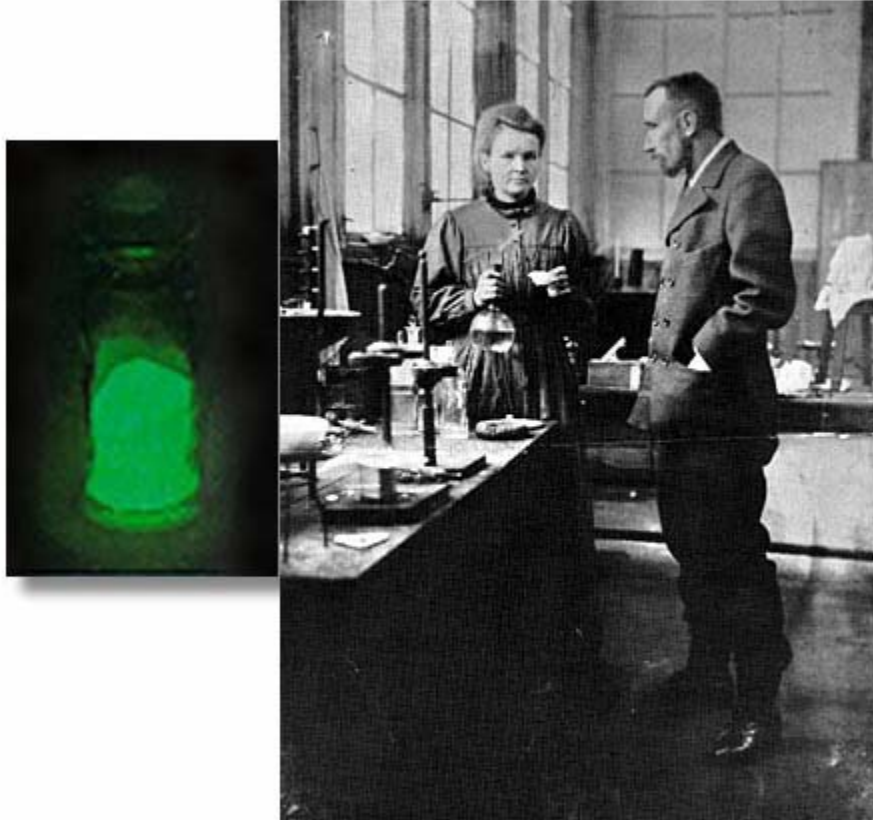


Who Discovered Radium ?



Radium is one of the few metallic elements that constantly emit invisible radiations. Such elements are called radioactive elements and the radiations they emit are called 'radioactive' rays. There are three types of radioactive rays— alpha, beta and gamma rays. Radium, due to the emission of the radioactive rays, disintegrates and finally gets converted into lead Half of this radioactive element gets converted into lead in 1622 years. This is called the 'half life' of radium. In the next 1622 years, half of the remaining substance decays into lead. This process continues indefinitely. The radioactive rays are so powerful that they can pass through different kinds of substances including the human body. These rays are very useful in the treatment of cancer. Do you know who discovered radium?

Radium was discovered in 1898 by a French married couple, Pierre Curie and Marie Curie. The story of its discovery is very interesting.

In 1896 Henri Becquerel discovered the phenomenon of radioactivity. He found that the uranium emits a kind of invisible radiations which are more powerful than even the X-rays. In 1898 Pierre Curie and Madam Curie, found that thorium also emits similar radiations. They thought that pitchblende, which is the ore of uranium, must contain

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some other radioactive substance too. They started refining pitchblende in order to obtain the new radioactive element. They had to work in a tin-shed because they could not afford a proper laboratory on account of limited means. Without caring for rains and storms, they worked day and night. Finally, they succeeded in extracting 100 milligrams of radium from several tons of pitchblende. They found that this new element was much more powerful than uranium.

Pure radium is white in color. It is quite heavy and thousands of times costlier than gold. The quantity of pure radium available in the world is very small. Radioactive rays are very harmful to the body. If handled carelessly its radioactive rays can cause bad radiation burns. There are 16 isotopes of radium. The most common is radium 226. It is used in medicine to destroy cancer growths.

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