

"I came under her spell," says Teresa's biographer.By **Chaitanya Kalbag**

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NEW DELHI, Sept 6 (Reuters) - An Indian bureaucrat who wrote two biographies of Mother Teresa remembers her as a woman with a mischievous sense of humour who wielded formidable administrative skill to control her worldwide organisation.

"It was a very special morning," Navin Chawla said, looking back at the day in 1975 when he first met the tiny Catholic nun.

"Here was this small woman in a white shining sari, darned neatly in many places. Her back was bent, her hand was gnarled.

"When she spoke of love and faith and sharing, there was no difference between her constituency of the poorest of the poor and of the poverty that was so apparent in her sisters. I thought to myself, here there is no difference between precept and practice."

Chawla, now the chairman of the Delhi Electricity Board, was speaking to Reuters early on Saturday, hours after Mother Teresa died of a heart attack in the eastern city of Calcutta.

"I found it so endearing...I came even more under her spell," he said. "There was a great sense of humour. She wanted some land for a lepers' home and I asked her how much land she needed. She said 'Five acres'."

Chawla said he took Mother Teresa in to see the Lieutenant-Governor of Delhi, whose deputy he was at the time.

"When the governor asked her how much land she needed she looked at me with a mischievous smile and said 'Ten acres'...And I thought, here's a great administrator as well. She seizes the moment and it explains why almost single-handedly and with just a few nuns she ran a network of 550 homes in 126 countries.

"Her only concession to modernity was the installation of a telephone. The fact that she has built such a multinational enterprise with a few sisters beavering away on rickety typewriters testifies to her administrative skill."

Chawla's "Mother Teresa" was published in 1992 and has been translated into 17 languages. Last year he and photographer Raghu Rai teamed up to produce "Faith and Compassion".

Asked what drew people to Mother Teresa, Chawla said: "All of us recognise goodness and compassion where we find it. Mother Teresa was one such. She believed in making a link, forging one link after another until these links ringed the world."

A member of the Indian Administrative Service, Chawla said he did not think it strange that a bureaucrat had become such a votary of the Roman Catholic nun.

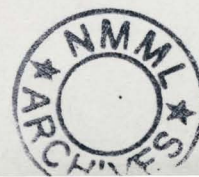
"I don't think these things are irreconcilable," he said. "She must have told me hundreds of times that my purpose was to serve the poor. Sometimes when I got fed up with my work or the circumstances I would go to her and say I wanted to chuck it.

"She would say 'No, you mustn't ever say it. You are here to serve the poor and look after the glory of God.'"

A 1994 British television documentary that questioned Mother Teresa's charity called the media myth around the Nobel Peace Prize winner a mixture of "hyperbole and credulity".

The documentary accused the Albanian-born nun of preaching the message that the poor must accept their fate while the rich and powerful are favoured by God.

Chawla said he asked Mother Teresa to respond to the charge that she took money from "all kinds of dodgy characters".



"She said to me: 'Who am I to refuse that person who wishes to give in conscience? How is this any different from the thousands of people who come each day to feed the poor? I have no right to judge. Only God has a right to judge.'"

Chawla said he was sure the Missionaries of Charity would continue to thrive despite the loss of the order's founder.

"One day I said to her 'How will all this run when you're no longer here?' She pointed her finger upward.

"I persisted so she said 'Let me go first.' I wasn't satisfied so she said: "You have been to so many of our homes. Everywhere you see the same sisters, the same poverty, the same food, the same work.

"But everywhere you do not see Mother Teresa. As long as we remain wedded to our poverty and do not end up subconsciously serving the rich I have no doubt that the mission will prosper."

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