

Arun Kumar

Arun Kumar is about 50 years old, he lives in Delhi and is a person affected by leprosy. He is married to his childhood sweetheart, Saraswati, a nurse and he has two daughters; Anisha Angel aged 20 (studying for an MSc) and Stuti Abigail aged 17 (studying business at university). Arun now works as Programmes Manager for NLR (a Dutch NGO) in India but his story has not always been so happy.

Arun was born in the city of Cuttack in Odisha, West Bengal. When he was just a baby, his father was killed in ethnic violence and his mother had to flee for her life. Now destitute and living in the state of Punjab, she had to beg for a living to feed herself and her young child. It was while begging on the streets, that she met Arun's stepfather, a man affected by leprosy who lived in a nearby leprosy colony.

After a while, Arun's mother had to give him up to a children's home for a better life. It was a missionary home and although it provided Arun with an education and some security, it was not the happiest of times; he was sexually abused by an older boy and he was diagnosed at the age of seven with leprosy. He was treated with dapsons which did not cure him properly and at 12 years old, he was diagnosed again, this time with multibacillary leprosy. Thankfully he had not developed any visible disabilities and this time he was prescribed with MDT which cured him properly.

By now Arun's stepfather (whom, at the time, he thought was a real father) had been treated for leprosy by The Leprosy Mission, but he was severely disabled; both his feet were amputated, one hand was a stump and only his thumb remained on his other hand. He told Arun that his mother was ill and urged Arun to leave the children's home and move to the leprosy colony to look after her. In reality, his mother had already died and his stepfather wanted Arun to look after him. To provide for his father, Arun took a job working as a servant for a man that sold tea and who beat him repeatedly. Arun said, "I hated this job. It was the most miserable time of my life."

However events were to change. Arun credits The Leprosy Mission, with turning his life round. Not only did they make sure that his leprosy had been completely cured; when he finished his schooling, he was given training and a job which restored his confidence. He later studied for further professional qualifications and was promoted to Programmes Manager. After ten years working for TLM he left and continued to excel in his career returning to work in leprosy in recent times.

Arun says, "leprosy is just a disease that can be cured but what we have to cure before it is finally defeated is the fear of leprosy." He said "my children only know leprosy as a disease and that's all I want anyone to know."

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