

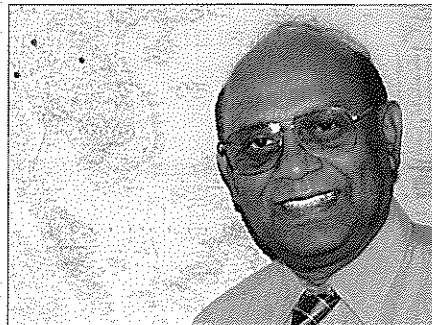


# Decades of Devotion

*Simon Watkinson talks to Dr Prabhakar Samson, director of TLM South East Asia from 1994-2002, about his thirty-three years' service with TLM*

**O**wing to the aftermath of September 11, the latter part of my recent field trip to Indonesia was cancelled, so I had a few days to spare in Singapore. Here I met up with Dr Prabhakar Samson, who started working for TLM in 1969 as a medical officer.

'I grew up in Miraj where my parents worked in TLM's Richardson Hospital,' he began. As an undergraduate, he frequented youth camps and at one of these he became 'born again'.



Prabhakar Samson

'I took an active role in the student Christian movement at University,' he added, remembering with fondness his role as Sunday school teacher to children with leprosy at Richardson. During this time he decided to devote his life to helping leprosy affected people.

He was medical superintendent at Richardson Leprosy hospital for more than twenty-five years and oversaw its transition from leprosy home to one of the most modern leprosy research centres in India. Yet he



Dr Samson with patients in the Yimen Leprosy Village of Guizhou Province, China

doesn't regard this transformation as his life's biggest achievement, but remembers with even greater satisfaction his co-ordination of the building of a fifty house resettlement village at Miraj, where slum dwellers with leprosy now live happily in a clean environment.

'They enjoy a far better lifestyle and the village also has a church which is the nucleus of this place,' Dr Prabhakar enthused.

He was a technical executive with TLM India before becoming director of South East Asia in November 1994. With almost 500 nationals working in Bangladesh and numerous projects in eight countries around Singapore, a busy flight schedule accompanies this role.

'Whenever we plan new work, I visit the place once or twice to ascertain the needs,' he said. Frequent trips are also made to China, given the huge prevention of disability work in fourteen provinces.

Sadly, some leprosy sufferers are relocated to villages far away from the cities, making re-integration into the community harder still.

'In the near future we will set up projects in Chinese leprosy villages as it's far better to help people where they are, by improving their accommodation and living standards,' he told me. 'By giving their children a better education, the youngsters can then integrate into mainstream society.'

## What was the most challenging part of his job?

'Working with an international staff and adapting to different cultures,' he replied. 'It took me two years to adjust to this.'

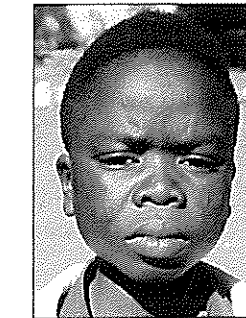
He then told me that the fear and stigma of leprosy had reduced due to general education, but that the eradication of leprosy would not be possible until an effective vaccine had been developed.

'So long as crowding and poverty exists, there will be leprosy,' he said, 'but TLM will be there to bring sufferers of this awful disease the wonderful consolation of the love of Christ.' ■

*Though Dr Prabhakar Samson retired from TLM in September 2002 and returned to India, he is still involved in work with children affected by leprosy. As a keen cricket fan denied his beloved sport on Singaporean television, he can now follow it passionately. As do most of India!*

# Standwa Jama – caught in time!

Twelve year old Standwa Jama is from a remote area of South Africa's Eastern Cape Province where survival is a continuous struggle. A TLM



Field Team diagnosed his highly infectious multibacillary leprosy three years ago. Four more members of his family were also diagnosed with leprosy and given MDT treatment. Though they have been spared the devastation of

leprosy, the deprivation and poverty of their meagre existence remains. Please pray for this family as they complete the healing process.

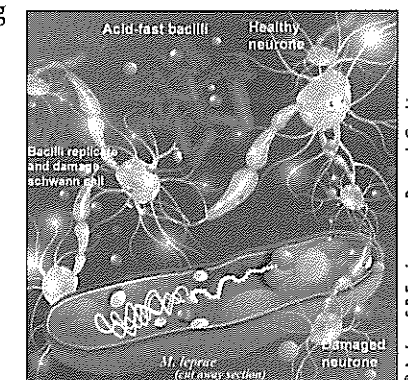
## Leprosy and TLM

Leprosy is caused by a bacillus and probably spread through coughing and sneezing. It is most common in the poorest countries of the world, but can be completely cured with a combination

of tablets – multidrug therapy (MDT), which costs just £15 to administer. Over 11 million leprosy sufferers have been cured with MDT since its introduction in 1982, but well over 600,000 new cases are still being

detected each year. An unacceptable 3 to 4 million people now suffer from, or are threatened with, permanent disability due to leprosy. Unfelt injuries to anaesthetic limbs lead to severe ulceration, bone infection, disabilities and deformities which both stigmatise and ostracise the patient.

TLM is currently caring for over 200,000 leprosy sufferers through its hospitals and field programmes worldwide.



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