

HISTORY OF LEPROSY

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ABSTRACT

Leprosy is one of the oldest and most dreaded diseases, which has tormented humans throughout history, leaving lasting impressions on religion, literature and art. If history is traced, evidence of leprosy is found in all the four Yugas of Hindu religion, quotes of Jesus in Bible of Christianity and verses of Prophet in Muslim religion.

KEYWORDS

Leprosy, History.

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INTRODUCTION: Leprosy is one of the oldest and most dreaded diseases, which has tormented humans throughout history, leaving lasting impressions on religion, literature and art. It has been and still continues to be synonymous with stigma and discrimination due to the hideous deformities it produces. Hence leprosy has been known since ancient times as "The death before death".

Leprosy & Hindu Religion: In Hindu religion, four Yugas are described. They are: 1) Krutha Yuga, 2) Tretha Yuga, 3) Dwapara Yuga and 4) Kali Yuga. In all the four Yugas, the disease leprosy has been mentioned. In Krutha Yuga the disease leprosy has been mentioned. In Krutha Yuga Renuka Yellamma marries sage Jamadagni and were living in the Ramshrung Mountains, near the present day Saudatti area of Belgaum district of Karnataka state. Renuka would wake up early in the morning to bathe in the Malaprabha River with complete concentration and devotion. Her devotion was so powerful that she was able to create a pot to hold water, made only of the sand, one fresh pot every day. She would fill this pot on the bank of the river and use a snake which was nearby, turning it into a rope like convulsions and placing it on her head, so that snake supported the pot. Thus she brought the water to Jamadagni for his rituals of oblation. One day when Renuka went to the river, she saw the Gandharvas spirits playing love play. For a moment she lost her concentration and devotion, as she was distracted, she lost her power of collecting water in unbaked pots, she returned to the ashram in shame. Seeing Renuka returning empty handed, Jamadagni became furious and angrily cursed her to suffer from leprosy. She suffers from leprosy. She prays saints Eknath and Joginath.

They instruct her to take bath in nearby lake called Jogala Bhavi and drink the same water for 3 days and 4th day she will be free from leprosy. Soon her disease gets cured. From Krutha Yuga till today, leprosy patients visit the hilltop Goddess Renuka Yellamma at Saudatti, Belgaum district, pray to her and take a bath in Jogala Bhavi and drink Jogala Bhavi water. Jogala Bhavi's water is rich in Zinc. Zinc is essential for the normal function of macrophages. Macrophages help cell mediated immunity to fight the leprosy disease.^{1,2,3}

In Tretha Yuga there is mention of leprosy in the form of shloka recited by Lord Rama during his fight with Ravana - Indrakshi Stotra -Narayana Uvacha of Goddess Durga it goes on as follows - Kshaya Apasmara Kushtadhi Thapa Jwara Nivaranam, Chora Vyagra Bhayam, Thathra Seetha Jwara Nivaranam. After reciting this Lord Rama had new zeal and energy to continue his fight with Ravana.

In Dwapara Yuga also the disease leprosy has been mentioned. In Dwapara Yuga Sri Krishna's 5th wife Jambavathi, had a son called Samba. Samba gets cursed from Hermits and suffers from leprosy. Sri Krishna advises him to go to Arasivalli near Srikakulam town, Andhra Pradesh and penance on Lord Surya. Samba penances on Lord Surya and his disease gets cured. From Dwapara Yuga till today leprosy patients come to Arasivalli and pray to Lord Surya and feel their leprosy is getting cured. We now know that higher doses of Ultraviolet B rays reach the Arasivalli, and Ultraviolet B have germicidal properties and these germicidal properties may be the cause for the beneficial effects to leprosy patients.^{4,5}

In Kali Yuga, Manusmriti written 1500 BC, forbids marriages with leprosy patients and their family members, and also imposes punishment to the family members who hide the leprosy disease information intentionally at the time of marriage.⁶

Sushruta Samhita written in 600 BC describes the spread, classification and treatment for leprosy. Leprosy spreads by touch, by breath, sharing the same bed, eating and drinking from the same vessel and using the same

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apparel. Sushruta classified leprosy into 1) Maha Kushta– (Today's Lepromatous Leprosy). 2) Kshudra Kushta – (Today's Tuberculoid Leprosy). 3) Vata Rakta – (Today's Pure Neuritic Leprosy). Sushruta also mentioned the treatment for leprosy by oil of Tuvaraka seeds. The active ingredient of Tuvaraka seeds are Hydnocarpic oil and Chaulmoogric acid. Both have bacteriostatic properties.^{7,8}

Leprosy & Christianity: Jesus Christ revealed his healing powers in a small medieval town called Emmaus, 7 kilometres from Jerusalem. By touching the leprosy patients he cures their sufferings. Jesus Christ brings ray of hope in the lives of leprosy patient's life.⁹

Bible > Matthew > Chapter 8 > Verse 3 Matthew 8.3: Jesus cleanses a leper. When Jesus came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him. And behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean". And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I will; be clean". And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. And Jesus said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a proof to them".

Leprosy & Muslim Religion: A popular Hadith from Sahih Al-Bukhari say's, Allah has not sent down an illness without sending down a cure for it.¹⁰ The Prophet said, "There is no disease that Allah has created, except that He also has created its treatment". One more Hadith says "flee from lepers as you would flee from a Lion". This was said to isolate leprosy patients and to prevent its spread.

Modern Medical history of leprosy starts from the discovery of mycobacterium leprae in 1873 by Gerhard Henrik Armauer Hansen of Norway.

Anti-leprosy activities in India: Christian Priests saw the suffering of leprosy patients in India. In 1875, at Chamba town, Himachal Pradesh, Christian Priests started a charity association to nurse leprosy patients. Today this charity association has grown and serves leprosy patients all over the world, under the new name "Leprosy Mission".

In 1925, the British Government started well-organized anti leprosy work throughout India by "The Indian Council of the British Empire Leprosy Association". After independence, this institute is renamed as "Hind Kusht Nivaran Sangh".¹¹

In 1941, Guy Henry Faget discovered Dapsone for the treatment of leprosy.

In 1955, the Government of India launched National Leprosy Control Programme. The prevalence rate of leprosy was 5-6/1000 population. The aim of the programme was to bring down the prevalence rate to 2/1000 population. The strategy of the programme was Survey, Education and Treatment. By house to house survey, resurvey, special group survey of all the villages, towns in India, a search was made for leprosy cases. All Leprosy cases are registered. All patients, family members and community as a whole are

educated about Dapsone treatment regularly for adequate time.

In 1983, the Government of India redesignated NLCP to National Leprosy Eradication Programme. The aim of the programme was to eradicate leprosy by 2000 AD. The strategy was to give multi drug regimen to all leprosy patients, at their door steps.

Since 2002, the prevalence rate of leprosy has come down. Government of India integrated Anti leprosy activities as part of Primary Health Centre activities.

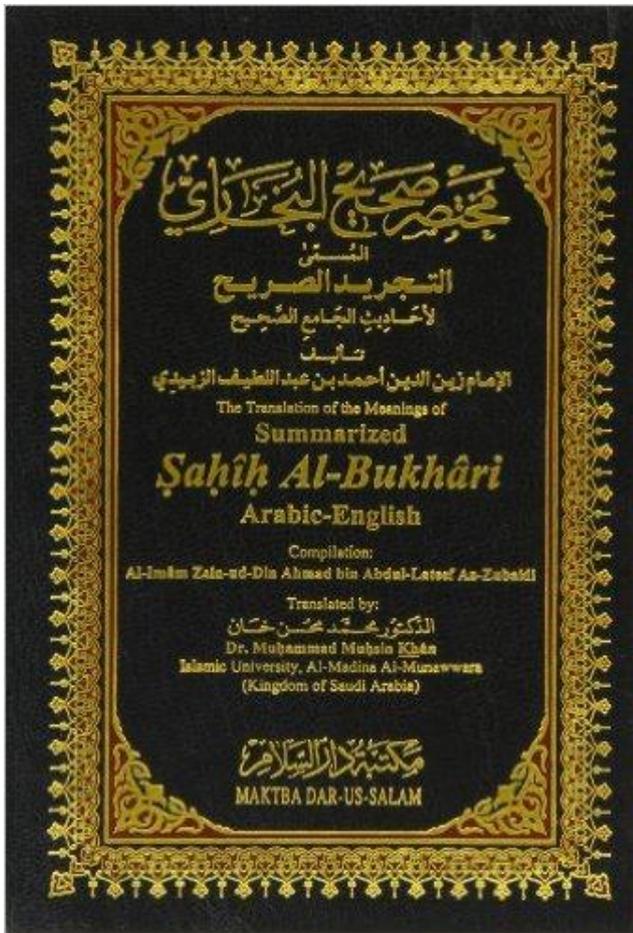
Today leprosy prevalence rate has come down to less than 1/10000 population. Modern medicines will cure the remaining leprosy patients. Soon the leprosy disease will enter the history books. Today we show our students photos of Small Pox. Similarly tomorrow we will show our students the photos of leprosy patients from our photo album.

CONCLUSION: Leprosy is a dreaded disease right from historical times and continued to puzzle today's doctors of modern times. Only the approach and rationale for treatment has changed with time.

Hill top Goddess – Renuka Yellamma Saudatti, Belgaum district.



**Renuka Yellamma contracted leprosy,
due to cursing by her husband**



Jesus Christ, healing leprosy patients at Emmaus 20 AD, medieval town 7 KM away from Jerusalem

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