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Prithviraj Patil
IANS

Meet the "Werewolf" Boy

From India

No, this 11-year-old boy has neither fangs nor claws; he has hair growing all over his face and body, a rare developmental anomaly which can be removed just through laser treatment or plastic surgery. The boy, Prithviraj Patil, the son of a well-to-do farmer in Sangalwadi near Sangli, is otherwise a healthy normal child. The facial hair, which is up to three-inches (8 cm) long may look awful, but it does not induce any itch or rash on the skin and it is not accompanied by any odor or skin disorder. "Hairy nevus, where a person has patches of excess hair growth or hirsutism, is not uncommon. But hair persisting all over the body is very rare", said plastic surgeon Vinay Saoji. "Though I have not come across such cases or its documentation anywhere, I suppose options like epilation could be tried out to rid the boy of the embarrassment", Saoji told IANS. Such traits, reminding us of real or supposed evolutionary lost characteristics are called atavisms. They usually appear because genes for previously existing phenotypical traits are not discarded from the genome, but often preserved and just inhibited by our DNA. Even if these genes are not expressed, a mutation can reactivate them. Atavisms that have been found in humans are for example babies born with a vestigial tail, named "coccygeal process", "coccygeal projection", and "caudal appendage", but other atavic traits in humans can be the presence of large, ape-like canines, the development of claws instead of nail or the presence of more than one pair of mammary glands. Atavisms have been also signaled in animals: whales and dolphins with small hind fins (showing clearly that they evolved from four limbed land mammals), or extra-toes in horses, showing that their ancestors had 5 fingers and toes like the rest of the mammals.