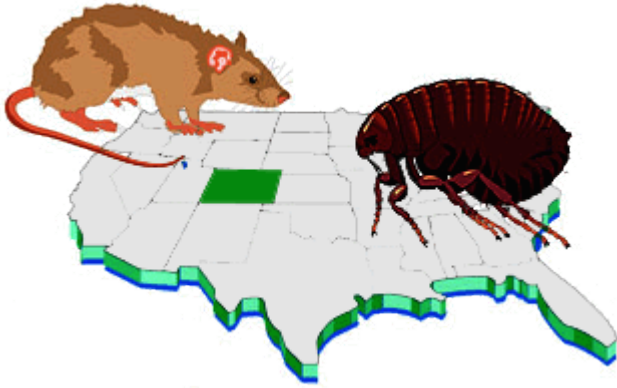


UNIT 32 – UPSC - Plague in Bombay

India's History : Modern India : Plague in Bombay : 1897

The Plague Epidemic



In September 1896 the first case of Bubonic plague was detected in Mandvi. It spread rapidly to other parts of the city, and the death toll was estimated at 1,900 people per week through the rest of the year. Many people fled from Bombay at this time, and in the census of 1901, the population had actually fallen to 780,000.

In the first year of the plague, a research laboratory was set up at the J. J. Hospital. It moved in 1899 to the Government House in Parel under the directorship of Dr. W. M. Haffkine. This was the beginning of the Haffkine Institute.

Those who could afford it, tried to avoid the plague by moving out of the city. Jamsetji Tata tried to open up the northern suburbs to accommodate such people. The brunt of the plague was borne by mill workers. The anti-plague activities of the health department involved police searches, isolation of the sick, detention in camps of travellers and forced evacuation of residents in parts of the city. These measures were widely regarded as offensive and as alarming as the rats.

In 1900, the mortality rate from plague was about 22 per thousand. In the same year, the corresponding rates from Tuberculosis were 12 per thousand, from Cholera about 14 per thousand, and about 22 per thousand from what were classified as "fevers". The plague was fearsome only because it was contagious. More mundane diseases took a larger toll.

On 9th December 1898 the Bombay City Improvement Trust was created by an act of the (British) parliament. It was entrusted with the job of creating a healthier city. One of the measures taken by the CIT was the building of roads, like Princess Street and Sydenham Road (now Mohammedali Road), which would channel the sea air into the more crowded parts of the town.