,000, which was returned.

The work of Ramakrishna Mission and the other Hindu charity [Bharat Sevashram Sangha](#), particularly during disasters, had always irked Mother Teresa and her friends, especially as MC are rarely seen in crises in Calcutta. Interestingly, in Lapierre's description of the mammoth relief operations following the cyclone he describes in his book, MC do not make any appearance.

I hope both Lapierre and Mother Teresa were aware, that despite its tiny size in India, when it came to child sex abuse, it is the Catholic Church which led even in that country. They must have known of the doings of Freddie Peat, the Catholic priest who kept a ‘pornographic farm’ in Goa, where 2,500 children had been ritualistically abused and videoed, some of them as young as a year old.

The *City of Joy* has sold eight million copies. Eloquently written, it has influenced the thinking of many, many more. People all over the world for generations to come will continue to learn about Calcutta from this book.

The book and the film after it, has dealt a mortal blow to Calcutta’s reputation. Pernicious and divisive, they reviled everything Calcutta and West Bengal ever stood for. It is also an attack on Hinduism sanctioned at the highest level of the Vatican soon after [John Paul II](#) became pope. In the 1980s the Vatican realised books on Mother Teresa and her fictitious activities never sold well among general public, hence a master storyteller was called upon to weave a grotesque tale.

The title is a direct lift from St. Augustine’s *City of God*, and the book was translated from the original French to English by [Kathryn Spink](#), who describes Mother Teresa as her ‘friend and mentor for many years’ (personal communication) and has written three biographies of her (the last being the only posthumous one to be authorised).

[Lapierre](#) is indeed a special person in having his book emblazoned by a blurb from [Pope John Paul II](#) himself. Can we imagine the supreme head of a religious order, such as Ayatollah Khomeini or the Dalai Lama lending a blurb to a work of fiction? Pope John Paul II called *The City of Joy* ‘A lesson of hope and faith for the world’ (back cover blurb). But that is not all. Mother Teresa herself, despite the book containing a passage where the good ‘Dr Max Big Brother’ is shown fornicating, called the book ‘A magnificent homage. . .’²⁹ She could be forgiven, as the book gives her magnificent publicity – something she adored: ‘Bless you Calcutta, for in your wretchedness, you have given birth to saints’: [Kovalski’s](#) thoughts after a meeting with her.³⁰

The only other book she publicly endorsed was *Letters to Gabriel*, by [Karen Santorum](#), wife of the fiercely anti-abortion, anti-contraception, misogynistic pro-gun Republican Senator Rick Santorum. Even when seriously ill in 1996, she wrote the foreword for this anti-abortion treatise.

It is a sad commentary on Calcuttans' regard for their own city's esteem that the Mayor of Calcutta at the time (1985–90) [Kamal Basu](#) did not read the book until 1990, five years after it was published. It is unfortunate, to say the least, that a book which was, indeed still is, a raging international controversy on their city had not been read by the erstwhile mayor or most of the citizens. Basu told me³¹ that he had presumed that the title was a complimentary one and was a homage to the city. Many, if not most, Calcuttans still think that! He said Lapierre used to 'shadow me and my wife, and once I remember him sitting beside her at Governor's House, I presume he had cadged an invitation from the French Consul, and trying to oil his way into our good books.' Basu said he remembers Lapierre 'pressurising' the then Corporation Commissioner R.K. Prassanna to award him a civic reception. Finally Basu was alerted to the derogatory nature of the book 'by some of my friends' and he managed to read 'excerpts while I was away in Washington'.

In the film, the shooting of which has been etched forever in the histories of Calcutta and Hollywood, the Kovalski character was changed into a woman ([Pauline Collins](#)), and [Max Loeb](#) was played by [Patrick Swayze](#). When Swayze and the director, [Roland Joffé](#) (not surprisingly, a 'muscular' Christian) along with the cast and crew, arrived in Calcutta in February 1991, they were expecting a city as described in the book: primitive and wailing, and supine in disbelief that the gods had arrived from the heavens. But they got a rude shock. *The Sunday Times* (London), reporting under the headline 'Film Turns Calcutta into City of Hate' said, '. . .when Hollywood came to Calcutta recently to start shooting a movie about the slums, the producers had little reason to expect anything other than a red carpet welcome. Instead, they are facing a battle worthy of any celluloid drama.' In a rare confessional, the newspaper also said, '. . .Calcutta is a cultural beacon misrepresented by the Western media's obsession with Mother Teresa. . .'^{32a}

Large sections of the population rose up in protest against the depiction of their city. Filming was held up almost every day due to picketing, barricades and brickbats being thrown into the sets. A Calcutta actor, [Biplab Chatterjee](#), due to play a major supporting role resigned in protest at the depiction of his city.

The producers employed an army of thugs conscripted from the ranks of the city's underclass. Things took a serious turn when a young journalist

called [Saumitra Ghosh](#) died, allegedly after being beaten up by bouncers. Roland Joffé, who I believe is British, sought diplomatic intervention from the British Deputy High Commissioner, [Anthony Abbott](#). The West Bengal government which was, in principle, against the film, but which would not stop it on account of free speech, found itself in a difficult situation.

It being Calcutta, the city soon got divided along political lines, with the Left opposing the filming and [Rajiv Gandhi's](#) Congress supporting it. The producers also distributed cash like confetti and divided the Calcutta intelligentsia. [Sunil Ganguly](#), a popular Bengali writer and self-styled intellectual, was appointed by Joffé as a consultant for a fee.

Filming did proceed, amidst tight security, and in due course the film was made. Calcuttans managed to force the producers to cut 25 scenes, and probably thereby the film has not plumbed the same depths as the book did. But no Calcutta slum was slum enough for the film, and so a particularly odious, purpose-built slum was erected by Hollywood for the shoot. [Nick Alder](#), of *Aliens* and *Star Wars* trilogy fame, was roped in to produce special effects of squalor and horror. Music was recorded in [Rome](#).

While filming was proceeding among disruption and protests, in an act of unsurpassed insensitivity and insult, [Joffé](#) went to meet Satyajit Ray, who was the city's ultimate cultural icon at the time, in order to get his blessings, in essence to buy him off with Hollywood cash. The uncomfortable meeting is recorded by Joffé with thinly veiled derogatory remarks about Ray:

I sit rather uncomfortably in a much lower chair to his left, looking up at him. . . Ray has just announced that only a Calcuttan, or at least an Indian, can make a film about Calcutta. Further it is quite impossible, he says, for a low-caste farmer to form any kind of relationship with a European. . . but my conclusions were different from Ray's. . . I tell this to Ray, who nods dismissively and says, 'Also your film is about lepers. I see no lepers on the streets of the city.' This is a bit of a stunner. . . Later, after our pleasantries have been exchanged, Ray says ominously, 'You won't be able to shoot on the streets of Calcutta, you know. It can't be done. Even I have extreme difficulty.' As I groped down the murky stairwell, it seemed pretty clear to me that Ray doesn't much want the film to be made. The question is, why not?³³

Why not, indeed! How dare a brown-skinned man, and a Calcuttan to boot, be protective about the honour of his birthplace! And how dare he reject the advances of a sahib from Hollywood.

Joffé claimed to know Calcutta more in a week than people who had lived there for generations. He was hence so stunned about Ray's comment about lepers. There are a dozen or so migrant lepers in the city centre who flock around and beg near the hostels where Mother Teresa's volunteers tend to shack up. They also trail Westerners, begging for money. A native Calcuttan is unlikely to come across a leper in the course of their daily routine. But [Lapierre's](#) book and Joffé's film depict the city as being overrun with every description of lepers: a Biblical scenario.

I find Joffé's tendentious passage about Ray deeply offensive. The implicit menace in his depiction of Ray would upset anybody who had any knowledge of him. He was a deeply cultured man whose placidity and patience were legendary. He was never known even to raise his voice.

A vivid account (giving both sides of the argument) of Calcutta's vain struggle against the might of Hollywood and the Vatican during the making of the film *City of Joy* can be seen in the hour-long documentary (called *Phantom of Joy*) which was commissioned by Channel 4. I believe the film was shown on British television in late 1991.

Calcutta lost the battle of *City of Joy*, just as it has lost the battles against all the slanders it has had to endure over the last seven decades. I blame Indians' lack of self-esteem and belief in themselves. There is an innate reluctance to rise up against the white man. Majority of educated Calcuttans have not read the book and believe 'City of Joy' is a compliment, as do advertisers. A sad comment on the judgement and discernment of 'educated' Indians.

Lapierre revived his interest in an epic film on Teresa after a brief respite because the Vatican was egging him on. He was aware of the financial rewards of such a film. He said, 'If the Vatican says it is something which should be done, then why not?' The Vatican continued to endorse him in the project, saying, 'We know [Dominique Lapierre](#) very well indeed. He is a great friend of the Vatican.'³⁴ Unfortunately, the Vatican's great friend, even with the 'living saint' behind him, was not able to summon up enough courage to bring mega-bucks Hollywood back to Calcutta. Moreover, he kept having serious periodic spats with her. She gave permission for the film three times, but revoked it each time. The first

permission (1982) was granted before a notary and two witnesses. This was withdrawn quickly and the second permission was granted on 13 October 1988 in a hand-written letter which Lapierre flourished before journalists. This was withdrawn and a third permission was granted. Over the years, Lapierre kept Teresa abreast of the script in which she took a keen interest. She told him to delete a blatant lie he invented – that she had been beaten up by a Hindu. He toned it down to a stone being thrown at her – even this did not happen.

Shortly after his book *Beyond Love* was published (1991) relationship between the two broke down permanently. It is said that Lapierre portrayed an MC nun (under thin guise) who could be clearly identified in this book but needlessly gave her a murky past (which in real life she did not have). Mother asked his American attorney to get involved at this point and severed all connection with Lapierre. Yet she did not withdraw her endorsement from the book *City of Joy*. She was livid when she found out he was shooting *In the Name of God's Poor* in Sri Lanka shortly before she died but could do little about it.

I have lost count on how many times I wrote to Dominique Lapierre asking for an interview. I wished to ask him about the lies and slanders in his book and also about the money that was being sent by readers of *The City of Joy* to 'Action Aid for the Children of Lepers of Calcutta'. Lapierre and his wife founded this organisation and every copy of his book asks the reader to send money to an address on Avenue Kleber in Paris. Lapierre promises that donations 'go towards supporting a home for 250 children of lepers, in Calcutta'. He also declares that he donates half the royalties from his book to the City of Joy ([Pilkhana slum](#)). I wrote a number of letters to this Paris address but did not receive any reply, despite sending (French) stamped addressed envelopes. I was curious to know about the money that was being sent to this office. I once sent ten dollars in cash to this address and also asked for a receipt; the money never came back neither did any receipt, so obviously the money was going somewhere, but was it going to the poor in Calcutta? After my sixth or seventh letter to Lapierre, I gave up and wrote to his English translator [Kathryn Spink](#), who has the rare distinction of being the author of three biographies of Mother Teresa. She replied that she had forwarded my letter to him and that she was 'sure you will now receive a response to your query. . .' ³⁵ I am still waiting.

At the time of Mother Teresa's death Lapierre was in Calcutta for some undisclosed reason. Some say he was filming a feature or a documentary. He was hiding in the Grand Hotel and there were strict instructions to hotel staff not to divulge any information about him. However, [Alakananda Bandopadhyay](#), a journalist from the magazine [Anandalok](#) waited outside the hotel for the best part of two days and finally managed to catch up with him. She challenged him that there were doubts about his assertions that he had lived in [Pilkhana slum](#) for two months before he wrote his book. She asked if he could have gathered his information from other sources, to which he replied, 'Maybe.' She also asked him why his hero, the American Max, was oblivious to exploitations in his own country, and why he had to be in Calcutta to be the ultimate black man's saviour, to which his replies were fudged.³⁶ It has to be said about Lapierre that he makes no apologies for portraying the white Catholic as the supremely superior group, who have the (divine) right to determine the lives and values of all others.

Some cynics say that the bust-up between Teresa and Lapierre was entirely to do with money and royalty. He himself never disclosed any rift; indeed, after her death he told Calcutta media that he had lost his mother.

In both the book and the film *City of Joy*, the main Indian character is Hasari Pal, a rickshaw puller. Calcutta has the dubious distinction of being the only city in the world to retain hand-pulled [rickshaws](#), which the British introduced via [China](#) in the 1930s. On 15 July 1996, West Bengal's Minister for Transport [Subhash Chakraborty](#) announced at a meeting organised by Automobile Association that, as from 1 January 1997, hand-pulled rickshaws would be banned from the city, and that the pullers would be asked to return to Bihar, their home-state. He said that the decision had nothing to do with ethics or conscience, but was a drastic effort to boost the city's abysmal traffic speed.

Chakraborty's comments caused a small but very significant stir in international media. The same journalists who were continually berating Calcutta and its rulers and citizens for the abominable practice of the rickshaw, and who can blame them for that, were now tearing their hearts out, grieving over the pullers' fate.

In the midst of all this, Mother Teresa, who would travel thousands of miles to prevent a single abortion, remained silent. Western journalists never remarked on the anomaly that, when desperately poor men, along

with their children, were pushed towards starvation in the purported city of Mother Teresa, she never entered into the equation. Also surprising was the silence of, Lapierre, for here is a man who has repeatedly shamed Calcutta, not entirely wrongly, for the practice of the human rickshaw. He had for years postured as the pullers' greatest champion and, in the process, amassed a very substantial fortune from the book and film about them. He once said that he was so moved by their misery, that as a permanent reminder of it, he always carried with him, wherever he went, the brass bell of a Calcutta rickshaw-wallah. In his book he almost exhorts the pullers to rise against Calcuttans in a bloody revolution, and sympathetically describes a fictitious episode where they fight a violent battle against the authorities. A man called Scarface sets himself on fire, and a policeman has his eyeball punctured by nail. But at the pullers' hour of peril he did not offer any assistance, financial or otherwise. Thankfully, he never set up any relief funds for them at Avenue Kléber.

But hand-pulled rickshaws exist to this day in Calcutta, as they have solid political and union clouts. From time to time tentative attempts are made to ban them but they peter out soon.

The Swiss Catholic priest Gaston Dayanand, who is very likely Lapierre's Kovaski, runs ICOD (Inter-Religious Centre of Development) near Calcutta. ICOD houses 250 poor women. Around 2007, a baby was born to a woman living there. Dayanand and his female assistant told the woman that the baby had developed jaundice and had to have special treatment at a city hospital. The baby girl vanished and the mother was told she had died. But she was sold to a childless couple for a tidy sum. This came to light through an employee of ICOD, who informed the mother. Mayhem ensued; villagers who had numerous grudges against ICOD barricaded the centre and threatened to beat up officials. Police got involved. There were angry posters and leaflets in the area. But money triumphed – the biological mother never saw her daughter again. [Lapierre](#) was fully aware of the situation, for he was the main funder of ICOD till 2012. Even now ICOD's website is replete with photos of the Lapierre couple. On 10 June 2012, Lapierre had a fall in his village in France and suffered serious brain damage and went on life-support machine.

When he last visited Calcutta (2008) villagers picketed his car and told him about goings-on at ICOD, but he did nothing. It is alleged by villagers that the handicapped girls are regularly compromised at the centre with full

knowledge of 'Kovalski'. I emailed ICOD mentioning the rumours that been going around for many years about the missing baby and wanted their side of the story. I received a reply from 'Kovalski' himself: 'Yes there have been a lot of rumours but since several years there is complete peace all around.' He also said because of an on-going police case the matter was *sub judice* (even in 2015) so he could say no more.

Lapierre (born 1931) remains unwell. But these days his family issues no statements about his condition. His wife used to ask for prayers for his recovery to be held at Mother Teresa's grave but has not done so for some time. He is not missed in Calcutta.

9

Mother Teresa's Accounts

This chapter is brief, because Mother Teresa's order does not keep any public accounts, except in Britain, where the laws are strict, and do not consider saints beyond their reach.

Mother Teresa once said to *Hello!* magazine, describing her Calcutta operations, 'We spend Rs 100,000 every month on rice alone. The money is mostly made up of small donations rather than large sums . . . What is so beautiful is that everyone gives – Hindus, Muslims, Christians. It's like the birds and the flowers; money just comes to us quite naturally. . . We declare everything we get to the government. It's better that way because it means we have nothing to hide!'¹

The last sentence is a clever double-speak and not quite true. Mother Teresa never published her accounts despite numerous requests from her friends and foes to do so. In India, charities are not obliged to publish accounts, but I do not know of another one which does not. It has been said repeatedly that MC surely have something to hide, for them to be so secretive. That may or may not be true. She declared as much as she had to relevant government departments, in the knowledge that the public would not have access to other accounts.

It has always seemed to me that sheer arrogance stopped Mother from publishing her accounts. She sincerely believed that she was above the law

as she was ‘doing it for Jesus’. She said many times, ‘If God wants me to do something, he gives me the money. . . Money; I don’t think about it. It always comes. The Lord sends it. . .’

As Mother’s biggest backers were corrupt financiers and dubious dictators, the sceptic might argue that she was applying divinity to the corrupt. She was loyal to her backers. She never revealed their identities. She realised that the best way to keep the donors’ identities secret was to say that the money was coming ‘from God himself’ rather than specify names. Surely nobody would dream of further quizzing the great Teresa, and she knew that.

By law, all Indian charities must send their accounts of their foreign earnings to the Ministry of Home Affairs in Delhi. I have obtained information about the Missionaries of Charity accounts via [Account Aid India](#), a chartered accountancy firm which deals with charities particularly, and which obtains and disseminates information about charities’ monetary activities, especially related to foreign earnings.

Officially, the Missionaries of Charity are not in the major league of receivers of foreign donations amongst registered charities in India. In most years they do not even feature in the top ten. Their Indian accounts show that they received from abroad Rs 292 (about \$7) million in 1998–99, Rs 173 (about \$4) million in 1997–98 and Rs 148 (\$3.5) million in 1996–97.

The order’s main bank is the ‘[Vatican bank](#)’, formally known as the Institute for Religious Works (IOR). Mother’s banking habits remained a secret until the IOR became involved in a major scandal in 1981–82.

In 1981, Mother Teresa’s own order became the subject of investigations by Italian authorities for currency irregularities. They were one of only 15 organisations belonging to the Vatican Bank to be investigated. The investigations were to do with serious irregularities involving conversion of foreign currency into lire, or conversion into another currency, bypassing the lire. Some people might call it money laundering. Indeed, on 12 May 1981 an unnamed woman, whose husband was a high-ranking Vatican employee, was arrested at [Rome](#) airport with a large amount of cash on her.

Mother Teresa was personally investigated along with 74 others, but charges against her were ultimately dropped. Nothing is known of the details of the investigations, and Mother Teresa was exempted from appearing personally. In any case, the Vatican Bank does not come under

Italian jurisdiction, hence the probe became a face saving exercise for both [Rome](#) and the Vatican. Some magistrates in Italy had been waiting for the opportunity to investigate the secretive IOR but there was little enthusiasm in most influential quarters for a serious probe. Mother Teresa's presence amongst the list of suspects made it almost impossible for a serious investigation to take place. The Vatican breathed a sigh of relief. Journalists, usually keen to rake mud when there is none, showed no interest in finding out more. Media reports at the time were entirely critical of Italian authorities for daring to question the Saint of the Gutters. I would strongly suggest that now is the time the investigations were re-opened and the findings made public.

A further scandal occurred with another bank managing MC accounts. The year after the Vatican bank 'probe', in June 1982, the President of [Banco Ambrosiano](#) of Milan, [Roberto Calvi](#), known in Catholic circles as 'God's banker' for his close ties with the Vatican, was found hanging from Blackfriars Bridge in London. His family always insisted that he was murdered, although initially a 'suicide' verdict was given. Fifteen years later, a murder investigation was opened into the case and the body was exhumed.

Shortly before he was murdered, Calvi, who had been fined \$12 million (in 1981) and sentenced to four years in prison for currency fraud, had received official 'letters of patronage' from Archbishop Marcinkus, President of the Vatican bank.

According to the British Catholic weekly [The Universe](#), the Vatican bank held a 'significant stake' in the collapsed Banco Ambrosiano. It also conceded, 'Mafia supergrasses have said Calvi was killed because he knew too much about Mafia money laundering schemes and its links to the Vatican.'²

Many respectable Catholic charities withdrew their accounts from the Vatican bank after its Mafia links became apparent, but not so MC. Why Mother Teresa of Calcutta decided to keep her money with the scandal ridden Vatican bank was for her to say. She might not have liked the safe but sloth Indian banking system, but there are excellent foreign banks in Calcutta. Indeed, MC do maintain a small account with the Standard Chartered Bank.

Archbishop Marcinkus, who was synonymous with the [Vatican Bank](#) during his lifetime was a consummate criminal who was involved in every

financial scandal imaginable and also possibly in at least three murders. This man was [Pope \(Saint\) John Paul II's](#) personal friend and had close rapport with Mother Teresa. The late Pope often used to tell a story of Mother suddenly arriving at Vatican Bank demanding to see Marcinkus to ask him for \$1 million.³

From time to time, both religious and secular media take various religious organisations to task for accepting money from dubious sources such as arms manufacturers. But no journalist ever dared ask Mother Teresa where her money came from, or relevant questions such as how much she received from the [Duvalier family](#) of [Haiti](#). After a closed-door meeting with Michèle Duvalier in Haiti, Mother gave her the following certificate:

Madame President is someone who feels, who knows, who wishes to demonstrate her love not only by words, but also by concrete and tangible actions. Madame President, the country vibrates with your life work. . . I have never seen the poor people so familiar with their head of state as they were with her. It was a beautiful lesson for me.⁴

Shortly afterwards, the Duvaliers were forced to flee Haiti in the middle of the night, because the poor finally had enough and were out to lynch their masters. The Duvaliers devised creative ways to torture their subjects, such as burning them alive or having them mauled by hungry dogs. They were, however, fervently antiabortion Catholics. It is known that the family regularly paid into MC coffers but the amounts remain secret. Michèle's family amassed a large part of their wealth from drug trafficking on Air Haiti planes.

Mother's special relationship with [Charles Keating](#), one of history's biggest swindlers, and the biggest thief (until then) in the history of the United States, is well known. It is not known how much Mother really got from Keating, (although she did not deny that she received at least \$1,250,000) but it is known that he stole (at least) \$253 million, which were the moneys of small investors. Keating also gave Mother the free use of his personal jet and, in return, he received her blessings and a personalised crucifix, which he carried everywhere. Most people believe Keating gave her much more than the declared \$1.25 million.

In January 1992, when Keating's fraud trial was still going on in a [Los Angeles](#) court, he got more back from his special friend. She wrote a letter

to the trial judge Lance Ito (who later became a household name for sitting at the O.J. Simpson trial):

Dear Honourable Lance Ito,

We do not mix up in Business or Politics or courts. . . I do not know anything about Mr Charles Keating's work or his business or the matters you are dealing with. . .

I only know that he has always been kind and generous to God's poor, and always ready to help whenever there was a need. Whenever someone asks me to speak to a trial judge, I always tell them the same thing. I ask them to pray, to look into their heart, and to do what Jesus would do in that circumstance. And that is what is I am asking of you, your Honour.

My gratitude to you is my prayer for you, and your work, your family and the people you are dealing with.

God Bless You

M. Teresa, MC.⁵

After Keating's conviction and imprisonment, [Paul W. Turley](#), the then Deputy District Attorney of Los Angeles County wrote the following letter to Mother Teresa:

Dear Mother Teresa,

. . .The victims of Mr Keating's fraud come from a wide spectrum of society. Some were wealthy and well educated. Most were people of modest means and unfamiliar with high finance. One was, indeed a poor carpenter who did not speak English and had his life's savings stolen by Mr Keating's fraud.

The Biblical slogan of your organisation is 'As long as you did it to one of My least brethren. You did it to Me.' The 'least' of the brethren are among those whom Mr Keating fleeced without flinching. . . It is not uncommon for 'con' men to be generous with family, friends and charities. . . No church, no charity, no organisation should allow itself to be used as salve for the conscience of the criminal.

You urge Judge Ito to look into his heart – as he sentences [Charles Keating](#) – and do what Jesus would do. I submit the same challenge

to you. Ask yourself what Jesus would do if given the fruits of a crime; what Jesus would do if he were in possession of money that had been stolen. . .

I submit that Jesus would promptly and unhesitatingly return the stolen property to its rightful owners. You should do the same. You have been given money by Mr Keating that he has been convicted of stealing by fraud. Do not permit him the 'indulgence' he desires. Do not keep the money. Return it to those who worked for it and earned it!

If you contact me I will put you in direct contact with the rightful owners of the property now in your possession.

Sincerely

[Paul W. Turley](#)⁶

This is the only occasion that Mother Teresa ever wrote to a judge. She was urged many times to use her influence in human rights violation cases, but she always maintained that she steered clear of politics and matters not directly connected with Jesus. Judge Turley never received a reply to his letter. Giving back even part of the stolen money was beyond the wildest nightmare of the 'living saint'. Even much-maligned politicians return donations when it comes to light that the money was stolen or obtained dubiously.

That sinners have presumed that giving to Mother Teresa would somehow absolve or reduce their sins helped her through the years. In 2001 it came to light that former FBI agent and KGB spy [Robert Hanssen](#), a devout Catholic, who received at least £1.4 million from the KGB, gave a large part of his proceeds to Mother Teresa. He was prompted to do so by his priest Robert Bucciarelli.⁷ Available records do not declare this donation.

It has been said by Mother's apologists that, when it comes to money and the 'living saint', the end justified the means. But what if the means is murky and has pauperised many an illiterate carpenter? The media are silent on this. What about the end though? Most, if not all of the money would be spent on religious activities.

Mother's attitude to money received in donation is exemplified by [Muggeridge's](#) memorable statement:

Despite this chronic financial stringency of the Missionaries of Charity [he was talking of the early days here], when I was instrumental in steering a few hundred pounds [a considerable sum in the late 1960s] in Mother Teresa's direction, she astonished, and I must say enchanted, me by expending it on the chalice and ciborium for her new novice.⁸

Nothing is known as to what happens to the endless donations and prize moneys Mother received. After her Nobel ceremony in 1979, she said that she would put her \$160,000 or so (which included \$110,000 prize money) towards good work in Calcutta. We have not seen the results. Between 1979 and her death, the order built their Tangra home for the mentally ill destitute in Calcutta; the building was donated (built for her) by a local businessman Bimal Jain. Mother did not even pay for the pumping house for the home that was donated by another businessman, Navin Khilani. The land was given rent-free by the government. Mother told Sudeb [Roy Chaudhuri](#), a Calcutta journalist, shortly before she left for [Oslo](#) to get her Nobel, 'I shall spend this [Nobel] money for lepers and for housing for the poor.'⁹

We have not seen any housing for the poor except for 50 Catholic families in Hatgachia, and no new leprosy facilities were built. In June 1981, Mother Teresa got the Discovery Medal of Marquette University (a Jesuit institution) in Milwaukee, which came with a public donation of \$150,000. There is no documentation of a single cent of that money coming to India. In June 1982, a Calcutta-born woman left Mother Teresa \$165,000 in her will in Toronto, even that money did not come to Calcutta. In the same month the people of Alberta, Canada gave her a donation of \$925,000, which made no impact in Calcutta. What happened to the \$50,000 [Yasser Arafat](#) gave her when he came to Calcutta in 1990? We will never know.

The amounts Mother received in the United States or elsewhere, I did not expect to travel to Calcutta, although most of the donors harbour the illusion that they would. In the early millennium, one source of income that the Missionaries of Charity enjoyed in the 1960s and 70s dried up. The unofficial adoption 'fee' they used to charge previously had to be reappraised, because of new Indian government rules on adoption. Previously they were quite open about placing their children with Catholic families, often in exchange for large donations. In 1967, the accounts of 'Mother Teresa Committee', a UK registered fund raising vehicle for the

Missionaries of Charity, showed £1,444 collected towards 'Adoption Fees Orphans'. Presently, asking for money in exchange of adoption has been made difficult, but donations from adopting couples remain a large source of income for the organisation.

WIDESPREAD SALE OF 'ORPHAN' CHILDREN

In 1980 (a year after Mother's Nobel) MC falsified the documents of 7-year-old Sonaton Dhar and sold him to a Belgian Catholic couple for Rs 125,000 (\$16,000). Sonaton, his ailing mother and two sisters had been given shelter at [Prem Dan](#) – this was not the norm, but was done so the children could be trafficked. The mother died (possibly allowed to die). All three children were then shown as 'orphans' and sold to Belgian Catholics. Sonaton's father was then alive, and so were his grand-mother and older sister Marani. From 1993 onwards, Sonaton Pauwels, as he now is, has been coming to Calcutta (made a dozen trips till 2002) to find Marani, who was too old to be trafficked and was living with their father and grand-mother. He is convinced that Marani is alive. He has not found her yet. He went to Prem Dan many times but was told by nuns to forget his past and move on. In 2002 some local journalists took him to MC orphanage where his papers with photo were found but all data were falsified. He is shown as an 'orphan' and a statement shows that his grandmother gave him over for adoption. This was in direct contradiction to Indian law. But most importantly, his grandmother did not want him adopted, nor did his father. Sonaton remembers his grandmother visiting him daily at [Prem Dan](#) but not allowed in – he used to meet her at the iron gate. His grandmother's 'consent' is a forgery.

In 2002, Anilabha Chattopadhyay, one of the reporters who made a documentary on the case, went to Dr Kunal De, a prominent member of West Bengal's Juvenile Justice Board, to ask his opinion on the Pauwels case. The interview was recorded for television. Dr De said, according to Indian law, grand-mothers could not give permission for adoption. Dr De implied, as clearly as he could (with his head turned away from camera) that this was a case of trafficking. He also implied, as this was Mother Teresa's order, no charge or action would be forthcoming. When brave journalists of *Khoj Khabar* made the programme, they had presumed that the film would shatter Indians' long-held concepts and 'shake the world'. But they had not reckoned with the spineless craven Indian mentality.

Sonaton found 74 such 'orphans' only in Belgium. That was almost \$1.2 million in 1980 – no record is shown for money obtained from 'orphans' sold by MC.

During December 2002, the Pauwels documentary was shown on a Calcutta TV channel three times (readers can watch it at www.youtube.com/watch?v=pJ1AZSIcswc), and although it is bilingual, Pauwels speaks in English and it is not difficult to grasp the essence.

The scrutiny of Mother's United Kingdom accounts makes for disappointing reading. If we take a random year; 1990, the total floating cash in hand was £2,930,898. It has to be remembered that at the time Mother had eight convents scattered across the UK, of which only one had a ten-bedded woman's home attached to it. The lion's share of the organisation's UK expenditure therefore went on the upkeep of the nuns and Brothers.

In 1990, Calcutta did get some slice of the £2.9 million cake, but we shall not know how much, as a sum of £130,958 was allocated to 'Calcutta, [Rome](#), Mozambique, Holland and Belgium' bundled together. I shall not be surprised if Calcutta got the least share of all these places. 1990 was a particularly lucky year for Calcutta, for in the previous year the same group of five received a sum total of £31,185.

In the same year, nuns and Brothers in Britain spent £6,660 towards travelling. This does not quite fit with 'The Sisters travel as the poor do' image. The following year travelling costs went up to £15,539 when £894 was spent on 'Almsgiving and Clothing'.

In 1991, assets in the UK showed a record annual jump of 56 per cent and reached £4,581,897. But that year 'Calcutta, Rome, Mozambique, Holland and Belgium' received £20,703, a drop of 84 per cent.

In 1995 the order spent £247,586 more than it earned as it transferred the bulk of £1,876,836 to Rome. The year 1995 again saw large 'travelling expenses', just for the UK nuns, consisting of £12,172. (Similarly, in 1993, the bulk of £2.05 million had been transferred to Rome.)

I am happy to say that in 1971, the year of the refugee crisis in Calcutta during the civil war in Bangladesh, £8000 was allocated specially for 'refugee relief'. However, that year saw just £5 allocated for the Home for the Dying in Calcutta, whereas £1,370.15 was spent on airfares.

In 1974, the Missionaries of Charity (UK) received £117,394 in donations. Of that amount, £80,000 (68 per cent) they sent to 'H.Q. Rome'; another £650 was sent to 'Beda College (Religious Training) Rome'. Child welfare in India got £334 and Home for the Dying in Calcutta £45.

That Mother Teresa would use the lion's share of her funds for religious purposes may come as a surprise to her secular admirers, but so far as she was concerned, there never was any question as to which side would win whenever a conflict of interest between religion and charity arose. The £5 and £45 were sent to the Kalighat home only because donors had made a specific request. Otherwise the insult would have been spared.

1975 was Missionaries of Charity's Silver Jubilee year. That year donations in the UK amounted to £148,388. But they sent £170,000, or 114 per cent to 'H.Q. Rome'. The top up was made up with rollover cash from previous years. Home for the Dying (Calcutta) got £238, and 'Education of Sisters' (religious) received £2000. This money was also sent to 'H.Q. Rome'. £4000 was earmarked in this year for 'World Wide Welfare – Children' but the whole sum was sent to 'H.Q. Rome'. As far as I am aware the Vatican does not have any women and children among its citizens. More disturbingly, the 'Child Welfare Scheme' was a sponsorship scheme Mother had set up in the 1970s whereby 'donors agreed to sponsor one of the orphaned or abandoned children in the care of the Sisters.'¹⁰ This is clear evidence that Mother Teresa was collecting money from possibly secular donors for 'child welfare' and sending the money to 'H.Q. Rome'.

In 1975, the Missionaries of Charity in Britain got a bit carried away with their munificence to Rome, and managed to create a budget deficit of £62,284. In 1976, the deficit increased to £75,571, as the transfer to 'H.Q. Rome' also increased to £225,364.

It needs to be remembered that all this money that we know of being sent to 'H.Q. Rome' is from the United Kingdom only. If we take all the moneys collected from all over the Western world and sent to Rome the total would come to many millions. This unknown but substantial sum was (is) being deposited with the [Vatican bank](#) with its dubious connections. The bank's past is equally murky. It helped numerous Nazis hide their plundered money and gold. Some of the gold was stolen; some was extracted from the molten teeth of concentration camp victims.

In February 1985 a solicitors' firm from Plymouth (UK), called Bond Pearce, wrote to the Charities Commission, informing them that one of their

clients intended to leave Mother Teresa ‘a substantial sum of money’. We do not know how much was left, as no accounts have been filed for 1985. Until 2002, accounts are also not available for the years 1986 to 1989. This is in serious breach of British law. Charities Commission could potentially bring action against the order; being Mother Teresa’s company would not spare them in the UK.

1999 and 2000 accounts show something unusual. Two nuns were paid off on leaving the order. In 1999, one Mary Louise Payne was paid £6,129, begging the question, was this precise figure a compensation payment? In 2000, £10,000 was paid to the second, an unnamed nun ‘in recognition of her services as a Sister in the Society.’ Many hundreds of Teresa nuns have left over the decades. I do not know of others receiving substantial golden goodbyes. Nuns have been murdered in Africa and Yemen; residents have been burnt to death in London in the Kilburn home where they came for safety. In 1986, Teresa’s private plane skidded in Dodoma, Africa and killed two boys and a nun. Compensation or reparation payments were not made in these instances. It is quite likely these two were paid off to buy their silence.

[Susan Shields](#), a former Mother Teresa nun who left the order in May 1989 after nearly 10 years, worked mainly in the US. In the US, religious charities are expected but not obliged to declare their accounts publicly so accounts of the order are not open for scrutiny there. Thus, MC have a convenient get-out clause in the US, where they collect their biggest donations. Ms Shields writes about her work with the order:

As a Missionary of Charity, I was assigned to record donations and write thank-you letters. The money arrived at a frantic rate. The mail carrier often delivered the letters in sacks. We wrote receipts for checks of \$50,000 or more on a regular basis. Sometimes a donor would call up and ask if we had received his check, expecting us to remember it because it was so large. How could we say that we could not recall it because we had received so many that were even larger?. . . We received touching letters from people, sometimes apparently poor themselves, who were making sacrifices to send us a little money for the starving people in Africa, the flood victims in Bangladesh, or the poor children in India. Most of the money sat in our bank accounts. The flood of donations was considered to be a

sign of God's approval of Mother Teresa's congregation. We were told by our superiors that we received more gifts than other religious congregations because God was pleased with Mother, and because the Missionaries of Charity were the sisters who were faithful to the true spirit of the religious life. Most of the sisters were not aware how much money the congregation was amassing. One summer the sisters living in the outskirts of [Rome](#) were given more tomatoes than they could distribute. None of their neighbours wanted them because the crop had been so prolific that year. Sisters decided to can the tomatoes rather than let them spoil, but when Mother found out she was very displeased. Storing things showed a lack of trust in Divine Providence. Donations rolled in and were deposited in the bank, but they had very little effect on the lives of the poor we were trying to help. . . The never-ending piles of sheets and towels from our night-shelter for the homeless we washed by hand, too. Our bathing was accomplished with only one bucket of water. Dental and medical check-ups were seen as unnecessary luxury. Mother was very concerned that we preserve our spirit of poverty. Spending money would spoil that spirit of poverty. She seemed obsessed with using only the simplest means for our work. Was this in the best interest of the people we were trying to help, or were we in fact using them as a tool to advance our own 'sanctity'? In [Haiti](#), to keep the spirit of poverty, the sisters reused needles until they became blunt. Seeing the pain caused by blunt needles, some of the volunteers offered to procure more needles, but the sisters refused. . . We begged for food and supplies from local merchants as though we had no resources. On one of the rare occasions we ran out of donated bread, we went begging at the local store. When our request was turned down our superior decreed that the soup kitchen could do without bread for the day. It was not only merchants who were offered the chance to be generous. Airlines were requested to fly sisters and air cargo free of charge. Hospitals and doctors were expected to absorb the costs of medical treatment for the sisters or draw on funds designated for the religious. Workmen were encouraged to labour without payment or work at reduced rates. We relied heavily on volunteers who worked long hours in soup kitchens, shelters and day camps. . . Our Constitution forbade us to

beg for more than we needed, but the millions of dollars accumulating in the bank were treated as if they did not exist. For years I had to write thousands of letters to the donors telling them their entire gift would be used to bring God's loving compassion to the poorest of the poor. . . .I shelved my objections and hoped that one day I would understand why Mother wanted to gather so much money, when she herself taught us that even storing tomato sauce showed lack of trust in Divine Providence.¹¹

Mother Teresa did file her accounts in Calcutta with the relevant authorities, as she was obliged to do so by law. Shortly after her death, I met (on 23 December 1997) her chartered accountant, [S.M. Roy Chaudhuri](#), who was then in his late seventies. Mr Roy Chaudhuri was a charming and honest man, free of guile, a rarity in India today in any walk of life, let alone in accounting. He had been keeping Mother's accounts since 1952. Although not wealthy himself, he had done it for free all his life. As a reward, he was allowed the rare privilege being the only non-Catholic to be present when Mother's coffin was lowered in its grave. He told me that the order kept its accounts at two city banks, State Bank of India and the Standard Chartered Bank.

He said that the amount collected in India in the mid and late 1990s amounted to about Rs 230 (\$5.2) million annually. Of this Rs 200 (\$4.5) million was donated from abroad and Rs 30 million (about 13 per cent) was donated by Indians. Chaudhuri was kind enough to let me briefly glance at a copy of the accounts filed for one of the previous years. I could not see that Mother Teresa was transferring any substantial monies from the accounts abroad to help the poor in India. The foreign donations sent to India from abroad, she was spending entirely here; in any case it is not possible to divert money out of India through normal means. The annual amount does not quite fit in if one takes into account large Indian corporate donations, e.g., by Jet Airways, Tata Tea, Sahara India, etc.

Now comes the crunch: how much money did the 'angel of Calcutta' spend in her eponymous city? A mere Rs 20 million, or less than half a million dollar per annum! Even if all of it were to be spent on the poor, it would translate to 12 cents per slum-dweller per year. And that too in her heyday. So, for all the frenzy, all the notion in the world that she brought enormous succour and funds into a desperate city, for all the bad publicity

she generated against the city, she spent less than her top drawer change in Calcutta: a serious act of betrayal, in my opinion. Needless to say, most of the Rs 20 million was spent on upkeep of the religious community and only a small portion reached the poor.

On 14 December 2001, I met [Atanu Sashan Mukherjee](#), the Registrar of Trusts, Societies and Non-trading Corporation in his tenth floor office in Calcutta's India Exchange Place, for this is where MC file their local accounts. I wrote an application in his presence, asking to see their files. The files are meant to be public and can be inspected by any member of the public (in theory). I took with me Mukherjee's acquaintance who reinforced my application. That is the Indian way of working. Mukherjee, who had been verbally appraised two weeks previously of my interest in MC files, looked at my application and gravely nodded a few times. He said, 'This is not going to be easy. Missionaries of Charity are not just any organisation. They are internationally famous with a lot of clout. They wield a lot of influence within the political establishments. I am a mere bureaucrat. In principle, I agree with your request but my hands are tied. The reason is quite simple. When she was alive, Mother Teresa once came up here and caused a huge rumpus.'

I was surprised. 'Mother Teresa came up here?' I asked. Mr Mukherjee carried on, 'Yes she did. It was about four years before I joined here, so it would be the early 1990s. Some woman journalist obtained her accounts from this office and published it. I don't think it carried any startling revelations but Mother Teresa did not like it. I am told she didn't like it a bit.'

The octogenarian 'living saint' drove up to India Exchange Place, took the lift to the 10th floor, burst into the Registrar's glass-cage office and gave him hell. Nothing is known as to what words were exchanged between the two but subsequently she had words with her friends in the political establishment. The following day the then Registrar got a phone call from some unnamed bigwigs asking him in effect to make the files unavailable to the public.

Though an Indian bureaucrat, Mr Mukherjee was suffering some pangs of conscience, I could see. 'Yes, in theory the files are public but this is India after all. What I can do to help you is seek permission from [Sister Nirmala](#). I will show you the files only if she agrees.'

In February 2002, Mr Mukherjee verbally told his friend (my conduit to him) that Nirmala had said no to 'that Chatterjee who has caused us a lot of trouble.' I wrote the Registrar another letter, and sent it by registered post (as you do in India) respectfully reminding him of the public nature of the accounts. In March came a letter signed by him, sent 'under certificate of posting' to my Calcutta address. It was more of a memo than a letter (I was being informed rather than addressed):

Mr Mukherjee wrote a letter dated 4 March 2002 seeking permission for me to inspect the accounts of Missionaries of Charity. Their letter of reply contained the excerpts reproduced below:

'Dr (Aroup) Chatterjee has written critical articles trying to discredit our Mother and the work of the Missionaries of Charity, which he makes available through the Computer network. We feel that he is likely to misuse any information that he may gain about our accounts to further his cause against us. We would therefore be grateful if you would decline his request.'

[Signed]

Registrar of Firms, Societies & Non-Trading Corpns, W. Bengal

The Registrar did not address me at all, he simply intimated 'his' decision. It was obvious that [Sister Nirmala](#) was the only one making the decision and he was simply passing it on to me. After quoting Nirmala's excerpt, I would have appreciated if he wrote his own comment such as he was sorry that I could not see the records, or that he was happy to agree with her and was exercising his discretion.

As an ethnic Indian, I am pained by the Registrar's behaviour. But he ought not to be singled out. The entire country is suffering with a severe lack of integrity. Pusillanimity before the white man is the norm. On the other hand, Indian society is becoming more aggressive and ruthless towards its own, especially its own dispossessed and needy. Indians take enormous pride in their nuclear arsenal, but have no pride of mind and spirit. More than fifty years after independence the Indian spirit has become more twisted and paranoid than ever. Indians often see fear when there is none; they are masters at making a straightforward issue distorted and convoluted. Western vulgarities, such as MTV, have reached remote

villages but Western standards of transparency have not touched the biggest institutions.

I wanted to see Teresa's Calcutta accounts as a matter of curiosity and completeness. I was expecting no great revelations therein. I was curious to see if the known larger monies were deposited here, such as the Nobel Prize cheque, the Templeton Prize cheque, the Alberta collection money, the [Arafat](#) cheque, or the money given by [Penelope Cruz](#) (she gave the entire earnings of one of her films).

The Indian airline company Jet Airways gave her 1 per cent of their revenue at one time which would be anything between \$3 and \$10 million per year in the 1990s. The company's current statements do not disclose how much was donated. Tata Tea gave her Rs 2 million (c. \$50,000), also Rs 1 per kilo of tea sold in Calcutta between January and March 1994, but without any reference being made in the company's accounts.¹² The company ran into trouble at their AGM on 19 September 1994 when a shareholder objected to donations to Teresa, especially as they had not been approved by shareholders. The company justified the donations as 'promotion' hence they said they needed no approval or specific mention.¹³

Though by far not one of the larger sums, I had a particular interest in the Nobel money as there was such a lot of furore about it at the time. The Indian government wanted to tax the money, causing lofty editorial after editorial all over the Western world. The government soon agreed to let her bring in the money tax-free if she wanted to, but did she? Or was it sent to 'H.Q. [Rome](#)'?

Recently the Indian government published a table of charities receiving donations from abroad from 2006–07 to 2013–14. MC are shown to receive Rs 488 crores, or \$105 million allowing for currency fluctuations. This was just cash; over and above the order receives a huge amount in kind. There was nothing at all to show in India in the way of charity or activities by MC to explain the beneficence. MC have also recently come under scrutiny from the government for possible irregularities. The order denies any wrongdoing.

10

The Politics of Mother Teresa

Mother Teresa issued thousands of disclaimers about any knowledge of politics, but even a casual look at her career would make one wonder if she 'doth protest too much.'

I wish to make it clear that, unlike many on the left of the political spectrum, I am not judging Mother Teresa from a leftist sanctimonious angle.

On an international level, Mother Teresa's political agenda was narrow, consisting of the 'politics' of human reproductive intervention and Catholicism. In India however, she often involved herself with pragmatic politics. She was an extreme Right social and political conservative. Unfortunately, many from the Left are fooled by her affectations and pretence of loving the poor – this particularly holds true of the Indian Left.

On the issues of abortion, contraception and Catholicism, she found her political allies in a particular spectrum in the political arena, who are most vociferous in the United States. Indeed, her biggest political allies were in the US, as were her most powerful financial backers. Not all her political friends were Catholics, and some, like [Ronald Reagan](#), were sturdy Christians from other denominations. Without actually giving an overt call to the American people to vote Republican, she made it very clear, especially by meeting Republican hopefuls before elections. When the Republican presidential nominee [Bob Dole](#) was once challenged by his own party over his anti-abortion credentials, he invoked the Teresa card, saying that he had been endorsed by Mother Teresa.

Many of Mother Teresa's political friends were racists and anti-Semites, although she herself was neither. But she showed remarkable expediency in allying herself with anybody who would propagate her causes. This was especially evident in the Indian context, which I shall come to later.

Mother Teresa's international political diktat came from the Vatican. The friendship between Mother Teresa and [Pope John Paul II](#) was more 'special' than that which had existed between Reagan and [Thatcher](#). Mother never saw eye to eye with the previous popes, who were all sitting on the

fence on the issue of contraception. John Paul II, by unequivocally declaring contraception 'anti-life' immediately became her darling. He has also ruled out any discussion on the matter of women priests. Indeed, when the Church of England voted in favour of women priests, he sent a midnight telegram of protest. Mother Teresa herself remained irrevocably opposed to women priests. Explaining why women should not be priests, she once (in 1984) told an Indian journalist, 'Nobody can be a better priest than Our Lady, and she remained only the handmaiden of the Lord.' The Hindu journalist misinterpreted 'Our Lady' as 'our ladies' and sent a message through the international newswires that Mother Teresa approved of women priests. Mother was not amused. Many disclaimers followed, including one that emphasised that she stood by what the Pope had said on the issue.¹ In 1983, The National Association of Religious Women in the US (the nuns' union as it were) rebelled against the Pope on the issue of women priests. It passed a resolution at its annual convention determined to 'stand together and not be broken.' How did the Pope deal with the situation? A few words in Teresa's ears (she was at the Vatican at the time) were all that was necessary.

Mother Teresa frequently stated that the 'happiest day of my life is when the Holy Father came to Calcutta.' It was upon her insistence that the Pope decided to visit this heathen city with a virtually nonexistent Catholic population. It is noteworthy that her happiest day had nothing to do with the poor, but when the head of an alien order came to an Indian city.

During Mother's lifetime, there was a Vatican inner clique consisting of [John Paul II](#), [Cardinal Ratzinger](#) (later Pope Benedict XVI), [Cardinal Sin](#) of Philippines, [Cardinal O'Connor](#) of New York, 'Father' Marcial Maciel the prolific paedophile, drug addict and money-lauderer, and Secretary of State Angelo Sodano who (along with the Pope) protected Maciel from prosecution. Ratzinger was politically close to Teresa but was disdainful of her low intellect. There was no chemistry between them. He is intolerant of other religions, and called Buddhism 'auto-erotic'. He was a member of Hitler Youth (which was not compulsory in Nazi Germany as is now wrongly claimed by the Vatican). He headed the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith (CDF), the successor to the Holy Office of the Inquisition. In this all male, chauvinistic, women-unfriendly club, Mother Teresa was made welcome, because her views were identical to those of the male members. She was their most effective ambassador. Indeed, this supremely

feminine wispy nun, clad in a sari, was regarded an honorary man by the Vatican inner circle.

Every religious order wishes to have footholds in territories ruled over by other faiths, but the Vatican found it difficult, if not impossible, to break into the Muslim and socialist bloc countries. Both the Vatican political machinery and Mother knew that she was the one person who would be allowed into hostile territories. Any government in the world which would reject her advances would do so at its own peril.

Fidel Castro found it impossible to say no to her, as he knew he would alienate many of his supporters around the world if he did so. Under Vatican diktat, Mother flew in by private jet to [Havana](#) from Fort Lauderdale, Florida on 9 July 1986 to meet Castro. Castro was obliged to agree to her coming in to Cuba to avoid committing public relations suicide. Once permission had been given, Mother Teresa declared, quite frankly, that her mission in Cuba would be ‘involved in spiritual work.’

During the 1980s Mother became obsessed with getting into the Soviet Union, and wrote Gorbachev many a letter to be let in. One remembers the famous photograph of her addressing a press conference in Moscow on 21 August 1987 beneath a portrait of Karl Marx. She did get into Soviet Union but Russians treat MC with suspicion. In September 2011 the order was issued with a criminal charge by Moscow municipality for illegal construction and the MC centre was bulldozed to the ground. Strangely, only a few months later, Russia donated a huge bronze statue of hers to Calcutta, which was placed outside the city’s National Library. She was not fond of reading or learning.

Her last obsession was [China](#). She was known to mutter even in the midst of her severe illnesses, ‘Let us pray that we get into China.’ It is said that even on the day she died, the Chinese frustration was bothering her.

In a video-recorded speech, given after her heart surgery to doctors and nurses at the [Scripps Clinic](#), California on 14 January 1992, she talked at length of her political successes in socialist-bloc countries:

Remember when I went to Cuba. I was invited to come there. [She invited herself.] Castro asked me ‘Why do you want to come to Cuba?’ As you know the church was completely closed then – no Priests, no nuns. We have 5 houses there now. In Russia we have 10 houses. . . We have opened houses in [Albania](#). Albania was legally

atheist. . . The latest good news for which I very specially want you to pray is China. The government of China has asked me to open houses there. I want you to pray very hard. As soon as I'm better and able to travel, I'll go there. This is miracle no. 1, a real miracle has come from them, I did not ask. I am going to China, all right, I'm not joking. China is yours, all right [puts her right hand up and thrusts forward]. Turkey has asked us also. It's a miracle of God. . .

It is untrue that the Chinese government asked her to open establishments. She put numerous representations through various channels to China and made at least two secretive trips there. In the six years between that speech and her death, she was not allowed to open places in China. It was a barefaced lie that Beijing asked her to come to China.

Latin America was a special case for both [Pope John Paul II](#) and Mother. Here the two took on the strategy of fighting socialism with Catholicism. Both Mother and John Paul II were especially worried about '[Liberation Theology](#)', which they considered a pernicious Marxist corruption of Christian teaching. Mother Teresa had great contempt for do-gooder priests who engaged in community work: 'I say to all priests: You have not become priests to be social workers.'² The Vatican singled out [Nicaragua](#) as a special case because of the popularity of the Sandinistas, and Mother Teresa predictably went in with the cross. Shortly before her death MC opened a contemplative house in Nicaragua, rather than a charitable institution.

Because of her association with Pope John Paul II, Mother Teresa was not universally popular in South America. Many of the priests there treat her with suspicion and contempt. Once in Brazil, Brothers belonging to her order who had come to set up a mission, were asked by local priests to 'move on'.³

South American priests have not forgotten John Paul II's treatment of [Archbishop Romero](#) of El Salvador who was murdered in 1980 by the country's CIA sponsored death squad while conducting mass. Ten months before he was killed, Romero had travelled to the Vatican to tell the Pope about the relentless murder of citizens and Catholic priests who were standing up to the military junta. The same Pope, who was constantly making international waves with his protestations about human rights violations in Eastern Europe, did not encourage Romero. He kept Romero

waiting for six weeks before meeting him, although normally Archbishops have immediate access to the pontiff. When Pope John Paul II finally met Romero briefly, he sent him away with advice to mend his ways and stop being a socialist.

The Vatican's support of [Haiti's](#) military (and fascist Catholic) dictatorships was equally bizarre, and here too Mother Teresa vociferously echoed the Vatican line. When Haiti's military overthrew the democratically elected (socialist Catholic) priest [Jean-Bertrand Aristide](#) in 1991, the Vatican was the only state to formally recognise the junta. Even according to Pope John Paul II's hagiographer Tad Szulc:

Strange as it may sound, there were no Vatican protests against massive human rights violations, including numerous killings, during the junta's rule, and not a single public word of support for Aristide's restoration to office. Subsequently, Aristide applied to the Holy See to allow him to leave priesthood altogether.⁴

Mother Teresa of course, was an old friend of the Haiti militia. She and the notorious [Duvalier family](#), who ruled with the help of their private army, the Tonton Macoutes, had tremendous mutual attraction. When she visited Haiti as the guest of the Duvaliers (to receive the Haitian *Legion d'Honneur*) she heaped paeans on Madame Duvalier who not only had milked millions off the state coffers, but was also an instrument of torture in the reign of terror. Mother said to Michele Duvalier, 'Madame President, the country vibrates with your life work.' She also added that she had never seen 'the poor people so familiar with their head of state as they were with her. It was a beautiful lesson for me.'

No, she was not simply being polite to generous hosts. She hardly ever spoke about her hosts in her speeches, even when accepting awards. Her speeches were usually quite prolix, starting off with the poverty theme (of both body and mind) and then launching into a long diatribe against abortion.

The praise heaped on the Duvaliers was a special certificate that she reserved for the very select, whose life view she endorsed. I can think of only Reagan who received similar endorsement. Even [Rome's](#) mayor Rutelli who she was particularly fond of, despite his stated aim to rid the city of gypsies by 2000⁵, did not receive such praise.

It is not that Mother Teresa condoned indiscriminate killing by ruthless dictators, but her line was, if you are doing all right in terms of religion and abortion, then whatever else you might do I shall overlook; moreover if you are financially generous to my order you are atoning for what the wider world sees as crimes.

Mother had a particularly close relationship with Ronald and [Nancy Reagan](#) and was an honoured guest in the White House many a time. Her love for Reagan arose from the latter's various attempts to outlaw abortion in the US. She overlooked that he was unforgiving, was a proponent of bloodthirsty military actions and the 'Star Wars' arms initiative, and was pro-gun and pro-hanging. He never wished to be known as a friend of the poor. It has been said that the Reagans, who were aware of their own cold uncompassionate natures, gave her astronomical amounts of money in order to assuage their conscience. In June 1981 she visited the White House and delivered a homily to Reagan, which left Ronald speechless (Mr President, not a quick thinker, was often lost for words) and Nancy in tears:

You have suffered the passion of the cross and have received grace. There is a purpose to this. Because of your suffering and pain you will now understand the suffering and pain of the world. This has happened to you at this time because your country and the world need you.⁶

What she meant was, your country and the world need you to be brave and ban abortion in the US and set an example in the Western world. By 'suffering and pain' she meant abortion, not the suffering of poverty or disease.

Mother was at ease among the US Republican establishment and was treated as a darling by American right-wing politicians. But her closest bond was with Senator [Rick Santorum](#), the ultra right-winger, years before he became a household name (he just missed the presidential nomination in 2012). Santorum opposes contraception for married couples, supports death penalty and guns, and does not believe that the poor should receive government assistance. It was remarkable how rabid intolerant people with extreme prejudices found their natural ally in Mother.

During [John Paul II's](#) papacy the Vatican's sole objective in Latin America was to undermine the Left movement in the continent and

destabilise Cuba. The Catholic Church's true intentions starkly came to light during the protracted Elián González saga in 2000. Elián was a six-year old who escaped from Cuba to Miami in a boat; his mother had perished during the journey. His father was in Cuba and wanted Elián to return. The US child and legal experts wanted him to return, and most importantly, Elián himself wanted to return. The only people who wished him to remain in Florida and grow up with his devoutly Catholic, distant uncles (most of whom had serious criminal records) were the Vatican and its followers. The same Church, which is so fond of flaunting 'family values', was now desperate to wrench son from father. Indeed, even back in President Eisenhower's time the US government and the country's Catholic Church had undertaken the secretive Operation Peter Pan, which orphaned Cuban children by taking them away from their parents and bringing them up in Catholic families in the US.

Mother's most useful political role came in the years leading to the destruction of the socialist bloc. It is now known (accepted by the Vatican) that Pope John Paul II worked closely with the CIA to bring about the just death of Eastern Europe. He and Mother worked tirelessly to be let into one Eastern bloc country after another, years before the Berlin Wall came down. Again the sole purpose was political destabilisation, rather than charity. The case of Mother's [East Berlin](#) home is an example. She came to East Berlin in June 1980, and led a procession of 20,000 Catholics. She called it an 'outdoor mass', though she herself did not accept women could hold masses. She opened her home in East Berlin in 1981, at the height of the Cold War, two years after her Nobel. Even the East German authorities could not say no to her. But within days of the Berlin Wall coming down in 1989, the home closed, when in fact, such a home would have been direly needed to give succour to Eastern Berlin with its new and manifold problems.

Throughout her life, Mother Teresa had hundreds of secret meetings with different popes, so Catholicism could return to her native [Albania](#). She was fortunate enough to see the demise of the Stalinist regime in her own lifetime. It was no coincidence however, that the toppling by crowds of the statue of dictator [Enver Hoxha](#) happened on 21 February 1991 and she arrived unannounced on 3 March. She was lying in wait in [Rome](#) through February waiting for the opportune moment while her Vatican allies were liaising with contacts in [Tirana](#). This was pure politics from a woman who

understood it well. Indeed, to keep her whereabouts secret, she travelled incognito from India to Rome. Her name did not appear in the Air India passengers' list; a fact acknowledged in her official biography.⁷

Ostensibly however, Mother Teresa maintained distance from Cold War politics, even in situations where her intervention would have been greatly beneficial to detainees and dissenters. When all the winners of the 1979 Nobel Prizes decided to send a letter to Leonid Brezhnev, protesting at the detention of a young Soviet scientist, the lone laureate who would not sign the letter was Mother Teresa; it would *look* too 'political' before the world. Again, in India she behaved differently. In July 1997, when a development worker called [Sanjay Ghose](#) was kidnapped by separatist guerrillas in Assam, Mother Teresa to her credit sent a faxed appeal from the Vatican (there on her very last visit) asking the terrorists to release him. (Ghose was later found murdered.)

Mother Teresa was instrumental in trivialising the [Cairo Population Conference](#) of 1994. As a sovereign state, the Vatican was invited to participate in the conference, although I find it odd that a 'state' without any women and children among its population would be invited at all.

The Catholic establishment fought tooth and nail to wreck the conference and succeeded to a large extent. Among the strategies it employed was a personally signed sugary letter addressed to the conference by Mother Teresa. It contained her usual words: 'If a mother can kill her own child, what is there to stop you and me from killing each other?' She also made it quite clear that she had the capacity to look after all the millions of unwanted children in the world: 'If there is a child that you don't want or can't feed or educate, give that child to me. I will look after that child.' No doubt, even most of the non-Catholic delegates believed her: after all, Mother Teresa did not tell lies! After the conference was over, the Vatican held it to ransom by refusing to sign the common declaration unless the wording was changed. Pope John Paul II and Mother Teresa refused to accede that artificial contraception should be available to women under any circumstance, including marriage or even after rape. In 1996, the Vatican cancelled their token \$2,500 annual contribution to [UNICEF](#) because it was offering the 'morning after pill' to women who had been raped in central Africa²²⁹ⁿ refugee camps.

After the Cairo conference, came the 1995 [Fourth Conference on Women in Beijing](#). Here Mother Teresa roped in [Mercedes Wilson](#) from the

right wing ultra-orthodox Family of the Americas Foundation to carry her letter (that she had written unsolicited) and read it to the conference. Mother's trenchant letter attacked the concept of [the independent](#) woman:

No jobs, no plans, no possessions, and no idea of 'freedom' can take the place of love. . . Yet we can destroy these gifts of motherhood, especially by the evil of abortion, but also by thinking that things like jobs or positions are more important. . .

The letter made headline news around the world. That the conference also received a signature and poster campaign from a thousand poor women of Calcutta supporting its work, sent via the Family Planning Association of India, never became known.

Many of Mother's most high profile admirers are independent women, and indeed some of them might even think that career is more important than child rearing. I hope people like Joan Collins, Julia Roberts, Gina Lollobrigida, Elizabeth Taylor, Elizabeth Hurley, [Penelope Cruz](#), not to mention thousands of media women from around the world, realise in what contempt they were held by their heroine. In her own case, Mother Teresa did not deem herself a career woman, as she was 'doing it for Jesus'.

In my view, even [Pope John Paul II](#) was more liberal than Mother Teresa: in his letter to the Beijing conference did not mention the 'handmaiden' role, but said that men and women are equal but different; 'uni-duality'. He also said unequivocally, 'Thank you, women who work!'

Mother Teresa's protestations that she did not personally attend international conferences because that would be too political, do not stand up to scrutiny because she was an official Vatican delegate in the 1975 UN International Women's Conference in Mexico City; the Vatican did not however allow her to head the delegation. That honour went to a man, Bishop [Cascante](#).

So far as abortion is concerned, it was Mother Teresa who changed it from a personal to political issue over the last few decades. Left to themselves, the old men at the Vatican, one suspects, would have been ignored as a bunch of 'out of touch fogies'.

It was astonishing that the world media reported with great deference Mother Teresa's call to the thousands of women in Bangladesh who had become pregnant after being raped by Pakistani soldiers during the

country's 1971 war of independence, to go on and have the babies. The sole voice critical of her was that of Germaine Greer, who was dismissed as a 'loony feminist' by journalists.

Mother Teresa did not utter a word of condemnation about the soldiers' actions or even a word of sympathy for the women or girls. Soldiers particularly targeted young girls for rape and when the latter became too ill, their genitals were mutilated by bayonets. Mother's obsession was that the raped women, if pregnant, must not have abortions. Instead of helping these desperately damaged women and girls, she chose to offer help (just until childbirth) to only those raped women who decided to keep their babies. However fewer than fifty actually gave birth, that too for various reasons, and unconnected with Mother's plea.

Outside the Indian subcontinent, Mother Teresa would traverse the globe to prevent a single abortion. In May 1981 she heard that her friend, the anti-abortion Republican senator [Mark Hatfield](#), had voted against the [Hyde amendment](#) which sought to prohibit federal funding of abortion for poor women who had been subject to rape or incest. She travelled to Capitol Hill and grilled her friend for two hours (in the company of two militant anti-abortion activists): 'She. . . made a very heavy pitch on the abortion question,' he said. Hatfield called the anti-abortion militants 'mean, uncompromising' but spared Mother Teresa, saying she was being manipulated.

In 1981, Mother Teresa travelled to [Japan](#) to address antiabortion meetings funded by Japanese Catholics. She made sure she had the widest television exposure. A year later she went there again, this time fiercely lobbying 230 members of Parliament s in the Hilton Hotel (on 24 April 1982). She almost succeeded in having the law on abortion changed in Japan. During the same trip she visited the Home for Atom Bomb Victims in [Nagasaki](#). She said not a word about the victims' suffering and the horror of the bomb. She blithely told survivors that the greatest destroyer of peace in the world was abortion.

Mother Teresa actively campaigned against [Geraldine Ferraro](#), a Catholic who did not absolutely object to abortion, during the US Presidential elections of 1984, when she was the Democratic Vice-Presidential nominee. On 15 October, New York's [Cardinal O'Connor](#) launched a bitter public attack against Ferraro at a meeting in Cathedral High School. Mother Teresa suddenly 'appeared unannounced' on the dais

and stood by him throughout the length of his speech. Three days later, Ferraro was suddenly told that she was not welcome at the Catholic Political Dinner Meeting she was supposed to address. It is well known that Mother Teresa was influential in making the organisers take that decision.

In February 1994, Mother Teresa especially came to Washington DC to file an *amicus curiae* in favour of [Alexander Loce](#) who was being prosecuted by the state of New Jersey for vandalising his former girlfriend's abortion clinic. Her letter to the Supreme Court was in her usual vein; long winded and humbly describing all the work she was doing with poor. I believe an *amicus curiae* can be filed in the US only by an American citizen, so she said:

Like that [unborn] child, I can be considered an outsider. I am not an American citizen. . . In many senses I know what it is like to be without a country. I also know what is like to be an adopted citizen of other lands.

She went on to heap praise on US civilisation ('. . .in a uniquely courageous and inspiring way, America has kept faith.' etc.) before coming to the *ad rem*; she said:

Yet, there has been one infinitely tragic and destructive departure from those American ideals in recent memory. It was this court's own decision in [Roe v. Wade](#) (1973) to exclude the unborn child from the human family. You ruled that a mother has broad discretion to choose to destroy her unborn child. . . America needs no word from me to see how your decision in Roe vs. Wade has deformed a great nation. The Constitutional Court of the Federal Republic of Germany recently ruled that 'the unborn child is entitled to its rights to life independently of acceptance by its mother. . .' Americans. . . must weep that your own government, at present, seems blind to this truth.

I think people will agree with me that these are not the words of the unworldly nun.

Eight months prior to [Loce vs. New Jersey](#), Mother Teresa had found herself in [Dublin](#), Ireland, stoking up the already boiling political passions

over a proposed abortion that has gone into Irish history. This was that of the 14-year-old girl, known as 'X', who became pregnant as result of rape by an older married man. In June 1993, Mother was interviewed on the 98 FM radio talk show, hosted by the popular priest [Michael Cleary](#) where she ruled out abortion for 'X' saying, 'Abortion can never be necessary because it is pure killing.'⁸ Father Cleary who maintained that the 'X' case was a conspiracy by liberals to change the law, asked Mother if she would ever accept abortion in cases of rape. 'No, never,' she replied. As it happened, 'X' had had a miscarriage by then.

Ireland had had an abortion referendum in November 1992, which, despite non-stop prayers by Mother Teresa, gave women the right to travel to another country for abortion. In 1990, she lost another marathon prayer battle, backed up by representations to Prime Minister [Thatcher](#) and various MPs, to have the UK abortion bill quashed.

Mother Teresa felt some kind of obligation to interfere in Ireland's social and political processes. In August 1982, she flew to Dublin and made a series of inflammatory speeches in favour of Prime Minister [Charles Haughey's](#) bill to ban abortion absolutely. She was fanning the already heated and bitter feud between the supporters and opponents of abortion in Ireland, who came to blows on numerous occasions. Before the 1995 referendum on divorce, she wrote a letter addressing the Irish nation, asking them to vote against legalising divorce. [Pope John Paul II](#) also issued a similar statement. This led the Irish columnist [Gene Kerrigan](#) to remark that 'people who keep silent when children are raped by priests are now full of chat.'⁹ Mother was also full of prayers, which failed again. The 'Yes' vote won.

Mother was confronted on the issue of [paedophile priests](#) by the Irish journalist [Kathy Ward](#). She replied, 'Pray, pray and make sacrifices for those who are going through such terrible temptations.'¹⁰ It is not that she was against custodial sentencing *per se*: a few times she said that she wanted to open a special jail for doctors who performed abortions.¹¹

In 2012 it came to light that Mother Teresa actively shielded a paedophile priest called Father Donald McGuire. McGuire was a Californian Jesuit who ministered to MC nuns during the 1980s and 90s. From 1993 on, nine charges of serious paedophilia were made against him. Mother Teresa sprung to his defence and urged his superiors to reinstate him. In her letter (hand-written on headed notepaper but unsigned) she said

McGuire ‘admitted imprudence in behaviour’ but she had ‘confidence and trust’ in him and wished to ‘see his vital ministry resume as soon as possible.’ McGuire went to prison for 25 years.

Contraception was another political battleground for Mother, although she kept utterly quiet on the issue in India. In a television address to the American nation, she declared:

Once that living love is destroyed by contraception, abortion follows very easily. . . let us never bring in the worst problem of all, that is, to destroy love. This is what happens when we tell people to practise contraception and abortion.¹²

In her eyes, abortion and contraception were two sides of the same coin; I wonder if millions of contraception-loving Teresa devotees the world over, realise that.

Mother Teresa was silent on contraception in India because here opposition to contraception is considered akin to terrorism against the state, by governments of all political persuasions. Mother once got slightly unstuck in Mexico on the grievous charge of violation of national constitutional principles. The newspaper *Diario del Pacifico* charged her with contempt of the country’s constitution when she opposed birth control at a conference in Acapulco in August 1982. She quickly left for Honduras.

It is not entirely true that she said nothing against contraception in India. Unable to take a political stance on the issue, she part-funded a ‘medical’ study on natural contraception to prove her case. Incidentally, this substantially expensive study is the only medical or paramedical activity that she ever contributed to. There are enormous opportunities for somebody with her level of funds to contribute to medical research in Calcutta, because here lies India’s School of Tropical Medicine, an internationally renowned centre for tropical diseases.

Mother’s [natural contraception study](#), entitled ‘Symptothermia vis-á-vis Fertility Control’ was headed by her own gynaecologist Professor [Ajay Ghosh](#). They ‘studied’ 17,000 slum women of Calcutta and showed that natural contraception, with the help of a thermometer, a temperature chart and an ability to check the character of cervical mucus, worked.

The study is statistically heavily flawed, but eventually it was published in the *Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology of India* (1982; 32: 443–447),

with which Professor Ghosh had close links. It is now quoted *ad nauseum* by the Catholic anti-contraception brigade as a valid study. I know it for a fact that many of the women in the study who became pregnant whilst using 'Symptothermia' as a method of contraception, went on to have abortions.

[Dr Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar](#), who was a co-author of the 'study', remained close to Mother till her death. When she opened up a fertility centre, Mother Teresa gave her a glowing testimonial: 'Every married couple deserves to have a normal child. I fully support Dr Ghosh Dastidar's efforts in helping couples. . .' etc. The testimonial hung for a long time outside her clinic on Rash Behari Avenue. Interestingly, there is an absolute ideological ban on fertility treatments in the Teresa brand of Catholicism. The Vatican unequivocally disallows them. But Mother overlooked that in order to appease Dr Ghosh Dastidar. Because, Ghosh Dastidar was becoming politically prominent at the time. And for Mother Teresa, principles played second fiddle to political clout. The doctor ran for Parliament in 1998 as an ally of the Hindu Nationalist Party, and for the State Assembly in 2001, both times unsuccessfully. Since 2009, she has been an MP in a safe seat with a huge majority for the powerful Trinamool Congress, West Bengal's ruling party.

Mother Teresa was convinced that natural contraception should be the norm rather than a matter of choice. She talked about it at length in her Nobel speech:

And in Calcutta alone in six years, it is all in Calcutta, we have had 61,273 babies less from the families who would have had, but because they practise this natural way of abstaining, of self-control, out of love for each other. We teach them the temperature method which is very beautiful, very simple, and our poor people understand. And do you know what they have told me - Our family is healthy, our family is united, and we can have a baby whenever we want. So clear, those people in the street, those beggars. . .[can use it]

Well, beautiful it may be, but natural contraception is anything but simple. Just imagine the scene: a beggar woman lying in a pavement shack, with 16-wheeler trucks thundering by, filling her 'room' with diesel smoke; she gets up then coyly checks if her cervical mucus has turned 'slippery

mucoid', then picks up the fertility thermometer from the pavement to check her BBT (basal body temperature), and finally neatly records the temperature on a beautiful chart pinned on to a gunny 'wall'.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that a good few middle class women would find natural contraception techniques quite trying. But of course, Mother Teresa's 'beautiful poor' would do anything for her. No matter that less than 2 per cent of female beggars and less than 25 per cent of female slum dwellers have any reading skills at all; I doubt if any would be able to read small thermometer calibrations in English and chart them on a graph. No matter, because fevers, especially malaria, are rife in this population and would make BBT somewhat untenable.

And yet, when Mother Teresa, who washed hypodermic needles in cold water before re-using them for the umpteenth time and who supplied one bottle for twenty babies in her homes, told her 'beautiful' tale of natural contraception to the world, everybody believed her. A saint does not tell lies. It is scientifically impossible to calculate *exactly* how many less children were born to a certain number of couples practising a certain method of birth control: one can only hazard a very rough guess. In that context Mother's Nobel Prize figure of '61,273' is particularly disingenuous, and was quoted to mislead the world, deliberately.

Empowered women, who have everything going for them, who are in an equal relationship, who are able to say no to their partners; [natural contraception](#) is for them (maybe). It is bizarre to propose such a method to slum women who are rarely empowered but often subjugated. This is yet another example of how out of touch Mother Teresa was with Indian slum women.

An Irish Catholic woman called [Maire Mullarney](#) once wrote in a Catholic weekly how she finished up with 11 children through practising natural contraception. 'The greatest damage was done by the authorities who persistently linked abortion and contraception,'¹³ she wrote. While she implicated the popes in the suffering caused to women through this method, Mother Teresa is never included in the 'authorities', although she had been the most high-profile person in the world who used to propound that such a link irrevocably existed; it was partly due to her imprimatur that the Vatican got its courage to go out and tell the world of the virtues of natural family planning.

In 1984, two years after Mother's 'scientific' paper was published, the late seventeenth [Duke of Norfolk](#), the highest ranking lay Catholic in Britain, told a conference of Catholic teachers, 'How can you ask a married couple to do it by thermometers and what not? My wife and I did that. It didn't bloody work. Has everybody got to have eight children like my mother?'¹⁴ The Vatican put pressure on the Duke to withdraw his statement but he stuck to it.

Regarding Mother's statistic of how many fewer babies were born to the poor in Calcutta as a result of natural contraception, [Mark Tully](#), the BBC's former India correspondent, and one of her admirers, has remarked, 'It is not known how the figure was arrived at.'¹⁵ Nonetheless, the figure doubled itself eighteen months later, when Mother claimed in June 1981 in Washington DC that her 'beautiful method' had resulted in 134,000 fewer babies in Calcutta in seven years.¹⁶ In 1982, during an interview on [Scottish Television](#), Mother Teresa claimed that her natural contraception had produced 'one million less babies in 10 years in Calcutta'¹⁷ : a grotesque lie.

Although her comment 'I help Hindus to become better Hindus, Muslims better Muslims . . .' is regularly vaunted by the media, it is well known to those close to her that she had an entirely understandable sense of unfulfilment due to the utter lack of impact Catholicism made in India during her lifetime. Once [Edward Desmond](#) from *Time* magazine asked her, 'Friends of yours say you are disappointed that your work has not brought about more conversions in this great Hindu nation.' Her reply was fudged. Desmond went on to ask, 'And should they [Hindus] love Jesus too?' to which she replied, 'Naturally, if they want peace, if they want joy, let them find Jesus.'¹⁸

Mother Teresa took a keen interest in the complex political processes of India; she allied herself with the political party which she felt was friendliest to Catholicism. This she felt was the Congress Party, of the [Nehru–Gandhi](#) dynasty. Mother had a personal relationship with [Indira Gandhi](#), and her ties with the Gandhi family became stronger after Indira Gandhi's son [Rajiv](#) married the Italian Catholic [Sonia](#). During her lifetime, over entrances of Mother's Delhi homes, large portraits of Indira and Rajiv hung beside her own.

During Emergency, India's darkest period between 1975–77, the nation's real ruler was Indira Gandhi's late younger son [Sanjay](#), who did not

hold any office of the state, but issued all the orders. Sanjay had a passion for population control and issued monthly 'sterilisation targets'. As a consequence, slum dwellers, mostly men, were rounded up and forcibly sterilised. Among them, many young men who had never married.

Sanjay also cared deeply for Delhi's beautification, and one fateful night, bulldozers arrived at the Turkman Gate slums, where the 'poorest of the poor' among Delhi's Muslims had lived for generations. By morning, Turkman Gate became a clean expanse.

It was moving to see that Mother Teresa considered her friendship with the Gandhis precious enough to overlook the small incident at the Turkman Gate slums, and the ongoing programmes of forced sterilisation. Issuing an approval certificate for the [state of Emergency](#), she said, 'People are happier. There are more jobs. There are no strikes.'¹⁹

Although there was media censorship during Emergency, the Catholic establishment was well aware of the forced sterilisation programmes. She was actually criticised by the Catholic press for her comments, even in the United States, where a long leader in *American Catholic Church* criticised her for ignoring human rights abuses.

When [Indira Gandhi](#) was overthrown and all the horrific details of Emergency were exposed, Mother Teresa did not withdraw her comments. Indeed her friendship with the Gandhi family went from strength to strength. One of the key players in Mother's political activities in India, especially in her dealings with the Gandhi dynasty, was [Navin Chawla](#), one of her three official biographers. Chawla was a top ranking civil servant in Delhi who was well known to smooth her ways through Indian bureaucracy. During Emergency, Chawla stuck to [Sanjay Gandhi](#). After Sanjay's death, he quickly switched his allegiance to [Rajiv](#) and [Sonia](#). Chawla was one of Emergency's main torturers, and was Mother's friend and confidante.

It is well known that Mother Teresa disliked [Morarji Desai](#), who became prime minister of India in 1977, following Indira Gandhi's defeat. Her letter to Desai, protesting at the curbing of certain benefits that Christian missionaries enjoyed, is much flaunted by Catholic circles as an example of her courage. It also contained a passage which betrays a degree of spite not generally known; addressing the 82-year-old Desai, Mother said, 'Are you not afraid of God?. . . Mr Desai, you are so close to meeting God face to face. I wonder what answer you will give. . .' It is widely known that Desai

was hurt by her comments. He however went on to live another 17 years and died in 1995, aged 99.

In her last few years, Mother Teresa successfully avoided direct political involvement in India, save for the one episode over quotas for [Dalit Christians](#). These are Christians who are genealogically lower caste Hindus, and are demanding inclusion in the positive discrimination quotas that lower caste Hindus are entitled to. These quotas apply to most jobs and college and university places, and in some areas 80 per cent of places may be reserved. The Indian government said that Christians by definition are casteless and refused to accede to the Dalit Christians' demands.

During November 1995, all Christian denominations in India organised massive protests over the Dalit issue, urging the government to rethink its decision on 'lower caste Christians'. They were delighted when Mother Teresa agreed to join in, as it raised the profile to an international level. On 18 November, she participated in *dharna* (sit-in) and fast in Delhi demanding reservations for [Dalit Christians](#).

Then suddenly, criticism of her actions started flooding in, especially from Indian media, who were normally sympathetic to her. Even her dear old Calcutta *Statesman*, published a sarcastic cartoon, asking why she should be spared when Muslims are called communal and divisive if they ask for quotas for extremely poor members of their community. [Sushma Swaraj](#), of the Hindu party BJP, was scathing, calling her sit-in 'a pitiful event' and said, 'Mother Teresa, instead of fighting this evil practice [of caste] wants to introduce the evil in her own religion. Her actions will do no good to the society, the country or to her own religion.'

Mother Teresa, who moved quite expertly in response to public and media opinion in India, now did an utter *volte-face*. She called a press conference (on 24 November) and denied all knowledge of the sit-in! She said she thought it was merely a prayer session. Her denial was emphatic: 'I have never participated in any sit-in demonstrations or demanded reservations for Dalit Christians.'²⁰ A professional politician could not have done it better.

The Christian community in India accused her of betrayal. Asked to comment on her denial, [Bishop Vincent Consessao](#) said, 'When we invited her, we gave her the entire programme but it probably did not register in her mind.'²¹ Why Mother suddenly, and so dramatically, ran away from the Dalit issue is open to conjecture; one reason could be that she did not want

to embarrass the Congress party, which was in power at the time. I personally think Mother Teresa would have enhanced her reputation in India, amongst both Christians and non-Christians, if she had shown integrity over the issue rather than take a U-turn. But then, she was never entirely comfortable in her adopted country.

[Sunanda K Datta-Ray](#), formerly editor of the Calcutta *Statesman* and editorial adviser to the Singapore *Straits Times*, who had known and dealt with Mother Teresa in a journalistic capacity for years, has always strongly contested Mother Teresa's naive and innocent image when it came to matters of intrigue. He has told^{21a} of an incident when he was asked to interview Mother Teresa for a television programme. On the eve of the interview he did a preparatory visit and asked Mother some ever so slightly uncomfortable questions, to do with theological issues. The next day, he discovered that he had been removed as the interviewer at Mother's own insistence, and [Desmond Doig](#), her sycophantic biographer had been instated instead. 'It is [Desmond](#) or no interview,' Mother had told Doordarshan (Indian television).

[Datta-Ray](#) also talks of an incident that happened during a flight from Bangkok to Calcutta where Mother came down from the first class cabin to ask him if he could help get her nuns 'white passports'. These are passports that are given to middle ranking Indian officials to make travel easier for them.

Another anecdote [Datta-Ray](#) tells is one when the head of the British Council in Calcutta took a titled Englishwoman to see Mother Teresa, but mentioned her title only in passing. Six months later, Mother telephoned the aristocrat in London from [Rome](#), calling her by her correct title, and asked her if she could use one of her houses in an up-market area of London to put up some of her nuns.

[Datta-Ray](#) describes Mother Teresa as anything but publicity shy. During his long tenure as the editor of *The Statesman*, she used to send him regular messengers, usually a pair of her nuns, with little notes about some programme or the other she was embarking on. He also told me of an incident recounted to him by the late [Subroto Basak](#), who used to represent Associated Press in Calcutta. One day, Calcutta's local journalists went to see Mother Teresa about some topical issue, but were told at the door that no meeting would be possible because she had suddenly taken ill. When [Basak](#) sent in his AP card, he was immediately ushered in.

It may come a surprise to people to know that Mother Teresa used to vote in elections in India in the 1960s and 70s. As the main opponents in West Bengal at the time were the Marxists and Congress, it is not difficult to surmise who she voted for. Indeed, her official biographer Egan describes an incident where a Marxist in Calcutta, on noting the indelible ink mark on her finger (voters in India are stamped on the casting of their vote to prevent impersonation) remarked that perhaps, as a saintly nun, she should be above party politics.²²

Latterly, she herself had stopped voting, but made absolutely sure that each and every one of her nuns, Brothers and novices went out to cast their vote on election day. As recently as 1991, she was writing to West Bengal's Chief Election Commissioner to protest at the exclusion of a number of her nuns in Calcutta's electoral register.²⁴ I was somewhat surprised to see the British Catholic weekly *The Universe*²⁵ print a photograph (with the caption 'Nun So Certain'!) of a long crocodile of Mother Teresa's nuns patiently waiting to vote outside an election booth in Calcutta during the Indian elections of March 1998.

It is not that the nuns are given a free choice to vote; as with every other matter within the closed and hierarchical world of the Missionaries of Charity, instructions came from the top as to who to vote for.

I have no problems with Mother Teresa, an Indian citizen, voting in an Indian election. There is nothing unusual about nuns voting. In countries like Ireland or Italy it is a familiar sight to find long queues of nuns patiently waiting outside polling stations. But Mother Teresa (and the media) should have spared us the wide-eyed bewilderment whenever the word 'politics' was mentioned. I am afraid the evidence does not match the affectation.

11

What Other Charities are doing in and around Calcutta

It is beyond the scope and relevance of this book to discuss the few thousand registered charities of Calcutta, many of which exist on paper only. I have attempted to give an overview of the more prominent ones. Comparisons are odious, especially as each charity has marked out its own territory of activity. I could not however, avoid comparisons in certain instances, especially when discussing the bigger charities, and when commenting on major issues, such as primary education or relief work during and after major disasters. I feel comparisons are necessary as it has been repeatedly pronounced by Mother Teresa and her friends that she alone looked after the physical and spiritual needs of her eponymous city.

The statistics, comparisons and data in this chapter pertain to the period until Teresa's death. Two post-1997 charities are included: Sabera Foundation, because of its erstwhile star-studded glamour, and, Responsible Charity. After its founder's death, MC made some qualitative improvements, such as letting children play with toys. But during disasters, the order is habitually inactive. Three major disasters happened in India post-1997: cyclone in Orissa in October 1999 (8,000 dead), earthquake in Gujarat in January 2001 (20,000 dead), and the 2004 tsunami (18,000 dead). In the first and the third crises, Teresa nuns operated small, token and dysfunctional soup-kitchens, but they were nowhere to be seen in Gujarat after one of the worst natural disasters in human history.

The majority of Calcutta's charities are non-religious.

RAMAKRISHNA MISSION

Calcutta's largest charity is the [Ramakrishna Mission](#), which has its headquarters in Calcutta; it is also the largest charity in India. It was founded in 1897 by a very remarkable man, [Swami Vivekananda](#) (1863–1902), a product of the high noon of Bengal renaissance.

The charitable functions of Mother Teresa's organisation and those of the Ramakrishna Mission in India are difficult to compare because of the gulf of difference between the two, but I have attempted it here, taking a random year 1993–94:

Natural Calamity	Organisation Giving Aid	
	Ramakrishna Mission	Missionaries of Charity
Drought in Bihar	yes	no
Drought in Gujarat	yes	no
Floods in		
Assam (Karimganj)	yes	no
West Bengal (much of it around Calcutta)		
Contai	yes	no
Jalpaiguri	yes	no
Garbeta	yes	no
Tamil Nadu	yes	no
Pondicherry	yes	no
Gujarat	yes	no
Fires in		
Andhra Pradesh (near Vishakhapatnam)	yes	no
Assam (near Karimganj)	yes	no
West Bengal (Malda and Barasat)	yes	no
Tornado in West Bengal		

(Sargachi, near Calcutta)	yes	no
Cyclone in		
Tamil Nadu	yes	no
Pondicherry	yes	no
Earthquake in		
Latur	yes *	no

**a massive operation*

During the same year 1993–94, the Ramakrishna Mission undertook the following house building programmes for the needy:

1. In earthquake-devastated Latur, 161 earthquake resistant houses were built and another 320 were in the process of construction.

1. In West Bengal the following houses were built:

55 houses in Purulia district

100 houses in Jalpaiguri district

143 houses in Jalpaiguri district

108 houses in Sagar island under the 'build your own house' scheme

1. In Tamil Nadu (Kanyakumari district) 71 houses were built

The Missionaries of Charity do not have a house building programme for the poor - it is not one of their functions. In the early 1990s, however they did build 48 houses for the poor in a suburb of Calcutta called Hatgachia on disused government land. They did not pay for the land which then caused a prolonged wrangle with the municipality; in the end, it relented and let them have the land for free. All very good and worthy, but it turned out that 43 (93 per cent) of the 48 families that moved into the houses were Catholic: surely a remarkable coincidence in a city where the Catholic population is less than 1.5 per cent.

The following is a table comparing the ongoing activities of the Ramakrishna Mission and the Missionaries of Charity (in Calcutta only):

Function	Provided by	
	Ramakrishna Mission	Mi
Hospice	no	
Orphanage	yes	
Home for Destitute Mentally Ill	no	
Home for Convicted Mentally Ill Destitute	no	
Leprosarium	no	
Hospital	yes (large & modern)	<i>not free for everybody</i>
School of Nursing	yes	
Community Health Service	yes	
Modern charitable dispensary (with x-ray and investigations facilities)	yes *	
	<i>treats 500,000 yearly</i>	
Basic Charitable Dispensary	yes	
	<i>treats 100,000 yearly</i>	
Specialised School for the Handicapped	yes	
Formal schools	yes (three)	<i>not free for everyone</i>
Village Adoption Schemes	yes	
Slum Redevelopment Schemes	yes	
Adult Education	yes	
Libraries	yes (ten)	
Higher Educational and Cultural Activities (such as foreign language tuition)	yes	<i>not free</i>

Ecological Projects (Part Funded by the Ford Foundation)

yes

Total annual income (from Calcutta and other sources)

c. Rs 750 (c. \$ 16) million

Under their 'Village Adoption Scheme' the Ramakrishna Mission, takes on twenty villages at a time near Calcutta where an integrated method is implemented to improve all aspects of rural life, with particular emphasis on children's and adult education, provision of basic health and antenatal cares, and the teaching of vocational skills to young people. Family planning is also high on the agenda. Till 1997, 9,000 villages were helped under the scheme.

Indeed, the rural development programme of the Ramakrishna Mission is so extensive that a separate semi-independent arm (called Ramakrishna Mission Lokshiksha Parishad) has been entrusted to look after that activity. Many of the village development activities are sophisticated, such as soil testing, and artificial insemination of cows.

It is not within the remit of the Missionaries of Charity to improve conditions in Indian villages, as villagers with land would not be considered 'poorest of the poor'. It is likely that those without land would migrate to the cities. In any discussion of the activities of MC in India, Vivekananda and his organisation merit special mention as they remain the bane of India's Catholic establishments. In the nineteenth century, large number of Indians, especially from the educated middle classes, would have converted into the more humane and rational Christianity, if Vivekananda had not come along. Vivekananda showed that practical Hinduism could be noble and charitable and thus stemmed the tide of conversion and rejuvenated Hinduism. Catholics have never forgiven him for that, which is why the Ramakrishna Mission is at the receiving end of murky slander by Dominique Lapierre in his Vatican sanctioned book (see chapter on *The City of Joy*). In his writings, Vivekananda frequently complained how the Catholic Church repeatedly tried to undermine him.

Catholics and the Ramakrishna Mission regularly clash over the conversion of tribal people. MC take the conversion of indigenous people very seriously, and Pope John Paul II, during his brief 1986 visit to India, after meeting Mother Teresa in Calcutta, flew off to a remote area in Ranchi to address tribal converts. The Ramakrishna Mission runs a free 160-bedded modern hospital in a tribal area of Arunachal Pradesh, something MC will not even contemplate.

The 1978 devastating floods in West Bengal, around Calcutta, was one of the very few natural disasters during which MC left their cloisters to help. But whereas MC fed 300 people daily, the Ramakrishna Mission fed 12,000 people daily for a fortnight in one district alone: Hooghly. That they could do it was thanks to their infrastructure. The students of the schools they run came to help with the relief services. On the other hand, MC lack the infrastructure to take substantial help outside their doorstep. The extremely sheltered life that the nuns lead and their obligation to pray according to a set routine make them unsuitable for going out into remote villages during crises when life could be unpredictable; their other major handicap is language. Hardly any of them speak Bengali, which makes it impossible for them to do any sustained relief work in West Bengal, especially in the rural outreaches.

Apart from the 1978 floods in West Bengal, the other disaster that MC extended help of some kind was following the cyclone and tidal wave in the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh (19 November 1977) which killed more than 15,000 people. Mother Teresa personally visited Andhra Pradesh and started feeding camps. Her biographer glowingly describes her actions:

A Sister wrote, 'Hundreds of corpses had to be buried. Mother went down on her knees and prayed for the victims as the flames consumed the bodies of cyclone victims . . .' Mother Teresa became ill and wrote me, 'I had an attack of malaria. That was the gift to me from Andhra Pradesh.'¹

There were a few hundred organisations helping in Andhra Pradesh in 1977, and MC were one of the smallest. The Ramakrishna Mission helped substantially with immediate relief in Andhra, but they also took up an ambitious project of building 1000 basic houses. This huge project was completed by April 1979, when the families moved in to their new estate, Ramakrishnapuram. Shortly afterwards, Mother Teresa received her Nobel Prize for her charitable work in India.

Major cyclones and tidal waves revisited Andhra Pradesh again on 7 November 1996, killing 1,500 people and devastating livelihoods. Where there used to be villages, there was flat wasteland. A few hundred thousand people were forced to take up begging; only there were not enough people to beg from. A few hundred Andhra women crossed over to Goa and were obliged to become prostitutes in order to feed themselves and their family. The prime minister declared the situation 'a national calamity'.

The relief operations following the 1996 cyclone followed a predictable pattern; the government came in a confused fashion. Local organisations in Andhra did a lot. The big boys, [Ramakrishna Mission](#) and [Bharat Sevashram Sangha](#), also did a lot. Many Catholic charities also helped, but the Missionaries of Charity were not amongst them. A few days later, [George Pereira](#), the Deputy Secretary General of the Catholic Bishops Conference of India, as quoted in a British Catholic organ, accused the central and state governments of causing ‘many deaths’². Whether Mother Teresa, who had operations in Andhra Pradesh, should have been called upon to bring her resources to the aid of the cyclone victims occurred to nobody.

BHARAT SEVASHRAM SANGHA

This is the other major charity in Calcutta and loosely translates as ‘Help India Society’. It is also one of the bigger charities in India. It was founded in Calcutta in 1917, when Mother Teresa was seven years old. Insofar as it is a deeply religious (Hindu) charity, it has similarities with Mother Teresa’s organisation; there are other similarities, such as lack of sophistication, eschewal of technology in their offices. Whereas the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Mission in southern Calcutta is buzzing with computers, the offices of the Sangha a few streets away make do with a single telephone: a very Mother Teresa approach. But the resemblance ends there. The Sangha is an order composed of celibate male monks only, who play a major role in relief operations during and after disasters. Indeed, there is an element of healthy competition between the Ramakrishna Mission and the Sangha.

When a calamity takes place in India, natural or otherwise, the monks of the Sangha are often the first to be seen at the scene distributing food and setting up feeding centres. They are well known to jump-in headlong in crises, and are occasionally criticised for the lack of a planned rational approach. They however have shown planning and vision in major crises such as in [Bhopal](#) and [Latur](#).

The following is a summary of activities undertaken by the Sangha in India as a whole (1996 statistics):

Bharat Sevashram Sangha Activities

High Schools	7
Junior Schools	40
Junior Basic Schools	1
Students’ Hostels for Poor Students 30 Orphanage	1
Libraries	12
Number of scholarships and assistances to poor students	3600

Rural Welfare Programmes - Ongoing (About 10 villages per annum)

Mobile Medical Units	12
Dispensaries	160
Eye Hospital	1
Acupuncture Centre	1
Medical Camps During Crises	about 200 per annum

Interestingly, Mother Teresa never thought of setting up an eye hospital for the poor in India, where millions lose their eyesight unnecessarily due to preventable causes such as cataract and trachoma. She was aware of the scale of the problem, as she used to eloquently endorse ORBIS, the Catholic charity which operates a flying eye hospital around the developing world. Indeed, hers is the only charity in India which has never sponsored an ‘eye camp’. Each year in West Bengal alone, about a thousand eye camps are set up by various charities.

Till 2000, [Bharat Sevashram Sangha](#) ran 5 leprosaria, all of them in Bihar. Indeed in 1994, MC formally requested Bharat Sevashram Sangha to take over their leprosarium in Sidgora in Bihar. Why the nuns had to abandon its institution is unclear.

The Sangha played a major role after the earthquake in [Latur](#) in 1993, although being a much smaller organisation, could not match the [Ramakrishna Mission](#). It ran a month long feeding camp, and also built a new high school building from the rubble. The total annual income of the Sangha was about Rs 50 million (not a big sum) during the late 1990s.

CHILD IN NEED INSTITUTE (CINI)

The biggest children's charity in Calcutta is not the Missionaries of Charity, but **CINI**. It was started in 1974 by a Calcutta doctor, **S.N. Chaudhuri**. From a one-room operation, it grew huge in two decades. Its headquarters are in Calcutta, but its operations are both in the city and the surrounding rural areas. CINI works on a grand scale, and MC do not come anywhere remotely close.

It will be difficult to summarise the multifarious activities undertaken by CINI, but here is a brief description:

1. Mother and Child Health Education Programmes

Health education is taken to the villages; giving basic instructions in antenatal, maternal and child care. Mahila Mandols (women's groups) have been set up to take health education to the villages. The women are drawn from the ranks of the villagers themselves.

1. Home Visits and Village Health Posts

Services are taken to the suburbs and rural areas, where immunisation, antenatal care, child development and basic treatments are undertaken. Currently, CINI has about 200 village health posts. CINI also trains traditional midwives operating in the villages.

1. CINI Outpatients Clinic for Women and Children

This ran every Thursday at CINI's headquarters in Behala, a Calcutta suburb; 700 patients were seen. The annual attendance in 1995 was 30,000.

1. Family Planning and Family Spacing Clinics

Every year, CINI distributed 50,000 condoms, fitted 300 coils, and issues 6,000 months' worth of the oral contraceptive pill (1996 figures).

1. Hospital

The premises in Behala have a small 12-bedded acute unit where babies and children with serious illnesses, such as severe gastroenteritis and pneumonia (and occasionally meningitis) are treated.

1. Nutrition Rehabilitation Centre (NRC)

Many of the children admitted to the acute unit suffer with malnutrition, so they are transferred to the 12-bedded NRC before being discharged.

1. Distribution of 'CINI Nutrimix'

CINI has created an infant cereal by roasting wheat and pulses and about 8,000 kilos of this Nutrimix are distributed yearly to the needy.

1. Pre-School Education

30 small pre-school nursery type schools are run.

1. Child Sponsorship Programme

Sponsors are sought in India and abroad to alleviate the poverty of poor families with children. About 1000 children were supported by sponsorship in 1997.

1. 'Shikshajyoti' Scheme

Older children receiving sponsorship are called upon to teach small groups of 3 to 6 year children from poor families.

1. 'Talent Search'

Children with a particular aptitude in an artistic area are identified and funded to receive specialised teaching.

1. 'Child to Child' Health Programme'

Older children are called upon to teach young children personal health and hygiene issues, such as environmental and personal hygiene.

1. Mother Sponsorship Programme

A sponsorship programme has been set up where pregnant mothers in Italy sponsor their counterparts amongst poor women in Calcutta during pregnancy.

1. Training

This is a major function of CINI. Thousands of health and community workers in both the government and voluntary sectors have been trained.

1. CINI ASHA Projects

These projects, targeted at exploited and particularly vulnerable children, were started in 1989. Child labourers and children of prostitutes are the beneficiaries of these projects. Hundreds of children have been saved from a life of abuse and prostitution through CINI ASHA. The workers of this project go into areas which Teresa nuns have not even heard of and even if they did, would most likely recoil in horror at the thought of working there.

1. Rural STD/HIV Projects

Education and awareness programmes in 5 rural red light areas around Calcutta, along with the distribution of free condoms has been undertaken.

All of CINI's services are free, except for training, where a charge is made to the trainee, and for Nutrimix, where a token price is levied.

CINI's activities have grown further since 1997, whereas MC's have shrunk. CINI continues to immunise thousands of children. Mother Teresa did not provide an immunisation service for poor children of Calcutta, not even for those in the slums near her homes. The government remains the biggest provider of immunisation, but numerous organisations in the voluntary sector have come forward to assist. In order to eradicate polio completely, the Indian government declares 'National Polio Days' in the country from time to time, when a concerted effort is made to give all children polio vaccinations and boosters. This is done in conjunction with the voluntary sector, with numerous children's charities coming forward to help with the implementation, but not amongst them are the Missionaries of Charity.

One of the major problems encountered by poor women in India is the lack of obstetric care, especially if complications arise in the last few months of pregnancy. According to CINI's 1994 report, 'One of the most serious problems encountered has been the lack of accessing hospital care at a low cost, especially for women at risk. The government hospitals offering obstetric care are overcrowded with inadequate staff and facilities. Private hospitals are prohibitively expensive.' What CINI did was to negotiate a complicated financial arrangement with a private hospital whereby poor pregnant women with obstetric complications would receive free treatment. Much of the money for this project came from an organisation called 'Amici di CINI' (Friends of CINI) in Verona in Italy.

Mother Teresa's order does not have any facilities for poor pregnant ladies of Calcutta. Although 'Go forth and multiply' was one of the major inspirations of her life, and despite her obsession with the foetus, she did not set up for Calcutta's pregnant women or their (unborn) children any antenatal clinics, any maternity clinics, any obstetric units, any mother and baby units or any child health clinics. It does, however, run at least ten mother and baby centres in the United States and one in [Rome](#).

CRY (Child Relief and You)

In terms of organisational network and annual budget, the largest children's charity of India is CRY; Child Relief and You. It began in [Bombay](#) in 1979 when seven Indians pooled Rs 50 to help a single child. CRY does not run any homes, but its functions are allocating its own funds to other charities to aid specific projects, sponsorship of individual children, and the training of men and women working with children. They have trained Mother Teresa's Sisters in Calcutta and elsewhere.

NARISEVA SANGHA (translates as 'Women's Welfare Organisation')

This charity, targeted at women, especially the 'lone women' of Calcutta and environs, was founded in 1944, a few years before Mother Teresa came out of her nunnery. It was conceived by a group of Anglicised Bengali women in the middle of the horrific 1943 Bengal famine which happened during the Second World War around Calcutta and which caused two and a half million to perish. Streams of starving villagers flooded into the city, and this is the *only* time in the city's history when corpses could be seen lying on the city's streets. Millions of widows were left to fend for themselves, and the NSS tried, in its small way, to address this problem.

Currently the NSS's main focus is the training of young women from the depressed sections of the society to become self-reliant. They are based in spacious premises (donated by the West Bengal government) in southern Calcutta and has the following functions:

1. Home for Destitute Women (125 places)

These women are required to attend 'industrial training', which teaches various vocational skills. I think most of these women do not come from the 'poorest of the poor' section of society. They are poor women who are homeless for social reasons.

1. Industrial Training Day School

Another 200 women are given non-residential training. 'Industrial Training' as specified by the NSS is mainly training in handicraft, such as saree printing, tapestry, manufacture of jute-based household products, embroidery, needlework. A small mechanical printing press is also run.

1. Cookery and Catering Units

Weekly cookery lessons are given and indeed, the NSS now has its own catering unit that sells its services to local businesses. Small scale manufacture of pickles, papads and condiments is currently a major function (and income) for the NSS.

1. Sudha Memorial Balwadi

A pre-primary school where 50 children from the 'poorest of the poor' section of society attend play school. It is also serves as a nutrition centre where these children are fed.

1. Shorthand and Typing School (and Computer Training)

The typing school was first started after the Bangladesh war in 1971 to help literate refugee women. Nominal fee is charged for training.

1. Working Women's Hostel

Single women working in clerical jobs in the city, unable to afford the exorbitant rents demanded by landlords, find the hostel for working women run by the NSS with nominal rent a way out.

SAROJ NALINI DUTTA MEMORIAL ASSOCIATION (SNDMA)

This charity was founded in 1925 (four years before Mother Teresa arrived in Calcutta) by Gurusaday Dutt, one of West Bengal's minor cultural heroes. It targets poor women, both urban and rural, and hence is run from two centres, one in Calcutta, the other in Mirpur, a village 36 km south of the city. The charity runs on a complicated but efficient system whereby about 130 sub-units called Mahila Samities ('women's groups') work under the umbrella of the association, but each with its semi-independent agenda.

The SNDMA headquarters in Calcutta has the following activities:

1. Handicraft Training School

This school is meant to teach illiterate women a useful skill, so they can strive to be independent. The skills taught are tailoring, carpet and handloom weaving, embroidery, tapestry, needlework, block printing (on fabric), brass engraving. The training programmes are geared towards a two- or three-year diploma course. Women training in handicraft are also encouraged, if they wish, to study up to Class VIII standard, which they can do in the same premises.

1. Primary Teachers Training Institute

Poor women, who have finished high school education, are offered this course aimed towards a diploma in teaching of pre-school children.

1. Primary School

A free primary school for children from very poor families, whose current student strength is about 260.

1. Adult School

This free night school, aimed at the very poor illiterate women, has a strength of seventy. Adult literacy is one of the major aims of SNDMA and all the affiliated women's groups have it as one of their objectives.

1. Printing Technology School

Meant for poor women with some level of education.

1. Marriage Guidance and Help for Battered Women

This service was started in 1985. Either conciliation or separation may be recommended. Counselling is provided for both partners. Legal help with divorce and alimony is also given.

1. Catering Unit

This unit trains women in cookery and also helps them run a catering business from the premises. The women are allowed to keep part of the profit.

1. Mother and Baby Clinic

This small clinic sees about 1,500 cases every year.

1. Family Planning and Child Vaccination

Family planning is a major function of the SNDMA. Children's immunisation and family planning are often run concurrently. Each year the charity carries out about 2,000 immunisations. On the family planning side, it carries out 300 laparoscopic sterilisations, fits 200 coils, and distributes 5,000 condoms. It also sponsors about 250 terminations of pregnancy yearly.

The rural (Mirpur) arm of the SNDMA serves 100 villages surrounding Mirpur. It has the following functions:

1. Library and Medical Centre

These are housed in the large village community hall constructed by the charity for the villagers. A small operating theatre and a pathology laboratory for basic investigations also operate weekly from the community hall.

1. 'Intensive Care Crèche'

A crèche for children from the poorest of the poor community, which also serves as a feeding centre.

1. Family Planning Drive

A large family planning initiative is undertaken from Mirpur. Every year 10 rural laparoscopic sterilisation camps are organised by the SNDMA. It also has 42 outlets for distribution of free condoms. About 300 coils

are fitted yearly.

1. Mother and Child Health

Ante-natal clinics and child immunisation programmes are run yearlong.

1. 'Save Sight' Project

This project, targeted at the poorest of the poor, mainly aims to prevent nutritional blindness, and carries out vitamin A supplementation for children at risk.

1. Child and Adult Education Centres

33 primary schools and 4 adult schools are run in the 100 villages.

1. Child Sponsorship

This is provided through the Christian Children's Fund, which does not seem to mind, given the SNDMA's trenchant pro-abortion stance. About 1,000 children are being sponsored. Families are also sponsored for a scheme, whereby hygienic toilets are constructed, or safe drinking water is provided.

1. Help the Aged Scheme

A monthly allowance is paid to about 30 widows from the poorest of the poor section so they can live their last days at home in their own villages.

1. Water Aid

Directly funded by the British charity Water Aid, this project has brought safe drinking water and built toilets for 50,000 rural people over the years.

1. Old People's Home

This small home, for the poorest of the poor, is situated in a village north of Calcutta.

The SNDMA is funded by both local and international donations. It has been particularly successful in garnering funds from Australia and Norway. Being one of the founder members of the Association of Country Women of the World (ACWW), it is in an advantageous position. The British High Commission in India is one of the SNDMA's more important donors.

ALL BENGAL WOMEN'S UNION (ABWU)

This charity was founded in 1932 (predating the Missionaries of Charity by 18 years) by two Calcutta women, [Charulata Mukherjee](#) and [Romola Sinha](#). The latter died in 2002 at the age of 94. It started with 3 rescued prostitutes and has now grown to an institution with impressive premises. Larger in area, in fact, than those of their neighbours, the Missionaries of Charity; Mother House and Shishu Bhavan being five minutes' walk from the ABWU's headquarters. A few years after its inception, the ABWU became closely associated with the rescuing and helping of women during the famine of 1943.

Currently, the organisation has the following activities:

1. Women's Home

It has 115 places for destitute women, often prostitutes or potential prostitutes.

1. Children's Welfare Home (Girls Only)

It has 130 places, for girls between the ages of 3 and 18. Most of the girls are orphans.

1. Primary School

Children and adults in the above homes are required to attend primary school which is at the same premises. Those wishing to go on to high school can do so at a nearby institution for free.

1. Pre-Primary School (for both boys and girls)

It has 350 places, and is open to both residents and to children from the nearby slums. Mother Teresa, whose operations are close by, does not have a similar function for her neighbours. She does have a primary school within her orphanage, meant for residents only, where the teaching is thoroughly unstructured, and where much of the time is spent in reciting (Catholic) prayers.

Mother Teresa did not run schools in Calcutta's slums despite her claims to the contrary. She could have, with her funds and contacts, even established a fully-fledged world-class school (both primary and secondary) in Calcutta for her 'poorest of the poor'. But she did not care.

5. Handicraft School

The older girls from the orphanage and the women in the home are obliged to attend training at the ABWU's handicraft school which teaches tailoring, sari printing, engraving.

6. Cookery, Catering and Bakery

The ABWU runs a thriving cookery school for women. Indeed, it runs a restaurant (Suruchi) from its premises, which is accessed by the public from RA Kidwai Road, and which had Princess Anne amongst its guests, when she visited the ABWU as president of Save the Children Fund.

The cookery school has a production unit, making pickles, papads, bread, etc.

7. Sponsorship

Orphans are sponsored under this scheme by a sponsor who pays a monthly sum towards the upkeep of the child. Although Save the Children is an important sponsor, the majority of sponsors are currently Calcuttans.

8. Psychological Counselling

As many of the orphans and destitute women come from severely disturbed backgrounds, counselling is offered. There is also a befriending scheme whereby a local family would befriend a particular girl, and would invite her for special occasions such as birthdays or festivals.

Particular attention is paid so that the women who had previously been prostitutes do not slip back to their old lifestyle. Many marriages are arranged by the ABWU and the girls are often married off in a communal ceremony.

9. Bata Shoe and Duckback Project

Two local manufacturers, Duckback (makers of waterproof clothing), and Bata Shoe Company contracted the residents of ABWU to produce a certain quantity of their products. This scheme provided valuable training for the women and an important conduit to the job market.

Mother Teresa did not have any industrial partnership schemes in her homes. The multinational companies of Calcutta (and the world over) were falling over each other to be seen to be associated with her. In 1975, when MC celebrated their 25th anniversary, (an event unreported in Calcutta's Bengali newspapers) a full-page advertisement was taken out in *The Statesman*³ by GEC, Dunlop, Brooke Bond, British Paints, Guest Keen Williams and Metal Box: 'Calcutta Thanks Mother Teresa and the Missionaries of Charity for 25 Years of Devoted Work amongst the City's Deprived'. Apart from these corporate giants, India Tobacco Company (part of the BAT group), the Calcutta-based multi-million dollar cigarette manufacturers, also keenly supported her through the years through donations.

It would have taken one phone call from Mother Teresa to any of these companies to arrange some kind of partnership scheme whereby residents from her homes would be given training and help with employment. But that phone call was never made. She did not care.

CATHEDRAL RELIEF SERVICE (CRS)

This small charity began in the wake of the Bangladesh war in 1971 and is affiliated to the Church of North India. It runs psychiatric units for the poor, development programmes in numerous slums, an artificial limb centre, a youth training centre and a home for the elderly poor. It is run by the dynamic [Dr Reeti Biswas](#), the son of an Anglican bishop. Bishop Biswas suddenly died leaving a young family which was plunged into penury. Dr Biswas was, as it happens, brought up in the famous [Motijheel slum](#), which according to folklore, has been transformed by Mother Teresa. Reeti overcame enormous odds and went to become a doctor. He was not one to mince his words on Mother Teresa (or on any other topic). Pointing to a portrait of Mother Teresa in his room, he told me:

I respect Mother Teresa the person but not the charity worker. Her entire agenda had been one of show and advertisement for her work. She had this fascination about people queuing up for crumbs outside her home. This she did so that others, especially foreigners, could see and wow. Once we sent some of our poor people to get some food from the Missionaries of Charity. They were ordered to queue up outside when they really didn't need to. Mother Teresa loved the image of a beggar with a bowl which is so dehumanising for the poor. I think they want people to remain poor and helpless so that they can come along and throw some crumbs and gather credit.

Previously the Missionaries of Charity used to give away some of their leftovers to our poor, but they have now stopped, no reasons provided. But, on the other hand, they are always coming to us for help; I have dozens of letters from Sister Shanti [one of Mother's closest nuns] asking my help in diagnosing TB, although our people (I am talking of the poorest of the poor here) could not dream of going to them for medicines. They do have some TB patients on their books, but they need to have these cards to get help. I don't know what the criteria are to get cards, but I know they don't come easy.

It's all very sad. With her resources Mother could have transformed the lives of Calcutta's poor, but instead she chose gimmicks.⁴

CALCUTTA RESCUE

Quite a prominent charity, which gets a lot of exposure in the West, and is run by the once-charismatic [Dr Jack Preger](#) (OBE), who had influential friends in UK media. *The Sunday Times* once quoted a destitute woman of Calcutta as saying, 'Funny that an Ingreswallah and not one of our own looks after us! Doctor Jack asks for nothing.'⁵ Concurrently, the paper also ran a fund-raising campaign for him, which netted £30,000 in a month. It does pay to be an *Ingreswallah* if you are doing charity in the Third World.

Preger is a trenchant supporter of the rights of Bangladeshi refugees in West Bengal, so I asked him about the acceptance of Bangladeshis in Britain. He said, 'Areas in Britain are now saturated. How many people can Britain absorb from Sylhet [area of Bangladesh] and other places? You get ghettos. . . in places like Brick Lane. . .' He also commented on 'immigrants buying into the cloth trade even in [Dublin](#). . . causing resentment there.'⁶

Preger came to work with Mother in the 1970s, but soon decided to leave her fold and start on his own, primarily because he got disillusioned with her medical care. He said 'perhaps Mother should let some other organisation, such as the Medical Missionaries of Mary run the medical side of her order, but unfortunately the Missionaries of Charity won't work with anybody else.'

Preger's charity, despite its intensely patronising name, is an efficient one. It receives a good deal of international funding and is run as a modern charity should be. It has a big network of international volunteers, more from Europe than from Britain. I believe in France, certain nursing courses officially allow a stint with [Calcutta rescue](#) as part of the curriculum. I know of nurses who have got coveted community nursing jobs in England on the basis of four months with Calcutta Rescue. The idea being, Calcutta is such an extra-terrestrial place that if you could have rescued it for four months, you can manage any challenge that is thrown at you.

There is a lot of medical emphasis in Preger's work, including clinics. He also has two primary schools, efficiently run. I know of instances when he paid for poor people to have pacemakers inserted in private hospitals. He donated wheelchairs to many destitute and beggars. The beggars in wheelchairs who begged for many years in front of the Indian Museum in Calcutta all had their wheelchairs given by Calcutta Rescue.

THE LEPROSY MISSION (TLM)

This UK-based Christian (Anglican) charity is the largest provider of leprosy relief in the Indian subcontinent. It runs the only leprosy hospital in Calcutta (Premananda Hospital), which specialises in eye care. Back in 1888, it opened Purulia Leprosy Hospital 155 miles from the city. It runs vocational training programmes in the villages. TLM was one of the major recipients of [Diana's](#) memorial fund, but in much of media it was described as 'Mother Teresa Leprosy Mission', a misconception stemming no doubt from Teresa's fascination with leprosy and Diana's fascination with Teresa.

Although leprosy cases are falling worldwide (including in India) by about 1 million per year, new cases are still being discovered in India. India continues to have the largest number of leprosy patients in the world.

Mother Teresa's order's leprosy work is on a much smaller scale than that of TLM. Also it is not particularly interested in the various extensive rehabilitation work that TLM undertakes.

However, it has to be said that, among all her charitable functions, Mother Teresa was the most sincere in her leprosy work. The leprosarium in Titagarh near Calcutta is almost decent and offers a level of dignity to residents. Residents are also offered the dignity of work through weaving the famous blue-bordered saris that the nuns wear worldwide. Many years before she became famous, Mother Teresa founded the leprosarium Shanti Daan about 350 km from Calcutta, where lepers stay and receive care in idyllic rural surroundings. Interestingly in the last twenty years of her life, when she made numerous outrageous claims about her charitable works, she talked very little about her genuine work with lepers.

SABERA FOUNDATION

This interesting charity was founded in 1999. One of the founders was Ignacio (Nacho) [Cano](#), the Spanish pop-star, who came to work with Mother Teresa. He then co-founded Sabera with a group of other notable Spaniards. [Penelope Cruz](#), who came to volunteer for Teresa in Calcutta in 1996 and also donated to her the entire earnings from her film *The Hi-Lo Country*, subsequently moved over to Sabera. Sabera started with its first resident Madhumita, who was 'rescued' from Mother Teresa's home. It is likely Cruz was not impressed with Teresa's work, though she made no such statement. The Board of Directors of Sabera read like a Hollywood *Who's Who*. Apart from Cano and Cruz, Melanie Griffith and Antonio Banderas were active functionaries who ran numerous fund-raising events. [Tom Cruise](#), though not formally a director, took a keen interest. Sabera brought [Ricky Martin](#)

to Calcutta (sponsored by [Hello!](#)) in 2002. It was rumoured that Martin brought a \$6 million cheque with him. He came to Calcutta numerous times on Sabera's behalf. The supermodel Esther Canadas was at one time trying to set up an exclusive designer Sabera label.

In 2001 Sabera launched a credit card with Penelope Cruz on the card-face clutching a scared child with a backdrop of unimaginable squalor. In its then website Calcutta was described as a hell-hole where thousands of women were abandoned in the streets by their families and 50,000 fetuses were killed annually. In truth, in all of India, gender-based foeticide is rare in Calcutta.

The happenings at Sabera in 2004 would shame a Bollywood soap opera. Serious internecine warfare broke out among the stars: Beverley Hills vs. Spain. The then CEO Carlos Duran made inflammatory statements against Hollywood stars. Then suddenly on Christmas Day 2004, Duran was deported by the Indian government (in a matter of hours) for overstaying his visa and other undisclosed reasons.

Sabera is now entirely run by Indians with none of the past giddy glamour. It focuses on the girl child and has two homes catering to 150 residents.

RESPONSIBLE CHARITY

In 2008 a 32-year-old fresh-faced American real-estate agent called Hemley Gonzalez arrived in Calcutta from Florida. Though an atheist, he was from a Cuban Catholic background. He went to work for MC as a volunteer, and within a fortnight his disgust was so extreme that he was petitioning the police, government and distributing fliers against the order. He was dispensed with the usual advice, 'It's easy to criticise, why don't you. . .' etc., so that is what he did – he sold his business and from the proceeds founded Responsible Charity in a rented room the following year. He did not know a word of Bengali or Hindi, had no contacts in the local community and was dangerously naive about the complex opaque ways of Indian society (he still is). He managed to band together a band of keen, humanistic band of Indian volunteers and paid workers, meeting whom restored my faith in Indian youth. He employed a French nurse, Céline B (name withheld at her request), who was similarly distressed by her experience with MC: Céline, whose aunt (from Martinique) was an MC nun, came to Calcutta in 2010 with a lot of hope to volunteer with MC, as for her and her family Mother Teresa was the 'ultimate icon'. She was horrified, and the last straw was when nuns told her it was not their problem if a poor 2- year-old boy called Yassi died from remediable dehydration: they chose to pray for him. She took the boy to her own room and gave him intravenous fluids and nursed him back to life. She took another destitute to MC and met with the same response. When she relocated to Calcutta with her husband and young daughter to work with Responsible Charity there was incredulous shock-horror among her family – that no sane normal person lived there! Céline says MC is a 'criminal' organisation which is there to 'Christianise'.

In August 2010, on the occasion of Mother Teresa's birth centenary, [Forbes Magazine](#) published a feature which was fairly critical of the late nun, for which both Hemley and I were interviewed. (A lot of MC's supporters belong to the Forbes super-rich list.) Shortly thereafter [Nirmal Hriday](#) shut down temporarily and some very modest improvements were instituted. Hemley believes the [Forbes](#) feature was directly responsible for the closure.

Despite meagre funds, Responsible Charity continues to provide sterling service to Calcutta's (and Pune's) poor.

There are numerous other effective charities in Calcutta, some big, some tiny. It is however vital to remember that charities/NGOs play a tiny part in the city's fabric, unlike in many African countries or in Bangladesh.

Most of Calcutta's charities were born way before Mother Teresa arrived in the city. Many of the bigger ones were started by women. Even the [Ramakrishna Mission](#) had the Irishwoman [Nivedita](#) (Margaret Noble) (1867–1911) as a major inspiration behind its founding. Nivedita was one of [Vivekananda's](#) foremost disciples who became a Hindu and dedicated her life to educate and uplift Indian women.

Sadly, one has to be white-skinned and Christian to gain recognition as a charity worker, particularly in India. Nivedita, who was a household name in my childhood, is gradually slipping into oblivion. And not many young Indians have heard of [Baba Amte](#) (1914–2008), who dedicated his life to serving and de-stigmatising leprosy sufferers. He worked in western India and founded three ashrams. His work has now grown into an industry and in one ashram alone there are 5000 residents. When he got the Templeton Prize in 1990 there was no fuss about him in British media. But when a not-yet superstar Mother Teresa got the same prize in 1973 she had acres of coverage, both in UK and India. In India itself he is becoming peripheral, while Mother Teresa's status grows steadily.

Indian charities, though well-known and respected in international charity circles, do suffer a great deal from lack of recognition amongst the Western public. While Calcutta Rescue and MC are awash with Western volunteers, there are none working for Indian charities. During 1980s there were frequently more volunteers than

residents in the Home for the Dying at Kalighat, and potential volunteers were routinely turned away. An acquaintance of mine was advised to go to their orphanage in Russia instead.

Indian charities do miss out on the huge wealth of human experience that Western volunteers bring with them. In terms of dedication, vision and sheer enthusiasm, they are unparalleled. There have been, amongst Mother Teresa's volunteers in Calcutta, nurses, doctors, scientists, social workers, architects, athletes, Hollywood stars, princesses, American senators and governors. MC save millions each year through free service provided by them. But in terms of experience and enthusiasm their service is priceless. With that kind of help, any other charity would have done miracles.

Many Westerners who went to Calcutta and were disappointed or appalled by Mother Teresa's activities, then came back with one or both of these misconceptions: a) at least she is doing *something* while the others are not, or, b) even if the others are doing much more than her, it was she who started it all. Both assumptions are wrong. There is a mental block among Western volunteers to learn about charitable Indians. Few Westerners visiting Mother Teresa in Calcutta would have heard of even the [Ramakrishna Mission](#), the country's biggest charity. Only [Calcutta Rescue](#) is widely known no doubt because it is also run by a white Catholic. Mother Teresa herself made the false and insulting claim that it was she who taught charity to Indians: 'A great change is coming about now. The rich are coming to wash and feed the poor. They are doing a great deal of work. Before now we, as Christians, had never given them the chance. We thought charity was for Christians only.'⁷

Mother Teresa herself was too drunk on her own ego to realise what low-level service she provided but many of her apologists despite knowing this chose to portray Calcutta as a Stone Age place, reason being they could then proclaim that Calcutta deserved no better.

Mother's finest hours in Calcutta were the 19 years (1950–69), when with little funds and recognition, she was achieving some alleviation of suffering in her target population. In the 1970s, as her international reputation was climbing spectacularly, the quality and scope of her work in Calcutta began to deteriorate. It was in this decade that poverty and its alleviation became more complex, especially for Calcutta with its fresh influx of refugees, not all of them poorest of the poor, who settled in the city. It was also in this decade that the Indian government took on an extreme pro-abortion stance, which made it impossible for Mother Teresa to cooperate with the government on welfare programmes (although she continues to receive free land from government). It was also in the 1970s that Mother began spending more and more time abroad, and took on a massive international expansion programme. Calcutta did not feature in that programme. Much of her international travel was for religious, rather than charitable reasons.

If we take a random year 1985, Mother Teresa went to the following countries in that year alone. [Japan](#), South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, [China](#), Australia, [Papua New Guinea](#), Switzerland, USA, Thailand, Egypt, Ethiopia, North Yemen, Tanzania, Kenya, Italy, Vatican City, Poland, France, Italy and Vatican City (again), USA (again). In between her travels, she fitted in a quick cataract operation at New York's St Vincent's Hospital. This had to be done quietly, as only a year back she had, amidst great publicity, said no to an offer from St Francis Medical Centre in Pittsburgh to operate on her cataracts for free. Humbly declining the offer, she had said that she could not accept the \$5,000 treatment when she could have the same operation in India; the media wowed.

She spent all of fall and winter of 1985 in the USA going back to India only to prepare for [Pope John Paul II's](#) visit there in February 1986. All her 1985 international visits, bar the one to Ethiopia, were for religious and diplomatic reasons. Can the gentlemen and ladies of the media tell me when, amidst all this whirlwind whiz, Mother Teresa (of Calcutta) could fit in the time to 'work in the slums of Calcutta'? And, 1985 was not an atypical year vis-à-vis her travels. Interestingly, she rarely visited Bangladesh, a very poor and needy nation, which is twenty minutes' flying time from Calcutta: evangelisation is impossible and dangerous in Bangladesh.

Mother Teresa deliberately gave her work a 'white Christian feeds hungry heathen' appeal because she knew it would tug at the heartstrings of her important donors and supporters. This was especially true for Americans who far are more religious and gullible than Europeans. While other charities moved on to more and more sophisticated and modern arrangements, Mother remained in her Biblical approach. She knew that this was the approach that produced the most moving images of publicity, and created the most vivid sentiments in the majority of the world's population. This is also the approach that appealed to glamorous celebrities such as [Princess Diana](#), [Penelope Cruz](#) or Gina Lollobrigida. Whether I am a 17-year-old backpacking Western youth or a Hollywood mega star wishing to change the lives of the poor in India in two weeks, I would much rather work in a rickety soup kitchen than sit behind a desk going through the sponsorship document of a slum-child.

Other Catholic charities in India have changed their way of working. Many of them are openly critical of Mother Teresa's approach, and, neither CAFOD nor Christian Aid would consider funding her work. Leo Baysham, the Indian Catholic who used to head Christian Aid's Southern Asia operations, said, '. . .she makes no

attempt at community health programmes for example. But people in the West carry on giving her money. . . The long-term care they offer children have no vision, no plan, no stimulation or education. . .'⁸

Mother Teresa's argument that tackling *causes* of poverty is, by definition, a political approach simply does not hold water. It is a cop out. Nobody should claim that primary education is politics.

She also indirectly deprived Calcutta's charities of funds, who complain that Mother Teresa still remains an obstacle for them to receive contributions from abroad. When it comes to Calcutta, donors abroad would often say 'Calcutta does not need any funding, as Mother Teresa's nuns are doing everything for the city, or more than everything', or, 'If we give money to a Calcutta charity, we'll send it to Mother Teresa.'

Mother exploited often struggling, institutions in Calcutta to further her own name. Although claiming never to use government facilities, she routinely sent her residents from [Prem Dan](#) to Calcutta's National Medical College and the Pavlov Hospital (both government hospitals) for anti-TB medication. One would have expected that she would bring her enormous resources to the aid of these struggling state hospitals. But she did not.

That is not all. Mother also took from other Calcutta charities. Her Sisters were trained for free by the children's charity [CRY](#). Some (empty) cardboard boxes were given instead of money.

Mother used the mental handicap charity Monovikas Kendra mercilessly. As her order does not have any training or rehabilitation facilities, she sent some of her charges to the Kendra for the day, every day. A token contribution would have been welcome, especially as the financial strengths of these two charities are rather different. But she would not donate any money to Monovikas for services provided. And that is not all. The children were brought to and from [Shishu Bhavan](#) in the Kendra's (sole) ambulance, when Mother's ambulances were being used to ferry nuns to the Auxilium Church.

When it came to receiving money from Calcutta's other charities, Mother was not one to overlook an opportunity. I know of an instance in 1994 when the orphanage Nav Jeevan had to pay hard cash to MC to accept one of their older children who could not be adopted.

Finally, to the strange case of Mother's plea for money to [Anandalok](#), then a fledging charity that provides, among other services, cardiac intensive care to the poor for a nominal charge. One day in July 1992, [D.K. Saraf](#), Anandalok's Director, was surprised to receive this letter:

Dear Sir

May I refer to you the case of Debasish Pal, who is in Vellore [a specialist hospital near Chennai run by Christians] undergoing treatment for leukaemia. He is unable to pay the high cost of treatment, due to poor financial positions. Kindly give him substantial help from your Trustee Board. I would be very grateful if you would help him.

God bless you

M. Teresa M.C.⁹

Saraf was surprised not so much because Mother Teresa was asking him for money, but more because she had even heard of Anandalok (then a very young charity), and was aware of the type of help they provided. In any case, within a week, a bank draft for Rs10,025 (No. Cal 1677 drawn on State Bank of Bikaner and Jaipur) was sent directly to the hospital.

Gratitude was, however, not one of Mother's more abiding traits (no wonder she treated Calcutta shabbily), for only a year later the same [D.K. Saraf](#) was snubbed rudely and then admonished in a letter (see Chapter 4), by Mother over the incident of her not turning up at the last moment at [Anandalok's](#) artificial limb donation ceremony.

Mr Saraf told me in an interview, 'I bear no grudges against Mother Teresa. If anything, I am slightly amused that she asked us, who could be classed 'poorest of the poor' compared to her financial strength, for money. But I am quite bitter that the West (and so many Indians) make such a fuss about her. Can you tell me what exactly she is doing?' Mr Saraf told me of an incident in February 1996 when a large number of shacks adjoining Mother's [Prem Dan](#) home burnt down. The slum dwellers did not even think of going to their illustrious neighbour for assistance. Instead they came to Anandalok, which undertook the rebuilding of shacks and also bought pots and pans etc. for them. 'The nuns watched on bemusedly as our people worked through the day rebuilding the rickety structures,' said Mr Saraf. 'But I must admit, we were given glasses of water whenever we asked.' Calcutta's expectations from Mother Teresa were woefully meagre. Sadly the city is not aware what she told the world she was doing for it.

12

Calcutta's Relationship with Mother Teresa

On 12 January 1997, Calcutta's highest selling daily, *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, did a light-hearted piece on influential octogenarians of West Bengal, entitled 'You are as old as you feel!' It described working days of two dozen elderly but active people who were in any way associated with the state. Mother Teresa was the only charity worker in the pantheon, the others being mostly from the arts. She was mentioned but briefly in the article. Eighty-two year old [Jyoti Basu](#) was still going strong as Chief Minister.

This was the same newspaper that, less than two months previously, on 17 November 1996, had carried on its front page a huge picture of Mother Teresa receiving her honorary American citizenship from the US ambassador to India, Frank Wisner. The picture and caption were deferential.

In Calcutta and in India, Mother Teresa is hugely venerated, but from a peculiar Indian perspective of 'someone who is a super-star in the West must be cool and great.'

Mother Teresa is a darling among upper middle class Calcuttans and much adored by the middle class. The rich love her, but the very rich, who usually come from the Marwari community (very often Orthodox Hindus or Jains) generally distrust her. The overwhelming majority of the poor in the city were unaware of her, and, at any one time, less than 1 per cent of the poor in the city would have got any kind of help from her.

In my childhood and youth in the 1960s and 70s, she was, at best, a peripheral figure in the city. I first heard of her in 1973 when I saw a picture of her in *The Statesman* returning from England with the Templeton Award. The next I heard of her was in 1979, when she got the Nobel Prize. I do not think it would be an exaggeration to say that, back in my high school days, in the mid-1970s, hardly any schoolchild in Calcutta would have heard of Mother Teresa – except for those who went to so-called 'missionary

schools', run by Anglican or Catholic churches. These are expensive institutions which are said to impart an English public school-type education. I am told that Mother Teresa was well known to 'missionary school' students. For instance, right through the 1960s, she used to appear monthly at a certain expensive missionary school in Calcutta, to talk about the scriptures and ask for donations, which she used to collect in return for little pamphlets called 'Soldiers of God', which carried stories from the Bible. I was a nerdy general knowledge ('GK') freak in my early teens but I would not have recognised her from a photograph.

Currently, even a primary school child anywhere in India would instantly recognise her, as hers is one of the most recognisable faces in the country. Again, children of the poor would not: her recognition broadly parallels Indians' economic status.

Mother Teresa's status in Calcutta has changed from indifference to acceptance and subsequently to adulation among upper classes. The turnaround point was her Nobel Prize. By and large, the Indian logic is, 'If the West is saying she is good, she must be good.' Most Indians blindly accept the verdict of the West, and have an enormous faith in the impartiality of Western media, and of the West in general. Amongst those readers who have lived in India, or have Indian friends living in India, would be able to appreciate this sentiment. In the last decade many Hindu nationalist Indians have shed this excessive adulation and moved in the opposite direction – rejecting anything that the West says, which has its own problems.

Mother Teresa's Nobel Prize did not make waves in Calcutta. I was an impressionable 21-year-old at the time and the only thing I remember are banner headlines in newspapers, especially *The Statesman*. Calcutta Corporation gave her a modest civic reception before she left for [Oslo](#). This was not a major event - I happened to discover it in my archival search. Certainly there was no public fuss or mass outpouring of joy at the announcement.

There were no crowds to meet her at the airport when she returned with her prize. (She left the prize money at the [Vatican Bank](#), despite a number of statements to journalists in Oslo that she was going to build this, that and the other with it in Calcutta.) Nobody has seen her medal in Calcutta – nuns say it is in an undisclosed location for security reasons. It is possible she left her medal at the Vatican, her true home.

The traditional Calcutta way to welcome a returning hero is to make a huge mayhem at the airport. When [Amartya Sen](#) came to the city following his 1998 Economics Nobel, there was a substantial pandemonium at Dum Dum, with hordes of journalists and a mass of people.

Mother Teresa, on her return from Oslo (via [Rome](#) and Delhi) was met at the airport by a clutch of local journalists, and by members of the city's Catholic establishment. Numerous photographs of her taken at the time at the airport will bear this out. No member of public was present.

An Englishman called [Dave Parry](#), a former worker at Ford (motor company) at Dagenham, happened to be in Calcutta throughout December 1979 (her prize was announced in October and formally awarded in December). He stayed at the YMCA hostel, a favourite haunt of Teresa volunteers. He told me¹ that there was hardly any talk of Mother Teresa or her Nobel outside volunteer groups. He remembers practically all the city's attention being gripped by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. He was quite involved with Calcutta's Christians, as his ex-wife was Anglo-Indian, but even among this group, Mother was rarely mentioned. And, as for the poor, he did not see any nuns working with them. He did see a couple of Teresa homes on his travels but they did not appear particularly inviting or active.

The mood among chattering classes was mainly congratulatory on her Nobel, but there were bursts of criticism. I am quoting here solely from the British Catholic weekly [The Tablet](#). On 8 December 1979, it ran the following feature:

In the correspondence columns of the Calcutta press, 'Delighted Calcutta' has been crossing swords with 'Disgusted Calcutta' over Mother Teresa's Nobel Peace Prize award. It will certainly appear from abroad that these exchanges are lacking in reverence which is her due. S.K. Ghosh in 'Mother Teresa: A Revaluation' ([Amrita Bazaar Patrika](#) [English daily, now extinct]), writes: 'In a recent controversy on the subject on the conversion to Christianity, Mother Teresa was sadly found on the wrong side, lining up with a handful of missionaries against the country of her adoption. . . But Mother Teresa also has reasons to be grateful to Calcutta and India. No other country and no other city would have offered her so many facilities and tolerated her open support of fraudulent proselytisation.'

Indian journalists, who are deficient neither in intelligence nor courage, have got their teeth into Mother's repeated condemnation of abortion and her refusal to accept 'artificial' methods of birth control. In a society in which overpopulation now kills on a large scale, her interest in the unborn foetus appears to them excessive. Her views on family planning are not universally shared by the Indian Christian community. *The Statesman* (10 November) describes the dissent of reporters: 'For the women she was addressing she had apparently outdated advice about the place of women being with their children, but then again based on her peculiar reasoning. . .'

The *Far Eastern Review* (2 November) was not too far behind in its Calcutta letter:

'It would be less than fair not to mention some of the controversies that have come her way.

Perhaps the noisiest of them touches a highly sensitive issue in Indian life: religious conversion. There have been allegations, denied, that those who come under the winds of her order almost always become Catholics. . .' Her Nobel award has certainly not cut across all local religious boundaries. . .

In 1978, she 'came out' as a champion of Catholic conversion with her public and virulent opposition to India's Freedom of Religion Bill. This Bill attempted to check conversion by force or inducement by Christian missionaries, who often commanded phenomenal financial resources. Most columnists viewed her stance as meddling in politics, which she had always claimed she eschewed. Moreover, her attempt to bring international pressure on the Indian Government by utilising her international position was viewed as meddling in the democratic process of the country.

I am saddened to say that such a measured, discerning and intellectual debate over the worth of Mother Teresa would not be possible in Calcutta today – mainly because of the city's intellectual decline, and her stronghold on people's emotions rather than reason.

Mother's image in the city began to climb around the mid-1980s and reached a peak in 1994. It has taken a certain dent following our *Hell's Angel* documentary in November 1994. This brings us to the question; why, compared with her pre-Nobel period, is her current image in Calcutta so

much more improved, given that her work has essentially remained the same? The answer to that I do not know. I can postulate certain theories: satellite television is one. Many middle class Calcuttans now get their news and indeed views about their country from various satellite networks around the world, all of which, shall we say, show a certain bias towards Teresa.

Many Indians tend to believe what they see, hear and read in foreign media. Indians in one part of the country are now beginning to depend more and more on foreign broadcasting services to obtain information on another part. As India is a huge country without a fast communication and transport network, an Indian in Assam, for example, would be more alien to somebody in Goa than a Norwegian would be to a Hungarian. In this situation, the prejudice shown by the international media with respect to Calcutta and Mother Teresa has a serious and lasting effect. Even so, Mother Teresa is not synonymous with Calcutta in the rest of India, as she is in the world in general. For instance, five months before her death, a political piece in the highest selling (Delhi based) national weekly *India Today* started off thus: 'In Calcutta, a city full of such everlasting icons such as [Rabindranath Tagore](#), [Satyajit Ray](#) and Uttam Kumar. . .'² It did not list Mother Teresa among Calcutta's icons, despite being a keen supporter of the Teresa mythology, simply because that is not the default position among Indians. I am sure, a Westerner reading the opening line might think that the correspondent was talking of a different Calcutta.

Calcuttans still croak that their city remains 'the cultural capital of India'. Even thirty years back, Calcutta had a distinctive culture: liberal, humanist, rather effete, but above all confident, which set it apart from the rest of India. Today, Calcutta's cultural decline is all but complete. It has now merged with the lowest common denominator in the rest of India. Today, a teenager in a middle class Calcutta household is glued to MTV and its Western pop stars, whereas in our days we were dragged by our parents to watch Bengali translations of Brecht's plays. Google tells us Calcutta is one of the top cities in the world to search for porn.

When a city's people becomes culturally bereft, it loses self-respect, and tends to stake claims for spurious achievements. Today, most Calcuttans claim Mother Teresa as their own, and also look upon her Nobel as some kind of reward earned by the city. Interestingly, Calcutta only reluctantly claimed [Raman's](#) 1930 Physics Nobel. This is because, although Raman

spent most of his working life in Calcutta (including his path-breaking Nobel research), he was not a homegrown Calcuttan.

Indians have a pathetic hankering after Western awards and recognitions, however minor. Amongst the Indian 'educated' urban classes it is necessary to converse solely in English and be ignorant of your mother tongue. This mindset is worst in Calcutta because of its colonial past. In many up-market schools in India (including Calcutta) speaking in the mother-tongue is banned and punishable. India is the only country in the world where this happens. Parents hanker after sending their children to expensive 'missionary schools' run by the Catholic Church. These schools are often not of a high standard, but are considered worthwhile because they teach good conversational English. Because 'missionary schools' are oversubscribed, Indians have started their own missionary schools. Devout Hindus would found schools with names like St. Soldier, St. Christmas or St Ethel-Burger. A school with an Indianised name would have problems attracting custom. As soon as Indians find out my wife is Irish, many of them proudly declare how he or she had a strict Irish priest or nun in school who would cane them regularly and thereby help in character-building. Beatings from an Indian teacher would be considered an insult on the family.

Until 1967, twenty years after independence, [Calcutta Swimming Club](#) used to admit only the white-skinned (there was a large European and American community in the city at the time). When a leftist government minister one day charged into the club with a band of pitch-black tribal men and jumped into the pool, the biggest criticism came from the ranks of chattering Indians: 'Is nothing sacred? . . .' etc. The Indian market is flooded with a thousand and one skin-lightening creams which are just over-priced harmful bleaches in a tube. Pick up any Indian newspaper, and you will find how all potential brides are 'fair and convent-educated'.

Indians are besotted with the Nobel Prize and are quick to claim any laureate who has any Indian connection at all. Hargovind Khurana, who left India for the US never to return and became a Chemistry laureate, is claimed by Indians as their own. Another Chemistry laureate, Venkatraman (2009), a US-UK dual citizen of Indian background, was so harangued by Indians claiming him after his prize that he did a special press conference imploring them not to email him to claim they knew him as a child.

In this context, Indians are proud that Mother Teresa added another tick to the small list of Indian laureates. They are not aware that she was also a Vatican citizen and the honour is not an undiluted one.

I accept Teresa is a towering icon in Calcutta today, yet her standing in the city is infinitely smaller than the world thinks it is. For instance, in 1995, just before West Bengal's autumnal festival the Durga Pujo, the Calcutta *Telegraph's* editor [Rudrangshu Mukherjee](#) wrote a large feature³ in his paper about the 'state of the city and the State'. He lamented that Bengal and Calcutta had declined sharply from giddy heights to basement level, and criticised Bengalis' penchant for creating 'icons of their great' but not really following their ideals. He mentioned a large number of the state's icons and even the non-everyday ones such as Satyen Bose (of Higgs-Boson particle fame) and Ravi Shankar (sitar maestro) but omitted Teresa! The omission was not deliberate as his newspaper is politically and editorially slanted towards her. Mukherjee, a product of upper class convent education, is very likely a Teresa fan and would have corrected his lapse if it was pointed out to him, but even to someone like him Teresa's association with Calcutta does not come naturally.

Mother Teresa never showed even a passing interest in Calcutta's culture and tradition, although her biographers claim that in the 1940s she was called 'Bengali Teresa' by other nuns. This might have happened but she would have been called so from subtle or overt racism which we now know she was subjected to by mainly Irish Loreto nuns. To be fair, she herself never claimed that she understood even the rudiments of Bengali culture. Mother's publicity machinery makes much of the fact that she spoke Bengali, albeit in a stilted and highly accented manner. But after a 68-year association, is that too much to expect? And nothing whatsoever exists, despite her being a prolific letter-writer, of her having ever written anything in Bengali.

On 28 August 1996, when Mother Teresa was ill on her 86th birthday, the columnist [Sumir Lal](#) writing in *The Telegraph*, examined her status in the city in the context of Calcuttans' need for personalities for adulation. He was not entirely happy that she had achieved star-status and examined her position vis-à-vis another contemporary stalwart, Jyoti Basu:

. . .the criticism she faces is more substantial than that which greets [Basu](#) [this is not the case in my opinion]. The emotions Calcuttans

feel towards her are, in the main, strongly positive. . . Calcuttans tend to be very proud of anyone who attain fame and recognition outside, and that is another reason Mother Teresa is such a star; . . . She is accused of being amoral and unscrupulous in her quest for funds; dictatorial; a publicity monger. . . the poor and dying are to her only a means of attaining salvation for herself. Hence the tremendous funds at her disposal have never been used to set up a state of the art hospital; to establish schools which would rescue generations from poverty; to renew the slums of Calcutta and eliminate disease and crime. There are also whispers of baptisms and conversions, of trading charity for Christ. And, there is the matter of her fame conveying a one dimensional image of Calcutta to the world as only a city of poverty and disease. The world is no longer aware of Calcutta's cultural and sporting traditions. But no matter. The people at large see her as a noble soul who has devoted a lifetime doing good work. She is also a Nobel soul and a darling of the West. So into the pantheon she rises.

One cannot discuss Calcutta and its icons without a discussion of Tagore. It is impossible to convey to an outsider the influence [Rabindranath Tagore](#) wields over Calcutta and West Bengal, more than seventy-five years after his death.

Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) was a product of the nineteenth century Indian renaissance, which largely happened in Bengal, and therefore known as the Bengal Renaissance. The reason why it happened in and around Calcutta is not because of some kind of innate cultural superiority of Calcuttans, as they think they possess, but because Calcutta was, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the portal through which Western liberal thoughts and ideas came to India, making it a fertile ground where new ideas could take shape. This is particularly true for social reformers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, such as Ram Mohan Roy, who amongst other reforms, outlawed the burning of widows (the suttee), and Ishwarchandra [Vidyasagar](#), who legalised widow remarriage and championed the education of women.

Renaissance Bengalis inspired the whole sub-continent and beyond, and created a watershed of knowledge and intellectual activity that permeated the whole of Asia. The Burmese leader Aung San Suu Kyi in her writings

has described how her father, her main inspiration, and other Burmese intellectuals of his generation were fired by Calcutta intellectuals. (Indeed, Burmese colleges at the time were under the aegis of Calcutta University.)

Tagore was born into a rich, landowning family in Calcutta when the Bengal Renaissance was at its prime. He was primarily a poet, but in the true tradition of the Renaissance man, also wrote novels, plays, dance dramas, short stories and essays. He was also a proficient painter. He wrote exclusively in Bengali, and is difficult to translate.

Tagore's other major contribution is in the field of education, for he never forgot his own emotional trauma as a child when forced through a cold, unimaginative education system. He used all of his Nobel Prize money (which was only a fraction of the total cost) to found an educational establishment about 150 km from Calcutta, in rural surroundings, where pupils were taught from nursery grade up to University level. Disenchanted with the Indians' obsession with theoretical learning and their mistrust of manual labour, he also founded India's first vocational training college.

Tagore had a particular dislike for the teaching of children in dark, cell-like classrooms, and he started the practice of open air 'classrooms' surrounded by nature, a tradition maintained to this day in Santiniketan. It is not generally known that the famous Dartington Hall in England, a school run on similar principles, was founded on Tagorean ideals.

Tagore's influence is, at every level, conscious or otherwise, of a Bengali, especially a Calcuttan. Every single child in Calcutta has to learn a large measure of Tagore as part of his or her growing up. Every school in Calcutta has, as part of its curriculum, a number of Tagore songs. I do not believe Tagore features in any way in MC's informal classes.

There are, of course, those in Calcutta who are not passionate about Tagore, and I include myself in that category. But no matter how you feel about Tagore, it is impossible to ignore him in Calcutta. Despite my lack of passion, I often find myself humming one of his songs in one of my moods; he articulated the emotions and thoughts of a Bengali like no other.

A few years back, *The Independent's* India correspondent, on a visit to Calcutta, wanted to test the genuineness of the city's passion for Tagore:

'I asked a petrol station pumper, a bureaucrat's wife and a policeman if they could recite a line or two from the Renaissance's most famous poet, Rabindranath Tagore. They all could, and the

bureaucrat's wife had to be gently stopped after she had sung three of Tagore's epic-long poems.⁴

The Smithsonian Institution remarked, 'It's hard to escape Tagore's influence in Calcutta. . .'⁵

Mother Teresa 'of Calcutta' never uttered the word 'Tagore' in her entire lifetime! In her 68 years in the city, she had not once, even uttered his name, not even in the context of her Nobel Prize. All her biographers have mentioned him, particularly when commenting on her Nobel. [Hillary Clinton](#), when she came to attend her funeral, said she was delighted to come to the city of Tagore and Teresa. Obviously she had been well briefed by advisors.

I do not know why Mother Teresa rejected Tagore so utterly. In her ignorance she probably thought he was an idolatrous Hindu, which he was not. He belonged to [Brahmo Samaj](#), a Christianised offshoot of Hinduism which eschews idolatry and casteism: but one would not expect Teresa to be aware of that, as she had neither interest in or respect for the culture of the city that made her famous.

Unfortunately for Teresa, she could not escape Tagore after all. One cannot, in Calcutta. Her funeral proceedings started off with the Tagore song, *Aguner Parashmani*.

It is said that Mother Teresa venerated Gandhi; she herself said so. She also named her leprosarium near Calcutta 'Gandhiji Prem Niwas'. It is likely that Teresa's public endorsement of Gandhi is an act of expediency. I find it difficult to believe that Mother Teresa did not know that Gandhi was a dyed-in-the-wool Hindu, idolatry and all, and strongly disliked Christian missionaries, despite his respect for Jesus – although he made the inflammatory statement that Jesus could not be the (only) son of God. I believe Mother Teresa adopted a lukewarm pro-Gandhi stance to enhance her acceptance in India. There are some broad strands where Gandhi and Teresa meet, such as in the matter of contraception. Although, unlike her, he never put artificial contraception in the 'sinful evil' category, he was a proponent of sexual continence. He considered lust a great evil.

India has regional heroes, and Gandhi has never been a darling of Calcutta. Putting it simply, the reasons for this are twofold: first, when Gandhi was pursuing his non-violent movement, the nationalist struggle in Bengal was an armed one, which Gandhi denounced and undermined. He

also fell out with [Subhash Chandra Bose](#) (affectionately called Netaji by the whole country: The Leader), Bengal's legendary hero, who rather naively raised an army to fight the British. Secondly, Gandhi was not accepted by Calcutta's chattering classes because of his total rejection of everything Western, including science and technology, and Western medicine. Calcutta, which had a distinct culture at the time that flowered because of Western influence, by and large rejected Gandhi's stance. Gandhi was against the teaching of humanities, arts and fine arts at college level.

There is a record of an encounter that took place between Tagore and Gandhi in the 1930s. Gandhi came to Calcutta to enlist Tagore's support for his call to eschew everything Western. In those days, Tagore was the 'sage of India', both nationally and internationally and people from all over came to him for advice and to ask him to endorse their causes. Tagore declined to endorse Gandhi's position and gently chided the latter for 'short sighted nationalism' and reminded him that India had a 'lot to learn from the West and its science.' Tagore also politely refused to take up Gandhi's passion for spinning one's own clothes and rejecting factory made garments.

Tagore was far from a spineless Anglophile. He was the first person to renounce knighthood. He returned it to the British monarch in protest at the massacre of innocent women and children in Amritsar in 1919.

So, this was Calcutta's culture: definitely pro-West, but ambivalent towards the British; anarchic and effete at the same time; but above all proud, distinctive and confident. This was the Calcutta Mother Teresa would have lived in during her youth. This was the culture the rest of India used to look up to.

Calcutta's distinctive cultural identity may be past, but what remains to an extent is the city's tradition of tolerance towards all religions; Mother Teresa exploited that tolerance to the hilt. Calcutta has steadfastly refused to be drawn into the caste- and religion-based politics of the rest of India, it was till recently a Left bastion. In the 1996 elections in India, the Hindu party the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) emerged as the biggest single party in the rest of India, but in Calcutta and West Bengal it could not manage a single seat. In subsequent parliamentary elections, BJP has continued to dominate Indian politics but in West Bengal it has just about managed to obtain a toe-hold.

West Bengal was ruled by the ominous sounding Communist Party of India (Marxist) – CPI-M - from 1977 to 2011, a record in India where state

governments do not last very long. West Bengal's former Chief Minister [Jyoti Basu](#) (1914–2010), is a household name in India and assumed a statesman-like stature. He would have become India's Prime Minister in 1996 had his party not pulled him out at the last moment, for inexplicable reasons; Basu himself called the decision his 'party's greatest mistake'.

Mother Teresa and Jyoti Basu (Chief Minister 1977–2000) knew each other for decades and their relationship was cordial. However Basu did not say, at the time of the announcement of her Nobel Prize 'You have been the Mother of Bengal, now you are the Mother of the world'. He has been attributed this remark by numerous biographers of hers, including official ones. The implication is obvious: Mother Teresa was such an essential part of Calcutta that despite her being a fundamentalist Catholic, she was feted by the Marxist Chief Minister. What Basu did say at the time was, 'Mother Teresa is a very worthy choice in the world today to receive this award.'

In Jyoti Basu's authorised biography⁶ Mother Teresa does not get a single mention in the text. In the book's picture gallery where he is shown with any number of international dignitaries ranging from [Nelson Mandela](#) to Prince Charles, there is a photo of him with Mother Teresa, the unconscious implication being that he was with another world dignitary, not a local one. In Basu's 572-page autobiography there is not a single mention of Teresa!

The pro-Teresa British author [Geoffrey Moorhouse](#), in his biography of the city, called [Tagore](#) and Basu '*The two men who have helped to make Calcutta what it is.*'⁷ Mother Teresa is not portrayed as a factor in determining the city's fortune or fate.

Basu had a Himalayan ego, and was vaguely aware how much Teresa was feted in the world. That he was often in a position to do her favours and that she regularly came to him to ask for such, massaged his ego no end.

Apart from Basu, Mother had did not have many friends in the ruling West Bengal political establishment. After Basu's somewhat reluctant retirement from politics (he had to be gently eased out by his party in 2000), Teresa's order found it difficult to get special favours, such as the grant of free government land when [Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee](#) (much to the Left of Basu) became Chief Minister. I have seen personal correspondence from Bhattacharjee sent to two Bengali intellectuals living in UK where he made it known (though did not spell out, being secular) that he was not happy with Teresa's association with his city. In September 2004 there was a rare

and virulent outburst by Biman Bose, CPI-M party chief and *de facto* number two in the government (some even said number one). Commenting on [Ricky Martin's](#) visit to the city to do charity, Bose said, 'Like Mother Teresa, the new breed of do-gooders are branding the metropolis as a doomed city inhabited by beggars, orphans. . . If such a pathetic picture of [Kolkata](#) is painted the world over how can we expect investors to have any faith in the city? Their charity is costing us dearly. We can do without it.' Sadly but predictably, journalists did not follow up Bose for further explanation. The matter died with the outburst.⁸

It is ironic that Mother Teresa was barred from her motherland [Albania](#) by the erstwhile Stalinist regime, and in Calcutta also she had to deal with a Marxist government for most of her working life. Fourteen years after her death the rabidly anti-Marxist but aggressively secular Trinamool Congress (TMC) came to power in the state, totally routing the Left.

Mother Teresa had a stable and cordial relationship with Calcutta Corporation. She often exploited the cash-strapped and overstretched Corporation to further her own name. Rarely she might also help them out.

Despite her fairly close association with Calcutta Corporation over the years, I was surprised to find that in *Calcutta Is*, a book (published by the Corporation in 1978) by [Sivaprasad Samaddar](#) who was the Administrator (a post created when the post of Mayor was temporarily abolished) from 1978 to 1983, she did not get a single mention within its 324 page philosophical and factual musings on Calcutta's problems and prospects. It was not an intentional omission: she was just such an infinitesimally small player in the city's urban life.

When [Pope John Paul II](#) came to Calcutta in February 1986, the Catholic establishment invited the Mayor of Calcutta to write a welcoming address in their special pamphlet that was published for the occasion. This is what [Kamal Basu](#) wrote to the chairman of the welcoming committee:

Dear Father Colussi,

The Pope's visit should encourage a large number from the affluent communities, both Catholic and otherwise, to contribute towards the development of Calcutta. . . We hope and trust that the visit of His Holiness Pope Paul II will be able to raise consciousness amongst persons who are in a position to contribute and get involved in such projects.

I believe the Mayor was hinting that Mother Teresa should have done more and should do more for Calcutta, and I asked him that question directly on one occasion. He was meaningfully silent. Incidentally, the Pope's visit cost the state millions.

Calcutta's religious tolerance was at its peak in the 1960s and 70s. As the city's problems multiplied, this tolerance diminished, and presently, I cannot say that the city is immune from the Hindu fervour that is sweeping the rest of India. The Hindu animosity of Calcutta, such as it exists, is directed against Muslims. The Christians are too tiny (comprising of 1.4 per cent of the city's population against a national average of 2.6 per cent) and too unimportant a community to be bothered with. In March 1995, nine American Evangelists were jailed in Orissa for converting tribal people with the lure of 'miraculous healing'. In January 1996, Louis Birje, an 82-year-old Belgian priest was given a prison sentence for converting 94 tribal people in a remote area of Madhya Pradesh. These happened when Mother Teresa was alive.

During 2000 and 2001, church after church was burnt in Gujarat, Gandhi's state. In 1999 the Australian missionary [Graham Staines](#) and his two sons (merely 10 and 8 years old) were burnt alive in Orissa. When Jyoti Basu was alive, Christians and Muslims from all over India would seek his help (he had wide cross-party influence) to offer them protection as they knew Calcuttans had no time for religious intolerance.

BJP came to power in Delhi in 2014, annihilating the secular Congress. Hindu nationalists in other parts of India are now greatly emboldened and many states are trying to criminalise conversion from Hinduism. But West Bengal remains safe for Christians; indeed the current state government is far more sympathetic to MC than were the Marxists. Two new statues of Mother Teresa have been put up in the city – a group-statue with her hugging two children was inaugurated by the Chief Minister herself in 2012 outside the National Library. This was a gift from the Russian Federation - which is strange as in Moscow they demolished an MC home without any notice. The other – a huge multi-coloured grotesque Disney type creation – was placed in a traffic island in the Salt Lake area in 2015.

When Mother Teresa founded her Home for the Dying in 1952, the city's Corporation gave her the abandoned building adjoining the Kali temple, one of the holiest of Hindu temples in India. There was considerable opposition amongst priests and orthodox Hindus, but majority

of liberal-minded Hindus at the time saw nothing wrong in a Christian missionary running a home along Catholic lines beside their temple. The then Chief Minister of West Bengal, B.C. Roy, who was, like [Tagore](#), an adherent of the [Brahmo Samaj](#), brushed aside any final opposition. This would not have happened in any other city in India.

Sadly, Mother's Kalighat home, [Nirmal Hriday](#) has done little to promote inter-religious relations in Calcutta. She did not maintain any kind of relationship with the temple priests. That does not surprise me, as in Biblical terms, pagan Priests (along with scribes and Pharisees) are the lowest of the low.

Kalighat priests distrust and dislike MC. They feel resentful and betrayed. One of their main complaints is that people from all over the world come to see Nirmal Hriday, whereas hardly any step inside their temple, which is literally next door: the grudge being about the loss of the potential earnings which could be theirs. They also point out that, unlike other Hindu temples, Kalighat allows non-Hindus to pass through its portals.

Kalighat Temple is not clean, in the tradition of many old Hindu temples. When I told the priests if they made their temple cleaner and more aesthetically pleasing, they could increase their revenue from tourists, they pointed out that Mother Teresa's home is more gruesome and dire, but princesses and presidents kept trooping through its doors.

There is a Teresa parable, repeated umpteen times, about a Kalighat priest who was dying of [cholera](#) and was rejected by his friends and colleagues, and who was finally taken in by Mother Teresa in [Nirmal Hriday](#); he recovered and from then on, she became a darling of the priests of Kalighat. Prior to this point, they had treated her with great suspicion.

In the manner of all Teresa parables, no details are supplied, i.e., name or date, but it is said that it had happened in Mother's early days. Cholera did break out in Calcutta in 1958, so it could have happened then, which was six years after the home opened. I interviewed at least two dozen Kalighat priests (of all generations) on video, but none was aware of the incident. This did surprise me, as according to the publicity machinery (and the media at large) this episode has been etched for generations in the minds of priests. According to the older priests, it is impossible that a Brahmin priest from the temple of Kali would agree to lie in a Catholic home; they also said that his being rejected by his friends and colleagues sounded

outlandish, as in Hindu terms, cholera is not an 'unclean' condition. When I said to them that the story sounded entirely plausible and that they could not be so sure, they challenged me to give real evidence of any Hindu priest who has even passed through the doors of Nirmal Hriday in its entire existence.

I personally think that the incident could have happened, but obviously it has not become the folklore in Kalighat that Mother Teresa had us believe.

I managed to interview a senior priest, Mohit Chattopadhyay in 1995 but I could not get him to talk about Mother Teresa, whether on or off the record. He said about her work, 'Her work, though on a small scale, is useful.' When I asked him to discuss the general principles of her work and its impact, he said, 'Mother Teresa is an international celebrity. Compared to her, I am less than ruffian. It would be imprudent of me to discuss her.' One has to merely scratch the surface to sense the hostility felt by Kalighat priests towards MC. Mother was singularly unsuccessful in bringing love and harmony to her own doorstep when she was telling the world how Nirmal Hriday was an orchard of love and peace, 'heaven's waiting room', etc.

There was another outbreak of [cholera](#) in Calcutta in May 1993. Kalighat was badly affected, being a dirty and crowded area. The Infectious Diseases Hospital in Calcutta got swamped and treated 22,000 patients just in the month of May. A few hundred died. What did Mother Teresa of Calcutta do during the crisis? She probably did not know about it as she was in the Vatican.

In July 1996, cholera broke out in the southern Indian state of Kerala, where MC run numerous operations, as the state has a large Christian population. Two hundred died in the outbreak; MC were not among the people seen to help cholera victims.

In the 1970s Mother's international reputation rocketed, particularly in the US where she probably became more popular than Jesus. *Time* magazine put her on its cover and coined the phrase 'living saint'. Yet she was not a household name in Calcutta. Her 1979 Nobel made her such, but not as a charity-worker, but as a celebrity.

[Dr Hilary Standing](#), the British sociologist (University of Sussex, and Tavistock Institute, London), author of *Dependence and Autonomy: Women's Employment and the Family in Calcutta* (Routledge, 1991) visited

Calcutta numerous times through the 1980s. She also lived there continuously for 18 months. She said:

I heard more about her in Britain than I did over there. I never came across any evidence of her work. Certainly I did not see her nuns working with the poor in the streets, or elsewhere. [Much of Dr Standing's work was done with poor and slum women.] I'd say she does not cross the paths of 99.9 per cent of Calcuttans. I heard her being discussed only once over there, which was when my friend was thinking of adopting a child. Mother Teresa's orphanage was one of the few she visited but wasn't impressed. Mother Teresa and *City of Joy* serve to re-reinforce the fears and fantasies of the West, and Calcutta fulfils a particular role in maintaining the old fantasy of the white man's burden. Although she is not a significant figure in real terms, she has, for some people, become an honorary Bengali. Bengalis do like heroes and for some people she fulfils that need. I'd say she is particularly popular with the clubbing classes.⁹

[Dr William Radice](#), Professor of Bengali at the internationally famous School of Oriental and African Studies, London, has been to Calcutta numerous times, starting from the 1960s. He said that only once had he heard Mother Teresa being mentioned over there: by the mother of an academic friend of his. And, it was in the context of attempts to find a member of the poor a home to die or lie in. He was not aware of the outcome of the attempt. He said he was not particularly ill-disposed towards Mother Teresa but he did despair at the horror that struck his audience when he informed them that he was going to Calcutta. He has had only one direct experience with the order in all his times in Calcutta, when he handed over some money (to Mother personally) that an Irish acquaintance had given him to pass on.

To give an idea of how much Mother Teresa was considered a part of the city's life in the 1970s, I consulted numerous *Who's Who* of that decade. In India, the various yearly [Who's Who publications](#) were taken very seriously indeed, both by the publishers and the population. They used to sell in their millions. Personality cult and hero worship are essential to Indian culture, which these books satisfied.

There were then half a dozen major yearly *Who's Who* in India, and the two biggest sellers were [the Times of India Who's Who](#) (first published 1913), and *The Year Book and Who's Who* – published from [Bombay](#) and Calcutta respectively.

Mother Teresa makes her first appearance in the *Times of India Who's Who* (which carried about 450 entries) in 1978, the pre-Nobel year. She gets a small mention as 'Mother Teresa Bojaxhiu'. The following year she takes off in a big way.

The Calcutta publication carried eighty famous names from the whole nation: Mother Teresa did not appear until 1981, two years after her Nobel, when she got a nice substantial paragraph.

I have traced another publication; *Who's Who in India*¹⁰ published from Calcutta in 1973 and carrying 1,700 illustrious names of India. Mother Teresa is not one of the 1,700.

*Famous India, Nation's Who's Who*¹¹ (1250 names), published from Delhi also does not have her until 1979.

A book published in 1970 called *Calcutta Today: A Comprehensive Survey* (Sales & Display Publications, Calcutta) not only does not have any mention of Mother Teresa in its text (despite it dealing with primarily the city's problems) but also does not feature her in its list of 'Who's Who in Calcutta Today'. The list runs to 239 names, and includes anatomists and glass blowers.

The only publication from the mid-1970s that gives Mother Teresa a mention is the *Directory of Indian Women Today*¹² published from Delhi in 1976. Mother Teresa, appearing as one of 4,500 notable women of India, has nice things said about her. This book also gives a state-wide list of 'Social Welfare Organisations'. Surprisingly, MC do not appear under West Bengal or indeed under any other state.

Mother Teresa's omission from Indian *Who's Whos* is noteworthy insofar as she had become a fixture in similar publications in most Western nations, especially in the US, from 1972 onwards. By the mid-1970s Western media were reporting that she was a star in Calcutta (among all strata of society) and people kissed her feet as she walked along. Kissing one's feet is wholly alien to Indian culture, even if you adored them.

Her omission from the Calcutta publications throughout the 1970s and early 80s fits in with my own perception of her work and the awareness of

her presence in Calcutta during that period. Today, MC's work has remained the same, but her acceptance in the city has increased manifold.

Between 1978 and 1985, I used to travel daily on my moped from my home in southern Calcutta to Calcutta Medical College in the heart of the city. I used to take a short cut which took me past Mother's orphanage, [Shishu Bhavan](#); all that I saw of the orphanage was the massive iron gates which remained securely shut. Sometimes, when I passed the building around midday, I would see between fifty and hundred people queuing up for their meal at the soup kitchen. Whenever I saw this sight, I would feel thankful towards MC for providing a useful function for the poor. I thought nothing more about it or about Mother Teresa or her order, until I came to the West. Upon coming here, I realised that Mother Teresa had been feeding entire Calcutta single-handed!

Since Mother Teresa is so much more popular with the middle classes in Calcutta today, I did numerous surveys among school and college students in the city. One such survey was done at Kalighat Women's Christian College, and was done for me by a friend who taught English there, in 1996, a year before Mother's death. It was done with only thirteen students (randomly picked), all of them in 2nd year Eng. Lit. The women-only college has a total of 400 students. Each student was asked to name two persons, living or dead, who she thought were the two greatest people associated with Calcutta in the city's history.

Here is the result:

Student No.	Two Greatest People In That Order
1.	Satyajit Ray, Sukanta Bhattacharya (socialist poet)
2.	Rabindranath Tagor, Sarat Chandra Chatterji (writer)
3.	Uttam Kumar (matinee idol), Jibanananda Das (poet)
4.	Rabindranath Tagore , Jyoti Basu
5.	Mithun Chakraborty (film star), Swami Vivekananda
6.	Mother Teresa, Annada Sankar Roy (Writer)
7.	Kishore Kumar (singer), Ramakrishna Paramhansadev (Hindu Mystic)
8.	Ram Mohun Roy (social reformer), Nazrul Islam (poet)

9. Rabindranath Tagore, Satyajit Ray
10. [Vidyasagar](#) (social reformer), Swami Vivekananda
11. Rabindranath Tagore, Satyajit Ray
12. Satyajit Ray, Uttam Kumar
13. Netaji [Subhash Chandra Bose](#), Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose (Scientist)

My friend also asked five of her teacher colleagues (from a mix of disciplines) to name the greatest pair, but Mother Teresa did not feature amongst the ten names.

I have decided to reproduce here the survey in Kalighat Women's Christian College because of two reasons: first, it happens to be in Kalighat, about half a mile from Mother's Home for the Dying, and secondly, because it has about 15 per cent Christians among its students, which is ten times higher than the proportion in Calcutta's general population. There is also a higher than usual percentage of Christians among the teachers. It is a government college, but was founded (in early twentieth century) by two Bengali Christian women.

I have undertaken similar surveys in four other colleges in Calcutta with slightly larger numbers of students (both male and female) but Mother Teresa didn't once feature in any of them. [Tagore](#), Ray, [Vivekananda](#) and Netaji were the most popular choices. I was relieved when Mother Teresa came up in the Kalighat College survey. I am not aware if the student who named Mother Teresa as her first choice was a Christian.

I am not for one moment claiming that my surveys were scientific or that they would stand up to statistical scrutiny, but they are, I think, representative of public opinion in general.

I have also done similar surveys amongst high school students in Calcutta's schools, and the results are quite interesting. In the poor or lower middle class schools, Mother Teresa did not come up at all, whereas the more affluent the school, the more she was recognised as an icon. This is not only true for the expensive church runs schools but she was also cited by a couple of girls from Modern High School, a school for the wealthy run on Hindu secular principles. However, in no school survey was she mentioned by more than 15 per cent of the respondents.

There is record of one published survey in India before Mother's death which was of a similar nature but it had been conducted outside of Calcutta. It was sponsored by the magazine *Business Today*, and was carried out on their behalf in the cities of [Bombay](#), Delhi and Bangalore, by the market research company Mudra Communications. They asked 302 subjects, between the ages of 10 and 20, to name their ideal 'role model' in life. [Mahatma Gandhi](#) and [Jawaharlal Nehru](#) (India's first prime minister) came up tops. According to *Business Today*, Mother Teresa and [Indira Gandhi](#) were quoted by a 'miniscule percentage'¹³. In the 10 to 13 age group Mother Teresa did not occur at all.

In my other survey, I asked 200 high school students in Calcutta, representing a cross-section of society, the question, 'Is Mother Teresa good or bad for Calcutta'? Ninety-two per cent said she was good. I must emphasise that my survey excluded Mother Teresa's 'poorest of the poor', hardly any of whom would have heard of her.

In 2000, www.calonline.com did a poll to elect the most significant contributors to Calcutta in various fields. Mother Teresa got two votes, fewer than most politicians. In the 'most charitable person' category [Vidyasagar](#) topped.

One reason why Calcuttans are currently so positive about Mother Teresa is because they are unaware of how their city is viewed in the world. A few are aware that the city has an image problem, but do not consider Mother Teresa as the reason. Calcuttans on the whole are convinced that Mother Teresa has enhanced the city's reputation in the world! They tell me that she has done so by portraying the city as a caring and compassionate place. Many are aware that Mother was called 'saint of the gutters' but a denial mechanism works if you try telling them that the gutter in question is Calcutta. They will tell you that the phrase signifies that Calcutta makes room for charitable people who are prepared to work in the gutters.

It is very difficult to convey to an ordinary middle-class Calcuttan that Mother Teresa's association has been terrible for their city. The main reason for that is Indians' slavish fascination with the West. Calcuttans are deeply impressed by her access to Western heads of state, particularly US Presidents. Teresa is seen as a Western icon, and hence almost beyond reproach. Most Calcuttans feel the city was privileged that she lived there (they are unaware how little time she spent in Calcutta). To criticise Teresa would imply tacit criticism of the West, which is difficult for many middle-

class Indians. In Calcutta, this mind-set is even more surprising, as it was a city of protests, and is known in India as the 'city of processions, strikes and agitation'. Calcutta is the only city in the world to have brought out processions against the Taliban treatment of women, and then again, against the US attack on Afghanistan.

Calcuttans also have the delusion that the British still have a special place in their hearts for their city as the epicentre of the Raj. It is futile telling them that, even to the majority British, Calcutta is simply synonymous with utter squalor and Mother Teresa.

A huge billboard advertisement (first appearing in 1994) erected by the Calcutta-based United Bank of India came up on the main road from the airport to the city, probably aimed at the handful of international visitors to the city. It ran: 'Welcome to Calcutta, The City of Tagore, Teresa and Ray'. The text was embellished by a little picture beside each name; Tagore and Ray getting a quill pen and a cine camera respectively, and Teresa being carried off with a dove. The hoarding stayed for almost seven years. Educated Calcuttans refuse to believe that their two greatest icons, namely [Rabindranath Tagore](#) and [Satyajit Ray](#) are unknown names in the West. Even my own family would not accept it. They have this notion that Tagore may not be widely read internationally, but he is a household name! It is futile trying telling them that Ray's films have not been shown anywhere in the West in mainstream cinemas for the last thirty years.

Calcuttans have no idea that the world has a one-dimensional view of their city. 'But our city is no different from any other city in India! Surely the West should know that! Surely, the West cannot be that ill-informed!' they say.

A large section of the city's population, especially from the semi-literate lower-middle class, has developed the notion that she became a Hindu. She certainly had many of the mannerisms of a Hindu holy woman. Furthermore, in the Hindu tradition, holy men and women from all faiths are revered.

During April 1996, [The Asian Age](#) newspaper invited its readers to contribute on the theme of 'Mother Teresa – Saint or Sinner?' The majority of the people writing in said that she was a good, holy and helpful woman; some even said she was a saint.

I am quoting from one of the letters that portrayed Mother Teresa in a positive light:

On my way back to Calcutta the next day [20 February 1996], I came across a couple with a four month old baby who were sharing the [train] compartment with me. We started talking and I asked them the reason for their visit to Calcutta. The answer surprised me. They wanted Mother to bless the child, who was suffering from a heart disease. The parents had been informed that the infant had two holes in his heart which needed an operation that would cost Rs 1.2 lakh. They could not afford that amount and said that their only hope was Mother Teresa's blessing. What, I would ask you, does a suffering person need? Strong antibiotics, or blood transfusions, as Mother's critics would suggest, or compassion which parents of the ailing child hoped for? Does Mother Teresa not spell hope beyond medicine? Are those eyes not blind that cannot see beyond antibiotics and medical tests?¹⁴

The story sounded plausible, and some Hindu families (I am assuming that the family in question was Hindu) would indeed do a tour of all the various shrines and of the numerous holy men and women of different faiths when faced with an incurable disease in one of their own. But what is noticeable here is the triumph of superstition over rationality, and the condemnation of latter by the author, who was obviously educated. The other more notable point was the acceptance that Mother Teresa's duty in respect to a poor ill child should be confined merely to blessing. This concept may be extraordinary in the West, but not in India. For here, Mother is canny enough not to give her clarion calls, 'Bring me that child. We do not refuse anybody.' In India, she is looked upon by many as a very pious lady who has some charitable functions also. Most ordinary Indians are unaware of her extraordinary financial prowess; indeed they were much impressed by her impoverished affectations. When she faced criticisms amongst certain sections in Calcutta on account of the cost of her treatments (amounting to a million rupees) in 1996–97 being waived by the [Woodlands Clinic](#) and the Birla Heart Research Institute, the chattering classes came to her defence, arguing that after all, she was a 'poor, holy woman'. I am therefore not surprised that the author of the letter did not question whether Mother Teresa should be called upon to pay for the child's heart operation. After all, Rs 120,000 was peanuts to her.

Mother had a comfortable relationship with Calcutta media. Pankaj Saha, one of the kingpins of Calcutta Television, was a fan. He did the Bengali narration of her funeral and frequently broke into poetry, pseudo-spiritual gibberish and fond reminiscences. *The Statesman*, which was virtually the city's only English language newspaper before *The Telegraph* appeared (in the 1970s), was slavish in its support. On 16 September 1997, eleven days after her death, *Statesman's* Editor-in-Chief and virtual owner [C.R. Irani](#) wrote a feature (one of his precious 'Caveat's) entitled 'Lead Kindly Light!' where he launched a bitter attack on her critics. He gently chided her dentist for disclosing her love of chocolates, but then made apology after apology for her association with the morally dubious. She was 'not a social reformer' neither a 'social worker', he said. 'Every crooked businessman makes an offering to a temple. . .,' so it was okay for her to take money from whosoever offered her? Then he made an apology on her behalf which is unique in India. He said, so what if she was against contraception and abortion? She did not harass the birth control clinics that were on the same street as Mother House.

One of the most outspoken critics of Mother Teresa in Calcutta's secular media today is [Sunanda K. Datta-Ray](#), paradoxically a former editor of *The Statesman*, and also a former editorial advisor to *The Straits Times* of Singapore. Writing in *The Telegraph* at the time of the elections to choose Mother Teresa's successor, he said:

For Calcutta, this ought to be a time of sober stock-taking. . . the stooped Albanian born woman has made Calcutta the metaphor of deprivation, destitution and degradation in much the same way as earlier generations linked the city with the [black hole](#) of imagined infamy. Internationally, Mother Teresa is the symbol of Calcutta. But how much reason does the city really have to be grateful to her? What public works, institutions and general charities do we owe to her devotion? . . .The time has come to ask how much of an impact Mother Teresa really made on pain and poverty even in the wastelands of Tiljala and Motijheel [slums areas of Calcutta]. . . The order's new head can ensure that the vast fortune Mother Teresa has accumulated is repatriated to India, and invested in Calcutta's bustees [slums], in a feeding programme for the undernourished, in clean and comfortable homes for the aged, and above all, in a fine

and fully equipped free hospital where the poor are guaranteed world class doctors, nurses, medicines and treatment. Or at least, of Woodlands standard! [the clinic Mother Teresa herself went to when unwell] It would be a small price for a halo.¹⁴

A variation of the same feature appeared in *The Telegraph* after Mother's death. That was the sole strongly critical view of her in local media (including *The Telegraph*) in the weeks following her death.

International journalists who travelled to Calcutta during Mother Teresa's serious illnesses privately expressed their astonishment at the lack of public concern. They were told to expect wailing crowds all over Calcutta, especially outside the clinic where the moribund 'saint' lay fighting for her life. What they saw was different, but they were careful that they did not tell the world what they saw. They were keen to give the impression that Calcutta became stricken with grief during Mother's illnesses and came to a near standstill. I challenge these journalists to show me a single photograph of even half a dozen poor people praying for her recovery anywhere in Calcutta. During Mother's August-September 1996 illness, my assistant and I kept a round-the-clock vigil (which is entirely recorded on video) outside these two buildings. Never did we see a single ordinary Calcuttan coming to enquire after Mother's condition, let alone pray.

The only public prayer that happened (during each bout of illness) was that organised by the Catholic Church in Calcutta's Mahajati Sadan (a public hall) where prayers for her recovery were said by leaders of various religious faiths. It was attended mainly by the Catholic population of the city, some politicians and journalists.

In the last four years of her life, whenever Mother Teresa took gravely ill, the only change seen outside Mother House was the deployment of policemen. Police were also deployed outside either the Woodlands, or the [Birla Heart Institute](#), wherever Mother happened to be at the time. This was for the unending stream of VIPs that came to pay their respects. Much of this respect was genuine, but for many, Teresa, offered a quick means to get on the front pages of national and international media.

On 28, 29 and 30 August 1996, I recorded a large number of VIPs coming to Woodlands to wish Mother Teresa a speedy recovery. This included the state's Governor, The US consul to Calcutta and half a dozen

judges! Absolutely no sign of the poor though. The Rotary Club of East Calcutta put up a velvet banner wishing her 'speedy recovery'. Prime Minister Deve Gowda sent her a bouquet of roses. In December, when she took ill again and was treated at Birla Heart Research Institute, he specially made time to come and see her during a visit to Calcutta.

On 24 August 1996, when much of the world's media were leading with Mother Teresa's deteriorating condition, the 9 a.m. Bengali news programme on Calcutta's main radio station did not mention her at all. The evening television news in Bengali on the same day, mentioned her as the 6th headline. The major news on that day in Calcutta was the celebrations for the city's official 306th birthday. A day-long celebration was organised, with fairs, tableaux, speeches, songs and dramas, and enactment of scenes from the past, such as horse-drawn tramcars. In the numerous celebrations that took place throughout the day all over the city, Mother Teresa 'of Calcutta' was not mentioned once. There were hordes of international journalists waiting for her to die. She recovered and lived another year, to die rather suddenly. But Western media dutifully told the world Calcutta was wailing with grief, and nothing about the jolly party.

On Mother's 86th birthday, on 26 August 1996 a statement went out in her name expressing 'my gratitude to Calcutta for allowing me to be here.' It is unlikely that she personally issued this statement, as she was rigged up to a ventilator at the time. It was almost certainly issued by her office. Many thought it would be her last official statement. It was the first time she, albeit by proxy, had managed to thank the city.

Mother Teresa's friends and associates in India were not drawn from the ranks of the poor. They were the rich and powerful. One of them is the redoubtable [Navin Chawla](#), one of the most prominent bureaucrats in Delhi. Chawla is also the only Indian to have been allowed by her to write an authorised biography. Besides this, he has made a small fortune from writing other pictorial coffee table books on her. Now what sort of man is [Navin Chawla](#)? He was the subject of numerous human rights investigations. During the [State of Emergency](#) in India (1974–77) he was Secretary to Delhi's Lieutenant Governor and was a henchman to the thug [Sanjay Gandhi](#), who unleashed a reign of terror. After public uprising via the ballot box overthrew Emergency, a special Commission of Enquiry was set up to investigate human rights abuses of the period. Given the extraordinarily complex Indian legal processes, the commission managed to

indict only twenty-six people (the biggest culprits), and Chawla was one of them. Chawla spent a few months in the wilderness but was back at his desk as soon as Mrs Gandhi came back to power.

[Navin Chawla](#) remains Teresa's highest profile champion in India and therefore his record, character and career do require some scrutiny. He has travelled the world to defend her. He came out of retirement and wrote a tear jerker defending her in [tehelka.com](#) in September 2013 after two serious Canadian academics slated her as a mere self-publicist in their research paper.

Mr Justice Shah, after investigating atrocities during the Emergency, opined that Chawla was 'unfit to hold any public office which demands an attitude of fair-play and consideration for others.' Nonetheless his extreme closeness to the Gandhi family propelled his career after [Indira Gandhi](#) returned to power in 1980. In 2009 he eventually became India's Chief Election Commissioner, despite a nationwide protest against the appointment.

Chawla undertook a reign of terror in Delhi and northern India during Emergency and has been compared to a Gestapo officer by some who were directly affected by him. Three Additional District Magistrates told the Shah Commission that they were ordered by Chawla to issue as many detention orders as possible against political activists without bothering to look into the merits of the orders. He told them plainly to 'fabricate the grounds' of detention if necessary. He threatened senior administrators with arrest if his quotas were not met. He convened a sub-committee (which included a psychiatrist) to interrogate activists who recanted their political 'mistakes' and pledged allegiance to Sanjay Gandhi's '20 point programme': to judge if their conversion was genuine.

Parole was granted to prisoners if they accepted sterilisation, even if they never had had children! In Tihar Jail he drew up a plan of 'baking' certain troublesome detainees in asbestos shacks but this was not carried out due to a technicality.

For the last three decades Chawla has been lecturing Indians on the merits of charity and compassion and extolling the virtues of his late friend and mentor Mother Teresa. Most decent people would find moralising by criminal thugs distasteful.

Why are people like [Muggeridge](#) and Chawla, separated by continents and generations, so drawn to Teresa? Crooks and thugs were close to her on

personal terms; she advised them and took their personal phone calls. She was well aware of Chawla's role in [Sanjay Gandhi's](#) forced sterilisation programmes. It is said that in 1997 it was she who advised him against retiring from the civil service.

The Kumars of Calcutta were very close to Teresa during her lifetime and remain staunch allies of MC. Since MC's relations with singer [Usha Uthup](#) are now frosty, [Sunita Kumar](#) remains their strongest Calcutta conduit to the outside world. She used to be Teresa's personal spokesperson. The Kumars, wealthy secular Hindus, own a large tract of Russell Street, one of India's prime real estates. [Naresh Kumar](#) represented India many times at Wimbledon and Davis Cup. Sunita Kumar has designed saris for the French fashion house Hermes. While I was sitting and chatting in their living room¹⁵ surrounded by original paintings worth at least \$1,000,000, he told me (with genuine modesty) that they were 'simple middle class people who just wanted to help Mother Teresa.' Naresh Kumar has unfortunately picked up some stock phrases and informed me, 'Poverty in the West (spiritual poverty) is much more devastating than poverty here.' I told him I begged to disagree, which he took in good humour. When I asked them if they thought Mother Teresa had done more harm than good to Calcutta through bad publicity, the couple looked genuinely surprised. Kumar said, 'I don't know what sort of people you are mixing with Dr Chatterjee, but we have spent all our summers in England for as long as we can remember, and honestly nobody before you has said anything of that nature.'

Usha Uthup was Mother's other non-Catholic spokesperson in India during her lifetime. Uthup is a versatile singer and is particularly known for singing Western style pop in Indian languages. She has a recording studio in Calcutta called Vibrations, which Teresa herself inaugurated. This charming lady was born in Madras, brought up in [Bombay](#) and settled in Calcutta. She is passionate about her adopted city and often wears a *bindi* on her forehead in the shape of the Bengali letter *KAW*, signifying Calcutta. She is aware that Calcutta has a negative international image but is reluctant to blame Teresa for it. Whether this is from denial or genuine ignorance I cannot say.

[Uthup](#) had various crises in her personal life and looked upon Teresa as a friend and counsellor. She ran into serious professional difficulty in 1983, when a powerful Minister of the State government banned her from using

the city's government auditoria because he accused her of spreading 'cultural decadence'. Teresa was a great solace to her during that hour of crisis and said, 'God is looking down on you and protecting you.'

Uthup admitted¹⁶ she had given large sums of money (and materials) to Teresa over the years. The singer is associated with a number of charitable organisations, the Aids and drugs charity SPADA being one of them. She went to Teresa shortly before her death to get a message for SPADA. Mother told her, 'Instead of giving so much money to Aids and drugs charity, give it to me.' Uthup maintains Teresa was not 'quite with it' at the time, but she took off the gold chain she was wearing and gave it to Mother.

Uthup said, 'Mother was never averse to publicity. If she was, then how is it that she is the best-known woman in the world today?' Towards the end of our interview, Uthup agreed that 'Mother never protested at the one dimensional view of Calcutta. That upsets me. No other city would have allowed her to function in the way she did.' Uthup however saw 'no confusion or conflict' between her extreme regard for Teresa and her love for Calcutta.

Her relations with Mother's successor and the order in general became cool since 5 September 1997. A couple of days after Mother's death, when her body was lying in St. Thomas' Church, Uthup expressed the wish to sing the hymn *Raghupati Raghava Raja Ram*, written by Gandhi. Her request was summarily dismissed by MC hierarchy as the hymn was multi-faith. Uthup remains deeply resentful about the incident and entirely blames the nuns for their narrow-mindedness. I reminded her that they were just following their founder's philosophy.

After her death, Mother Teresa is a better known name in Calcutta than she was during her life-time. But her grave only draws between twenty and fifty visitors daily, almost all of them visitors to the city. On 15 October 2000, despite a fair amount of advance publicity, the fiftieth anniversary celebrations of her order drew about 100 members of the public. There was not a single 'poorest of the poor'. Most were upper-middle class people, and 50 luxury cars could be seen lined up outside Mother House. Representatives from the various faiths were invited, most of whom made lengthy speeches. Mohammed Karim, the Muslim representative, recited two sonorous and long-winded odes, one dedicated to Mother Teresa, the other to her successor.

The Outlook 2002 poll: In the weeks leading up to India's fifty-fifth independence anniversary in August 2002, the English language magazine *Outlook* invited both its readers and others (by placing advertisements in different media) to elect the 'greatest post-independence Indian'. Respondents (55,000 eventually replied) were asked to choose from a list of ten selected by *Outlook*: Jayaprakash Narayan, Indira Gandhi, Atal Behari Vajpayee, J.R.D. Tata, B.R. Ambedkar, Mother Teresa, Vallabhbhai Patel, Sachin Tendulkar, Dhirubhai Ambani and Jawaharlal Nehru. Needless to say, the respondents would have been from the middle and upper classes of Indian society. Mother Teresa came a galloping first in the poll (although in over-45 age group, Nehru topped). Most of the candidates would be unknown in the West and therefore had limited appeal among younger Indians who take most of their values and ideas from Western media.

The *Outlook* issue (19 August) announcing the result had an interview with a young 'educated' woman in Delhi who was asked by a journalist if she knew why Mahatma Gandhi (who, being pre-independence was not a candidate in the poll) chose not to wear a shirt. After considerable thought she replied that she could not say as she never studied fashion design.

In 2000, Priyanka Chopra from Delhi won the Miss World title. One of her qualifying questions was 'Which living woman do you most admire in the world today?' She replied to Jerry Springer, the compere, 'Mother Teresa', although the nun had been dead more than three years. Interestingly, the reply was a verbatim repeat of the one given by Sushmita Sen, the Indian who had won the Miss Universe title some years previously. Despite the *faux pas* (or because of it) Chopra won her title. She also said that her hobby was 'gospel singing' – though even Indian Christians rarely engage in it. After the contest, when journalists asked her to rectify her answer, she replied Hillary Clinton was the living woman she admired most. She could not find a single woman from her own country, amongst the thousands who are working in the field of empowering dispossessed Indians to admire.

The above is an example to illustrate how much Indians are ready to sacrifice their dignity in order to ingratiate themselves to the West. It would have been unthinkable for Chopra and her ilk to admit, for instance, that her hobby was, say, Assamese folk singing.

Satish Chandra Dey was an octogenarian who never married or had children. In the early 1990s, when he retired as a school-teacher (from

Ichapur Northland High School near Calcutta), he decided to buy a place in a supervised-type of residential establishment. He decided to opt for Mother Teresa's establishment in Nimtala Ghat Street in Northern Calcutta. It might come as a surprise to many, but MC run a system of offering supervised places for the elderly in return for payment. Dey said he chose Mother Teresa's Order because he had 'read so much about her, especially in the international media, and because she was so much revered in the world.' He had saved well during his working life to provide for his old age and paid the order a lump sum of Rs 400,000 (about \$10,000): a fortune in Indian terms. The money was paid by cheque.

However, he was forced to leave after two years, as he found the conditions intolerable. Though an atheist, the orthodox Catholic bias in the home did not bother him, but he found he was being treated as a servant. Despite his age and his payment for accommodation, he was asked to work, and especially was ordered to man the gates. At odd hours he would be woken up to go and open the gates. He found it demeaning and hard, especially for a retired man, then in his seventies.

Dey however refused to criticise Mother Teresa or even the order. He found the nuns steeped only in religion and ignorance, but felt they were 'nice'. He met Mother Teresa four times and felt fascinated and overwhelmed. He calls her an international symbol of peace, love, etc. He even refused to divulge if he got part of his money back. He contracted TB whilst in the home and was grateful that he was treated for free. I believe that such a man, if meted the same treatment by an Indian order, would have filled the correspondence pages of newspapers with lengthy letters. Dey's sentiment is characteristic of Calcuttans (and Indians) – no matter how badly she treated them, and even if that maltreatment was personal, they would not be drawn to criticise her. The psychology behind this is complex.

In 1997, a few months before Mother's death, neighbours of my mother in Calcutta took a four-year-old boy (A.B.) to MC's Dum Dum centre to ask if they could help financially for his hole-in-the-heart operation. Nuns were horrified and showed them the door, saying they never helped in that way, but could have perhaps considered it if the family were Catholic. The family then went to Dr Devi Shetty (the celebrity cardiologist) who doctored the boy back to life. Paradoxically Dr Shetty (like most Indian celebrities) adores Mother Teresa for his own reasons. A.B. is doing well

but his family will never speak out against MC, though they felt insulted beyond imagination.

West Bengal's previous Chief Minister, [Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee](#), a man of impeccable leftist and cultural credentials and an extremely proud Calcuttan, would not be drawn to criticise Teresa publicly. What he feels privately is another matter.

Calcutta abounds in public statuary. The city-landscape is dotted with scores of statues of the great and good. [Tagore](#), [Vivekananda](#) and Subhas Bose, each has hundreds of statues and busts. To date, Mother Teresa has one bust, two statues and one huge mural (more than Marx and Lenin combined).

It was therefore inevitable that Teresa's rich and powerful fans in the city would clamour for a statue of hers as soon as she died. In 1998, a few months after her death a Christian-dominated organisation called [All India Minorities Commission \(AIMC\)](#) decided to erect a statue of Teresa on the Park Circus traffic island. The famous city sculptor Gautam Pal (his statues of Gandhi grace all the world's major cities including Washington DC, where it was inaugurated by President [Clinton](#)) quickly finished a huge statue of the late nun but it never made it to its destination. AIMC and MC got involved in public mud-slinging over collection of funds and who should erect a monument to her. The nuns said the Minorities Commission was not a Catholic organisation and, as such, not authorised to collect funds in the name of Mother. (The AIMC has a significant Muslim presence.) MC went to court and obtained an injunction. Mr Pal was stuck with the statue in his garden. An empty plinth stood in Park Circus for a few years but then filled with the bronze of another worthy.

In 2000 [Subrata Mukherjee](#) became Mayor of Calcutta after decades in political wilderness, when Trinamool Congress (TMC) won the city's municipal elections. A political animal (he is a professional politician and has never held a job outside politics) from his early teens, he had been fighting (sometimes violently) the Left influence in West Bengal from a centre-right platform. He was keen to leave his own stamp on the city of his reign. Almost on assuming office, he announced that he wished to turn the city's centrally located racecourse into a football stadium. Calcutta has half a dozen football stadiums including India's largest one. A public outcry stopped his plans. Though a proud man used to getting his own way, Mukherjee was humbled and silenced.

Then in February 2002, he suddenly announced he had decided to rename [Park Street](#) after Mother Teresa. He did not foresee the furore that erupted.

Park Street was one of the first streets built by the British in India in the eighteenth century. Until the mid-twentieth century, it was upmarket and fashionable and exclusive, very much like a Regent Street of the East. Now it is dowdy and seedy, but people still associate it with genteel (Western) charm. Property remains prohibitively expensive. Another unusual feature of Park Street is the large number of restaurants here that are allowed to serve alcohol. (Sale and serving of alcohol are controlled in India in general.)

Calcuttans who are normally indifferent to anything to do with Mother Teresa became agitated at the renaming proposal. Many said since Park Street was already named after Fanny Park (a minor colonising memsahib), so it would not be right to rename. Most objections came from the view that, as the area had a racy and louche reputation, it would not be a suitable association for a 'holy and pious lady'. When the debate was really heating up, during March 2002, one of the local English dailies, [Hindustan Times](#), set up a special section called 'Platform' for readers to air their views on the issue. It specially invited prominent citizens to give their views. Almost all the celebrities supported renaming. [P.C. Sorcar Junior](#), a magician of international repute called Teresa 'the greatest soul on earth' and asked for immediate renaming. Moon [Moon Sen](#), model and actress, (and later MP) did not want Park Street renamed because it was Park Street. [Mamata Shankar](#), actress and danseuse (niece of Ravi Shankar, the sitar maestro) thoroughly supported renaming. She said Mother had 'made the name of our city known to the world'! She thought Park Street was not a problem because 'when people troop down for fun and entertainment next time, the name of Mother Teresa would kindle a consciousness in them.' The eminent author [Mahashweta Devi](#) opposed renaming but diplomatically avoided any criticism of Teresa; she said she was 'too old to remember new names'.

The public were mainly opposed to the idea but only a few cited the reason that Calcutta had little to be grateful to Teresa for. Some said that she was anti-progress, being against contraception and abortion, and was unsuitable for a city like Calcutta. Many said 'we have had enough of renaming so leave our streets alone'.

The local media were also opposed for a mixture of reasons. In the end, the Mayor retreated. He had also rather flamboyantly announced that he wanted to put up a statue of Teresa on Park Street, and would ask [Pope John Paul II](#) to come unveil it. He was unaware that the Pope was so ill at the time that he could barely move even within the Vatican City. *The Telegraph* put a seal on the saga with a pompous editorial:

Just about everybody has expressed shock and indignation at this peremptory decision. . . The Mayor should not only leave Park Street and Mother Teresa alone, but also make decisions within the municipality more democratically.¹⁷

This would have been the end of the renaming saga, but the Mayor, whose pride was badly hurt, was waiting for an opportune moment. TMC was then frantically courting minority votes. On 19 August 2002, a tiny advertisement was placed in local newspapers by the Corporation asking for objections on renaming [Park Street](#), or else the process would go ahead. Despite the size and location of the advertisement, sufficient protests were sent in to halt the process, but the Mayor took it upon himself to effect the name change and Park Street officially became Mother Teresa Sarani on 11 December 2004. A beautiful abstract statue by the respected sculptor Tapas Sarkar that used to grace the middle section of the long road was removed or destroyed and replaced by a bust of Teresa. The talented Sanatan Dinda sculpted the bust; he said, ‘This commission is like winning the [Oscar](#) for sculpting.’ An elaborate ceremony was organised by Mukherjee for renaming and statue unveiling, which was monopolised by TMC bigwigs. Mamata Banerjee (who had just finished a tenure as India’s Minister of Mines) officially presented the statue to the world, and the Mayor remarked that the road itself would become an international tourist attraction now that it was named after the world’s best-known woman. Archbishop Lucas Sircar profusely thanked Mukherjee for doggedly pursuing the renaming and statue causes against many odds. The CPI-M controlled state government took no part in proceedings. Chief Minister Bhattacharjee said to a journalist friend of mine that he did not agree with either the renaming or the statue, but would not elaborate.

Teresa’s birth centenary celebrations on 26 August 2010 saw no slum dweller or even any poor person turning up, though all international news

services reported that ‘hundreds’ of them were present. Outside Mother House swanky cars lined up and the affluent trooped in to pay homage at her grave. Uthup sang ‘Happy Birthday to You’. Then nuns boarded a special tram carrying a statue of their late founder. A film festival themed on her life was inaugurated at the city’s art complex. At St. Xavier’s College grounds there was a lengthy ceremony including song and dance rituals. Again no poor person was seen. Mamata Banerjee, then the national Minister for Railways, flagged off a passenger-less commemorative train with Mother’s memorabilia that toured the country for six months. Google picture gallery has photos of the day, so does www.motherteresa.org (59 photos) and there is not a single poor person to behold. The state government (still CPI-M controlled) tacitly kept away from all the jollity.

I remain pessimistic about Calcuttans’ judgement, rationale and basic analytical ability to judge Teresa’s impact on their city, let alone her contribution on world at large. They are an emotional people who do not look beyond the surface. They are moved by superficial posturing. They get overwhelmed by Western awards and by white women wearing the sari. This is the Calcutta of today. I am therefore not expecting Teresa to be re-examined in her eponymous city and expect her reputation to climb therein. There is also the unnamed fear that Indians feel in their bones as soon as they challenge status quo or people in power. Which is why some say India was ruled and invaded for millennia. Today’s Indians will not lift their little finger it was not for self-interest. I have given up explaining to Calcuttans that challenging the Teresa mythology is very much in the self-interest of the city and all its citizens.

13

Death and Funeral

Mother Teresa died on Friday, 5 September 1997 from ‘left ventricular failure’ (heart failure in layman’s term). The official time of death was given as 9.30 p.m. (GMT 5 p.m.), but she had been lifeless for at least 40 minutes beforehand. Her last words were ‘I can’t breathe’, uttered in English, which was her natural language. Unlike the last words of [Princess Diana](#) (who died only five days previously) there has not been a controversy (so far) about Mother’s last words. But some in the Catholic establishment have decided that her final words were self-concerned, not befitting her image, and there is a pressure to alter them. Her champion and spiritual adviser, Father [Edward Le Joly](#) maintains in his book that she said ‘I can’t breathe’ at 9 p.m, but a ‘Sister heard her saying: ‘Jesus, I trust you’, her last words as she surrendered her soul to God [at] 9.30 p.m.’¹ But at 9.30 she was completely without breath and life. It is likely that in future, her final words would be distorted even further to impart a tremendous rapport with the ‘poorest of the poor’, who she was leaving behind.

There is also no controversy about the time, mode and manner of her death, and about the events of the evening leading to it. I spoke to [Dr Alfred Woodward](#)², the personal cardiologist who last attended her, and his account matches that reported in the (local) media.

At 7.30 p.m., on 5 September, Mother Teresa had her frugal supper of bread, soup and banana, and prepared to retire for the night, but at 7.45 told her Sisters that she had back pain. Contrary to public perception, Mother Teresa frequently complained of pain. The nature, but especially the site of her pain set alarm bells ringing as her heart failures and attacks usually started with back pain. Following a well-rehearsed and oft-executed contingency plan, [Dr Woodward](#) was immediately paged; a slight controversy exists regarding the precise time his pager went off. According to the local media, this was at 8 p.m. but Dr Woodward told me that his bleep went off around a quarter past eight. Dr Woodward was at his place of work, the Assembly of God Church Hospital, about a kilometre away from Mother House. It took him less than 10 minutes to drive to 54a A.J.C. Bose

Road and arrive at Mother Teresa's bedside. He found her breathless, blue(ish) and in great pain. 'Her SATs [oxygen saturation] was very low,' he said. At 8.30 p.m., he intubated her, that is, passed a plastic tube through her windpipe in order to pump oxygen directly into her lungs. Finding her pulseless, he then gave her a host of 'emergency drugs' through her veins and started cardiac massage. Professional delicacy prevented me from asking what these drugs were, but I have no doubt they were appropriate. He carried on with the massage and repeated some of the drugs. There was a defibrillator in the room but Mother Teresa was not 'shocked'. Dr Woodward told me that the defibrillator had been put to use only ten months previously when Mother Teresa's heart was in abnormal cardiac rhythm and had to be electrically brought back to normal rhythm.

After ninety minutes of intensive resuscitative activities, Dr Woodward gave up and finally came out and faced the Sisters. Just before 10 p.m. he pronounced the 'living saint' as dead; the time of death was given as 9.30 p.m. The news spread immediately. Death was formally announced to the media around midnight by [Sister Nirmala](#), her successor: 'Our beloved Mother went home to Jesus suddenly at 9.30 tonight. The cause of her death was acute left ventricular failure. We ask all to pray for the repose of her soul.'

What is significant in all this is that Dr Woodward did not have to carry with him a single equipment or drug. Mother Teresa's bedroom had been fitted with two pulse oxymeters (instruments that indirectly measure oxygen saturation in the blood), a defibrillator and, last but not least, a ventilator (US respirator). The last alone cost \$5,000, the equivalent of about 7 years' wages of an Indian secondary school teacher. A cupboard in the room had a wide array of the most sophisticated cardiac (and other) drugs of the day. All together the total equipment and drugs in the room cost about \$15,000. Nothing wrong in that, but one needs to contrast it with Mother's frequent statements how she wished to suffer like Jesus and die like the poor.

Prior to her terminal heart failure, Mother Teresa had obtained an undertaking from those around her that should she suffer another 'event' she would be spared another trip to the hospital.

Not more than a hundred ordinary people (but no poor among them) arrived at Mother House as the news of her death was announced on local radio and television, the first announcement being at 10 p.m. However, dignitaries started coming right away, the first on the scene being West

Bengal's Minister for Sport and Transport, [Subhash Chakraborty](#); he was followed by singer [Usha Uthup](#).

Mother Teresa's favourite Calcutta newspaper *The Statesman* announced her death the following day with expected banner headlines; it however described her as 'Yugoslavian-born', a description she disliked. The Yugoslav connection comes from her birthplace [Skopje](#) (currently the capital of Macedonia) being incorporated in Tito's Yugoslavia, following World War II.

The following day, there were no crowds at Mother House. So much so, that two of the local dailies, ran the same story on their front page. On Sunday, 7 September 1997 *Ananda Bazar Patrika* under the headline 'The World Mourns but Calcutta Remains Indifferent' stated:

It was business as usual on A.J.C. Bose Road, as if nothing had happened, although one particular address, no. 54a, happens at the moment to be the most famous one in the world. . . True, Mother Teresa was not a star to the multitudes in the stature of Uttam Kumar or Hemanta Mukherjee [singer], and nor can one expect her to enjoy the level of popularity as did Satyajit Ray, but even so. . . when the whole world is fixing its gaze on Calcutta, would it be too much to ask of our citizens to show a bit more emotion?

At 6.45 p.m on Saturday, when Mother House re-opened to readmit more dignitaries coming to pay their respects, one could even see a nun standing at the doorstep and beckoning at ordinary folk in the street to come in. In the small crowd however, there were present some people who had been personally helped by Mother Teresa. One of them was Paresh Chandra Das from Park Circus, who supplied Mother with rosary beads for years.

Evidences of tributes to the departed appeared in certain parts of the city such as Creek Row or Kalighat where effigies have been erected with flower offerings, but one had to look very hard to find such tributes.

No doubt [Diana's](#) funeral kept people in. Perhaps Mother Teresa would have preferred such a low-key response to her death.

The daily *Aajkal* ran the same story with the headline 'Numbed by Diana's Death, Calcutta Fails to Mourn for Teresa'. The article described a

scene where a small crowd of people were standing outside the window of a shop selling television sets, intently watching Diana's funeral:

A middle aged man, who was watching the proceedings, took off his glasses, wiped his tears and muttered, 'Unbearable, unwatchable.' The hi-fi shop where the above scene unfolded is but a few hundred yards from the first floor room where the mortal remains of Mother Teresa are lying. Braving the drizzle, a few hundred people did assemble in front of Mother House, but the city as a whole chose to stay indoors. People with TV sets watched Diana's funeral at home, while those without thronged outside TV shops. I asked Amar Sampui, a cycle-rickshaw puller in Tollygunge about the discrepancy in the level of grieving for the two women in the two cities. His sentiments were typical of the city at large: 'Mother Teresa lived to a ripe old age. Diana after all was a young woman in the prime of her life.'

In a house directly opposite Mother House, young Pinky was shuttling between the living room and the veranda, alternately watching TV and the people come and go at no. 54A. After a while her patience gave up and she ran indoors, saying, 'No, better watch TV properly. Prince William's crying.'

One wonders if the few hundred people coming today to Mother House were drawn by the film stars strutting in to express condolences. Though the city as a whole turned itself away from Mother Teresa on that Saturday, I met people there who had been directly helped by her and some of them had made long journeys from the suburbs to see her for one last time. I met Bharati Baag from Uluberia, Parbati Roy from Alipur and a woman called Mary. All three were in floods of tears. Ms Baag told me she had been looked after by Mother Teresa since she was a two-month old orphan.

On Sunday at 9 a.m., that is, 36 hours after her death, a convoy of three MC 'ambulances' moved Mother's body to St. Thomas's Church on exclusive Middleton Street near the city centre. St. Thomas's is one of the handful of Catholic churches in Calcutta and shares grounds with Loreto House school. Mother Teresa first came to Calcutta as a Loreto nun, but she

was victimised and discriminated against as Albanian by western European nuns, who then taught the daughters of many of Asia's royal families. Loreto House, a preserve of the super-rich, told Sister Agnes to keep a low profile.

Mother's remains were placed within a glass box in the middle of the church. The body was injected with chemicals to prevent rotting. Sixteen giant cooling machines and fans were placed in the church. People were urged by media to come and visit the body and pay respects. Extensive arrangements were made by the government to prepare for crowds coming and queuing up at the church.

Crowds did pick up on Sunday, 7 September at St. Thomas's, although it was nowhere near spectacular. [Yusaku Usanami](#), India correspondent of the world's biggest selling daily, [Japan's Ashahi Shimbun](#), was seen on Sunday standing outside the church taking in the volume of crowds. He was doing it with the help of a stopwatch and a notebook. He asked local journalists who were around him what the population of Calcutta was, and after calculating the percentage that had come to see the 'Mother of Calcutta', nodded his head in disappointment.³ In [Japan](#), Mother Teresa is very big indeed, enjoying a stature almost equalling that of hers in the US. *Shimbun* had actually brought out a special morning edition announcing her death. Interestingly, although there was a host of Indian photographers always milling around Mother Teresa, taking her pictures in order to sell them internationally, she herself bestowed the status of 'official' photographer on a Japanese, Morihiko Oki. This made PR sense, Oki's technology was obviously far superior, as were his international contacts.

A Calcutta photographer, [Pranab Mukherji](#), shadowed Mother for almost thirty years, but still was not considered worthy enough to be called 'official'. Shortly after her death, in an emotional interview with [The Boston Globe](#), Mukherji said:

She is beautiful, Mother Teresa is. She was also one of the world's greatest psychologists. Tycoons of the world have less practical business sense.⁴

On Sunday, the list of worthies who came to pay respect included India's Prime Minister Gujral, West Bengal's governor Reddy, and the Bollywood actor and former Miss Universe (1995) [Sushmita Sen](#). Sen and

Teresa had become close friends shortly after the former won her title and she would drop in at Mother House from time to time to talk about personal and other problems. Today she appeared distraught in the church and was photographed with tears streaming down her face. Bollywood actor (and politician) [Sunil Dutt](#) came at midday, after cancelling a trip to the US so he could come and pay respects. He told reporters he met Mother Teresa only a month before when she expressed a desire to open an AIDS home in [Bombay](#).

A great many ordinary people came to see Mother's remains in the church on Tuesday, September 9, so much so that the opening hour had to be extended to 8.30 p.m. Hardly any 'poorest of the poor', or even the poor came however. Most were solid middle-class, and were seen to wait patiently with bouquets of flower. Some schools, which had no connection with Teresa or her order, organised a day's outing with queues of children joining the crowd to view the body in the glass case.

As Mother Teresa died so soon after [Diana](#), indeed the day before the latter's funeral, comparisons between public behaviour at the two deaths became unavoidable. The public expression of spontaneous grief and emotion after Diana's death was so much more that the comparison becomes embarrassing. But it would be fair to compare the reaction after Teresa's death in Calcutta and that after the Queen Mother's death in London in March 2002 at the age of 101. People queued throughout the night (in freezing cold) to see the Queen Mother's remains, so much so that the opening hours had to be extended overnight. And the funeral route was lined by dense crowds, not a sprinkling of spectators.

On 10 September 1997, [Suman Chatterjee](#) (no relation), the well-known pro-Teresa hack ran an extensive analysis of Calcutta's muted response to her death in *Ananda Bazar Patrika*. In a 1,200 word article entitled 'Two Peoples, Two Deaths, But Why Uncharacteristic Responses?' he contrasted the 'cyclone of emotion' amongst the naturally reserved British over Diana with the phlegmatic attitude displayed by normally excitable Calcuttans. He said:

The reasons for the indifferent reaction of Calcuttans over the death of its most famous citizen are not difficult to discern. Mother Teresa had, unlike Diana, lived a full and long life. And she had, in the recent past, been so many times so close to death, that Calcuttans

were left unmoved when death finally came. Secondly, however much the world had feted this European nun, her work had always left Hindu Bengalis less than impressed. Despite having lived in this city for seventy years, she remained until her last breath an orthodox Roman Catholic in every conceivable way. Thirdly, her stance on an important issue such as abortion, her penchant of mixing religion with charity, and her ultra-closeness to some of the world's most notorious dictators had all made people, not only those of a leftist persuasion, sceptical about her ideals and motives. But most importantly, she had bared before the world the darkest and lowest sides of our city; it is only natural that we would want those aspects to be hidden. It was Calcutta that had made Mother Teresa the legend she became, but one wonders what the city got in return. In other words, Mother Teresa's need for Calcutta was much greater than the city's need for her.

Another pro-Teresa journalist, [Shankar Lal Bhattacharya](#), who always prided himself that he grew up, albeit in a middle class household, in the vicinity of the official residence of the world's most famous woman, commented on the lack of recognition Mother Teresa had in Calcutta whether in life or after death. In an article, embellished with quotes from T.S. Eliot, for the women's magazine *Sananda*, he described how she had always pined for recognition amongst Calcuttans:

Until her last days she used to mill around us [local journalists] in order that she was recognised and appreciated more. . . I have no hesitation in admitting that we Calcuttans got nowhere as close to her as she had wished for us to do. After her Nobel Prize in 1979, she became like a 'monument' in the city; celebrities from far and wide came to see her. The majority of us Calcuttans, however, got our news about her from newspapers and television.⁵

Bhattacharya was naive to think that Mother Teresa was resentful that she was not better recognised by Calcuttans: she did not care as long she did not ruffle feathers. Her sole aim was to get more and more glory for her causes (abortion and her faith) through exploitation of the city's reputation. However she was ever mindful of the multifarious religious, ethnic and

political tensions that went on perpetually in India and was always eager to be on the right side of the city's hacks, hence the 'milling around'.

Mother got a state funeral. It was a symbol of respect by the State (Republic of India) and much is made of it by the Catholic establishment. Providence had been kind to Mother Teresa many times during her life, and her death also happened at a convenient time, as Prime Minister then was [I.K. Gujral](#), a political non-entity, who headed a bizarre and unlikely (secular) coalition that disintegrated in eight months. [Gujral](#) was sympathetic to Teresa and also wanted to give a signal of support to religious minorities. If Mother had died seven months later when the BJP came to power, things could have been different. However even the BJP might have granted her a state funeral, given the extraordinary amount of international diplomatic clout she had. In India, state funerals are not as rare as they are in the West. When the Speaker of the lower house of Indian Parliament, G.M. Balayogi died in a helicopter crash shortly afterwards he was promptly given a state funeral. In 2012 Bal Thackeray, the ultra right-wing Hindu nationalist who never shied from violence, was given a state funeral in Mumbai though his enemies held power in Delhi.

A state funeral meant that the entire substantial cost was borne by the Indian taxpayer. The wishes of MC in invitations and religious arrangements were respected. The date was fixed for Saturday, 13 September, after some initial confusion. The nuns got busy with receiving dignitaries who flocked to Calcutta, bringing huge and undisclosed donations. Many of the 'great and the good'⁵ that flocked to Calcutta such as [Hillary Clinton](#), Mrs Chrétien, and Queen Noor, were meeting for the second time in the space of one week, for they had recently attended [Diana's](#) funeral in London. The US sent an impressively large delegation, numbering over a hundred, consisting of a number of Senators and members of Congress. Only the Vatican sent a larger troupe.

One world statesman who did not over-sentimentalise his grief at the death was [Nelson Mandela](#). He described her as a 'unique person' and made no mention of her charity, love for the poor, etc. Mandela actually knew Calcutta quite well, although he had visited the city but once. Jyoti Basu was a personal friend and, throughout the apartheid era, the ANC and Calcutta Marxists maintained close contact. A lot of money was sent to South Africa from Calcutta through public donations to help the ANC.

A major headache that the authorities faced in the week between death and funeral was over the state of the body. Even when it was being removed on Sunday from Mother House to St. Thomas' Church, a distinct greenish hue was noticeable. Although the nuns continued to deny that there was a problem. They said, 'Mother is well. She can see and hear everything. Can't you see she doesn't even require ice to stay well?' However Vicar General [Francis Gomez](#) said, 'I know the Sisters are speaking from their hearts, but we have adopted full technical measures, with the blessings of Jesus of course, to preserve the remains.' Government pathologists treated the body with more chemicals on 9 September and a special 'cooling jacket' was placed around it. The 'cooling jacket' was specially purchased and flown over by the government from abroad.

Being a state funeral, the body was formally 'handed over' to the Army on Thursday 11 September; from then on soldiers stood guard beside the body. The last public viewing was on Friday afternoon, by which time crowds had thinned again.

As in her life frequently, so in death, Mother Teresa let Calcutta and its inhabitants down. One example of this was the treatment of [Leon Madeira](#) at the hands of MC. The Madeiras were one of the three Portuguese-origin families left in the city whose ancestors came here in the eighteenth century, and have made coffins ever since. Mr Madeira had made coffins for MC exclusively. He naturally assumed that the final glory, that of making the coffin for the great Mother Teresa would also fall on him. Indeed, he had already selected the wood and the design when he was informed that his services would not be required; that MC had decided to accept the gift of a coffin from the [Bombay](#) Archdiocese. It would be inconceivable that the organisation would spurn an offer from the numerically and politically powerful Catholics of Bombay. Mr Madeira did not receive any apology or explanation from the organisation.

On Saturday the 13th, the day of the funeral, the coffin was ceremoniously carried from the church by Indian soldiers, then transferred to a military gun-carrier at 8.45 a.m., which was, in turn, joined to the back of an army truck, called a 'tractor'. About fifteen army trucks and a number of cars followed the tractor. On the open-top tractor were a dozen soldiers in fine turbans and half a dozen senior nuns and priests of the order. No crowds followed the cortege. There were supposed to be crowds along the roads, but there was only a sprinkle of people.

The cortege drove five kilometres to Netaji Indoor Stadium, the funeral venue, arriving at 10 a.m. The ceremony of Mass, wreath laying and speeches took three hours. MC were given a free hand as to who to invite at the stadium, which can seat 12,000 people. But there were only about a hundred poor and disadvantaged people there, who were specially driven in a bus from Mother House. Why they did not invite more is a mystery. There were about 6,000 people in the stadium, about half of them nuns and other religions. There were national and international officials and dignitaries. There were also a large number of army personnel and security police in plain clothes. Finally, large contingents of world media were present.

Given the length and complexity of the wreath-laying ceremony, it was executed without any major hiccups, except for two minor incidents. The first was the failure of the Deputy Minister of Transport and Communication of Kazakhstan to turn up when his name was called (no one even knew whether he had arrived in the city), and the second was when the soldiers could not produce a wreath for Brazil's representative to lay. The ceremony was quite a circus, with a goose-stepping soldier handing a wreath over to the dignitary in jerky robotic movements then marching away pompously. Many dignitaries respectfully touched Mother's body after laying the wreath. The Colombian representative came in a mini-skirt:

However, the funeral was marred by continuous and inappropriate clapping by the audience. As soon as the Albanian President laid his wreath, one of the first ones to do so, a section of the crowd started clapping. This started a trend. From then on, clapping became infectious and every time a wreath was laid, the audience clapped loudly. Even the nuns joined in. The Vatican delegation could do nothing but shift uncomfortably in their seats. Clapping grew louder and louder and when towards the end, the turn came for Chief Minister [Jyoti Basu](#) to lay his wreath, it became thunderous and almost unstoppable. The last person (before the Indian President) to lay a wreath was from the military, the Supreme Army Commander of the Eastern Theatre. Perhaps it would have been a good gesture to ask an orphan from Mother's orphanage to lay the last wreath. Chief Minister Basu was criticised by local media the following day for coming in very late and constantly chatting to the person sitting next to him.

The clapping issue caused a lot of embarrassment and was heavily criticised. [The Statesman](#) took the audience to task with 'Jarring Note Mars

Funeral' on its front page in boxed highlight.

At 1.20 p.m. soldiers re-emerged from the stadium with the coffin and carried it back to the gun carriage. The coffin-lid was open to allow people to see the dead nun, and she was now covered with a plastic sheet as it was raining. During both legs of the journey the cortege drove at about 5 km per hour. The return route was 6 km long making the total length 11 km.

A liberal estimate of the crowds lining the 11 km long funeral procession route puts it at 80,000, although it is likely to have been 60,000. When my father died, 5000 people took his remains (at half an hour's notice) from the High Court (he had been a lawyer who took up public interest cases) to Calcutta Medical College, my own alma mater, where he had donated his body to the anatomy department. (Another proof, if a personal one, that the streets of Calcutta are not strewn with dead bodies.)

At 2.20 p.m. the cortege stopped 500 metres from Mother House and eight soldiers carried the coffin along A.J.C. Bose Road, then turned into the narrow alleyway beside number 54a, finally entering the building through its famous side-entrance. Soldiers re-emerged at 2.40 p.m., having formally handed over the coffin to priests and nuns. Twelve soldiers standing on the tram-tracks outside fired three rounds of rifle volleys into the air at 2.45 p.m. The ground floor of Mother House had been prepared and consecrated to be Mother's resting place over the previous week. The coffin was lowered into the newly dug floor of Mother House at 2.55 p.m. Only one non-Catholic was allowed to be present at that precious moment: her accountant [S.M. Roy Chaudhuri](#).

There were hardly any poor along the funeral route. Those who had come, did so purely from curiosity. Many had mistakenly assumed that the three Queens (of Spain, Belgium and Jordan) and [Hillary Clinton](#) would travel with the cortege. Some wanted to see what Imelda Marcos looked like in real life!

[Michael Sheridan](#) writing in *The Sunday Times* (London) admitted that amidst all the ceremony and pomp 'Only the poor were missing. . . few of the sick paupers to whom she devoted her life lined the streets of Calcutta' but then rationalised by saying that they did want to come but were 'frightened away'!⁶ In fact, the small number of poor that came were attracted more by the pomp than by Teresa.

The Boston Globe said, 'A plan to have a group of the city's most deprived accompany the body on its final ride was scrapped at the last

minute.’⁷ What it did not say was why it was scrapped - because not enough of the ‘most deprived’ could be found to make an impressive sight. They could rustle up about a couple of hundred at the most. If foreign journalists had been surprised at the lack of the ‘poorest of the poor’ wailing at the passing of their ultimate purported keeper, they kept judiciously quiet.

The British (Welsh) poet [Stephen Knight](#) found himself in Calcutta during Mother Teresa’s funeral. Here is the published account of his experience:

13 September: I arrived in Calcutta on the morning of Mother Teresa’s funeral. . . On the drive into the city, we passed. . . the billboards of enterprising companies: ‘Tata Steel pays homage to Mother Teresa’, or the unmistakable blue and white band of her habit beside her slogan ‘Do Ordinary Things with Extraordinary Love: Berger Paints’. My favourite, a cartoon of a grief-stricken caterpillar beside a poor likeness of Mother Teresa, was captioned ‘second to none’. The morning edition of [The Statesman](#) was full of similar gestures:

Our Reverend Homage to Mother
Who taught us to love mankind
Deeply mourned by Duckbill Drugs

. . . Police and the military in every corner. . . After unpacking, I walked to the nearest street where the cortege would pass, through an arcade of shops, past one man, lying on an oil-cloth on the wet pavement, flapping the stump of an arm like a flipper, past another rattling coins in a tin cup, past children selling paperbacks spread out on a pallet in the street (thrillers, romances, Jeffrey Archer’s *First Among Equals*) to take up a position near the barriers, by then too deep with spectators. . . A helicopter circled in the distance, . . . The chatter was in Bengali, the crowd jostling, eyeing me askance, but there was no wailing, nothing like the funeral of the Princess of Wales the week before, just a jockeying for position.⁸

Interestingly, an American magazine, *Workers World* made this daring comment:

The media had predicted a million poor mourners would line the street. Why did less than 5 per cent of that number actually turn out? Aren't poor people grateful?⁹

[Peter Popham](#) of *The Independent* (London) had this to say about his encounter with people who were queuing to see Mother's body earlier on at the church:

People had all sorts of explanations why they had come. 'I came to see the line,' one man said simply. . . 'We want to see her body,' said a teenager, 'she's famous, that's why we've come.' . . .Sheer fame certainly had a lot to do with it. An elegant lady in a brown silk floral patterned sari, clasping umbrella, sketch pad, pens and a camera fought her way with flashing eyes to the front of the crowd outside the church. She took snaps, then opened the sketch pad and dashed down the scene of military jeeps and Rajput pipers. She said, 'I'm writing poetry on this, it started with [Diana](#) poems and went on to Teresa poems . . . In London years ago I walked your streets trying to catch Rex Harrison and Audrey Hepburn. I've queued for days trying to see Duke Ellington. . .'¹⁰

One section of the city's population which expressed the most visible grief was its sportsmen. The reason for this is unclear, but it could be that they were mobilised by the state's personable and energetic Minister of Sports (and Transport) [Subhash Chakraborty](#), himself an admirer of Teresa. Though a Marxist, Chakraborty was well known in Calcutta as not being particularly friendly to the poor or dispossessed. It was he who declared war on hand-pulled [rickshaws](#) and also staked his personal reputation on the banishing of all pavement stalls from the city's streets. The day before the funeral, on Friday the 12th, Chakraborty asked the city's sportsmen and women to assemble at Allen Park, a small triangular piece of green about a kilometre from St. Thomas' Church. Orders were given to come in white (the Hindu colour of mourning) and to bring a bouquet each.

After the funeral, Mother Teresa's birthplace [Albania](#) became involved in an embarrassing incident. The Albanian delegation comprising of the country's President and four others were put up at the Hindustan International Hotel. The hotel had been reassured that the bill would be met

by either the state or the central government, but when the time came for the delegation to leave, it refused to let them go unless they settled their bill, which they had to. West Bengal's finance minister later reimbursed the Albanians.

Now, how does Calcutta say farewell to its *real* favourites? The 1941 funeral procession of [Tagore](#) was attended and witnessed by 2 million people, when the Calcutta's population was 4 million fewer. Coming to more recent deaths in Calcutta, how did the population mourn and behave at Satyajit Ray's funeral on 24 April 1992? To convey the idea I shall quote from a source as unlikely as any, [The Wall Street Journal](#):

How big is a crowd of one million people? It's impossible to convey the sensation of being in such a throng of humanity, but that's how many of the citizens of the communist-ruled state of West Bengal gathered here for the funeral of Satyajit Ray. . . [His] body was lying in state at the West Bengal Film Institute and the sheer number of mourners made it impossible for some time to manoeuvre the garlanded open coffin onto the gun carriage. . . The police were worried that the half a million or so who hadn't succeeded in entering Nandan might riot. . . It is difficult for outsiders to understand the intensity with which he was loved by Bengalis, who are said to have poetry in their soul as well as their language. To Bengalis under 25, though, Mr Ray is remembered not as a film-maker but as a writer, especially of children's books. He was the best-selling author in the Bengali language and the largest royalty earner in all India. . . The mood was sombre. Calcutta was mourning for itself. Mr Ray had been the emblem of Bengal's self-esteem.¹¹

The [Wall Street Journal](#) of course extensively covered Mother Teresa's death and ran two large features¹² (one of them by Philip Lawler, editor of *Catholic World Report*) extolling her greatness and goodness. This is not surprising, as it is on Wall Street that many of Mother Teresa's biggest supporters do their daily grind. The paper however conveniently forgot to report on Calcuttans' reaction to her death, although it ran numerous articles on crowd numbers and public grief erupting in London following [Diana's](#) death.

In the days after her death, they were two controversies in local media. One was over an article that appeared the very next day in *Ananda Bazar Patrika*. It was written by Swami Lokeshwarananda, the head of *Ramakrishna Mission*, the Hindu charity that is also India's largest one. It appeared in the newspaper's front page squeezed underneath the banner headline MOTHER OF 20TH CENTURY PASSES AWAY. The Swami's piece was entitled 'Let Us Bow to Her, A Friend of the Poor'. He said:

When I witnessed the rapid horizontal spread of her work, I became concerned as I wondered if quality would be sacrificed to achieve quantity. But she is rightfully criticised for applying subtle pressure on those under her care to convert to Catholicism, but that charge could of course be applied to all Christian missionary organisations. Now the question is often asked; what is the difference between Mother Teresa's work and that of the Ramakrishna Mission. The difference was in her penchant for publicity. Whereas the Ramakrishna Mission works in silence, Mother Teresa always actively sought publicity. Many people, including those that live in this city, are not fully aware of the full extent of the Ramakrishna Mission's work, as we work in silence. Gimmicks we do not seek.

Lokeshwarananda's article caused an uproar that raged in the correspondence page of the newspaper for a month. Many supported him, but many said it was in bad taste to criticise a 'noble European lady the day after her death'.

A minor controversy happened on 11 September: *The Statesman* published an interview with Mother's dentist *Barin Roy*, who, while reminiscing about his most famous patient, innocently remarked that she had rotten teeth and was inordinately fond of chocolates. The feature was done to highlight various interesting vignettes about the woman whom the world made such fuss, but Calcuttans knew little about. The Catholic establishment went into a deep sulk, especially as the world's media were present in the city at the time and might read about something that did not fit the image.

Despite the overall public indifference, the corporate sector made a scramble to post notices of condolence in newspapers and public billboards, as the poet *Stephen Knight* observed.

For almost a week all the major newspapers in both English and Bengali carried supplements where boxed condolences were put in by various companies, big and small. Companies like Haldia Petrochemicals, Apollo Tyres, Sahara Group, India Tobacco, B Sirkar Jewellers, were amongst the biggest mourners. One of the city's biggest advertising firms themselves did a large hoarding with 'Mother Teresa: 1910-Eternity'. All of Monginis Cake Shops remained shut on the day of funeral as a mark of respect.

[Pope John Paul II](#) did not attend the funeral, which surprised most people. Western media were faintly critical. ABC said, 'When Mother Teresa is laid to rest on Saturday, the mourners won't include the temporal head of the religion to which she devoted most of 87 years, Pope John Paul II.'¹³

The semi-official reason that the Vatican grapevine spread was that it was because of health reasons. This did not quite ring true as less than a month later he embarked on an arduous tour of Brazil. Officially, Vatican consistently refused to issue any statement as to the reason of his non-attendance. If anything they were keen to stress that although 'he gets tired much easier than before, but when he is rested, he is lucid and his mind is really sharp.'

But when the Vatican declared that the Indian-born Cardinal Lourdasamy would officiate at the funeral, Indian Catholics took it as a put-down. They told the Vatican that as the Indian government was expending so much money and effort, it would be impolite not to show some appreciation. Vatican withdrew Lourdasamy at the last moment and instead sent the 'number two' in the Vatican 'government': Secretary of State, Angelo Sodano. The reason for the Pope's absence remains a mystery but it could be to do with his orthodoxy and fundamentalism. Very likely he did not wish to conduct a multi-faith ceremony in non-consecrated premises. And, it would be inconceivable for him to conduct Mass there with non-Catholics present, indeed them being the majority.

Mother Teresa had been aware that her political ally the Pope would not be coming to her funeral. A short while before she died she spent seven weeks with him in [Rome](#) during May and June 1997. She had been discussing her funeral arrangements with people close to her for a couple of years. It is often discussed whether she was aware that she would be awarded a full state (i.e., military) funeral. Many a time I have read how disgusted Mother would have been at the pomp and ceremony and the

absence of the poor. The poor chose to be absent, and I do not think she (like most human beings) would have been pleased to be carried on a cannon, which she knew she would be. But she did not wish to be awkward with the Indian government.

The route the funeral cortege took probably would not have met with her approval as it showed some of the best parts of Calcutta; wide avenues, acres of lush green park, elegant buildings floating between sunshine and drizzle. Mother used to get irritated if Calcutta was portrayed as a normal city.

What surprised Calcuttans was that a major public event had passed with absolutely no untoward incident, for this is a volatile city where emotions run high, especially wherever there is a large collection of people. A week after the funeral, Shuma Raha writing in *The Telegraph*¹⁴ commented how relieved officials must have been that everything went peacefully, particularly when one contrasted this one with the other major public funerals. She mentioned how crowds turned emotional, then unruly, in Ray's and also in the matinée idol Uttam Kumar's funeral (1980). During the journey of Tagore's remains to cremation, crowds descended on his body, ripping off his beard to keep as memento. The reason why there was no incident during Teresa's funeral was because there was no emotion. Calcutta gives a certain place to Teresa, but has never bonded with her. Also, there were no real crowds.

Explaining the general lack of emotion displayed by Calcuttans, *Boston Globe*'s Patricia Smith declared, 'In silence, Calcutta mourners shouted their grief.' She noted 'there was no wail, no anguished outcry, no keening of tortured mourners.' Then she opined that whereas in 'the African-American community, the living writhe and testify, stomp and glorify, all the while calling for the one that is gone,' in Calcutta they said goodbye 'to the holy Mother' with 'a silence that was alternately respectful and stunned.'¹⁵ What a euphemism for 'indifference'! Whoever has spent half a day in Calcutta would tell you that 'respectful silence' is alien here. Interestingly, shortly after she returned from Calcutta, Smith had to resign as a journalist as it was confirmed that she had been fabricating stories for a long time. It must have taken falsehoods of incredible magnitude for a journalist to be disciplined on those grounds. Apparently *Boston Globe* had been aware that she had been doing this, but probably that made her ideally suited for reportage from Calcutta.

Calcutta's ambivalence to Mother Teresa can be illustrated through an editorial that appeared in *Ananda Bazar Patrika* the day after the funeral. The piece, describing Mother Teresa as a 'living legend', started off with 'As in the life and deeds, so in her death had Mother Teresa brought glory to Calcutta'. Only to finish off with 'If Mother Teresa has put Calcutta in the world map yet again, then that recognition is as one of the darkest places of our planet.' I think Calcuttans got somewhat bewildered by the international furore over her, and did not quite know how to react. People realised this woman was very big indeed in the West, and therefore assumed she must have been someone great. Also, the Catholic establishment spread rumours in the surrounding villages that there was a holy woman lying dead in the city, physical contact or proximity to whom, was bringing miracles. The Archbishop of Calcutta admitted such a rumour was going around when he appeared with me in the *Today with Pat Kenny* programme on Irish radio (on 30 August 2001). Many villagers, who had no idea who Mother Teresa was, brought talismans and medals which they were trying to rub on the glass case surrounding the body.

It is remarkable that out of the city's 11.5 million people, much of the Western media would mainly speak to Christians when doing a survey of the population's sentiments towards her. The French bureau Agence France-Presse spoke to three people, two of them Catholics, and the other possibly so:

'Now I don't know where to go,' said Hazel D'Costa, a resident of Calcutta. . . 'I can't express my feeling or my sorrow in words,' she said. 'I used to visit Mother House once a week to get solace. . . [not aid].' Noel Gomes, another Calcutta resident, added, 'Mother made us [Catholics] proud in her lifetime. Now she has gone to heaven we're even prouder.' A Chinese settled in Calcutta, who gave his name as Ah Wong, bemoaned that Mother died before opening an office in mainland [China](#). 'We'd all been looking forward for her to open a mission in China,' he said. 'Unfortunately she couldn't do that. Our only consolation is that the Missionaries of Charity have a centre in Hong Kong.'¹⁶

The Chinese of Calcutta are almost solely Catholic. It is noteworthy that none of the three spoke of Mother's charitable acts.

[Peter Popham](#) found in the crowds a man who was had been her beneficiary: Kasu D'Souza, a Catholic from Goa, on the other side of the country. 'Formerly a fisherman and a merchant seaman, he came to Calcutta a year ago with his wife and children in search of work.' Mr D'Souza told Popham that before he found a job he was given breakfast from Mother Teresa's kitchen every morning. There should not be an iota of doubt that he would not be fed had he not been Catholic.

[The Sunday Times](#) (London) carried a photo with the caption 'Mother Love'. A well-attired middle class child was shown along the funeral route waving a poster of the dead nun.

During the week between death and funeral, international journalists arrived in Calcutta in droves. Western journalists had a field day at Calcutta's expense. Many television journalists hired local youths to bring them to some of the city's worst areas, from which they would do their broadcasts. The ITN journalist [Robin Denselow](#) broadcast (on 11 September 1997) the evening news watched by millions in the UK, from a silted up dark canal surrounded by grim slums showing a woman who was washing her hair in the canal. His guide to this destination was [Tom Woodhatch](#), who apparently did charity work in the city with [Calcutta Rescue](#), and who, in my opinion, detests Hinduism and is deeply condescending of Calcuttans. Denselow did a brief interview with Woodhatch in front of the dire scene and declared: 'This is how the majority people in Calcutta live and now that Mother Teresa has passed away, they won't be able to do that.'

[Patricia Smith](#) wrote in *Boston Globe* that collective whispers or sighs or mutterings of 'T-e-r-e-s-a' were going up all over the city. She found a beggar outside Orient Furnishers for whom it was 'too much effort in mouthing his own name. But there is one word he can repeat; Teresa.' He could but actually didn't. She also called Calcutta 'a temporary world of clash and chaos', implying the city would swiftly vanish after the death of its purported keeper.¹⁷

Like many others, the BBC television commentator [Nick Gowing](#) took a low jibe. He said the army's planned artillery salute had been replaced by a rifle volley to spare Calcutta from crumbling. Overcoming the Indian awe of sahibs and the reluctance to criticise them, somebody wrote in [The Statesman](#) that Gowing, being a British sahib, should have known that a

single clap of monsoon thunder was a million decibels louder than the proposed artillery salute.

The Hong Kong-based British television journalist [Ian Williams](#) felt gutted by the nun's death, but not from grief. His would have been her last television interview if she had lived another day. He had arrived in Calcutta on 4 September with his camera crew in order to record her reactions to [Diana's](#) death. Particularly he wanted to film the prayer meeting Mother Teresa had arranged in St. Paul's Cathedral (Calcutta) on 7 September. He was hoping to speak to various people in the order who were present during Diana's Calcutta visit. In preparation for his interview, he went to Mother House on the morning of 5 September. Western TV journalist that he was, he got immediate access to Mother at 7 a.m. He chatted to her for a few minutes, but alas did not have his cameraman with him. Mr [Williams](#) said he was overwhelmed on meeting the 'living saint'. He said he enquired after her health but she, with characteristic modesty, did not wish to talk too much about herself. Instead she asked him about the circumstances of the Paris crash. He told newsmen in Calcutta¹⁸ that she was very keen to know how the British were expressing their grief and whether [Diana](#) was getting an appropriate and grand enough funeral. She also recalled the Princess's kindness and charity and also their last meeting in New York. When Mr Williams formally asked for permission to film Sunday's prayer meeting, Mother Teresa said it had to be arranged through her friend [Sunita Kumar](#). He was unable to contact Kumar directly on the phone but at 11p.m. the same day received a call from her son, saying that Mother Teresa had passed away. Williams was devastated. He was insistent that his 7 a.m. chat ought to be recorded as her last formal interview.

This just illustrates that even in her last hours on this earth, Mother was tied up with publicity and propaganda. There was no involvement with the poor.

In the months following the funeral, I wrote about a hundred letters to the great and the good who had come to pay their last respects to the 'saint of the gutters'. Essentially I asked everybody two questions:

1. Did their pre-conceptions of Mother Teresa's work fit in with what they saw in Calcutta? Did they feel that she was a gigantic presence in the city?
1. Did the city of Calcutta live down to its perceived gruesome image?

Of the fifty or so American politicians I wrote to, not one replied. They included Senators, members of Congress and also [Hillary Clinton](#). I wrote her a letter and an e-mail. Her office sent an automated reply e-mail with an assurance that a written reply might be sent but never was.

The Queen of Spain's personal secretary Jose Cabrera Garcia wrote¹⁹ to say she did not offer her opinions on either persons or places, hence. . ., etc.

The doyenne of television presenters, the celebrity anchor [Christiane Amanpour](#) of CNN said, 'What I saw during my brief visit was a proud city, dignified and kind people with all the ups and downs of any big city in the world. Clearly Mother Teresa was one of Calcutta's many distinguished residents.'²⁰

[Deborah Wong](#), Asia correspondent of ABC News wrote:

The first time I went to Calcutta I carried with me the perception that it was a city of poverty and slums. What I found instead was an energetic metropolis, full of charming old buildings and infused with a vibrant cultural life. . . Whether or not that [Mother Teresa being a significant figure in the city] is true I cannot say. But in death she did become a symbol for people. . . I think more and more people are discovering its [Calcutta's] charms (I believe Newsweek did a cover story called something like 'Calcutta Comeback'.)²¹

The [Duchess of Kent's](#) personal secretary Judy Newton wrote, 'As a fleeting visitor Her Royal Highness is unable to offer an opinion on this subject.'²² The Duchess of Kent, who had converted to Catholicism a couple of years previously, reportedly travelled to the city in a chartered aircraft belonging to [Tom Cruise](#) as the Queen's representative at the funeral.

The former Dutch Prime Minister (and devout Catholic) [Ruud Lubbers](#) wrote, 'What I saw did not live up to the old image of Calcutta. . . I could strongly feel Mother Teresa's presence everywhere. The atmosphere was full of charity. It was as if she was with us, her presence could be felt in all the streets of Calcutta.'²³

[Newsweek's](#) [Kenneth L Woodward](#), who considers himself some kind of an expert in 'saint-making', and who wrote a gushing cover-feature soon

after her death ('[Sainthood](#) Now: The [Beatification](#) of Mother Teresa') replied rather petulantly, 'Sorry, I didn't go to Calcutta, we have correspondents in India for that purpose, and I do not buy the line, fostered by Calcutta's socialist politicians that she gave the city a bad name.' Woodward did not bother to use even writing paper sending, back my letter with his reply scribbled at the top.

Following Mother Teresa's death, the new head of the order was [Sister Nirmala](#) (Joshi). She was elected in February 1997, eight months before Mother's death. When it was announced that Mother Teresa would step down and a new head be elected, world media reacted appropriately. The story was reported in detail and with prominence. But when the issue of succession dragged on and election was postponed more than once, there was no news fatigue. The case was treated as an exotic royal succession.

During December 1996 and January 1997, a hundred MC nuns flew into Calcutta from all over the world to prepare for the big succession. The election date was set for 2 February 1997, and in mid-January the electors went into 'retreat' for discussion. Then suddenly on 28 January election was postponed indefinitely, no reason given. Speculations ran wild through media. I believe there was discord between Mother Teresa and the Vatican over the choice of successor. I believe she favoured the austere and dour Sister Frederick, the Anglo-Maltese who was an ultra-orthodox disciplinarian. It is likely that the smart PR men at the Vatican thought Frederick, though ideologically sound, would be a media disaster. They wanted Sister Nirmala, a wise choice. Nirmala was affable, relatively young, and had secular education up to university level. Most importantly, she represented Catholic triumphalism. She was a Hindu convert from a Brahmin family, and from Nepal, which was then the world's only officially Hindu nation.

In March, the Indian press speculated that the confusion and conflict within the organisation were so profound that maybe no successor would be elected and a 'council of nuns' would take charge. There was also speculation that the order might move its operational headquarters to the Vatican. It needs to be mentioned here that, although Mother Teresa always stressed that her organisation was a truly Indian one, in 1965 it ceased to be governed by the Calcutta Archdiocese and came under direct governance of the Vatican. The reason for this is unclear, but could be partly financial given the size of its income.

Finally, after three postponements, an election was held and a candidate emerged. Sister Nirmala became the 'Superior-General' and her smiling picture, waving from the balcony with Mother Teresa beside her in a wheelchair, was beamed round the world.

[Nirmala](#) (1934–2015) was a conservative but not duplicitous, unlike her predecessor. On 12 September 1997, the day before Mother Teresa's funeral, Nirmala held her first press conference. This was at the insistence of various journalists from all over the world who were due to leave Calcutta the following day and were eager to take back for their readers something from the successor. The press conference was a media disaster with the Indian public. Nirmala said there was nothing wrong with the poor staying poor: 'We want the poor to accept poverty with the same stoicism displayed by the nuns. They should be content with whatever the Lord had given them.' She also said that there was nothing wrong with wealth as long as part of it was given to the poor. To Indian journalists' queries about funds and their sources, and about the lack of published accounts, she said the order relied on God for funds and that there was no question of changing any policies on publication of accounts. She reiterated Mother Teresa's stance on accepting money from anybody without questioning the means of obtaining such money. Then came the crunch. Indian journalists asked her about her views on contraception and abortion. At this point her mentor [Naresh Kumar](#) who was on the dais with her, tried to deflect the discussion. But she stopped him and replied courageously that the order's views remained unchanged. Contraception and abortion remained sins and were repugnant. The following day the local newspapers made critical headlines of her views. The Letters columns also attracted opinions which betrayed faint disgust. Interestingly, in her long life whenever Mother Teresa had been faced with a potentially unpopular answer she had always managed to divert into 'love' or 'prayer'. Nirmala's views were the same as Teresa's, but the latter had never articulated them quite so succinctly on Indian soil. More interestingly, even to this day, Calcuttans are not quite aware to which extent Mother Teresa detested contraception and abortion. They are not aware how she regarded poverty in itself as a noble virtue, almost to be desired and cultivated.

Sister Nirmala headed the order till 2009 - six years before she died - and was succeeded by the German, Sister Prema Pierick.

Mother Teresa's body lies buried in a simple grave in Mother House on Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose (Lower Circular) Road. Upon the grave stands a metre-high figure of Madonna and child. They used to be fluorescent blonde but in 2001 someone had the sense to paint them a darker hue. A Bible in Albanian lies on the grave.

Mother Teresa had wished and expected to be buried in the grounds of St. John's Church in Sealdah where many of her nuns are buried. However, on 9 September 1997, Calcutta's Catholic establishment declared to local media that they had opted for an indoor site as they were worried that her grave would be desecrated. Less than 50 people visit the grave each day, almost all of them visitors to the city. On her birth and death anniversaries, and at times such as Easter and Christmas, the figure might go up to 200. On my many visits to the grave, I have never witnessed a poor person visiting it.

14

From 'Living Saint' to Saint

Don't trivialise me by trying to make me a saint

–[Dorothy Day](#), Catholic social
activist for the poor

A Catholic saint is made in two stages: [beatification](#) and [canonisation](#). The first stage, beatification, if successful, ends with declaring the person 'blessed'. Canonisation completes the process and the person becomes a 'saint'. One miracle is required for a person to be beatified and one to be canonised. It used to be two and two but [Pope John Paul II](#) cut it down so he could create more saints. Astonishingly, he created almost a thousand saints: more than all his predecessors, in the two thousand years before him, put together.

Many years usually pass before a person whose cause is taken up finally becomes a saint. Each step can take decades, and also the person can lie suspended for years between the two stages. How soon he or she is able to touch the finishing line depends on how much money and time their backers are prepared to spare. It is much like a US presidential election. The quickest beatifications to date are those of Mother Teresa and John Paul II – six years. They are followed by the Spanish Fascist [José Maria Escriva](#), who managed it in 17 years, and became a full saint in 27. He had many millionaires backing him. [John Paul II](#) is the fastest Saint in modern Catholic history, taking merely nine years following his death.

Soon after Mother Teresa's death, I wrote to various people regarding her becoming a saint. Essentially the point I made in my letters was that Mother Teresa had been a publicity-hungry and often hypocritical person; also she had not always been honest in her pronouncements and intentions. I wanted these facts to be recognised during her [beatification/canonisation](#) and asked whether her [sainthood](#) should be called into question.

The first two people I wrote to were Henry D'Souza, the Archbishop of Calcutta, and [Peter Gumpel](#), the Jesuit, who was an official at the Vatican

vital for the creation of saints. He was also an increasingly powerful political player there. Gumpel wrote back soon after on 23 December 1997:

Naturally I respect your opinions, but as far as the procedure in the Causes of Beatification and Canonisation is concerned, I beg to inform you that at this stage the Roman authorities cannot intervene in the Cause of Mother Teresa of Calcutta. . . According to the laws which govern these matters the evidence has to be gathered by the competent Local Ordinary, which in this case is His Excellency, the Archbishop of Calcutta. I am sure His Excellency will carefully consider all arguments which possibly could be adduced against the Cause of Mother Teresa and that in due time he will inform the Roman authorities about these difficulties.

It will then be the task of the Roman authorities to evaluate such possibilities. . .

With all good wishes for the New Year,

Respectfully yours,

Prof. Dr Peter Gumpel, S.J.

So I wrote off to Henry D'Souza on 3 January 1998:

Your Excellency,

I am writing to you regarding the beatification/canonisation of Mother Teresa. I wrote to Fr. Peter Gumpel S.J., who advised me to write to you, as you are the Local Ordinary dealing with the matter. I have a large amount of evidence why Mother Teresa should not be declared a saint. I wish to offer my evidence voluntarily as an unofficial Promoter Justitie*, if you wish. I shall fully co-operate with the Vatican authorities in the matter, although the evidence I shall offer will be my own. I am sure you will not disappoint me, a Calcuttan born and bred. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Aroup Chatterjee

**I have been told since by Vatican watchers that the formal post of the 'devil's advocate' (Promoter Justitie) has been abolished, which makes the process even more partisan.*

D'Souza sent a prompt reply (dated 17 January 1998) asking me to send my evidence by registered post, which he said he would pass on to the 'relevant members of the Committee'. I now prepared a 2500-word 'Deposition' and sent it (by registered post) to D'Souza. Here is the gist of my deposition:

1. Mother Teresa was dishonest about her 'picking up' destitute from streets when she hardly ran such a service. Her ambulances were employed as nuns' taxis.

1. She was cruel to her residents in many ways including subjecting them to used needles.

1. Despite telling the world frequently that she was open to other religions she banned non-Catholic worship in her premises, much to the distress of her residents.

1. She operated a strict closed-door policy at her orphanages in Calcutta – street-children had no chance of getting help there, neither did poor women with babies.

1. She used a dangerous baby milk called Belgomilk which she got free – this mixture can cause serious harm to babies.

1. Her claim that she fed up to 9,000 in her soup kitchens in Calcutta had no basis in truth – she fed a handful.

1. She made up an arbitrary figure of 61,273 – fewer babies born due to [natural contraception](#) – even in her Nobel speech, without a jot of evidence.

1. Despite telling journalists that she wanted to die like the poor she received the most expensive treatments countless times in various clinics in India and abroad.

1. She frequently meddled in politics. She used to vote in Indian elections. She criticised India's Freedom of Religion Bill. Most disturbingly, she supported Mrs Gandhi's Emergency when democracy was suspended and torture was routine; thousands of men were forcibly sterilised during Emergency. Contrast all this with her feigning naivety about politics.

1. She would accept money from anyone, no matter how corrupt, even if she knew that the money had been stolen from very poor people.

1. It would be a disservice to her to be called 'of Calcutta' as Calcutta is one of the world's most pro-abortion cities.

At the time I had no proof that she was selling children to Catholic couples after falsifying their documents, hence this issue does not feature.

I received a prompt but surprising reply to my deposition from Archbishop D'Souza:

I have your letter with the appeal for the [beatification](#) of Mother Teresa. I am proposing the same to the persons concerned for advice. I do wish we can begin the process for the person whose sanctity we all admired.

With my good wishes

H.D'Souza

cc: [Sr. Nirmala](#), M.C. with enclosed letter

11 March 1998

I believe Archbishop D'Souza had not had the time to peruse my deposition, for his letter seems to be a standard reply to a letter of support. By then a Canadian priest belonging to the MC itself, called [Brian Kolodiejchuk](#) had been appointed the 'Postulator' in the [sainthood](#) process. He had set up office in Calcutta with secretaries and computers. I wrote to him:

Dear Fr. [Kolodiejchuk](#)

I shall be grateful if you could look at my evidence of the intense culture of deception surrounding Mother Teresa. I wish to state that she herself was the main perpetrator of this deception.

Please will you read my deposition to the Congregation for the Cause of the Saints. I have also submitted the deposition to various other relevant individuals and bodies.

Please note that I shall be only too pleased to depose in person should you call upon me to do so (in any corner of the world).

I remain

Yours sincerely

A Chatterjee

29 March 1999

I never received a reply from Kolodiejchuk, which prompted me to write (with a copy of my deposition) to José Saraiva Martins, who heads the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints at the Vatican:

Dear Fr Saraiva Martins

Enclosed, please find a deposition regarding Mother Teresa's [beatification/canonisation](#). As a born and bred Calcuttan, I have presented arguments why Mother Teresa's case for becoming a saint should be seriously called into question.

I have sent the document to His Excellency [Archbishop Henry D'Souza](#) of Calcutta and to other relevant people.

I sincerely wish you would peruse the document and consider the points therein.

Yours sincerely

Aroup Chatterjee

4 July 2000

I did not receive a reply from Saraiva Martins. Meanwhile, in May 2000, a news item appeared in Catholic media¹ that the examination of witnesses in the Teresa [sainthood](#) cause was now complete and there were no further witnesses to examine. Kolodiejchuk gave a press statement that the five-member team had examined 100 witness of which 75 were from Calcutta. What he did not say was that the Calcutta witnesses were mostly nuns. He however mentioned that 'only a handful' of witnesses gave 'negative' depositions.

Sometime towards the end of 2000 I received a phone call from Westminster Cathedral offices in London informing me that they had been passed on a letter that I wrote to the Archbishop of Calcutta and asking me if I would like to be a 'witness' in the [beatification](#) process. I agreed. A few days later I received a letter (dated 11 December 2000) from Monsignor [Ralph Brown](#), Judicial Vicar of the Archdiocese of Westminster:

Following discussions with this office, you have agreed to give evidence in connection with the [Canonisation](#) Process of Mother Teresa. I know well that your views are not entirely in favour of Mother Teresa. . . I think it has already been explained to you that the interviews take some considerable while, which is why two days have been allocated. . . I am very grateful to you for being so kind as to answer questions. . . May I wish you well for Christmas and the New Year.

At the time I was under the impression that I would be the sole genuinely hostile witness in Teresa's beatification cause. Later on it came to light that [Christopher Hitchens](#), the world's most high profile Teresa basher, was also such a witness a few months later in Washington DC Hitchens' testimony was heard by three priests, and probably because it was tape-recorded, took one day rather than two.

I was interviewed on the 3rd and 4th of January 2001 in a small comfortable room in Vaughan Place close to the Cathedral. My 'inquisitor' was [Dr Alison Grady](#), a retired teacher, who is called a Lay Auditor in church speak. She was a devout Catholic who did voluntary work for the church. She almost always interviews couples who are about to divorce or are seeking the church's permission to remarry. Although a spinster, she is an expert on the minutiae of canon law on marriage and divorce. She told me she had never before interviewed anybody in the matter of beatification-canonisation. Usually saints are created many (sometimes hundreds of) years after their deaths, so it is not often that a living witness is around to provide evidence.

[Dr Grady](#) had a typed sheet of questions with her which she read out to me. She was not permitted to ask anything that did not feature in the sheet given to her. The questions had been set beforehand and are the same for anybody who would be a witness. There were 263 questions in all. My answers were written down (by hand) by Dr Grady underneath each question.

The 'Mother Teresa Cause' as the church calls it has been assigned the reference number 'R/99/116 (Calcutta)'. As can be expected, the questions were primarily geared towards finding out if Mother Teresa had led a life faithful to the church. That alone determines her [sainthood](#).

I was not allowed a tape-recorder or to take contemporaneous notes but I have reproduced here as best I can some of the more interesting questions along with my answers. Although the questions have been reproduced verbatim, I have paraphrased here some of my answers:

Q. 6. Did you have any special bond with her?

A. Depends what is meant by 'bond'. She has defiled the place I was born and brought up in.

Q. 7. Are you moved to testify for some human reason (e.g., affection, interest etc.)

A. Human and spiritual reason.

Q. 21. *What education did she obtain?*

A. Very little secular education.

Section B: The Servant of God [Mother Teresa] as a Sister of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Q.B45. *What was her commitment with reference to fidelity to the Rule, fervour in devotion, her desire in perfection, and community life?*

A. She was a devoted servant of the church and followed the Rule exactly.

Q.B50. *What kind of relationship did she have with her superiors?*

A. She was very dutiful and obedient of her superiors.

Q.B55. *What was the characteristic traits of the human and religious personality of Mother Teresa?*

A. At the time [her early life] she was an honest and hard-working person and was genuinely moved by people's suffering.

Q.B57. *How did she express fidelity to the Loreto Rule and observance of vows?*

A. She was very faithful to the Rules and vows.

Q.B58. *How did she live the ascetic aspect of the spiritual and religious life?*

A. She lived a spartan and basic but comfortable life. Her life revolved round her faith.

Q.B.59. *Did she live a fervent devotional life?*

A. Yes.

Q.88. *What were the relations of Mother Teresa to the Co-workers and the Lay Missionaries of Charity?*

A. She was worshipped by them. She saw them as important in her publicity. She lived for publicity. Many of them were important people in the world and were valuable publicity agents for her.

Q.91. *How many Sisters left the Congregation during Mother Teresa's governance?*

A. I think about a thousand left. Some European ones left because they felt disgusted. [Susan Shields](#), one of her former nuns has written in various places about her negative experiences. Some nuns (mainly Indian) left when they got pregnant.

Q.93. How did Mother Teresa behave toward them when they expressed the desire to leave and/or when they already left?

A. She did not act on any of the criticisms they had made. She did not give them any support. She was unsympathetic and unforgiving to the ones who had become involved in sexual liaisons with men (I do not say it as a criticism).

Q.94. What did Mother Teresa do to discover and encourage vocation to the Missionaries of Charity?

A. In India she used the 'carrot' of a secure life, as against the insecurity of the life of an average woman, particularly from the villages. Interestingly less than 5 per cent of her recruits are from Calcutta itself.

Q.95. What were the methods and criteria she used?

A. In India her order offered the temptation of world travel, and of a very comfortable existence if one was a Contemplative Sister or even an 'active' Sister in a place where there were no residents to look after, such as in Sweden, Iceland, Belgium, Malta, Sicily, Austria etc. For the average Indian recruit, being a Teresa nun offered the basic securities of shelter, food, medical care. She recruited a large number of tribal women and men, but hardly any from Calcutta itself.

Q.101. What were the relationships of Mother Teresa and of Missionaries of Charity with various religious and civil authorities with which they came in contact with?

A. She was expedient and practical about keeping good relations for survival in a generally hostile country like India. The ruling party of West Bengal, the Marxists, had close ties with the (erstwhile) Albanian Communist Party which had persistently refused her permission to see her mother and sister. But she appeased the West Bengal government and would collaborate with any politician (of whatever persuasion) who would further her cause. She maintained friendly relations with all religious groups because it was necessary for her to do so. During the 1975–77 Emergency in India, thousands of men (many of them unmarried and childless) were forcibly vasectomised, but she praised the [state of emergency](#) as she had friendly relations with Mrs Gandhi who she saw as the best protector of Indian Christians in India.

Q.111. Did Mother Teresa always act with clarity, justice, detachment from earthly goods, and competence?

A. Competence Yes; the rest No.

Q.121. What was the attitude of Mother Teresa to the Second Vatican Council and how did she implement the changes asked for in Church documents, especially in regard to religious life?

A. She was thoroughly opposed to modernisation. I do not think she implemented any of the progressive changes recommended.

Q.122. What was Mother Teresa's attitude to constant media exposure and the attention it gave her?

A. She lapped it up while pretending to hate it. Once she took the whole of [South African cricket team](#) and a gaggle of South African media into the Home for the Dying; after a tour of intensive camera work she suddenly realised she hated publicity and ordered the group to leave at once.

Q.127. What was Mother Teresa's intention for the Homes for the Dying especially concerning the type of medical care the sick and dying receive there?

A. She did not believe in medical care. She believed that the residents ought to 'suffer like Jesus'.

Q.132. What was Mother Teresa's attitude to and efforts towards conversion to Christianity and her attitude to other religions?

A. In India she did not actively proselytise, although if she could quietly convert, she would. She pretended to respect other religions. But she allowed only Catholic worship in her homes; orphanage prayers had to be Catholic only.

Q.134. What was Mother Teresa's attitude to the City of Calcutta and the kind of publicity she brought to it?

A. She was oblivious to the negative publicity she generated, and even if she was aware of it she would not care, because she was bringing glory to herself and her church. She was very much caught up in her own propaganda. She gave Calcutta a very poor image: slums, dead bodies lying all over the place, etc. I believe she detested Calcutta for the city's casual approach to abortion.

Section E. The Personality of the Servant of God

Q.E.135. What were the characteristics of the personality of Mother Teresa?

A. From the age of 60 onward she became devious, ready to shake hands with anybody to further her cause, glib, intensely hypocritical, insincere, very superficial. Prior to that she was an honest, concerned and

genuinely helpful person. At the age of 59 she was discovered by [Malcolm Muggeridge](#) and, as a result, she changed permanently.

Q.E.136. What were the characteristics of Mother Teresa's spirituality?

A. She was a practical person and very cunning. I would not call her spiritual, although she was obviously deeply pious. She had very little ethics when it came to furthering her cause.

Q.E.138. What in your judgement would be Mother Teresa's particular message to the Church and the world today?

A. Her only message to the world was that abortion was murder and doctors who performed abortion should be in prison; contraception is an evil thing; women should be at home.

Q.159. Who after Mother Teresa's death visited the body?

A. The first outsider was [Subhas Chakraborty](#) the Sports and Youth Minister of West Bengal. The second person was the pop singer [Usha Uthup](#) (there is some dispute as to who came first). In any case there were no poor visitors for a long time after her death.

Q.167. Did Mother Teresa exercise the spirit of faith in the various moments of her life and especially during her last years?

A. Yes, she did.

Q.169. Did Mother Teresa attempt to nourish her spirit of faith?

A. She prayed non-stop, took the Bible literally. She never read anything from any other religion. [If she had, it would go against her [beatification](#)]. Prayer for her had become an obsessive ritual.

Q.171. Were there any circumstances in which Mother Teresa failed or was imperfect in the exercise of faith? If so, what are these?

A. For political and practical opportunism, she went directly against Catholic teachings on a number of occasions. She supported the [State of Emergency](#) in India, despite being fully aware that people were being forcibly sterilised. She supported (later retracted her support when criticised) [Diana's](#) divorce, although for any other woman she would utterly bar divorce for any reason. She also gave a certificate of support for her friend and collaborator [Dr Kakoli Ghosh-Dastidar](#), who has a fertility centre in Calcutta. [Fertility treatments are totally proscribed by the Catholic church].

Section K. The Virtue of Charity K.I. Love of God K.II. Love of Neighbour

Q.K.178. Did Mother Teresa show concrete expression of charity (love) towards the Lord in the various periods of her life?

[It is significant that ‘charity’ here is to do with the charity in the religious and not the ordinary sense.]

A. Yes, she did.

Q.K209. Did Mother Teresa attain control and domination over her own natural inclinations and passions?

A. Yes, she did.

Section Q. The Virtue of Obedience

Q.Q223. Did Mother Teresa show the spirit of submission, respect and obedience before various Archbishops of Calcutta and other dioceses? If so how or how not?

A. She was respectful and submissive.

Section R. The Virtue of Chastity

Q.R.227. Was she a good example in conduct and dress in regards to virtue of chastity?

A. Yes, she was.

Q.R.231. Did Mother Teresa take proper care and precaution to safeguard her consecrated chastity? If so, what means did she use?

A. I do not think anybody would question her chastity. She did not need to take any precautions.

Q.R234. Do you know if Mother Teresa ever failed, even occasionally, against the vow of religious chastity?

A. She never failed. [A negative or even doubtful answer to this question from a serious witness would jeopardise her [sainthood](#) chances]

Q.259. Are there any persons and groups that do not share the opinion on the reputation of sanctity of Mother Teresa and therefore are against the present Cause of [Beatification](#) and [Canonisation](#)?

A. The Hindu fundamentalist groups in India (who are numerically and politically quite powerful these days) are viciously opposed to her and are opposed to any kind of honour that could be bestowed on her. I myself am not against her becoming a Catholic saint.^{1`}

[This was the only occasion on which did [Dr Grady](#) show any emotion. She was startled and asked, ‘*You are not. . . ?*’ I explained

to her, if I was running a business I would, of course, reward my best sales people, whatever their other virtues. Besides, Mother Teresa, with all her faults, pales into insignificance before the sort of thugs, anti-Semites and fascist collaborators the Catholic Church has recently beatified, such as [Pius IX](#), Pius XII, [José Maria Escriva](#), Stepinac (Archbishop of Zagreb who oversaw the killings of thousands of Jews, gypsies and Communists), Cardinal Schuster of Milan, etc.]

X. Graces Attributed to the Intercession of Mother Teresa

Q.X261. Do you know of any persons who have received spiritual graces, heavenly [I am not quite sure if I got this word right] favours or extraordinary healings through the intercession of Mother Teresa?

A. No, I do not know of anybody. And, I do not believe that miraculous healings take place through the intercession of potential saints, but that is my personal opinion and I realise that I am in a minority in the world today to hold such opinion which I call rational. As a medical practitioner I do know however that the human body is a mystery we do not fully understand and I see many ‘miracles’ every day when dealing with my patients.

Q.263. Do you have anything to add, correct or delete in your testimony about the Servant of God, Mother Teresa of Calcutta?

A. I wish to point out she was not a truthful person. She even lied in her Nobel Prize acceptance speech: she gave the impression that her order scours the streets of Calcutta looking for destitutes, which is patently untrue. She also quoted a precise figure (61,273) which she said was the number of children *not* born because of poor people practising [natural contraception](#). This figure was plain prevarication. She also said that she did not know of any amongst the poor women in Calcutta who had an abortion. This is a grotesque lie and she knew it. She has also lied in books written about her about the number of people that she fed in her soup kitchens in Calcutta.

In an interview with [Daphne Barak](#) from the US magazine *Ladies Home Journal* [April 1996], she blatantly said she wanted to die like the poor in her ‘Home for the Dying’ ([Nirmal Hriday](#)) where conditions are abysmal. In the last few years of her life she hardly visited Nirmal Hriday. She knew very well that there was no question of her dying there as she was used to having treatments at some of the best clinics in the world.

She used to vote in Indian elections. She was very pro-active about all her nuns going out to vote. They were told exactly how to vote. All this contrasts with the naive image that she nurtured for herself.

I believe she had no right to lecture poor women about the evils of artificial contraception. It was immoral of her, a secure virgin nun feted by the world, telling a desperately poor Indian woman that she must stay away from the coil or the condom. She however did not have the moral courage and integrity to publicly air her views on contraception (and even abortion) in India, as she knew that would be detrimental to her public relations. Although she said a lot about the evil of abortion (and how women who have abortions were nothing short of murderers) she never made any statement about the heinous practice of selective abortion of female foetuses that happens in India a great deal. Again, this was from a desire to maintain public relations, and betrays her lack of courage and integrity.'

If Mother Teresa generated excessive interest in the media during her lifetime, obsession with her was no less intense following her timely demise. She, who had been known as the 'living saint' during her lifetime, was now being championed as a soon-to-be actual saint. Press and television followed the Catholic Church's [beatification-canonisation](#) process with great interest as if it were some rare scientific breakthrough. Every press communiqué about her from the Vatican was dutifully reported in world media. Barely three weeks after her death, [Newsweek](#)² magazine ran a cover story with 'Sainthood Now: The Move to Canonise Mother Teresa' splashed across the cover over her photograph. Back in 1998, when the Vatican specially waived for her the five-year waiting period for the process, it had been major news around the world, and made front page news in most American newspapers.

Given this level of interest in her becoming a saint, I had presumed that my being an *official* hostile witness against her would arouse some curiosity in hacks. How wrong I was.

A few weeks after I gave evidence, during February-March 2001, I sent letters and emails to a large section of the English-language press from around the world to let them know that I have been an *official* hostile witness in Teresa's beatification. This was the letter I sent:

It might interest you to know that I was able to offer *official* evidence against Mother Teresa in her beatification process. This is the result of 2 years of persistent representations to the Vatican and various other ecclesiastical authorities. My evidence was heard in London on 3rd and 4th of January 2001 at Westminster Cathedral offices.

A Catholic Saint is created on the basis of how true he or she had been to the letter of Catholic teaching and has little to do with their charitable nature. It is therefore unfortunate that so much of the secular media confuse a Catholic saint with 'saintly'.

During my interview I was asked questions such as how often and how deeply Mother Teresa used to pray, whether she was kind to her family, whether she had been a chaste woman etc. There were however opportunities to put in my views on how duplicitous and hypocritical she was – not that it would make any difference and I do not think it should do either: after all, this is the Catholic Church's own in-house reward system.

I had volunteered to be the so-called 'Devil's Advocate' (*Promoter Justitiae*) but the Vatican did not allow that.

I am from Calcutta myself and have spent the last 6 years researching the activities and operations of Mother Teresa and her organisation.

I sent this letter (mostly via e-mail) to 400 journalists around the world – about 350 of them in the US (as this is where her myth is the most intense), some in the UK, and a few in Australia and South Africa. The US's 350 journalists belonged to the country's 50 most popular newspapers. From my 400 mail shots I managed to get 4 responses.

[Stephen Bates](#) from *The Guardian* (UK) acknowledged my letter, so did [Lavinia Byrne](#), the British freelance journalist and former nun who left her holy orders (but remains a staunch Catholic) in protest at the Vatican's treatment of women. I also got an e-mail from *The Washington Post's* education correspondent who wanted some technical clarification about the process of [beatification](#). Particularly mystifying was the silence of [Kenneth L. Woodward](#), who is considered by himself (and by others in media) to be an expert in saint-making and was the main author of the *Newsweek* cover-feature. Since he is said to take a keen interest in all aspects of saint-

making, I thought he would be at least curious to know what a genuine *hostile* witness in an otherwise carefully managed drama had to say.

Exactly two months after my mail shots (on 26 May 2001) the Archbishop of Calcutta Henry D'Souza issued a press statement (again widely reported the world over) that Mother Teresa was heading for beatification in record time.

There are many people from around the world, many of them quite well-informed, who are terribly impressed by the Vatican's show of 'evidence-collection' before a saint is created. Indeed, quite often the collected evidence runs into volumes and takes years. But I wish to point out one significant point – has any candidate ever been rejected after the 'investigations'? The answer is NO. What kind of 'investigation' is it that always yields the same result? The so-called investigations, testimonies etc., are nothing short of 'eyewash'. They impress journalists who know little about the process. Interestingly, the Vatican makes a show of offering criticisms (no doubt trivial) about the candidate to appear neutral – in Mother Teresa's case it probably would be to do with her not preaching Christianity more stridently and visibly, and her relative shortage of humility in the last 20 years of her life when she accepted she was going to be a saint soon after death. The Vatican would then negate the negatives with platitudes. No genuine criticisms are offered during beatification/[canonisation](#) and if they are, as were in my and Hitchens' testimonies, they are dismissed.

[Pope John Paul II](#) beatified some strange people. But when he declared the hated nineteenth century [Pope Pius IX](#) 'blessed' in September 2000, there was an uproar from many quarters. Even the Catholic weekly [The Tablet](#) called it 'A Beatification Too Far'.³ [Pope Pius IX](#) was a hated figure in his day who would imprison minor dissenters – the papal prison was always full. He brought back public hangings. He reconstituted the Jewish ghetto, brought in draconian anti-Jewish laws like rescinding Jews' civil rights, and to top it all abducted a Jewish boy (Edgardo Mortara) from his parents (who he would playfully hide under his flowing robes) and converted him to Catholicism. In a cruel act befitting his personality, Edgardo was brought up in a wing of the Vatican funded by levies on Jews. When attacked by the European press for the abduction he said, 'The newspapers can write what they want. I couldn't care less what the world thinks.' In 1870 he declared that Jews were 'dogs. . . there are too many of

them in [Rome](#), and we hear them howling in the streets.’ When he died Romans attacked his funeral cortege and stole the coffin which was almost on the verge of being thrown in the Tiber, if not for the last minute intervention of the Papal Army. The Vatican and the Catholic establishment love him because he served the firm well. Even they are not claiming that he was kind and charitable, but they want to reward him for his services to the firm. He was the one who first officialised two of Catholicism’s most crucial and triumphal doctrines – Immaculate Conception of Virgin Mary, and, papal infallibility. Most liberal Catholics detest him and are ashamed of him. It is said a nun’s fractured kneecap healed through his intercession.

A more serious issue hangs over the proposed beatification of another [Pope, Pius XII](#). His role during the deportation and killing of Roman Jews during World War II is considered at best a poor understanding of Hitler’s intentions, and at worst tacit appeasement of Hitler with full knowledge. When Jews were being deported from ‘under his window’ to be killed – his supporters claim he was not aware of their ultimate fate – he made not a single murmur of protest. It is assumed by many that because he regarded Bolshevism and Communism as the ultimate enemy, he chose to lean on Hitler as the force that could ultimately defeat the international Left movement. Also it is well known that majority of Vatican establishment were openly anti-Semitic and Fascist sympathisers.

The Vatican’s role during the Holocaust is historically crucial to our further understanding of this heinous period in human civilisation. In October 1999, three Jewish and three Catholic historians were selected to study materials relating to the Vatican’s role during era. But on 21 June 2001, the Jewish historians were told by the Vatican that full archives would not be available to them for ‘technical reasons’. To this day Vatican has been shielding records which would throw light on Pius XII’s role during World War II.

It is likely that Pius XII aided and abetted the killing of innocent people (including children) for political and religious reasons. Given the depth and seriousness of controversy, this man should not have been proposed for beatification. He was favoured because like both John Paul II, and his successor Benedict XVI, he was ultra-right-wing and viciously anti-Communist.

When the wholly worthy Nikolaus Gross was beatified in 2001 (for being killed by Nazis for his conscience), his son protested that he did not

want his father made a saint by a Church that had connived with Hitler. But John Paul II simply ignored his wishes and went ahead.

José Maria (now Saint) [Escriva](#), who before Teresa and John Paul II held the record – 17 years – for the quickest beatification, was slated by some of his former colleagues for his fascist beliefs. [Vladimir Felzmann](#), a former member of Escriva's secretive organisation Opus Dei, said in an interview with [Catholic Times](#)⁴ that Escriva was an admirer of Hitler. John Paul II rewarded fascists who staved off threats from the Left, and had a particular regard for Escriva, who collaborated with [Franco's](#) ruthless military regime that ruled 'in the name of God'. In March 2001 the Pope also beatified in one stroke 233 collaborators of Franco, who fought (and died) to preserve Franco's fascist Catholic state against Spanish Republicans. He also beatified 130 Chinese 'martyrs' who fought on behalf of Western (Christian) and colonial powers in the Boxer uprising of the nineteenth century. They were collaborators against indigenous Chinese. These beatifications have caused another serious dent in the already strained Sino-Vatican relations.

Pope Pius X (Pope 1903–14) is one of only five Popes of modern times to have actually made it to [sainthood](#). He was not a popular man, even amongst the Catholic clergy. Priests would be excommunicated for the tiniest hint of 'modernism'. He introduced the practice of all parish priests having to take an 'anti-modernist oath'. This saint detested socialism and also any concept of dialogue or understanding with other religion

Pope John Paul II beatified a 'person' who never existed – Mexico's Juan Diego. Even Catholic theologians accept that he was part of Mexican folklore and not a real person. Again there is a distinct religious and political reason why Diego is being made a saint. According to folklore he was one of the first Mexican Indian converts to whom the Virgin of Guadalupe appeared in 1531. The power of this myth started waves of conversion amongst Mexicans.

What I am trying to establish is that the Vatican, especially under John Paul II, ruthlessly followed a well-defined agenda when creating saints. It is therefore unfortunate that the secular media and public in general are impressed by the so-called sanctity of these people. Liberal left leaning Catholics are even uncomfortable about the [sainthood](#) of [John Paul II](#) who we now know actively protected paedophiles, especially the notorious

Father Maciel, who was also a world-class money launderer, paying millions into Vatican coffers.

While the Vatican is keen to create saints of the dubious, it is equally keen not to make saints of the deserving. [Dorothy Day](#), the woman who worked all her life to empower the poor has been ruled out, so has [Helder Camara](#) the outspoken Brazilian priest and champion of the dispossessed. After the World Trade Centre attack on 11 September 2001 a Fire Chaplain called Fr. Mychal Judge died while helping victims. A movement for canonising Fr. Mychal has been told by the Vatican that he should not be a candidate as he befriended gays and divorcees.

The Vatican is secretive and touchy about the ‘miracles’ that a potential saint has to effect in order to be elevated. Miracles are ‘investigated’ – but by the Vatican’s own appointed team. Vatican does not conduct an open investigation into the ‘miracles’ in public domain. Italy, which has given the world the largest number of Catholic saints, has a subversive organisation called CICAP (Committee for the Investigation of Claims on the Paranormal) which would be happy to look into any of these miracles, given a chance. CICAP, in the last few years, have exposed about 6,000 ‘miracles’ in Italy, about 200 of which have resulted in prosecutions. Mother Teresa’s ‘miracles’ similarly could be given to Calcutta’s many sceptic and rationalist societies, which go around the villages trying to break down superstitious beliefs, for ‘investigation’. But her beatification miracle does not even need an investigation as it was declared void by almost everyone, including the ‘cured’.

From 1998 onwards the Vatican regularly disseminated news items of many ‘miracles’ being caused by Teresa’s intercession. In August 1998 Archbishop D’Souza came on TV in Calcutta and proclaimed that a French girl who had met with a car accident in the US (he could not recall the girl’s name nor the place of accident) might have experienced a miracle when she placed a ‘Mother Teresa medal’, personally given to her by the deceased nun, on her body. He said the girl made a complete recovery from her injuries. Then came the case of a Palestinian girl with bone cancer who got better after Teresa appeared to her in her dreams and said, ‘Child, you are cured.’ Following that came the case of Rita Mascarenhas, a Catholic nun in Purulia (about 250 km from Calcutta) who was said to be paralysed from the waist downwards after a nerve was snapped during an operation. Two

days after Teresa's death, a friend gave her a piece of cloth that had been rubbed against Mother's body. Mascarenhas pinned the cloth to her side and soon heard a voice telling her to get up and walk, which she did.

But the official miracle for [beatification](#) as accepted by the Vatican is the case of [Monica Besra](#), a tribal woman living in a remote village about 500 km from Calcutta. The Catholic establishment went out of its way to keep her identity secret, but eventually journalists found her out. Indeed, as early as August 2001, [Luke Harding](#) from the UK's *Observer*⁵ travelled all the way to Raigunj to speak to her. She was unavailable but when he wanted to speak to the nuns to discuss the 'cure', they refused to emerge. Raigunj's Bishop Alphonsus D'Souza said, 'They have been given strict orders not to talk about it. Obviously what happened is an objective miracle. But the sisters don't want to give different versions as that would spoil things.'

In May 1998 Mrs Besra was said to be suffering from a massive tumour of the uterus. On 5 September 1998, the first anniversary of Teresa's death two nuns tied a Mother Teresa aluminium medal (this particular one had been in contact with her dead body) on to her abdomen. Then followed a night of praying, and the following morning the tumour had completely disappeared.

The nuns now asked Monica's sister Kanchan to write to Mother House in Calcutta describing the 'cure'. Apparently Kanchan did not wish to do it, so the nuns did it themselves on Monica's behalf as she cannot read or write. The Church then arranged for five doctors ('an extraordinary number for a poor resident of a Missionary of Charity home,' comments Harding) to examine Monica, who all agreed with that an 'objective and organic miracle' had taken place. In a press statement issued in August 2001, Calcutta's Archbishop D'Souza said, 'The probe found the miracle to have met the essential requisite of being organic, immediate, permanent and intercessionary in nature.'

Cynics say the Vatican chose Besra over the others because of her poverty and illiteracy. Also, she was remote and inaccessible, being resident of a village almost cut off from outside world.

On 1 October 2002 [Monica Besra's](#) 'miracle' was formally ratified by the Vatican after a long closed-door meeting of Cardinals and Vatican 'doctors'. On 4 October, E-TV, one of Calcutta's television channels, interviewed during its 9 p.m. news, [Partha De](#), who was West Bengal's

Minister of Health at the time of the alleged miracle. He said that Besra was a patient at Balurghat Hospital (450 km from Calcutta) where she had been treated and cured and challenged the Catholic Church to prove otherwise. Besra herself was shown on television, possibly for the first time, the news crew having found her in her remote village Nakore. She was asked a few questions; she confirmed, surrounded by nuns, that she had been cured through Mother's medal. Her husband Selku Murmu also appeared, disgruntled and wishing 'to be left alone'. Finally she was shown being whisked away by two nuns in an MC 'ambulance'. The television crew concluded at the end of the news item that the news crew's internal investigation concluded that 'serious doubts' existed about the alleged miracle.

During the week beginning 7 October 2002, all Calcutta newspapers, both in English and Bengali (including the normally deferential *Statesman*) carried features pouring scorn on the 'miracle' claim. *Ananda Bazar Patrika* carried a lengthy editorial (5 October) and later also an investigative feature. Essentially they all said the same thing – that they were disappointed at the so-called miracle claim. Newspapers quoted the superintendent of Balurghat Hospital [Dr Manju Murshed](#) who said categorically that medical intervention cured Besra. She was said to have been treated by two doctors, [Dr T.K. Biswas](#) and gynaecologist Dr Ranjan Mustafi, both of whom came forward to talk to reporters. They said that Besra was suffering with tuberculosis and later was found to have an ovarian tumour (I believe she in fact had tuberculous peritonitis which would account for her symptoms). Doctors confirmed that she received prolonged treatment for TB and was thereby cured.

Ananda Bazar Patrika (9 October) said that MC had requested Besra's hospital notes from Balurghat Hospital, which it declined to forward. Using their political contacts, the order then wrote to Health Minister De, who asked for a formal report from Dr Biswas and Dr [Murshed](#) sometime in 1999. The doctors gave a factual report which De quoted to journalists in October 2002 after the ratification of the 'miracle'. The same feature had Besra's interview. She was said to be talking hurriedly without pausing. When asked why she was speaking like that, she said she 'might otherwise forget.' *The Telegraph* (11 October) also said that Besra pleaded not to be asked too many questions as she would have to 'remember' her statement.

On 10 October, [Hindustan Times](#) led with the news ‘Docs Allege Pressure to Back Miracle’ wherein it quoted Dr Murshed as saying ‘They [Missionaries of Charity] made repeated calls to our hospital pressing us to say it was a miracle. They also made written requests to uphold the miracle theory. They gave up only recently, that too only after I refused to allow our doctors to visit their place.’ In the same article husband Murmu surprisingly turned against the miracle and said that medical intervention cured his wife.

The daily [Aajkal](#) wrote a stinging editorial (10 October) entitled ‘White Mischief’:

We all know the miracle claim is false, how can it ever be true? Although venerable Vatican Doctors have claimed otherwise! But can they shut us up— us people who think rationally? Because Mother Teresa was a star, because she is revered, will such humbug and deceit be accepted by right thinking people? And the peddlers of such sheer falsehood – will they simply continue to use us, just because they are sahibs and memsahibs?

The question may be asked why Calcutta media which are normally indifferent or deferential towards Mother Teresa took such a hostile path. I believe Calcuttans were sorely disillusioned. Mother Teresa was white-skinned and hobnobbed with Western world leaders. She was therefore regarded as rational and progressive. The obscurantism and superstition of saint-making came as a rude shock to them. To this day the deep conservatism of Teresa is unknown to most Calcuttans: yet another proof how little Calcutta knows about Teresa – and vice versa.

Needless to say, Calcutta’s views on Mother’s ‘miracle’ were entirely ignored by the Vatican. She marched on towards becoming ‘Saint Teresa of Calcutta’, notwithstanding its citizens’ reservations. The postulator of her cause, Fr. [Brain Kolodiejchuk](#), collected 34,000 pages of documents (called ‘evidence’) on her life; 112 witnesses (including myself) were examined.

On 19 October 2003, [Pope John Paul II](#) beatified Mother Teresa (she became a ‘Blessed’) in front of St. Peter’s. Presidents and Prime Ministers were present, though the BJP-controlled Indian government snubbed the ceremony by sending a very minor Catholic minister. Besra met the Pope in a pink sari. All her family were flown to [Rome](#).

If Mother Teresa was unique, I think her uniqueness comes from the unique controversy surrounding her [beatification](#). Never before had a 'cured' withdrawn the intercession. Soon after beatification, Besra challenged the 'miracle' and said she was cured by medicine. She changed her tune again, only to change it again! The yo-yo goes on, and at the time of going to press Besra does not accept a miracle ever took place. No one in Calcutta accepts the miracle. On 20 October 2003 *New York Times* published an interview with Dr Ranjan Mustafi who categorically stated Besra was cured by many months of treatment.

Mother's [sainthood](#) is in an uncharted place. As a retraction or denial of a 'miracle' by the 'cured' has never before happened in the history of the Catholic Church. I therefore started sending messages to Kolodiejchuk via Facebook asking him how the Vatican would deal with this conundrum. I suggested that they should start afresh with a new 'miracle'. I also said it was a grave mistake to choose a poor Indian – as poor Indians have no allegiance to Mother, and do not even know who she was. I am yet to receive a reply from Kolodiejchuk.

Despite the unprecedented rejection of the 'miracle' by the 'cured' and by every other quarter including doctors and the government, Vatican gave two fingers to Indian opinion and secretly proceeded with canonisation. Indeed it never even commented on the dispute or the controversy, as if it was beneath them to take note of such minor hiccups in a distant land. I have no doubt if Besra was a white European living in a Western nation, it would have behaved differently. On 18 December 2015 it suddenly announced that Mother Teresa was well on her way to becoming a saint in September 2106, as a second 'miracle' was proven: a Brazilian man had been 'cured' of brain tumour/abscess when his wife prayed to her. As I had expected, this time they chose a different hemisphere and a different continent. Also the identity of the 'cured' will be kept a secret till the last moment, though the 'cure' happened in 2008. Vatican has not repeated the mistakes it made with Besra.

Readers will note that I have expressed two diametrically opposing views on whether Mother Teresa should be declared a saint. Whereas I have written to Catholic authorities that she ought not to be, I have written to other people (that is, journalists) that we should not care if the Vatican declares one of its own a 'Saint'. Then again, in my statement as a 'witness'

at the hearing I said it was not important what sort of general moral fibre a 'Catholic' saint possessed.

I confess that I am confused and am in dilemma on the issue. A part of me feels that Catholic saints – because they have such a broad appeal amongst the general population – should be beyond reproach in the broad everyday sense; at least they should not have broken any of the Ten Commandments (Mother Teresa frequently lied, [Pius IX](#) was into public hangings). Another part of me wishes to adopt a lofty disdain of the Vatican's internal machinations and wants it to get on with it.

I would be interested to know what readers think.

Annexure

The Nobel Peace Prize – some serious questions and concerns

On 29 July 2000 a programme entitled '[Dynamite](#)' was broadcast on BBC Radio 4. The programme was a historical overview about the Nobel Prizes and was not necessarily a critique of them. A number of people with knowledge about the workings of the Nobel Committees were interviewed. A startling comment was made on air by [Jan Olov Johansson](#), Head of Science Programming at Swedish State Radio. He said that there has been at least one instance of somebody having been denied a Nobel Prize (he did not mention which particular one) because she was a woman and a Jew.

I wrote to the Nobel Institute in Sweden, mentioning the programme and the relevant comment, asking them for clarification. I received a one-liner from [Camilla Hylten-Cavallius](#): 'To our knowledge this has never occurred.'¹

Significantly, two days later I received this mail from [Anne C Kjelling](#), head librarian of the Nobel Institute in Norway:

Neither I, nor our director know of anything that would substantiate what you heard on Radio 4 about one person being denied the prize because she was a woman and a Jew. It sounds *very* unlikely. Was it supposed to be the Peace Prize? . . .²

Subsequently I wrote three e-mails to [Johansson](#) himself, at his official address at Swedish Radio, but never received any reply. Significantly, he did not issue a retraction or a statement to the effect that he could have been mistaken or rash. [Ian Docherty](#), the radio programme's producer at the BBC had this to say to me:

Why he [Johansson] didn't go into details [name, Prize, year, etc.] isn't clear to me. Certainly, the Nobel Prize website doesn't mention this; perhaps that is not surprising. . . I share your unease about the Peace Prize. . .³

Gandhi and the Nobel Peace Prize

There should be no doubt whatever to anybody who has studied the Nobel Peace Prize with even a cursory interest, that it is (was) a deeply political and partisan prize. *It is not generally known that Gandhi was never awarded the Peace Prize.* It has only recently become apparent as to what lengths the Norwegian Nobel Committee went to stop him from getting it. After 2000, the Norwegian Committee became aware of criticisms about its workings and published some self-critical articles, one of which, by [Øyvind Tønnesson](#), editor of the Peace Prize section of the Electronic Nobel Museum, was reprinted in the Indian magazine *Frontline*⁴. The article mentions how Gandhi was nominated five times⁵ but rejected each time. It is apparent from the article that the twentieth century's greatest apostle of peace was deliberately blocked.

During the 1937 nominations [Professor Jacob Worm-Muller](#) advised the Nobel Committee. The Norwegian professor wrote that there were:

. . . sharp turns in Gandhi's policies. . . He is frequently a Christ, but then, suddenly, an ordinary politician.⁶

Why a Hindu had to be consistently a 'Christ' remains a mystery. Worm-Muller cited many of Gandhi's critics in his deposition and stated

that some of his non-violent campaigns against the British might become violent, as if he were to be held responsible for the behaviour of 350 million Indians. Tønnesson states, as if in defence of Worm-Muller, that killings did happen at Chauri-Chaura during Gandhi's first Non-Cooperation Movement in 1920–21. Gandhi had no personal involvement at Chauri-Chaura where a mob attacked a police station and killed policemen; moreover he became so severely scathing of the perpetrators that he incurred the wrath of most Indians. The 1937 prize went to Lord Cecil of Chelwood; I am not aware if his Lordship fulfilled the criteria that Gandhi failed in, as I know little about him.

In 1938 and 1939 Gandhi was re-nominated by the Norwegian MP Ole Colbjørnsen, but was, never a serious contender. He did not make it to the shortlist.

In 1947, after Indian independence, he was re-nominated, this by time three prominent Indian politicians. Committee chairman Gunnar Jahn wrote in his diary:

While it is true that he is the greatest personality among the nominees. . . , we should remember that he is not only an apostle of peace; he is first and foremost a patriot. . . Moreover, we have to bear in mind that Gandhi is not naive. He is an excellent jurist and a lawyer.

So being a patriot was a disqualification for the Peace Prize! The problem the committee faced vis-à-vis 'patriotism' was its keenness to not embarrass the British government. It is now accepted that this was a major reason why Gandhi was turned down again and again. The 1947 prize went to the highly deserving (Christian) Quakers.

In 1948 Gandhi was nominated by two Laureates, the Quakers and Emily Balch. He made it to the shortlist but was assassinated before a recipient was decided. Rules allowed a posthumous award, but Gandhi was not so lucky. Tønnesson says that a posthumous award was not possible because the committee got worried about the recipient of prize money, as Gandhi 'did not belong to any organisation [not true, as he belonged to the Indian National Congress and had founded the Sabarmati Ashram], left no property behind and no will; . . .' This argument is too spurious to discuss. The committee decided near unanimously not to make a posthumous award

to Gandhi. Chairman Jahn wrote, 'To me it seems beyond doubt that a posthumous award would be contrary to the intentions of the testator,' despite the rules allowing it.

The committee's extreme sanctimoniousness over a minimal amount of potential violence, emanating from or on account of one of their Laureates, reeks of hypocrisy. [Theodore Roosevelt](#), one of the most bellicose of US presidents got the prize in 1906. In those days American newspapers were deeply deferential towards presidents, but nonetheless *Philadelphia Ledger* was moved to remark how curious it was that 'the militant champion of a large army and navy and the wielder of the 'big stick' should be crowned as America's great pacificator.' The *New York Times* remarked 'the prize was awarded. . . to the most warlike citizen of the United States.' In his autobiography the Peace Laureate unabashedly declares, 'In my own judgement the most important service I have rendered to peace was the voyage of the battle fleet around the world.' In his earlier life, Roosevelt led a regiment of volunteer cavalry, the 'Rough Riders' to fight Spanish forces in Cuba. In the year of his Nobel he sent troops to the Caribbean. Indeed he would be thoroughly insulted if he was called a pacifist or even peace-loving. The Peace Committee was so enamoured of Theodore Roosevelt and his entourage that the 1912 prize went to his Secretary of War – [Elihu Root](#)! The reason for rewarding Roosevelt and Root was simple and had nothing to do with peace: they saw to it that white Christian supremacy was not usurped by the Asian power [Japan](#). In 1904, Japan repeatedly beat Russia in European mainland; Roosevelt and Root managed to beat Japan down into a submissive position and regained white Christian supremacy.

Even the Nobel foundation's own website says:

In some people's opinion, [Roosevelt] should never be awarded a prize for peace. . . Were the Norwegians after American goodwill..? . . .Roosevelt had been opposed to the peace movement. . . If the report on Roosevelt was so critical, why was he awarded the Nobel peace Prize? One possible answer, which was given by contemporary Norwegian and Swedish commentators, is that the committee chairman thought Norway 'needed a large, friendly neighbour; even if he was far away'. Halvdan Koht [committee

member] later concluded that this was the case, and it may well be true.

The 1953 prize was awarded to US Chief of Staff (of combined military forces) [George Marshall](#). Again, it was a political award to appease the United States and had nothing to do with peace. When he was about to receive his award in [Oslo](#), dissenters interrupted the ceremony, shouting protests. King Haakon VII, fearful of an adverse US reaction, immediately rose to his feet and led the audience in applause for Marshall. It is indeed ironic that a person who had led the biggest armed forces in the history of mankind was given the Nobel Peace Prize whereas another, an avowed pacifist, was denied it for the putative reason that some amongst his millions of followers might someday turn violent.

In 1973, the Norwegian Committee, in an act that defied all credulity and credibility, gave the prize to [Henry Kissinger](#), jointly with the Vietnamese leader Le Duc Tho, who promptly turned it down. Admittedly, the Nobel Committee remains embarrassed about the Kissinger award but why it was given remains a mystery. As [Tønnesson](#) wryly wrote to me, 'I will say no more about the 1973 prize.'⁷ Henry Kissinger has always been an advocate of war (and suffering). In his doctoral thesis he championed the use of force; he believed that justice (i.e., human rights) should be secondary to maintaining order by force. He freely advocated the use of brute force against states he deemed unfriendly. His views are more suited to a brutal dictator rather than a Peace laureate.

Kissinger was one of the main architects of the Vietnam War as Nixon's Secretary of State. In 1973 he and Nixon orchestrated the Christmas bombing campaign of Hanoi. As well as being responsible for the millions killed and maimed in Vietnam, he also ordered the bombing of neutral Cambodia and Laos, in order to terrorise the whole region. More than 350,000 people died thanks largely to this Peace Laureate in these two countries which had nothing to do with the war. Dr Kissinger was also friendly with numerous thugs and dictators, the Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet to name but one. He is a co-defendant in private court cases brought by Chileans who disappeared under Pinochet. Demands to try [Kissinger](#) for war crimes are ongoing from around the world.

Even in his bland coffee-table book, *The Nobel Peace Prize and the Laureates*, [Irwin Abrams](#) writes:

The Committees announcement in 1973 met with a generally negative reaction, both in Norway and throughout the world. Critical comments in the press ranged from disbelief and cynicism to dismay and outright protest. . . Demonstrations at the White House held aloft placards mocking the 'Ignobel Prize'.

The Quakers, previous Laureates, travelled to Oslo to request the Committee to rescind their decision: the first and only time this happened. After the award was declared two committee members resigned in disgust. Many years later, one of them wrote that there had been absolutely no discussion about the 1973 award and three pro-Kissinger members came to the final meeting with their minds fully made up. Nonetheless, Aase Lionaes, committee chair, declared to the world that the decision had been 'very easy.' Kissinger never came to Oslo to receive his Nobel Peace Prize for fear of igniting violent demonstrations; the US ambassador suffered tomatoes in his stead.

Kissinger did not sober up after his Nobel, in 1975, he sanctioned the Indonesian invasion of East Timor. He is also alleged to have sanctioned the murder of Orlando Letelier in Washington DC.

With regard to the Committee's supreme loftiness about a posthumous award, it needs to be pointed out that it was made, in 1961, to the Swede [Dag Hammarskjöld](#). He was the UN's second Secretary General and almost succeeded in breaking it up. Throughout his two tenures he pursued policies close to the US (some say to the CIA) thus causing an escalation in Cold War tensions. During the 1960 crisis in Congo he took an overtly pro-US line that polarised the world. People of a certain generation would remember the picture of [Nikita Krushchev](#) pounding his table with his shoe; it was all over Hammarskjöld. The pro-Soviet and non-aligned nations were demanding that he be removed and replaced by a three-member committee. [Hammarskjöld's](#) aggressive pro-US stance was no doubt responsible for earning him the Nobel. A man of peace or reconciliation he was not.

If the Nobel Peace prizes have shown an obvious political bias, a bias towards evangelical Christianity is no less palpable. The 1958 prize went to Dominique Pire, a Belgian Catholic priest. Nobody is certain what he did for world peace, but certainly modesty was not his forte. When he did some work with refugees after World War II he promptly started leafleting the Nobel Committee with details of his activities. Rules forbid self-promotion,

but that did not disqualify him. He had influential friends who took up his cause, among them the Norwegian Ambassador to Belgium who persistently championed him. When the prize was finally announced, hardly anyone, even in Belgium, had heard of him. The telegram from [Oslo](#) was sent to the wrong town and returned to sender. When the [New York Times](#) asked the Belgian Embassy information on the new Laureate, even they had not heard of him. The newspaper should have asked the Vatican instead.

In 1930, the prize was given to Nathan Söderblom, who had no qualification other than being the Archbishop of Uppsala. In 1946, John Mott, another evangelist Christian got the prize. Significantly, Mott had supported United States' war effort in World War I. (Hammarskjöld was also a preachy and orthodox Christian.)

In my opinion, his sentiment towards Christian missionaries in India was another reason why Gandhi was turned down repeatedly. Although he respected Jesus and Christianity, he was frequently scathing of missionaries. He was forever worried of Hindus being lured into mass conversions through inducements. He did not accept that Jesus was the son of God.

One was in with a serious chance of being a Nobel Peace Laureate if one was fighting the Soviet bloc and was a stout Christian at the same time. This confluence happened, to an extent, in Hammarskjöld but was full-blown in [Lech Walesa](#) (1983 Laureate) who ran a bitter and often violent campaign against the oppressive Polish Communist regime. It is now known that his campaign was largely funded by the CIA, and partly by the Vatican. He was a personal friend of [Pope John Paul II](#), and made monthly visits to the Vatican. His campaigns for Poland's presidency were vicious and ugly. He is the father of numerous children and detests people who practise contraception. He has launched vitriolic attacks on doctors who practise medical abortion. He abhors liberal secular women. He believes homosexuals should be 'behind a wall'. This former trade unionist has allies in the ultra-right US political class who are against rights for workers and women. There is nothing peaceable or even pleasant about this man.

A number of clandestine networks connected the Christian right-wing peace Laureates and people who ultimately decided the prizes. [Operation Octopus](#) was one such network. During the Cold War the West German Christian Democrats and the CIA set up a 'slush fund' of invisible money which they passed around the world to fight left-wing forces and also to prop up brutal right-wing dictatorships, especially in Southern Europe and

South America. People who were intimately involved with Operation Octopus as donors or as recipients include the peace Laureates [Kissinger](#), [Willy Brandt](#) and [Walesa](#).

In 1939, the deeply anti-Semitic US Secretary of State Cordell Hull defied President (Franklin) [Roosevelt](#) and sent back the SS *St. Louis* which was carrying 950 Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany. As a result 250 were killed in concentration camps. In 1945 Hull was rewarded with the Nobel Peace Prize!

In 1987, the Prize had another strange recipient in [Oscar](#) Arias Sànchez, President of Costa Rica, ignoring [Nelson Mandela](#), who was on the shortlist. Mandela had been nominated and rejected a few times already. Finally he made it in 1993, but jointly with F.W. De Klerk. De Klerk is a dubious conservative politician whose belief in apartheid may have remained (as evidenced in a controversial 2012 interview). Even someone of the stature of Mandela could not get the prize solo – was it because of his lifelong belief in Marxism, or his scathing attacks on US foreign policy? Had he got the prize while he was still in prison, it would have given the anti-apartheid movement a great fillip. I feel he was given the Nobel reluctantly, in order not to create a controversy similar to the one surrounding Gandhi. In contrast, Walesa (one of the youngest recipients) got the prize at the height of his battle with Communists.

In 1996 the prize was shared by [José Ramos-Horta](#) and [Bishop Belo](#), two unknown Vatican insiders. Both were said to be champions of the (Catholic) East Timorese struggle for [independence](#) from Muslim Indonesia. Belo is a Roman Catholic Bishop and Ramos-Horta is a staunch Catholic. Ramos-Horta lived all his life in Portugal and scarcely visited East Timor, and Belo promptly left for Australia as soon as the going got tough there (imagine [Mandela](#) or Gandhi ever doing that). As the awards were given while the independence movement was ongoing, they were a huge boost for the movement and helped it to succeed. Can there be any doubt that the 1996 award(s) were determined by politics and religion?

The Millennium peace prize (2000) was another patently political one and went to [President Kim](#) Dae-jung of South Korea. His credentials – he was firmly allied to the US, converted to Catholicism and took the baptismal name St. Thomas More. Catholicism is the fastest growing religion in South Korea and no doubt a Nobel to a convert would be a catalyst for potential converts. Kim's award was supposed to be for North-

South peace efforts and in such cases the Committee almost has a rule to share the prize with a negotiator from the other side, but there was no recipient from the North.

A political scandal, titled 'Cash-for-summit' broke out in South Korea in February 2003. It revolved around the secret payment by the Kim Dae-jung administration to North Korea of hundreds of millions of dollars to secure the June 2000 North-South summit between the two Koreas.

Kim faced allegations of forming an organisational lobby to win the Nobel Peace Prize. One of Kim's sons was convicted of massive bribery and corruption not long after his father's Nobel, and was sent to prison.

[Mary Robinson](#), former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, did an exceptional job but her determination to bring [Kissinger](#) and US ally Pinochet to the [International Criminal Cour](#) may have cost her the Nobel. The safe [Kofi Annan](#) (2001) got the prize which fulfils the committee's current keenness to show ethnic diversity, as it is of late keen to over-correct its previous white Christian bias. Another seriously flawed recipient was Obama (2009) who has (had to) send killing machines on a weekly basis.

When the Norwegian Nobel Committee has been so sympathetic to struggles by the right of the political spectrum against the left, they have ignored more deserving causes from the left or even from the apolitical. Heroes and heroines of the Spanish Civil War and the French Resistance have been totally overlooked, as they were from the left. The immense Soviet sacrifice in World War II has been disrespected and ignored. While honouring the US [General Marshall](#), could the Committee not think of a single Russian? Jewish concentration camp sufferers have also been ignored. The Committee makes tremendous fanfare about the 1935 prize given to Ossietzky (incidentally a Catholic). This was a wholly deserved award, given to someone who was imprisoned by the Nazis. But could a single Jewish hero not be found amongst survivors of Nazi camps? [Simon Wiesenthal](#) never got the prize. [Elie Wiesel](#) did, but he had to wait until 1986 and, it could be argued, that only when he took a distinctly anti-Soviet line was he rewarded.

I wrote to [Tønnesson](#), with these specific queries but did not receive a suitable reply, except, ' . . .there have been Laureates who would have never got my vote.'⁸

The Vatican and the Catholic establishment take the Nobel Peace Prize extremely seriously and have well-oiled machinery for nomination, re-nomination, lobbying etc. For instance, Fr. Shay Cullen was nominated for the 2001 prize, even when a charge of serious misconduct was being heard against him in the Philippines courts. For the 2002 prize, an obscure Catholic group based in [Rome](#)? called Sant' Egidio became nominated. In the same year, an obscure Polish Catholic missionary (Marian Zelazek) working in India was nominated: sadly and predictably upper class Indians were delighted as they hoped another proxy Nobel might come to India. News of his nomination was reported on Indian television channels as newsflash every ten minutes.

[Pope John Paul II](#) was nominated countless times from the 1980s onwards. Indeed, some people in the committee were getting rather tired of his recurrent nominations. In January 2001, the (Lutheran) Bishop of [Oslo](#), [Gunnar Staalseth](#), a member of the selection committee, implied in a statement that he was fed up with the Pope's nominations and essentially asked his powerful backers to stop putting his name forward. He criticised [Pope John Paul II's](#) opposition to condoms and said, 'The current Roman Catholic Theology is one that favours death rather than life.' I wrote to [Staalseth](#) shortly afterwards asking his opinion on Laureate Teresa's virulent opposition to condoms but never received a reply.

I had a lively exchange of correspondence with Mr [Tønnesson](#). We started off on a polite note but his replies soon became terse and tetchy. Here are some of our exchanges:

AC *I beg to differ from your view that the awards do not show a political bias.*

ØT That is not my view, and I didn't say it was.

AC *I feel, until the Cold War ended, if you were a white Christian bringing so-called hope/civilisation to the unwashed/un-white you were sure to be nominated at least.*

ØT Feel free to feel anything! . . .

AC *And a right-wing bias probably existed I feel. I do not comprehend how [Walesa](#) could even have been nominated. He has made Poland a divided country and, even in his early days, it was obvious that his were truculent policies especially against*

women. And he has been vicious about his political opponents, in which class he puts liberal women.

ØT This is a strange viewpoint, I think. (Tønnesson goes on to make a robust defence of Walesa and his actions, although he does not mention the Polish Laureate's abhorrence for contraception.)

AC *Re: Mother Teresa, her image and the publicity surrounding her, probably made the award inevitable. But I wish to point out that her views on abortion and contraception were the absolute core of her being. She breathed them every second of her life. In 2029, I shall be curious to see if the Committee made any comments, however mild about her views against women. I am also pretty sanguine that Malcolm Muggeridge did the main spade work for her prize. Apart from everything else he was a deep anti-Semite. That he had such close access to the Committee fills me with despair.*

ØT Are you sure he had 'such close access?' Personally I don't know.⁹

I have devoted such time and space to the Nobel Peace Prize as, it is often said, especially in India, where people are deeply charmed by any Western award, that only the purest of the pure can win the prize. In the West also, people have an extreme regard for this award and hold it beyond reproach. I remember a few years back when the extent of [Kissinger's](#) atrocities first became publicly available (although it had been known for some time but this was written proof from the archives being made public), [Jeremy Paxman](#) attacking Kissinger on BBC's *Newsnight*. Paxman asked, in his typical mauling style, if the former Secretary of State was not embarrassed or ashamed to accept the award. Kissinger left the interview in a huff. But I would ask the Norwegian Nobel Committee why he was given it in the first place. Even a mauler like Paxman did not raise the issue. Somehow, the Nobel Peace Committee, in deep dark and peaceful Scandinavia needs to be beyond criticism.

While I was taking my manuscript to literary agents, I received a negative reply from an American agent which was just a one-liner: 'But . . .she received the Nobel Peace Prize!' When I wrote to Mme Chirac, the French president's wife, after her trip to Calcutta asking her about Mother

Teresa's activities, her secretary replied to the effect, that we should reconsider criticising someone who has won the Nobel Peace Prize.

Although the Peace Prize has had some worthy recipients, especially the institutional ones, such as the Quakers, Amnesty International, Medicine Sans Frontier, I believe that award is deeply flawed. Being opaque and beyond criticism has made it even more susceptible to influences. I am not that convinced that it has an effective fact-checking machinery either, as its methods are somewhat quaint. The use of an adviser who is often biased does not generate a healthy system. Her year of birth is one of the few things in Mother Teresa's life that is not shrouded in mythology, but the Nobel Committee has got that wrong. In one of their main official handouts, given to institutions about the various peace Laureates, it is given as 1914 when it should be 1910.

The Peace Committee is now on an over-correction drive and is desperately seeking out non-white and non-Christian recipients. This sentiment is well-meaning but flawed. Some worthy people have got the prize (such as Malala Yousafzai, Shirin Ebadi) but mostly recipients have been mediocre or non-worthy, such as Wangari Maathai and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf.

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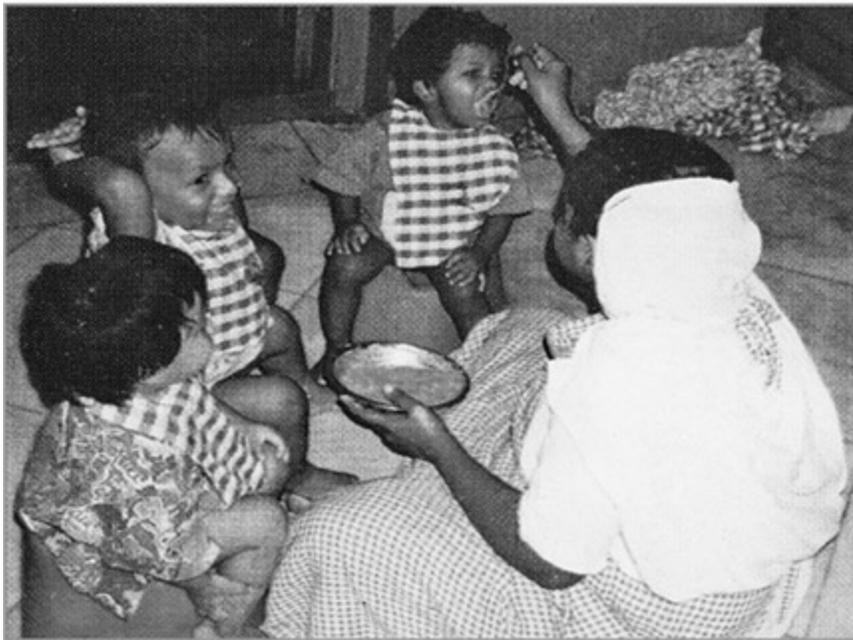
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Annexure

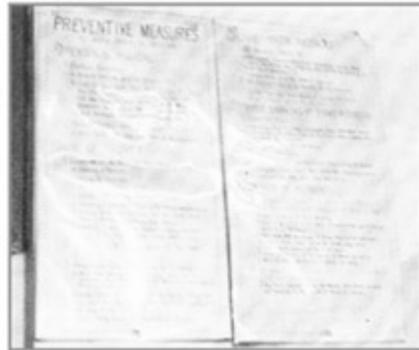
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Above: 'Ambulances' are rarely used to carry patients: they are employed as nuns' taxis.
Below: Chickens being carried for nuns' feast in an 'ambulance'.



Above: Inside Shishu Bhavan (orphanage) Calcutta: eight in one cot, a familiar sight.
Below: Two natural functions simultaneously – babies being fed while on toilet.



Above: Inside the Home for Dying, Calcutta. Many have compared this place to a concentration camp.

Below, Left: Scene at Prem Dan, Calcutta.

Below, right: A facsimile of How To Re-use Needles & Gloves in Home for Dying manual listing out the details. (This was removed following publication of this book)



Though Mother Teresa gave her residents practically no care, and she repeatedly said she abhorred expensive treatments for herself, in Calcutta itself she routinely checked into the expensive Belle Vue Clinic and Birla Heart Institute.

Index

A

Aajkal
Abbott, Anthony
Abram, Irwin
Account Aid India
Aeroflot
Agnew, Jonathan
Albania
Alice (film)
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All India Minorities Commission(AIMC)
Alder, Nick
Alton, David
Amanpour, Christiane
ambulances, misuse of
American Professional Bracing Inc.
Amrita Bazar Patrika
Ananda Bazar Patrika
Anandalok
Annan, Kofi
Arafat, Yasser
Aristide, Jean-Bertrand
The Asian Age
Attenborough, Sir Richard

B

Baba Amte
Balch, Emily
Banco Ambrosiano

Bandopadhyay, Alakananda
Bangladesh
Barak, Daphne
Basak, Subroto
Basu, Jyoti
Basu, Kamal
Bates, Stephen
beatification
Belle Vue Clinic
Belo, Bishop
Besra, Monica
Bharat Sevashram Sangha
Bhattacharjee, Buddhadeb
Bhattacharya, Shankar Lal
Bhopal
Bhutan
Bimala (destitute)
Birla Heart Institute
Birla, G.D.
Biswas, Dr Reeti
Biswas, Dr T.K.
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Bojaxhiu, Agnes
Bojaxhiu, Nicolas
Bombay (Mumbai)
Bose, Subhash Chandra
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Brahmo Samaj
Brandt, Willy
Brown, Jerry
Brown, Mgr. Ralph
Burgess, Anthony
Byrne, Lavinia

C

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Calcutta Rescue

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Calvi, Roberto
Camara, Helder
Cano, Ignacio
canonisation
Cantacuzino, Marina
Cascante, Bishop Ramon
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Chafer, Peter
Chakraborty, Subhash
Chaplin, Geraldine
Chatterjee, Biplab
Chatterjee, Suman
Chaudhuri, Dr S.N.
Chaudhuri, Dr Sumita
Chawla, Navin
Chetcuti, Paul
Chetla slum
Child in Need Inst. see CINI
China
cholera
Chopra, Priyanka
Christies (auction)
CINI
(The) City of Joy
City of Joy Scholars
city of palaces
Cleary, Michael
Clinton, Hillary
CMDA
Colbjornsen, Ole
Collins, Pauline
Consessao, Bishop Vincent
Constant, Audrey
conversion, secretive
Cruise, Tom

Cruz, Penelope
CRY (Child Relief and You)
Crystal, Prof David
Curzon, Lord

D

D'Souza, Archbishop Henry
Dacre, Paul
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Delgish, Peter
Dalit Christians
Datta-Ray, Sunanda K
Davey, Jessica
Day, Dorothy
De, Partha
Dean, Dr Richard
Denslow, Robin
Desai, Morarji
Desmond, Edward
Devi, Mahashweta
Dey, Satish (schoolteacher)
Diana, Princess
Dnarapara slum
Docherty, Ian
Doig, Desmond
Dole, Bob
Domenici, Senator Pete
Dublin
Dutt, Sunil
Duvalier family
Dynamite (radio Programme)

E

East Berlin
Eberts, Jake
Egan, Eileen

Elizabeth II, Queen
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Escriva, José Maria

F

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Felzmann, Vladimir
Ferraro, Geraldine
Fletcher, Keith
Fodor's India
Fonda, Jane
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Fox, Edward
Franco, Gen
Fransisca, Sr

G

Gandhi, Indira
Gandhi, Mahatma
Gandhi, Rajiv
Gandhi, Sanjay
Gandhi, Sonia
Ganguly, Sunil
Ganza, Ana
Gemelli Hospital
George V, king
Gherlardini, Paolo
Ghose, Sanjoy
Ghosh Dastidar, Dr Kakoli
Ghosh, Dr Ajay
Ghosh, Saumitra
Gidacom Hospital
Glover, Charles
Godden, Rumer
Gomes, Francis

González-Balado, José Luis
Gorée, Georges
Gowing, Nick
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Grady, Dr Alison
Grey, Stephen
Gujral, I.K.
Gumbel, Andrew
Gumpel, Peter

H

Haiti
Haldar, Debi
Hammarskjöld, Dag
Hanssen, Robert
Harding, Luke
Harper Collins
Hatfield, Senator Mark
Haturia, children's death in
Haughey, Charles
Havana
Heenan, Cardinal
Hell's Angel
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Hitchens, Christopher
Hoxha, Enver
Humphrey, Hubert
Hukin, Oliver
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Hylten-Cavallius, Camilla

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Irani, C.R.

J

Jackson, Glenda
Japan
Joffé, Roland
Johansson, Jan Olov
John Paul II, Pope
Javier Pérez de Cuéllar

K

Keating, Charles
Keay, John
Kenny, Pat (radio Programme)
Kent, Duchess of
Kerrigan, Gene
Kewley, Vanya
Khabra, Piara (MP)
Khatun, Baby
Khatun, Shahida
Kim, President
King, Oona (MP)
Kipling, Rudyard
Kishore Kumar
Kissinger, Henry
Kjelling, Anne C.
Knight, Stephen
Kolkata (renaming)
Kolodiejchuk, Brian
Koselka, Rita
Kovalski, Stephan
Krushchev, Nikita
Kumar, Naresh
Kumar, Sunita

L

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Lal, Sumir

Lancet

Lane, Freddie

Lapierre, Dominique

Latur (earthquake)

Le Joly, Edward

Leigh, Vivian

Leighton, Dan

Leonard, Tracey

Liberation Theology

Littlejohn, Bel

Loce, Alexander

Loeb, Max

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Loudon, Mary

Lubbers, Ruud

Luke, Sr

M

Macmillan, Ken

Madeira, Leon

Major, John

Major, Norma

Malayalam Manorama

malnutrition centres

Mandela, Nelson

Maniktala slum

Mark, Mary Ellen

Marshall, Gen George

Martin, Ricky

Massachusetts

Mayo, Katherine

McClarence, Steve

McNamara, Robert

Melghat
Mondal, Karabiram
Moore, Molly
Moorhouse, Geoffrey
Mother Teresa: In the Name of God's Poor (film)
Motijheel slum
Muggeridge, Malcolm
Mukherjee, Atanu Sashan
Mukherjee, Charulata
Mukherjee, Dr Sudhendu
Mukherjee, Rudrangshu
Mukherjee, Subrata
Mukherji, Pranab
Mullarney, Maire
Murshed, Dr Manju

N

Nagasaki, MT in
Narayan, Jayaprakash
National Prayer Breakfast
natural contraception study
Nehru, Jawaharlal
New Market, nuns shopping in
New Statesman
New York Times
Newsweek
Nicaragua
Nirmal Hriday (Kalighat home)
Nirmala, Sr
Nivedita, Sr
Norfolk, Duke of (17th)

O

O'Connor, Cardinal
Oberon, Merle
The Observer
Operation Octopus

Oscar
Oslo
Outlook poll

P

Paedophile priests
Pamela (beggar)
Papua New Guinea
Park Street, renaming of
Parry, Dave
Parry, Melanie
Paxman, Jeremy
Peoria
Pereira George
Pickles, Dr Will
Pigott Smith, Tim
Pilkhana slum
Pius IX, Pope
Pius IX, Pope. . . ; appeasement of Hitler. . .
Popham, Peter
Poplin, Dr Mary
Preger, Dr Jack
Prem Dan

R

Radice, Dr William
Ramakrishna Mission
Raman, Sir C.V.
Ramos-Horta, José
Ratzinger, Cardinal
Ray, Satyajit
Reagan, Nancy
Reagan, Ronald
Renoir, Jean
re-use of needles
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Richard, Sir Cliff

rickshaws, proposal to ban
Roberts, Paul William
Robinson, Mary
Roe v Wade
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Romero, Archbishop
Roosevelt, Theodore
Root, Elihu
Rowe, Andrew (MP)
Roy Chaudhuri, S.M.
Roy, Dr B.C.
Roy, Dr Barin

S

Sainthood, author testifies
Samaddar, Sivaprasad
Santorum, Karen
Santorum, Rick
Saraf, D.K.
Saroj Nalini Dutt Mem. Assoc. (SNDMA)
Schweitzer, Albert
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Scripps Clinic, Calif
Sebba, Anne
Sen, Amartya
Sen, Moon
Sen, Sushmita
Shankar, Mamata
Shaw, Sue
Sheen, Martin
Sher-Gil, Amrita
Sheridan, Michael
Sherman, Frank
Shields, Susan
Shishu Bhavan Calcutta (orphanage)
The Simpsons
Sin, Cardinal

Singh, Khushwant
Sinha, Romola
Skopje
Smith, Dr R.C.
Smith, Patricia
Sorcar, P.C. Jr
South African cricket team
Spink, Kathryn
Springer, Jerry
St. Martin's Press
Staalseth, Gunnar
Staines, Graham
Standing, Dr Hilary
Stanmeyer, Anastasia
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Stillwell, Tim
Streep, Meryl
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Swaraj, Sushma
Swayze, Patrick

T

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Tagore, Rabindranath
Tampa Tribune
Taylor, Bob
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Thatcher, Margaret
Thomas, Christopher
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Tirana
(TLM) The Leprosy Mission
Tonge, Dr Jenny (MP)
Tønnesson, Øyvind
Tully, Mark

Turley, Paul W.
Twining, Thomas

U

Un Gen. Assembly Hall
Unger, John
UNICEF
The Universe,
Usanami, Yusaku
Uthup, Usha

V

Vardey, Lucinda
Vatican Bank (IOR)
Vidyasagar
Vivekananda, Swami

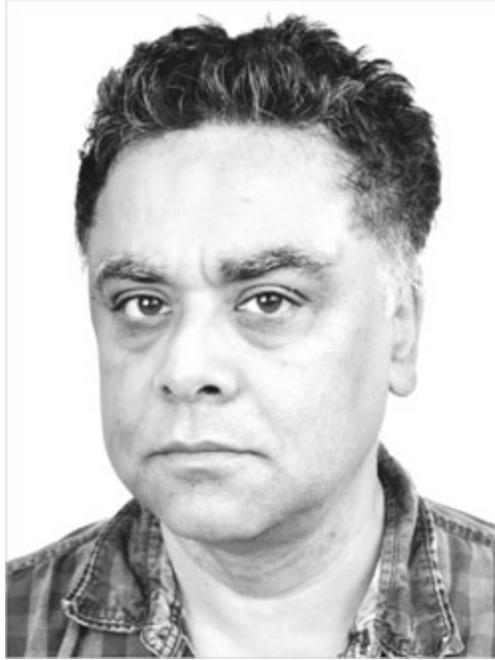
W

Walesa, Lech
The Wall Street Journal
Wapshot, Nicholas
Ward, Kathy
Warner, Sally
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Wells, Bowen (MP)
Westmacott, Sam
Wharfe, Ken
Whitman, Sylvia
Who's Who publications
Wiesel, Elie
Wiesenthal, Simon
Williams, Ian
William Makepeace Thackeray
Wilson, Mercedes
Wong, Deborah
Woodhatch, Tom
Woodlands Clinic

Woodward, Dr Alfred
Woodward, Kenneth L.
Worm-Muller, Prof. Jacob
Wüllenweber, Walter

X

'X' case of Ireland



Dr. Aroup Chatterjee was born and brought up in Calcutta. He now lives and works (as a physician) in London. He was, if anything, positively inclined towards Mother Teresa while he was living in Calcutta, though he knew little about her. Upon coming to the West he was appalled at the Teresan mythology and at the gruesome image that his home-city had in the world. He has done research on Mother Teresa for over twenty-five years and can be called the world's foremost authority on the late nun. He has appeared numerous times on BBC and other world media to discuss his subject. He is married and has three children.