News and Notes

A UNIQUE MUSEUM IN MUMBAI – ACWORTH LEPROSY MUSEUM

The newly expanded Acworth Leprosy Museum at Wadala, Mumbai which was opened by the Municipal Commissioner, Dr. Jairaj Phatak, on 9th June 2009, is not just about a disease. It holds a mirror to Indian society through the ages, by depicting how it dealt with a dreaded, misunderstood as highly infectious, and apparently incurable deforming disease (Figure 1).

The ‘Homeless Leper Asylum’ (today better known as the Acworth Municipal Hospital for Leprosy), was established in 1890 to mitigate the nuisance caused by ‘leper’ beggars infesting the streets and public places in Bombay, by confining them to a shelter (Figure 2).

The Asylum owed its existence to the energy and initiative of H. A. Acworth, the then Municipal Commissioner of Bombay. It was the result of the interaction between the Corporation, the Government, and prominent citizens of Bombay.

The Museum is dedicated to the nameless millions of leprosy sufferers throughout history, to the philanthropists and social workers who ameliorated their sufferings, and pays tribute to those whose labours delivered remedies and other benefits to the most marginalised of human society.

Figure 1. The Museum is housed in a former ward of the Hospital.
The Museum is substantially supported by The Sasakawa Memorial Health Foundation and The Nippon Foundation, Japan.

A joint venture of the Acworth Municipal Hospital for Leprosy and the Acworth Leprosy Hospital Research Society, Wadala, Mumbai, it has a broader aim to inform the public about a disease which is a still a serious problem in our country.

The Museum is the only one of its kind in India, and is composed of eight modular displays besides a special exhibit on the establishment and early years of the ‘Homeless Leper Asylum’:

1. Leprosy as perceived in ancient India and in scientific medicine today.
2. A Timeline of Developments in Treatment from earliest to modern times.
4. Leprosy in Fictional and Religious Literature in India.
5. The Voice of the Victims.
8. Methods of Health Education in Leprosy.

Every poster, document, file has something to speak on every aspect of leprosy from ancient to modern times. The documentary and pictorial collection is planned as a valuable resource for scholars in history, sociology and medicine. It tells a story for a disease that challenged humanity and its intelligence since ancient times until 50 years ago; it has an interesting history reflecting on contradictions in human nature from fear and revulsion to sympathy and love.

We welcome anyone who wishes to utilize its resources and understand the disease. It will also interest historians and researchers of the metropolis.

For further information contact: Hon. Secretary, Acworth Leprosy Hospital Research Society, Wadala, Mumbai 400031, India, Tel no. (022) 24184263, Website www.theacworthleprosymuseum.org