

The Psychological Factor

N. M. Jose of Government Leprosy Hospital, Calicut, writes:

WITH close and constant observation, we can anticipate the needs of the patients. The mere word leprosy brings a lot of stigma with it. I was a resident nurse who was supposed to see their complaints even in the absence of the medical officers. Thus I was in the middle of them to share their past and present, happy and unhappy events. They were most striking, the tormenting stories of the thrilling youths. Still some of them are echoing in me. How many youth have been crushed down by the hands of this brutal murderer who kills without killing and shapes without shaping.

Some Views

Dr. Radhakrishnan: Is it not the duty of the society to sympathise with these people? They are merely unfortunate and that misfortune could occur to you or me or any of us.

Mahatma Gandhi: And he rushes to serve the patients at all costs and at all risks. If according to poet our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought, our noblest actions are undoubtedly those that seek to remove all sufferings from human life.

Functional Disorders

Leprophobia: One thinks that one has got leprosy and its manifestations while one actually does not.

Leprophilia: One will not have the disease but one actually wants the disease.

History

Leprosy patients are ousted from the society, may be killed. Fr. Damien, a famous Christian

missionary, lived and died for them. Amidst the millions of missionaries and lepers the name of Fr. Damien shines and shines without no equal.

Social Stigma

If a person knows that he is the victim of the disease that will be a shock to his life, which may even lead him to suicide. His family and the society look at him with evil eyes. They think that the disease is the outcome of a curse, a venereal disease or any other evil deed. Then why should we blame them in such erroneous notions. Even now there are people who are fearful to visit the very sites of the leprosy hospitals. Some of the medical and paramedical staff consider the work in a leprosy hospital as a punishment. They are made to believe public?

Collapsed nasal septum, legophthalmos, facial skin laxity, scanty eyebrows, anaesthesia, nodular eruptions are some of reasons for these conceptions.

Inferiority Complex

This is a common feature which keeps them aloof and away from the society. We must give them confidence to believe that they are needed in the society and they can do many things in the dynamic world.

Resentment

This is a very interesting fact I have observed. The saying "Like the mentality of the leprosy patients" is well followed on such occasions by their attempt to touch a non-leper. May be knowing all these phenomena man is called "the greatest miracle, the creator of all miracles."

There are so many patients who are taking regular treatment and carrying out reputable jobs. They fear the public rather than the disease. Isn't it high time to inform the public that their convictions are faulty and fears are unapproachable? Will a day come when these poor lepers will command the same prestige that their fellow human beings command? Will a day come when a nurse considers the cry of a leper as the cry of an ordinary patient? Will a day come when the angel smiles to him in the form of complete relief and peace?

An International Endeavour

THE British Leprosy Relief Association (LEPRA) is financing a project to breed South American armadillos in captivity at a zoo in Guernsey in the Channel Islands. The armadillos are to be used in laboratory experiments seeking an anti-leprosy vaccine, according to a BIS release.

The armadillo experiment is part of the programme for which LEPRA is planning to raise £1 million (about Rs. 1.7 crores) this year for combating leprosy, which now affects 15 million people worldwide.

LEPRA is associated with research work in Hyderabad, the

All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi, the Foundation of Medical Research, Bombay, and the Comprehensive Medical Research Institute, Agra.

The British organisation believes that the most effective way to counter leprosy is to diagnose child sufferers and treat them. It is spending over £ 80,000 (about Rs. 13.6 lakhs) a year on child diagnosis and treatment in 21 countries. LEPRA also helps to finance projects concerned with the control of leprosy in India, Malaysia, Africa, the Caribbean and South America.