# Twitter Thread by Savitri Mumukshu - ████████ ████████



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**1**

**India’s milestone of 1 Billion doses for its Covid vaccine proved its capabilities regarding its own healthcare. It’s a huge leap forward for India which was decimated by the British, who caused horrific epidemics that killed over 81 million Indians in the last century alone.**




2

In the 1800's, Britain built vast networks of badly designed irrigation canals to squeeze profits from Indian agriculture. The canals changed the salinization of water bodies, allowing the Cholera bacteria to thrive. Historically, Cholera was never an epidemic in India.

In the early 19th century, however, British economic "development" in India allowed cholera to escape from its original homeland. As discussed in section 8.2, the British constructed a large number of irrigation canals during the 19th century in order to tap the agricultural potential of their Indian colony, and these canals eventually watered about 20 percent of India's agricultural land. Unfortunately, these poorly designed canals led to salinization, which in turn created a hospitable environment for the saline-tolerant cholera bacteria. Furthermore, India's

3

The canals became breeding grounds for cholera & flooded over nearby land, picking up cholera from infected villages & spreading it. Britain's haphazard construction & disregard for India's natural ecosystem caused the first Cholera epidemic at Jessore (Bangladesh) in 1817.

agricultural land. Unfortunately, these poorly designed canals led to salinization, which in turn created a hospitable environment for the saline-tolerant cholera bacteria. Furthermore, India's canals had a habit of flooding over adjacent land, and as a result, they tended to pick up cholera bacteria from infected villages and spread them over a wide area. The British further worsened the problem by insisting on the compulsory settlement of Indian subjects alongside these canals, meaning that semi-nomadic pastoral and agriculturalist people were forcibly obliged to adopt a full-fledged agricultural lifestyle, and all the diseases that went with it.

4

To make things worse, the British forced farm laborers to settle along the canals. They forced semi-nomadic, starving workers to adopt a fixed agricultural lifestyle in small unhygienic settlements, creating a perfect environment for the Cholera epidemic to spread.



5

Statistics & data linking disastrous canal programs in Punjab & Bengal to Cholera outbreaks were purposely suppressed by the British to protect profits, even as millions of Indians died. They insisted it was not contagious, touting the lie that Cholera was "timeless" in India

The British further exacerbated the death toll of cholera in India through sheer callousness towards the suffering of the Indian population. Instead of taking responsibility for worsening cholera through their "development" program, the British created a myth that epidemic cholera was "timeless" in India. According to Sheldon Watts, the British went so far as to actively suppress information linking their canal programs to disease outbreaks for fear of scaring off investors and dampening profits. The British also insisted that cholera was not contagious, despite considerable evidence to the contrary, since if cholera was labeled a contagious disease

6

British showed their racism & bigotry as they blamed "vice, lethargy & filthy habits of Indians" for Cholera. Christian missionaries said Hinduism & the "degradation" of idol worship caused it. Kumbh Mela & Puri's rituals were demonized as epicenters of the epidemic.

In the drive for water and sanitary reforms, cholera was continuously associated with the landscape and environments of India. While the previous chapter touched on the religious pilgrimages of India as the source of the international cholera pandemics, India's landscape itself was believed to have brought forth this disease. In its very name—Asiatic cholera—the disease was represented as inherently foreign. And foreign was feared. In England, environmental sanitary reformers, such as Sir Edwin Chadwick, decried India's "natural propensity" for disease and cholera. John Snow, who discovered cholera's water vector, at the same time, told the London Privy Council that cholera came from the "eastern centres of its habitual dominion…from the alluvial swamps and malarious jungles of Asia, where it was first engendered amid miles of vapourous poisons, and still broods over wasted nations as the agents of innumerable death." It was believed that the marshes and swamps constituted the entire nation of India.[13] As William Sanderson, a London doctor and urban reformer, said in 1866:

> Cholera is known to have originated in India, which has long been well-populated…Cholera could originate only in dense masses of population depositing excreta and other animalized matter over surfaces, from which it is carried by the percolation of the rainfall to the sources of the water supply.[14]

7

Western "scientists" wrote horrifyingly racist & Hindumisic accounts of how Cholera was born when despair molested the Hindu "goddess of filth" & infected the Ganga. Hindu religion & pilgrimages were blamed directly for an epidemic that India had never faced before the British

An account of cholera's origin by John A. Benson, a professor of physiology in Chicago, offers the most egregious example of this fear mongering. In 1893, Benson illustrates the unrestrained imagination of the period. Benson's cholera creation myth begins in the marshland:

> Up from the dark Plutonian caverns of Erebus, up from the clouded Stygian valley, up from the depths of hell, in the early part of this century, arose the Goddess of Filth, and she wandered around over the face of the globe, seeking for a home to her liking. And coming to the delta of the Ganges, in this low, insalubrious and festering locality, where so many noxious and noisome diseases are generated, and where so many epidemics have arisen and so often swept over the earth with most fatal and desolating effects,—here she met, on dark and stifling nigh, with gaunt Despair. And surrounding her with his bony arms, Despair threw her on the foul, dark and slimy ground, and had his will of her. And when the day of her reckoning was reached, here in the neighborhood of Jessore—a town in the center of the delta—in agony and in shame and in desolation, Filth gave birth to the monstrosity yclept [by the name of],—Asiatic cholera. And here she nurtured and fed him, here in this vast pest-house where every conceivable vegetable and animal substance is left upon the soil to rot in the heat and dews of a tropical climate,—here Filth fed her offspring from her own breasts, and as he grew and waxed strong, and his tusks and teeth appeared so that he would chew and tear her dugs, she longed to wean him, and one day as he ferociously fastened himself upon her, she cast him away on the mud, and as his mouth was forcibly torn from the dug, some of her foul milk was scattered around, and falling into the water of the Ganges, as drops, was at once coagulated by the water, and became—the Spirilla Cholerae Asiaticae[*sic*].[15]

8

The "Angel of mercy" Florence Nightingale said "British had a civilizing & sanitizing mission in India, the land of domestic filth, where plague & pestilence were the ordinary state of things". India was marked as the root of diseases like Cholera to justify racist superiority

Another way in which what happened in the barracks was related to civilian life outside was through the moral argument, more fervently voiced by Florence Nightingale in London than by the medical profession in India, that sanitation was civilization. In her view, it was a terrible blight on Britain's record as a civilized nation that its soldiers lived in India in conditions of disease, intemperance, and squalor. But she equally believed that Britain had a civilizing and sanitizing mission that extended beyond its own soldiers to India's "native" population. In May 1863, as the labors of the Sanitary Commission drew wearily to a close, Nightingale reflected: "This is the dawn of a new day for India in sanitary things, not only as regards our Army, but as regards the native population." In an address in October that year, she described India as "the focus of epidemics" and the home of cholera. It was a land of "domestic filth," a place where plague and pestilence were "the ordinary state of things." The vital question, then, was "no less an one than this: How to create a public health department for India; how to bring a higher civilization into India." A year later, in September 1864, she wrote to Sir John Lawrence, the new viceroy of India and a trusted ally in the fight against disease, "you are conquering India anew by civilization, taking possession of the Empire for the first time by knowledge instead of by the sword." 100 Nightingale's practical impact upon sanitary policy and medical ideas in India was not as great as her admirers have liked to believe. But in linking health and sanitation with civilization, with the wider purpose and moral legitimacy of British rule in India, she was giving voice to sentiments that were shared by many medical and sanitary officers in India.

9

British historian, Sheldon Watts, estimates over 25 million Indians died of cholera under British rule, decimating India's economic & demographic growth in the 19th & 20th centuries. But the British blamed Cholera on India's "uncivilized" Hindu religion, temples & priests.

then quarantine measures would have been implemented, and British business interests considered such measures to be an insufferably expensive violation of the sacred principles of free trade. Instead, the British insisted that cholera was caused by the vice, torpor, and "filthy habits" of the Indian people. As we shall see below, this would not be the last time that the British elites responded to cholera deaths by blaming the victim. Overall, the epidemiological consequences of British meddling in India were atrocious; disease historian Sheldon Watts believes that as many as 25 million Indians died of cholera in the years of British imperialism, severely retarding India's demographic and economic growth in the 19th and 20th centuries.

10

In 1894, bubonic plague erupted in Hong Kong, but the British purposely ignored it to ensure their profitable opium trade from Indian ports to China was not affected. Ships from Hong Kong carrying plague infected rats were allowed into Indian ports ensuring its spread in India

04. The plague sneaked into India via Bombay port from Hong Kong as the British were *illegally dumping opium in China* by running opium-laden ships between Bombay and Hong Kong.

05. The flea-infected rodents via these *opium ships* landed in India and the first case was detected in *Mandavi, a crowded locality* near the Bombay harbor.

06. The British, money minded as they were, had kept the opium trade going and the *ports functional* despite reports of plague attack.

07. The Raj preferred the needed *silver from China* to native Indians' health; their gross negligence in the early stages of the pandemic helped the plague spread fast and wide.

11

An Indian doctor from Bombay, Dr. A.G. Viegas was the first to officially confirm a case of Bubonic Plague in India. But the British fiercely opposed him, trying to cover up the epidemic. They dismissed his correct diagnosis saying Indian doctors

were irrational & inferior.

ports' plague encounters practically disappeared.[26] The official plague diagnosis came on September 23, 1896, when Dr. A.G. Viegas, an Indian physician of Bombay City, reported that he found "a genuine case" of bubonic plague, beginning a mass epidemic that would change the future of India. [27]

Reports of the plague's presence in India spread like a wildfire. Within a day of Dr. Viegas' report, newspapers across the United Kingdom announced that "a serious outbreak of bubonic plague has occurred" in Bombay and almost 300 people already had died.[28] In Bombay, the *Bombay Gazette* argued that the disease identified as plague was not truly plague but a mild fever.[29] Medical and governmental officials in Bombay predominantly met the presence of the plague with

12

British soldiers tried to isolate Indians in forcible house searches looking for the infected, manhandling them like beasts. In railway inspections, women were stripped in public view. Mass incidents of sexual harassment, insults & abuse by British created huge resentment.

When the examination of rail passengers began in February 1897, it drew an immediately hostile response. *Gurakhi*, another Marathi paper, angrily denounced the examination of women passengers at Kalyan, a major junction on the lines linking Bombay with Pune,
north India, and Calcutta. "That a female should be publicly asked by a male stranger to remove the end of her sari [from the upper half of her body]," it protested, "is most insulting and likely to result in loss of life. "49 Passengers traveling to Calcutta via Khana Junction on the East India Railway were subjected to a similar ordeal. Forced to alight from the train, they were separated into two queuesone for men, the other for womenand made to wait until they were examined, in full public view, by a European doctor. It was only after an outcry in the press had shown the strength of Indian feeling that screens were provided and a few women doctors were found to examine female passengers. But the basic resentment remained. As Moradabad's *Nizam-ul-Mulk* put it in April 1900, "The very sight of plague doctors at the railway station curdles the blood of passengers."50 The examination of women on the streets of Pune, as much as the frequent and keenly resented house searches, fed mounting indignation in the city and helped provoke the assassination of W. C. Rand, chairman of the Plague Committee, on June 22, 1897.51

The physical manhandling of Indians as if they were "mere beasts and as such not entitled to any belief or sympathy,"52 was made all the more offensive by the use of troops, especially British troops, in Pune and Bombay to carry out house searches. This inevitably invited hostile comparisons with military conquest and occupation.53 The citizens of Pune, who with some justification felt that they had been singled out for "special treatment," saw the use of soldiers as a crude attempt to punish or intimidate a city which had become notorious for its anticolonial opposition.

13

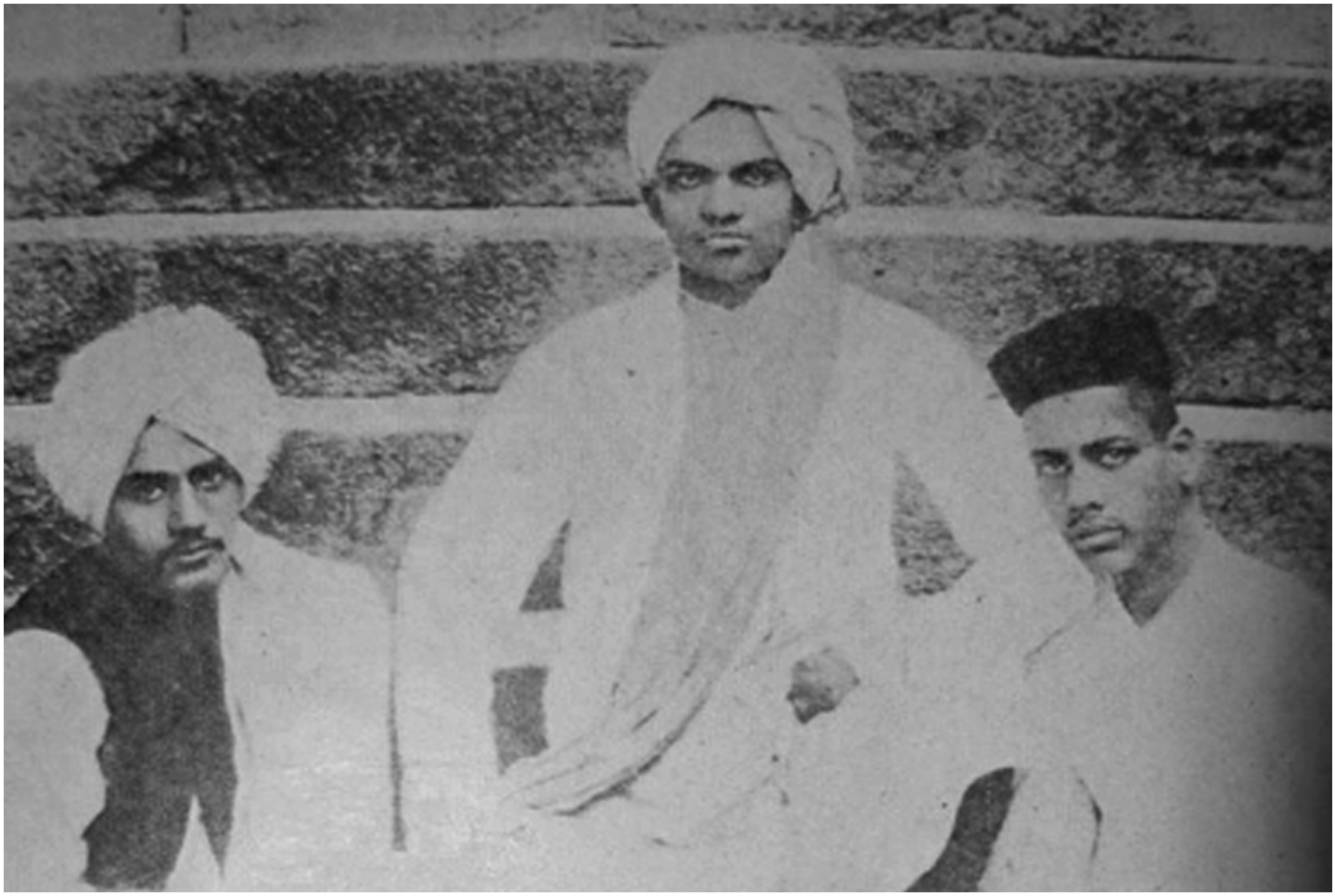
These horrific intrusive "containment" measures by the British included sexual harassment, destruction of property, defiling temples, breaking Hindu idols, & burning of Hindu books. Terrified Indians refused to go to hospitals or be inoculated out of

distrust & fear.

go to the hospital when sick.[92] Indians saw hospitals and doctors as agents of the plague, desiring to either kill or infect them by the Queen's orders.[93] While these concerns remained troublesome to British plague policy, the examination of women caused the most violence and anger among the people. Traditionally, Indian women were not touched by men outside of the household, yet male doctors primarily examined these women in public, an extreme dishonor and mistreatment in Indian culture.[94] Riots, protests, and violence ensued based on suspected detainment or abuse of Indian women. This violence culminated in the assassination of Plague Committee chairman W.C. Rand and Lieutenant Ayerst in Poona late at night on June 22, 1897.[95] As the people of India rejoiced in their declaration of noncooperation, Rand and Ayerst's murders shocked the British government as many feared that continued measures would bring even worse results and wondered if this was the start of a rebellion.[96]

14

So many atrocities compelled the Chapekar brothers in Pune to assassinate officials Rand & Ayerst to show their protest. Distrust & fear of the racist British medical system led to widespread infection, resulting in more than 16 million Indian deaths due to the Plague.



15

As Indians reeled from deadly epidemics, Britain was busy exploiting India's land for profits & export, causing terrible famines. Rotten grains from dirty warehouses infected by rats were distributed to starving Indians as "Famine Relief" spreading the Plague across all India.

warehouses, the grain inside did not contain the plague bacillus. Instead, the transported grain came into contact with rats and the rat-flea, *X. cheopis*, which "bred best in the debris of cereal gains."[73] The whole continent of India experienced a wide famine in the 1890s and the spread of relief grain, especially from ports such as Bombay, provided an avenue of dissemination for plague. Rats followed the grain and helped transport plague to the outlying villages.

The grain trade likely single-handedly increased the number of plague cases within India. The flight of thousands aided in this dissemination as clothing and bedding transported plague-carrying fleas across India. Once in a location with their proper hosts, the fleas attacked and infected the local rat population, starting a plague epizootic among the rats.[74] Both Karachi and Poona experienced a large number of rat deaths before human cases emerged. By this time, scientists and medical

16

Millions of Indians died, too weak from starvation to fight epidemics. But the British were intent on frantically expanding the railways to transport & siphon off India's food supplies. Unplanned construction wreaked havoc creating new environments for epidemics like malaria.

malnutrition might have been a factor in weakening resistance to the disease, though there is no clear medical evidence for this, and the changed patterns of diet and behavior induced by famine were probably more significant in exposing individuals to infection. Hunger led to a desperate and debilitating search for sustenance and relief, and the consumption of roots, leaves, and other surrogate foods often brought on sickness and diarrhea. The mobility of the famine-struck, their concentration in relief camps or in towns and cities, facilitated the spread of the disease, while the collapse of family or community care caused by famine and disease was not compensated by adequate measures of state medical relief.27

17

They built embankments for roads & railways, ignoring drainage patterns, causing water logging & floods that became nurseries for malaria. Britain's insatiable greed created unplanned irrigation canals further spreading malaria, despite their own scientists' warnings.

The factor of the cultivation of rice in the increase of malarial fever was acknowledged by C.A. Bentley who was the Director of Public Health in Bengal in 1925.[72] Arabinda Samanta reads Bentley's report uncritically as a condemnation of British policies of creating railways and embankments, which contributed to the lack of inundation, leading to stagnant anopheline breeding water in many parts of lower Bengal. The contribution of roads and railways to malaria in Bengal was the source of great debate in colonial India, and there was nationalist criticism of the destruction of traditional embankments and new construction sites. However,

18

Malaria became the most common killing epidemic in India. Railway travel was a cesspool of infection. Over 20 million Indians died due to Malaria, as a direct consequence of Britain's colonial greed. Empire. Again they blamed India's climate, Hinduism & people as the cause.

While the nexus between pilgrims, pilgrimage, and railway travel became central to official narratives about contagion and epidemic spread in India, railways affected its public health in other ways, too. In many accounts, it was railway construction and infrastructure (rather than travel) that was correlated with rising malaria, which Sheldon Watts describes as 'far and away India's most common killing disease,' at least in the 'eighty years before 1947.'[11] Watts recounts how, during the construction of the Great Indian Peninsular Railway in 1923–24, the correlation with malaria was reflected in the saying 'a death a [railway] sleeper.'[12] Borrow pits for embanking roads and railways became 'nurseries for mosquitoes,' while railway and road embankments, frequently 'heedless' of natural drainage patterns, generated waterlogging and flooding, thus creating breeding places for malarial mosquitoes.[13] Public accounts also

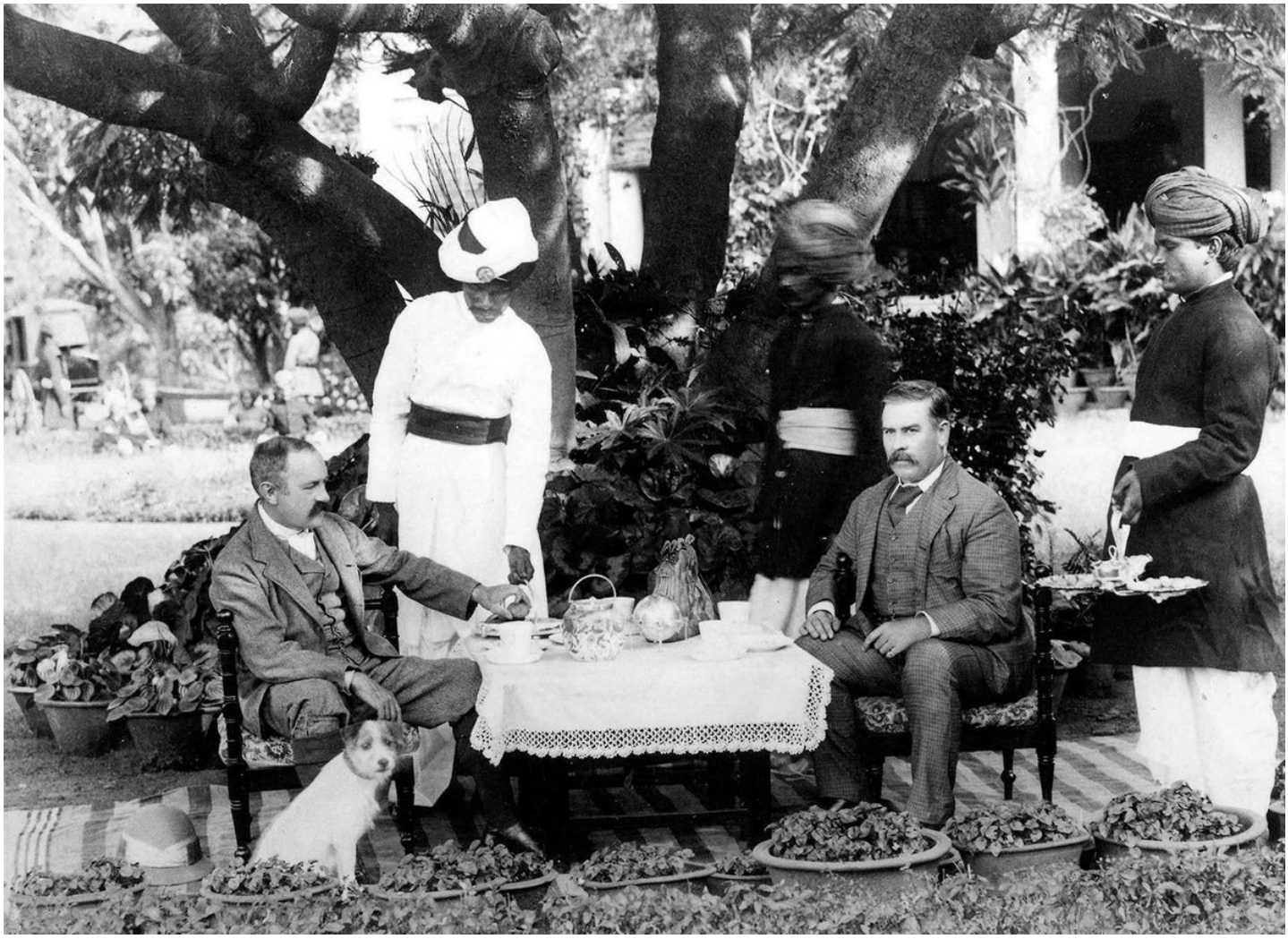
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In 1918 infected WW1 soldiers caused the Spanish Flu epidemic. Britain allowed a ship from Mesopotamia carrying infected soldiers to dock in Bombay. Soon the Influenza epidemic spread like wildfire through railways & postal system. The white Sahibs ran away to the hills.

Till 19 June, the health of the city was quite as usual. One army transport steamer came into our harbour at the end of May from Mesopotamia and entered the city on 4th of June. The Medical Officer of this steamer reported and drew the attention of the Medical Officer of Bombay harbour to the fact that some new disease has attacked the crew. It was the first duty of the Health Officer of the harbour, according to the Act on Infectious Diseases, to inform at once the Health Officer of the Bombay Municipality of this disease. This he failed to do and did not even inform the authorities till the 26th June.

20

As the British in India lived in spacious bungalows with servants, they were hardly affected. Indians living in crowded, unhygienic cities were devastated by the Flu. Smaller towns had no hospitals & Indian Vaidyas were discredited by the British, so millions died from neglect



21

By then the British had drained all of India’s food supply to feed its soldiers in WW1. Indians faced another horrifying famine even as they battled Influenza. Weak, starving Indians dropped like flies as the epidemic swept through the country leaving death & horror.

Given the extreme drought conditions of 1918 and surge in foodgrain prices, it is also quite likely that a large part of the unusually high mortality in India compared to other countries, was because of the interaction of influenza with prevailing adverse conditions that could have greatly reduced immunity (Katona and Katona 2008; Stanke et. al. 2013; Reyes et. al. 2018) or with malaria and anaemia as hypothesised for Iran (Afkhami 2003).

22

The devastating effect on Indians can be seen from statistics. More than 20 million Indians died due to influenza alone. Total deaths in World War I were less than 20 million. From 1817-1920, pandemics caused entirely by British policies, had a catastrophic impact on India

Hill (2011), using age-data analysis, also pointed out to an important finding that a large part of the loss attributed to influenza in the intercensal growth method could be due to lower fertility (in the years after influenza) rather than influenza mortality itself. Taking this into account, we consider the 30 million figure arrived in Table 6.4 as an upper-estimate and **the true figure to be upward of *20 million* for the Indian subcontinent comprising of present day India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.** This is also in line with CKW and Hill (2011) estimates for the Indian subcontinent using a scaling factor of 1.7 on their estimates for British Indian districts. And hence, similar to what Davis (1951) had originally posited. This figure represents about 6.4% of the population in India, projected for early 1918 (313 million).

23

India's fight for survival under the brutal, racist British regime reveals that their murderous lust for wealth directly caused pandemics which killed over 81 million Indians. This number does not even include another 20-30 million killed by the famines that Britain created.

**Death toll of Indians due to pandemics brought by British Empire - @MumukshuSavitri**

| Epidemic | Indians killed (in millions) | | Year | Causes |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cholera | 25 | Million | *1817-1824, 1900* | British created unplanned irrigation canals that caused salinization for multiplying Cholera bacteria and flooding which spread Cholera. They forced settlement of traveling workers in unsanitary, fixed sites for agricultural labor. |
| Bubonic Plague | 16 | Million | *1896 -1921* | Carried by British ships from Hong Kong to Indian ports, where infected rats spread the disease. Despite rapid spread, British refused to stop opium shipments to Hong King in their greed. Horrific atrocities under guise of containment measures by British led to huge distrust about hospitals and inoculation. |
| Malaria | 20 | Million | *1890-1920* | British forced construction of borrow pits for roads and railways which served as mosquito nurseries. Unplanned railways created unsanitary drainage patterns, water logging and flooding that spread malaria. Canals for rice irrigation were breeding grounds for malaria, but British refused to acknowledge it, as they provided huge profits |
| Influenza | 20 | Million | *1918-1919* | Carried by British WW1 soldiers and military cargoes to Bombay from where it spread following trade and postal routes. |
| Total | 81 | Million | | |

24

India's milestone 1 Billion Covid vaccinations is proof of its incredible resilience. We survived deadly pandemics equal to many Holocausts at racist British hands. Today we stand self-reliant in control of our own health, guided by the strength & spirit of an undying culture.



25

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