



CHAPTER

Train Ride to Titagarh — Gandhiji Prem Nivas (Leper Colony)

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NAVIN CHAWLA QUOTED MOTHER TERESA when she said, “Leprosy is not a punishment. It can be a very beautiful gift of God if we make good use of it.”

Thursdays are the one official day of rest for the Missionaries of Charity and for the volunteers. It is also the day when many volunteers take the hour-long train ride to Titagarh to visit one of Mother Teresa’s leper colonies, Gandhiji Prem Nivas (Abode of Love).

During my stay in Calcutta, I visited the colony twice and had the opportunity to photograph and videotape interviews with patients, Brothers of the Missionaries of Charity, and numerous volunteers. It was a powerful journey for all of us who made it because we could truly see the extent of Mother Teresa’s commitment to helping those most in need.

When she turned her attention to the plight of lepers in India, she was able to reverse an extremely sad predicament for some of the country’s most neglected people into a positive and thriving enterprise. There are about 12,000,000 leprosy cases worldwide, most of them in Asia, with some 4,000,000 in India.

Mother Teresa set up her first mobile leprosy clinic in 1957, followed by the construction of facilities that would provide medical care, dormitories, schools for the children of lepers, and the resources that would make the lepers self-sufficient. Today there is a Missionaries of Charity leprosy station in most Third World countries.

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The British built an enormous railroad network throughout India that still serves as the main form of long distance travel. It is also a magnet that attracts, among others, lepers who are often found by volunteers or the Brothers of the Missionaries of Charity, who either treat them medically or bring them to one of the leper villages.

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