

[Jhogis huts follow the food]

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Wherever I'm asked about my three months' stay in new Delhi I usually relate only the good stories. There were so many wonderful things to see and such wonderful happy experiences it's true I can hardly wait to go again. Unfortunately every city has its state of poverty. Although not as bad as other cities in India the sight of small children in Delhi begging or mothers holding tiny babies reaching their hand out or pointing to the babies' mouth caused by heat to ache.

The small cartwheels to the huts of these poor people are called Jhogi huts and whole communities of them sprang up next to any garbage dump. One day the driver of the car in which I was riding took a short cut and drove right through one such community. It had a dirt road right down the center that led to a floating bridge over the Jumna River. I was appalled at the sight as we drove by, so close I could look inside each one but was close to the road. Amazing too, so we walk with sheep along the road side selling fruits, vegetables and other basic necessities. When we reached the other side of the river I had such an empty feeling of helplessness that it took several days to recover from the shock.

Another day one of my friends was driving me to the Taj Palace Hotel, a 5-star hotel that charges 800 rupees a night. We missed the entrance way so circled the hotel and came back. As we drove around the back there was another Jhogi community that had sprung up right across from the back of the hotel. My friend explained that they often build their huts behind the hotels because of the tourists and also the hotel garbage.

The Jhogis can get up a shelter quickly with little effort and few materials. I was shocked one day to read in the newspaper that right in the city where I was living there had been a fire and 2000 Jhogi huts were destroyed, leaving thousands homeless. It was just a small article in the paper obviously not worthy of the headlines it would surely receive in our country. The small article assured the readers, two Jhogis were already rebuilding.

Near the house where I lived there was one such Jhogi hut in the middle of the sidewalk. While out walking my friend and I had to leave the sidewalk, walk around the front, then return to the path. My friend laughingly told me that the government workers kept pulling down and he keeps building it up again. Seems the hut was there before the sidewalk.

One of the most pathetic incidents I encountered was the plight of a mortally handicapped woman, old for her years, who lived in a narrow in a pile of clay in the alley under by bedroom window. I first became aware of her in the middle of the night during a violent thunder storm. The thunder must have frightened her because she

leaped loudly from the night. After learning of our custom I often walked through the alley to see if she was alright. The residents of the area would leave food out for her and my tutor ever gave her a suit of clothes to wear but she was incapable of comprehending so am not it shown by the raincoat and left it lying. On very hot days I found her sleeping in the shade near the servants quarters at the back of the houses. Her hunched form resembled the full glare of the hot afternoon sun.

Often at night I would hear her crying out and as it was the season for thunder storms and I knew they frightened her, I began to tell everyone I met about her hoping someone would help.

As it turned out my American friend who whom I enjoyed long walks and talks happened to mention one day that she belonged to the American outreach program. So I told her all about this poor woman and she promised to look into it for me.

Shortly after I arrived home I had a letter from one of my new friends from India and she said, Sharon, the American woman, says to tell you not to worry about the woman in the alley any more as their outreach group is now taking care of her.

Indo Canadian

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