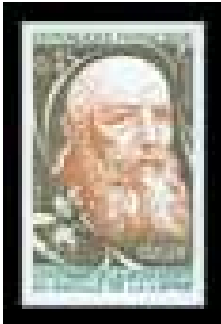


Gerhard Armauer Hansen (1814-1912)

JV Pai-Dhungat*, Falguni Parikh*



France (1973)



Norway (1973)



12th Int. Leprosy congress, Delhi (1984)

Gerhard Armauer Hansen(1814-1912) Postal stamps released in France, Norway (1973), in India at 12th Int. Leprosy congress, Delhi 1984

Gerhard Armauer Hansen was born in Bergen, in Norway in a large family with meagre resources. He was a brilliant student and inherently industrious. He was also an avowed atheist and expressed grave concerns over religious teachings.

Hansen joined the staff of the Lungegard hospital for leprosy. Danielssen was the physician-in-charge of this hospital, who later became his father-in-law. Danielssen held that aetiology of leprosy was either humoral or hereditary but surely not contagious, since he failed to transmit the supposed contagion to animals or to himself through direct inoculation of morbid tissue.

Hansen's suspicion of infectious nature of the disease was supported by meticulous statistical and epidemiological studies of its incidence in several communities in Norway and his highly significant findings of "small staff-like bodies resembling bacteria" in leprosy nodules. Although 1873 is usually given as the year of discovery of the bacilli, Hansen has described "large brown elements" as early as 1869. These are depicted beautifully

on the Norway stamp shown above.

Hansen communicated his observations and assumptions on the aetiology of leprosy to the Medical Society of Christiania, Oslo in 1869. "Bacillus Leprae" can therefore be called the first infectious agent ever described in a chronic disease. Identification was delayed until the development of suitable histology technique. In 1880 he assigned the name "Bacillus leprae" to the organism now called *M. Leprae*. Hansen was active in civic promotion and legislative efforts, along with institutional treatment to control and hoped to eradicate leprosy.

Through the ages leprosy had been a dreaded disease and a stigma. Major cultures in the world believed that leprosy afflicted persons "Spiritually unclean". Note the leper on the France stamp and leprosy world map depicted on International Leprosy Conference stamp issued by India in 1984. Today we are nearing leprosy control if not eradication of this "iceberg disease" thanks to Gerhard Hansen, many eminent leprologists, MDT and the World Health Organisation.

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