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## Behind the scenes

# Mother Teresa's Delhi mission

By Promilla Kalhan

ON her way to Rome this week Mother Teresa will stop over in Delhi for some hours to attend to work connected with her worldwide activities in aid of the poorest of the poor and the suffering. One item in her itinerary in the Capital is to release a well-documented report on the leprosy situation in India. Entitled "Vocational Rehabilitation and Social Reintegration of the Leprosy affected in India", the 135 page report is by an IAS Officer, Navin Chawla (currently General Manager of Super Bazar in Delhi). Mr Chawla met Mother Teresa when he was secretary to the LG, Mr Kishan Chand. He came under her spell and spent some of his spare time working in her homes for the underprivileged. He helped her acquire land for a home for the worst of the leprosy-stricken in Seelampur. His interest in them grew and he travelled all over the country visiting projects and homes for them run mostly by voluntary agencies. Generally reports are dry as dust. This one is not. It describes their plight as untouchables, discusses the latest treatments available and recommends how best to provide them with gainful occupations. According to the report: "the leprosy-affected can perform usefully in a number of occupations i.e. as railway gangmen, gate keepers and gardeners. A Finance Corporation should be established to assist all categories of handicapped persons to obtain financial assistance towards self-employment schemes. It is difficult for the leprosy affected to obtain bank loans. Stigma affects all aspects of leprosy control and rehabilitation".

In a touching way, Mr Chawla describes the plight of perhaps the most disadvantaged victims who have been mutilated by the disease. Yet only a small number of them pose a danger to others. He makes an impassioned plea for a repeal by all State Governments of the cruel Indian Lepers Act of 1898 which was based on the premise that leprosy was incurable and that all cases were infectious. It affected a number of areas of segregation including marriage, divorce and inheritance. Only eight State Governments have repealed it.

The author of the report takes a dim view of the fact that many medical practitioners are unwilling to handle leprosy patients some times for fear that this may not be tolerated by the bulk of their clientele.

Leprosy is not hereditary. If treated early it need not leave a physical mark and can be cured. The healthy

children of leprosy affected parents deserve help to be integrated in society through training and work. Tackling leprosy control is an urgent matter in India because while the prevalence rate in 1971 was 0.55, it rose to 5.72 per thousand in 1981. The largest number of recorded cases in 1985 were in Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Bihar, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, and Orissa taking the total up to a staggering 32,35,935. Since 1985, 2,80,964 cases have been added. India, like other parts of the world, waits for a leprosy vaccine now under trial.

with him permanently. But he has a faithful Man Friday looking after him.

### Samvadini

For decades past there has been a controversy concerning the suitability of the harmonium as an accompaniment to Indian classical music. The instrument originally came from France. Its opponents looked upon it as a kind of hybrid import from the West. Opposition to the harmonium was so strong that All India Radio excluded it. But it made a reappearance over the electronic media during the 1970s.

Recently a musician, Pandit Manohar Chimote from Nagpur delighted an audience of music lovers in New Delhi with a solo recital of a kind of improvised harmonium called Samvadini. He has introduced several changes in the ordinary harmonium and even added some strings to the key board. The effect is quite pleasing and un-harmonium like. Pandit Chimote is now campaigning for the instrument to be accepted as being suitable for solo performances. Pandit Chimote was brought to Delhi by an organisation sponsored by Mr Vasant Sathe and it formed part of the Ganesh Chaturthi celebrations.

As an accompanist, early during his musical career, he provided harmonium support to Bade Ghulam Ali Khan. Later the film industry in

### Musical opening

When President R. Venkataraman goes to Bhutan this week to dedicate the Chukha Hydel Project



M. S. Subbulakshmi

costing Rs 244 crore built by India there will be a musical event at the site. The Bhutan royal family has especially invited M. S. Subbulakshmi for a 15 minute vocal recital at the project site. She will render a hymn to Rama. M. S., who will fly to Thimpu via Calcutta is now 74. During her long innings as a vocalist she has, it is estimated, benefited charitable institutions to the tune of well over two crore rupees through singing.

### Gianiji's memoirs

Former President Giani Zail Singh's book of his memoirs has been delayed, according to a source close to him. Gianiji kept hardly any notes and there are some gaps which need to be filled. Otherwise the part of the book already written covers a good deal of ground. He has, however, yet to tackle the period of his Presidency, the source added. His daughters, son and wife come to Delhi at intervals but none of them live



Pandit Manohar Chimote

Bombay picked on him to play harmonium in their instrumental ensembles. But he broke away to be able to carry on research with the harmonium even though this meant hardship.

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