

Leprosy in Bengal, C. 1873-1956

Since 1870s onwards, leprosy had more become a fearsome sight to the Victorian 'healthy' populace. Initially it was not an imperial danger to the government, although, the death of father Damien in Molokai intensified the anxiety about 'contagiousness' which prevailed in the colonial mind from early nineteenth century. This popular unease had influenced the colonial policies, regarding the 'lepers' in India, to segregate them from the mainstream lives. The Lepers Act of 1898, largely ignoring the suggestions of Leprosy Commission in India 1890-91, had intended to confine these malicious bodies in the asylums of India. This thesis aims to study the numerous medical treatments of and the social encounter against this age old disease in colonial and postcolonial Bengal and analyze the indigenous response, concerning the disease prevention, to the colonial state within the broader context of British Empire. The thesis, hence, considers the public health policies towards leprosy and the 'lepers' [used as derogatory term] in Bengal by conceptualizing the imperial narratives about the *disease*. On the other hand, the present study focuses on colonial language, expressions, and practices that examined or perceived leprosy as 'social threat' or 'problem population' and medicalized the leprosy sufferers through the institutional 'care' in Bengal since the late nineteenth century till the mid twentieth century. This thesis has six chapters including introduction and conclusion. It selects 1873 as the point of departure when G. H. A Hansen had discovered the causative agent of leprosy and concludes with the Albert Victor Leper Hospital (Abolition) Act which was passed in 1956 to disband the operation of the hospital, situated at Gobra, Kolkata and dissolve the board of trustees.