

BOOK REVIEW

Kudo, Hiromi Josepha. 2006. *Mother Teresa: A Saint from Skopje*. Gujarat, India: Sahitya Prakash, Anand. ISBN 81 89317 09 1 (hardback), xxx + 216 pp., Indian Rs 250.00, US\$ 25.00.

Dr Hiromi Josepha Kudo's monograph on Mother Teresa is the latest work on the Albanian-born Roman Catholic nun who continues to attract the attention of scholars (religious as well as secular) from around the world now as much as when she was alive. *Mother Teresa: A Saint from Skopje* is the first book in English on the famous missionary by a Japanese scholar.

The work is structured into four chapters. In the first chapter "Early Life in Skopje," the focus is on some formative moments in the life of Agnes Gonxhe Bojaxhiu (Mother Teresa's original name) during the 1910-1928 period. The author rightly emphasizes from the start the significance of studying Mother Teresa's childhood and youth to understand better the worldwide famous personality she became from the end of 1970s onwards.

In the second chapter "Religious Life in India and Mother's Second Vocation," the focus of attention moves to some key moments in Sister Teresa's life as a cloistered nun and as head of the Missionaries of Charity congregation she set up in 1950. Of particular interest in this part of the book is the author's attempt to highlight what Mother Teresa had in common with social workers in general as well as what set this charitable nun apart. The author, however, could have paid more attention in this chapter, especially on pp. 83-90, to Mother Teresa's growing professionalism as a "social worker," her determination not to be perceived as such as well as her original take on inculturation in the post-Independence India.

The third chapter, "Principal Activities" provides detailed information on some of the charitable institutions run by Mother Teresa's congregation in and around Calcutta. The author is able to provide such

Suggested citation:

Alpion, Gëzim. 2006. Review of *Mother Teresa: A Saint from Skopje* by Hiromi Josepha Kudo. *Albanian Journal of Politics* II(2): 120-122.

minute details about the strict daily routine and work of Mother Teresa and members of her congregation in Mother House (headquarters of the Missionaries of Charity), Shishu Bhavan (children's home), Prem Dan (institution for the mentally handicapped), the leprosy rehabilitation centres Shanti Nagar (place of peace) and Gandhiji Prem Nivas (Gandhi Centre of Love) and Shanti Dan thanks to her knowledge as an 'insider'. Dr Kudo first met Mother Teresa in 1988 and since that time she has been doing voluntary work for and carrying out research on the Missionaries of Charity regularly. Having seen for myself some of these institutions during my visit to Calcutta in 2005, I believe the author is right to highlight the positive impact the sisters and brothers of Mother Teresa's order are having on the abandoned orphans, old people, mentally handicapped patients and lepers in their care.

In the "Concluding Chapter" the author identifies some of the reasons for Mother Teresa's popularity in India. In this section an interesting connection is made between Mother Teresa's appeal in India and the Indians', especially the Hindus', veneration for deities, mainly goddesses, and the mother figure.

Of the eight appendices included in the book, I found of particular interest Mother Teresa's letter to the Archbishop of Calcutta Ferdinand P erier of January 13, 1947 in which she explains very vividly why she wants to leave Loreto order and refers briefly and diplomatically to the ridiculing she had to put up with following her announcement that she wanted to start her own congregation. To my knowledge, this is the first time this important document appears in print.

This study, which is a curious mixture of biography, hagiography, diary and doctoral thesis, could have benefited from copyediting. The information in some footnotes and in the text itself is at times repetitive and even out of place. The author relies almost entirely on her own observations to draw conclusions on Mother Teresa's personality and work. She has obviously studied carefully several works written by some of Mother Teresa's fellow missionaries in India (such as Edward Le Joly) and Indian admirers (like Navin Chawla), but makes no mention of renowned Western biographers of Mother Teresa such as Kathryn Spink, Eileen Egan and Anne Sebba. Like most uncritical scholars of Mother Teresa, Kudo also avoids referring to the nun's critics like Aroup Chatterjee and Germaine Greer and mentions only in passing Christopher Hitchens. The author also steers clear of controversial topics such as Mother Teresa's opposition to abortion.

The study sheds new light on some of the early influences in Mother Teresa's life and especially on the people who helped her both in Skopje (to realise that she had a religious vocation) and Calcutta (to establish her congregation). The book identifies correctly the inestimable role Drane (Mother Teresa's mother), several Jesuits in Skopje and Calcutta (especially Father Celeste Van Exem, Father Julien Henry and Archbishop Périer), the spirituality of the Carmelite nuns, numerous Indian officials and Indian citizens (Christians, Hindus and followers of other faiths) played in the life and work of this twentieth century religious and media icon. Like many other scholars who study celebrities, however, the author seems to ignore the fact that history makers like Mother Teresa are essentially self-made individuals. There could have been no Mother Teresa if Mother Teresa herself had not been so focused, determined and such a visionary missionary.

What sets this study apart from many other works on Mother Teresa is the long time the author has spent conducting 'field study' in Calcutta. Equally important is the fact that she is one of the few non-Balkan Mother Teresa scholars to have visited Mother Teresa's birthplace. Her research time in Skopje, however, could have been put to better use. In Skopje, the author appears to have been almost exclusively in the company of Macedonian Slav scholars and religious people who have yet to admit that Mother Teresa was Albanian. Had Dr Kudo paid more attention to what Mother Teresa herself and her brother Lazar said and wrote repeatedly about their Albanian roots and their father's devotion to the Albanian national cause, she would not have drawn the wrong conclusion that the nun's father Nikollë was not Albanian.

In spite of the above-mentioned drawbacks, the book is a sincere attempt to study and understand Mother Teresa's charismatic personality, spirituality and, what Malcolm Muggeridge calls in his 1971 book *Something Beautiful for God*, "love in action." As Father Cyril Veliath SJ, Professor of Indian Studies at Sophia University in Tokyo, Japan, emphasises in his foreword, Dr Kudo's study reflects her devotion to Mother Teresa and the people she loved. Dr Kudo may not have always provided the right answers but she certainly asks all the right questions.

GËZIM ALPION

University of Birmingham

[Http://www.sociology.bham.ac.uk/gezim_alpion](http://www.sociology.bham.ac.uk/gezim_alpion)