

MOTHER TERESA

Founder of Missionaries of Charity

Mother Teresa the 'angel of mercy' dedicated herself to the service of mankind and served god amongst the poorest of the poor, sick and the dying for more than 50 years of her life.



Teresa was born as Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhin on 26th August 1910 in Skopje, now the capital of Macedonia to Albanian parents. She was the youngest of three children. Exposed early to prayer and service, she was deeply religious. At the age of 18, she left home for Dublin, Ireland, to join the Loretto abbey and become a nun of the Roman Catholic church. After her training, she was given the name of Sister Teresa. Sisters of Our Lady of Loreto, were very active in India, doing missionary work. She came to India on January 6, 1929 to become a teacher and was moved at the sight of the crippled and helpless people on the pavements. She taught in St. Mary's convent school in Kolkata for 15 years later on became the headmistress. In 1937, she took her final vows as a nun, in Darjeeling.

In 1947, on a journey to Darjeeling later referred by her as the most important journey of her life she had a vision or call to leave the convent, to live among the poor and to take care of the sick and the dying, the hungry, the homeless, to be God's Love in action to the poorest of the poor, which was the beginning of the Missionaries of Charity. At first she did not get the permission to leave the convent but in 1948 she got the permission specifically from Pope Pius XIII to leave the the Loreto community and work among the city's poor. She left the convent, took basic training in nursing and went to live in the nearby slum. She wore an inexpensive and simple white sari with a blue border, which became the most recognised symbol of the Sisters of Charity.

Following one of her former student, others joined her in her mission. In 1948, she opened the first slum school. As the congregation grew she sought approval

from the Pope and shifted to 54A Lower Circular Road, which became the Mother House. The Missionaries of charity was officially established as a religious congregation for the Archdiocese of Calcutta in October 1950. The organisation devoted to the working for the destitute, now have thousands of homes and members all over the country and abroad. Calcutta became the center of her humanitarian activities. Her first home was 'Nirmal Hriday' (pure heart) for the sick and the dying, and then ' Shishu Bhavan' for the disabled, orphaned and mentally retarded children, 'Shanti Nagar', a colony for lepers where they were cared for, they could learn a skill, build their own houses and could work on their own fields, AIDS hospices and so on. The first home outside India was founded in 1965 in Venezuela. Others were later opened in Italy, Tanzania, Australia, US, Communist Cuba, former Soviet Union etc.

Mother Teresa became an Indian citizen in 1962. She has received many national and international awards in recognition of her noble work for humanity. The first award being Padmashri for distinguished service (1962), then the Magsaysay Award the same year, PopeJohn XXIII Peace Prize (1971), Good Samaritan Award (1971), John . F. Kennedy International Award (1971), Jawaharlal Nehru Award for International peace (1972), Nobel Peace Prize (1979), Bharat Ratna (1980), Rajiv Gandhi Sadbhavana Award (1993) etc. were some of them.

In 1983, at the age of 72, Mother was diagnosed with a serious heart condition and her health steadily worsened. In 1990, Mother had decided to step down as the head due to her failing health and so called a conclave of sisters to choose a successor. But in a secret ballot, she was re-elected with one dissenting vote, that was her own. In 1991 she underwent heart surgery and in March 1997, Sister Nirmala a former Hindu converted to Roman Catholic was elected to succeed Mother Teresa as leader of Missionaries of Charity. On September 5, 1997 the 87-year old mother died of severe cardiac arrest at the Missionaries of Charity headquarters in Kolkata.

The late mother taught the world the beauty in giving and left behind an enormous organization with the will to continue her work. Mother was beatified by Pope John Paul II at St. Peters square in Vatican, on October 19th 2003, seven years after her death. Henceforth the mother will be referred to as the Blessed Teresa of Kolkata.

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