

with regard to residential rights, property rights and what the future holds.

**INDIA (MARCH 17-21)**

On March 18-19, I took part in another workshop on leprosy and human rights in Pune, Maharashtra State. In my opening remarks, I cited Raoul Follereau, who in letters and speeches half a century ago talked about leprosy as a curable disease and one that was difficult to catch. Appealing for an end to discrimination, he asked what it meant to be cured if after the fact a person was still called a “leper.”

Only recently is society waking up to the magnitude of this problem and starting to do something about it. Prof. Yokota, who took part in this workshop as well, said it was shameful that the UN was only now taking up the issue.

The keynote address was given by Chandrashekhar Dharmadhikari, a retired judge, who cited the need to change popular thinking if persons affected by leprosy are to be treated equitably by society.

Following the opening ceremony, International Leprosy Union Chairman Dr. S.D. Gokhale presented the findings of a survey on leprosy and human rights in four states: Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa and Maharashtra. The survey showed how disability is the starting point of discrimination and prejudice; that disability is a major cause of inequitable treatment in the job market; and that disability and poverty are deeply intertwined.

On a positive note, self-help movements of the disabled are beginning. Further, in various parts of India, it is now a legal requirement that disabled



A recovered person making car parts near Pune

persons have a say in making policies and laws.

Concerning legislation, academics and lawyers pointed out that most people were unaware that leprosy-affected persons are covered by the disabilities act, although they acknowledged that in reality the act does not adequately recognize disability due to leprosy. They also highlighted the fact that leprosy remains grounds for divorce under India’s marriage laws. For various forms of discrimination to be removed, they said, legislation must serve as an instrument of social change and laws must be “internalized” if they are going to have any effect.

There was also a session at which

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Workshops such as this one in India are turning the spotlight on stigma and discrimination.