

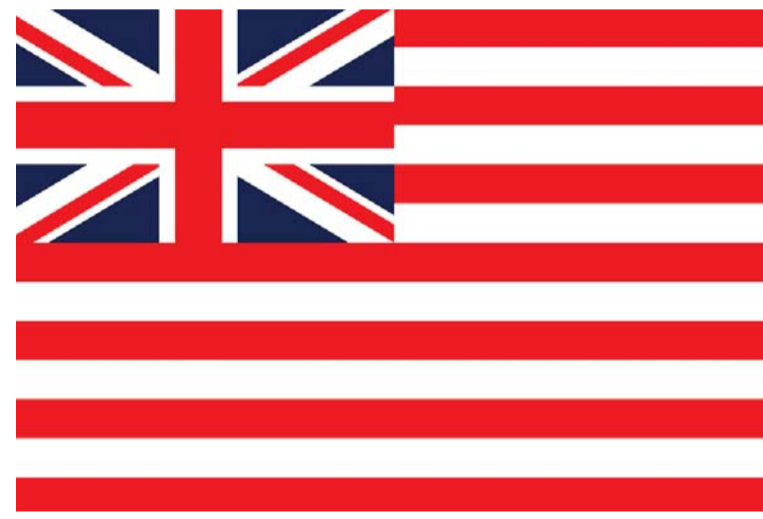
World Hemophilia Day: Raising Awareness for a Rare Bleeding Disorder

Observed annually on April 17, World Hemophilia Day aims to increase awareness about hemophilia and other inherited bleeding disorders. The day highlights the challenges faced by patients, including delayed diagnosis, limited access to treatment, and the high cost of care. Hemophilia, a genetic condition that impairs the blood's ability to clot, can lead to prolonged bleeding and serious health complications if untreated. Global health organisations and patient groups use this occasion to advocate for better healthcare policies, improved access to clotting factor therapies, and stronger community support, ensuring that those affected can lead healthier, more dignified lives.

#ENVIRONMENT

Killing Colonial Forest Policies

The Environmental Legacy of British Colonial Rule in India: A Lasting Impact on Wildlife and Ecosystems



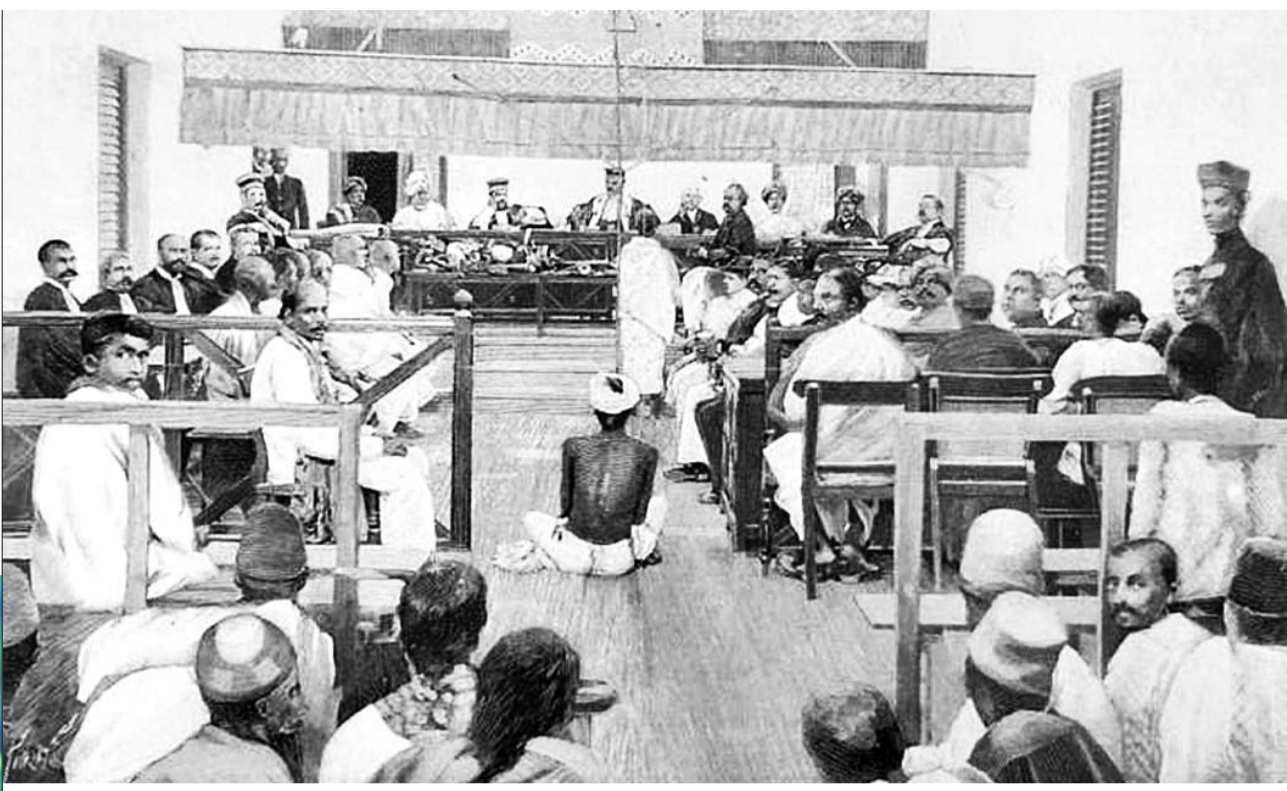
The British colonial era in India, spanning from the mid-18th century to 1947, left an indelible mark on the subcontinent's environment. While the period is often remembered for its political and economic upheavals, its ecological consequences are equally profound and enduring.

Systematic Deforestation and Habitat Loss

Under British administration, vast tracts of India's forests were cleared to meet the demands of the colonial economy. The Indian Forest Act of 1865 and its subsequent amendments, such as the Indian Forest Act of 1927, were instrumental in this process. These legislations redefined forests as state property, restricting local communities' access to resources like firewood, fodder, and timber. This not only led to widespread deforestation but also disrupted traditional livelihoods and cultural practices of indigenous communities.

Introduction of Invasive Species

In 1807, the British introduced *Lantana camara*, a thorny shrub, to India for ornamental purposes. However, this species became invasive, rapidly spreading across forests and outcompeting native vegetation. The dense thickets of *Lantana* hindered the movement of large herbivores like elephants, disrupting their feeding patterns and leading them to encroach upon human settlements, thereby escalating human-wildlife conflicts.



A photograph in a French magazine of a session of the criminal bench of the Karaikal Court in French India, in 1895. A series of ceiling punkahs are activated by the man seated on the floor.

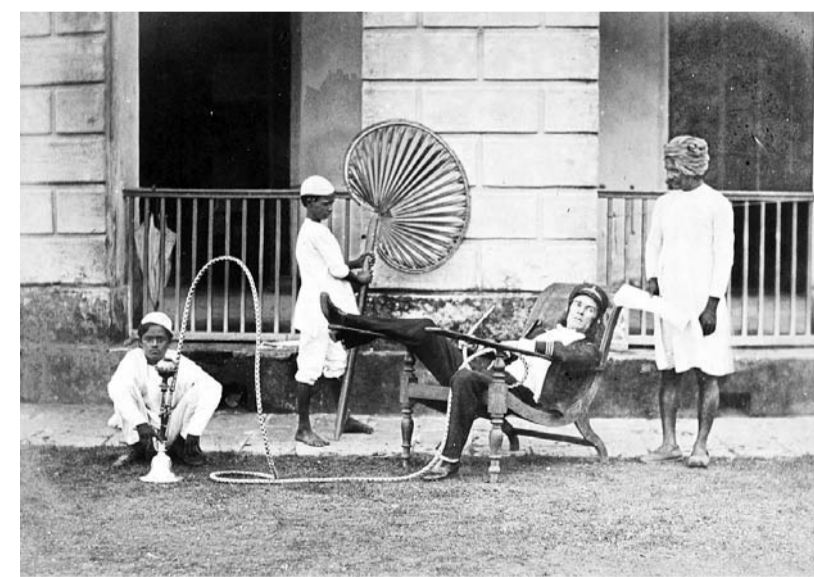


When the British first came to India, they had to adapt themselves to a lot of unfamiliar things, such as the climate, the blood-sucking mosquitoes, the spicy food, the language. But the one thing they couldn't get used to was the heat.

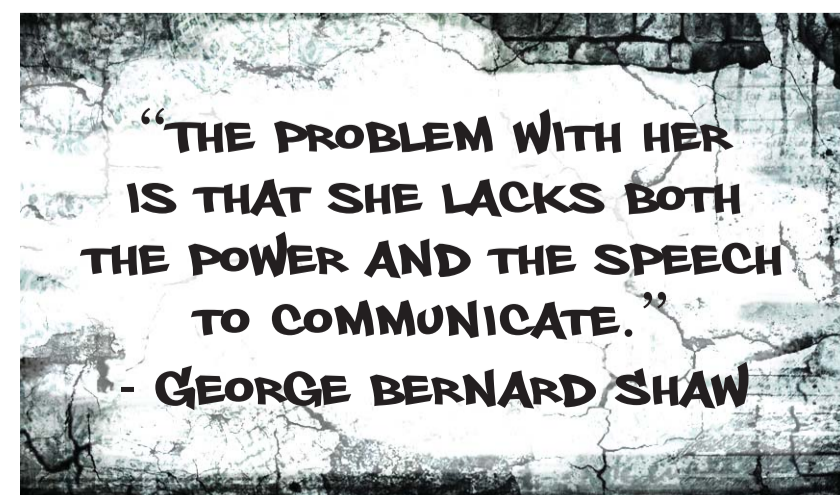
Summer in India begins from April and lasts until October. In the north and in the west, the summer arrives early. In this part of India, April and May are usually the hottest months after which the monsoon helps keep temperatures down. In eastern India and in the coastal regions, rains delay the onset of summer. But as rainfall becomes scarce, heat begins to build up, which is exacerbated by the humidity from the sea creating a very suffocating experience. The *punkah* was the life saver that made British lives at all possible in India.

Origins of the Punkah

The word *punkah* comes from the Persian word *pankha*, meaning 'fan' or 'to blow'. The device itself has a long history, dating back to at least 500 BC, when it was first used in the ancient Persian Empire. In



THE WALL



Persia (modern-day Iran), large hand-held fans made of feathers or fabric were employed to provide relief from the intense heat. These early fans were likely operated by servants or slaves, and the cooling process involved manual effort, requiring someone to wave the fan back and forth.

The British Adoption and Innovation: Fabric Panels and the Punkahwalla

As the British established themselves in India during the 18th and 19th centuries, they adopted the punkah for its practicality in combating the unbearable summer heat. The punkah's design in India became distinct from its earlier Persian counterpart. Large rectangular or square fabric panels, often made of cotton or linen, were mounted on a wooden frame, creating an efficient yet simple mechanism. These fans were typically suspended from the ceiling and attached to ropes or pulleys, which would allow a servant, called a *punkahwalla*, to pull the ropes and swing the fan back and forth, creating a breeze in the room.

The *punkahwalla* became an essential part of daily life in afflu-

ent British homes and offices in India. It was a labour-intensive job, as servants would often spend hours pulling the rope to keep the fan swinging. The presence of a punkah and a *punkahwalla* in a home became a symbol of wealth and status, as it signified that the family had the resources to employ staff to maintain such comforts.

Punkahs were a luxury found only in palatial homes and government bungalows and offices. As one British resident described, "You have a punkah over your bed, another over your bath-tub, another at your dressing-bureau, another over your dining-table, and another above your desk. Your body servant calls out to your punkah-wallah and has him shift from one cord to another as you move about your room, or go from one room to another. You have the punkah in motion all day and all night somewhere, and for this purpose, you must have two men to relieve each other. When you go to bed... you are fanned to sleep."

The Punkah in the Colonies: A Cooling Revolution

The punkah wasn't confined to just British homes in India; it became a common feature in public buildings, government offices, and even hospitals and barracks across British colonies. The cooling device played a crucial role in ensuring that colonial administrators, soldiers, and others working in tropical climates could tolerate the heat during the long, oppressive summers.

By the early 19th century, the punkah had spread beyond India and found its way to other parts of the British Empire, particularly in the colonies of the Caribbean, Africa, and Southeast Asia. In these regions, the punkah was used not only by the British colonial elite but also by local populations who had come to appreciate the cooling benefits it provided. In many cases, the fan was adapted for larger spaces, like public buildings or military barracks, and it became a familiar feature of life in the colonies.

In 1819, a significant innovation

BABY BLUES

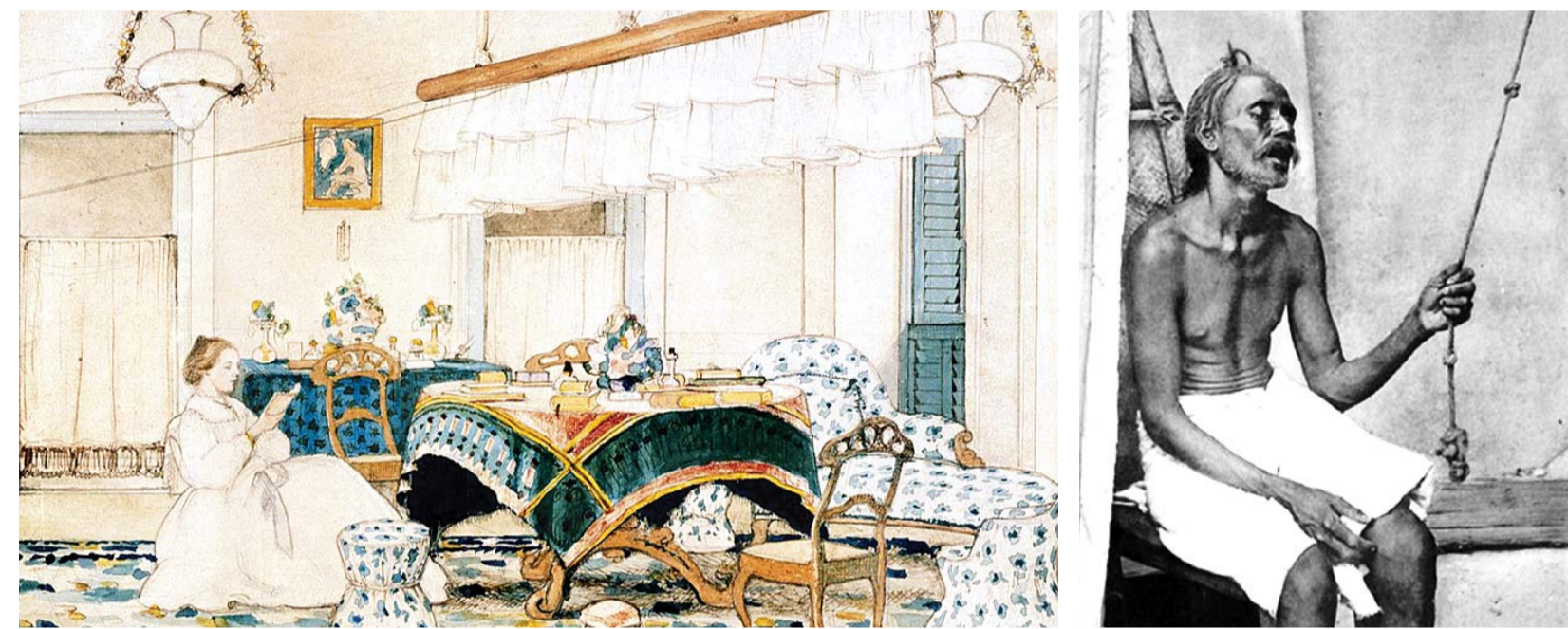


Sweating Locals For A Colonial Comfort

PART I

Two important developments between the late-eighteenth and the mid-nineteenth century might have had particular influence in the promotion of the punkah from an item of comfort and luxury to an instrument of absolute necessity. The first of these was a possibly newly formed medical understanding since early nineteenth century concerning the European's susceptibility to the 'tropical' climate of India, that in some of its more pointed articulations, cast the punkah and similar devices as a critical factor in avoiding mortality. "Whoever cannot provide himself with these artificial cooling appliances," commented a climatological treatise, "...languish and gasp for air... Little by little, the European loses appetite and sleep... all power and energy forsake him."

#THE PUNKAH



took place in the princely state of Awadh (modern-day Uttar Pradesh, India). A steam-powered punkah was introduced, which eliminated the need for manual labour. This mechanical version was the precursor to the electric fans that would come later, and it marked a shift towards more automated cooling systems.

The Exploitation of the Punkahwalla

While the punkah provided a much-needed solution for dealing with the heat, it also became a symbol of the exploitation of colonial labour. The *punkahwalla*, often a low-ranking servant, was tasked with the physically demanding and monotonous work of operating the fan. This job, while essential for the comfort of the colonial elite, was poorly compensated,

and many *punkahwallas* worked long hours in hot, humid conditions with little regard for their well-being.

The *punkah-wallah* functioned as a "human machine," often working day and night in 12-hour shifts. They were frequently subjected to harsh, even fatal, punishment by British officers for falling asleep, notes in some accounts indicate that employers sometimes tied the puller's hair to the rope to keep them awake.

Punkah-wallahs were paid very low wages, with reports indicating they often received only a few annas per day/night. In military barracks, the hiring was handled by 'Thekedars' (contractors), who brought workers from villages, often exploiting them fur-

ther by taking a percentage of their earnings.

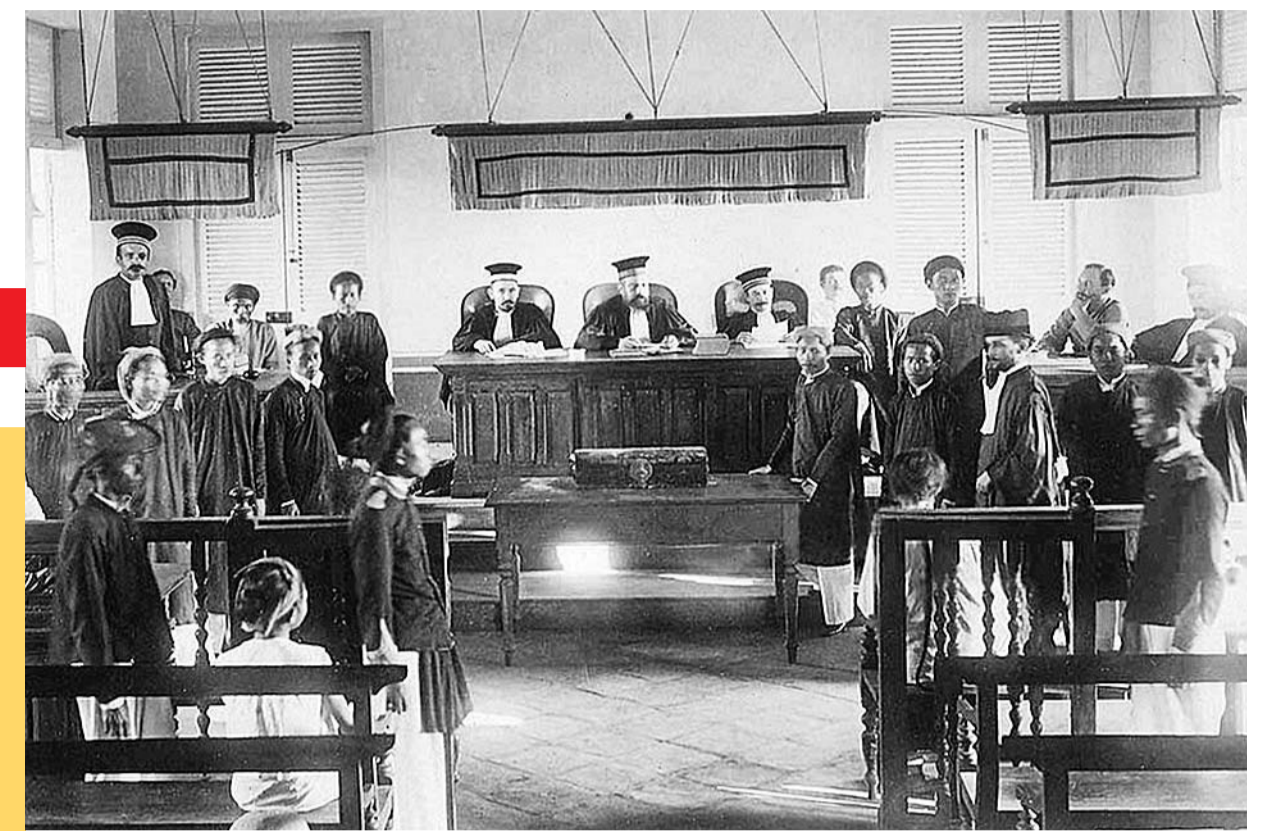
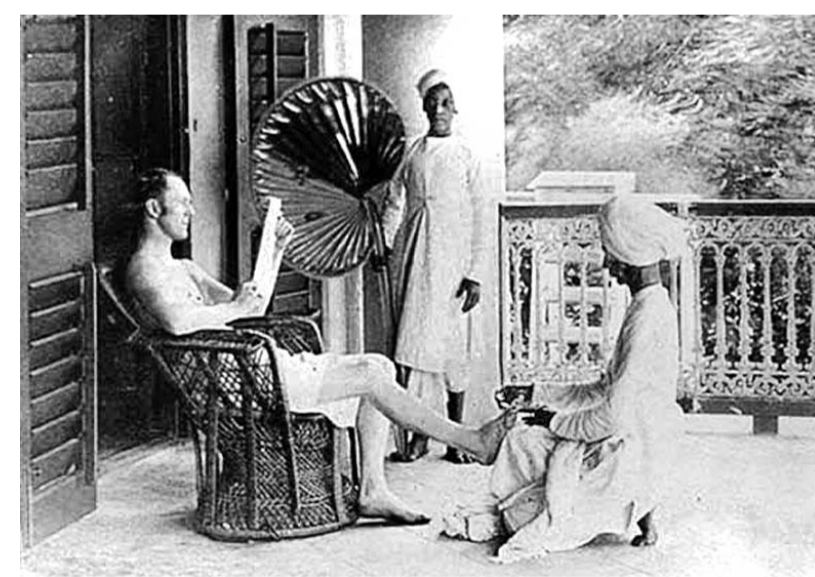
The punkah and its pullers

The traveler Peter Mundy noted the presence of 'the great artificial fan of linen which hangs down from aloft' at Shah Jahan's court in Agra where he was visiting in 1632. The Hobson-Jobson guide described an even longer lineage of the punkah, stretching back to the Arab world of the 8th century.

In the process, it discounted the apocryphal account becoming popular towards the end of the nineteenth century, that the origin of the punkah lay in an East-India Company officer's ingenious plan of hanging a table-top from the ceiling and getting his native attendant to 'swing' it above his head by tugging

at it with an attached string. Yet, it is still quite difficult to deny that colonial settlers in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century India seemed to have reinvented the use of the device on the most exaggerated scale against those mighty foes, the scorching sun and the suffocating humidity of tropical India.

There was comfort in the punkah, the kind that Justice Hyde did not have as he left the courtroom several times to change his shirt, soaking wet with perspiration, during Nanda Kumar's infamous trial in 1775. Settler Europeans' use of the punkah and its pullers, along with numerous other domestic servants, also connoted distinctive elements of 'status' and 'luxury' to metropolitan visitors. Similar distinctions, of



Punkahs were used all over South-east Asia. This photograph shows a Vietnamese court with a ceiling punkah.



course, also applied to the use of the ornate hand-held fans, which the French *voyager de Grandpre* noticed were being used individually for every attendee at the dinner table of his hosts in Calcutta.

But by 1789, when he was recording these notes, these fans had already acquired their younger, and more mechanical cousin, who eventually usurped their name in future glossaries with a pride of false precedence. By 1848, one such glossary described the hand-held fan to be 'more of an ornament,' while the 'swing punkah' had apparently become an 'indispensable' fixture in 'all principal apartments' of European homes. 'The swing punkah definitely had the advantage of scale, it could fan over large or congregations and spaces and thus could be used in both private and public settings (like churches).

But still, not every European was necessarily very keen about it. Colesworthy Grant (1810-1880) maintained a difference between the way one 'may enjoy it as a relief' and the way others demand it 'as a necessity, and are unable to stir from under the punkah for an instant but in the greatest discomfort.'

Two important developments between the late-eighteenth and the mid-nineteenth century might have had particular influence in the promotion of the punkah from an item of comfort and luxury to an instrument of absolute necessity. The first of these was a possibly newly formed medical understanding since early nineteenth century concerning the European's susceptibility to the 'tropical' climate of India, that in some of its more pointed articulations, cast the punkah and similar devices as a critical factor in avoiding mortality. "Whoever cannot provide himself with these artificial cooling appliances," commented a climatological treatise, "...languish and gasp for air... Little by little, the European loses appetite and sleep... all power and energy forsake him."

Exemplary of this new sense of alienation from the Indian climate



migrants were notorious for their colonized character and their collective capacity to astutely bargain the conditions of their lives and livelihood.

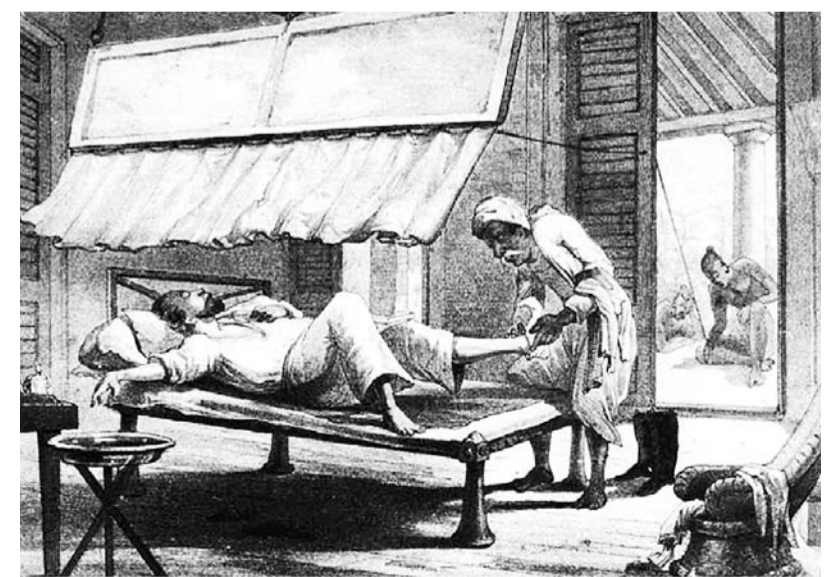
In the domain of public transport, the Company state found it difficult to control their erratic hiring rates as well as their untimely unavailability during pilgrimage seasons. When working in private capacity as servants or palki carriers, Oriya workers, as Balthazar Solvyns noted, frequently quoted religious rules set by their chiefs in order to refuse services like lighting a tallow candle or handing a glass of water. This reluctance to conduct certain kinds of tasks in European homes extended for some time to the new requirement of punkah-pulling.

In the early nineteenth century, an observation recurs in colonial accounts about these Oriya servants, but also at times about other, possibly Muslim attendants, refusing to pull the punkah over a table serving beef or pork. In many ways then, there existed an obvious gap between a Johnson-like fantasy of tireless menial labour compensating for the heat-induced exhaustion of 'the tropics' and the realisation of this fantasy in terms of native servants systematically subjecting themselves to the gradually multiplying demands that the punkah made on their labouring time.

If this gap was eventually tided over, this had to do with a sustained campaign of the Company state towards regulating the service labour population of early-colonial Calcutta, and particularly, the 'Balasore bearers'. These Oriya migrants were policed, threatened, and subjected to strict regimes of clothing and hiring-rate control. The social and financial principles of their collective existence were ruthlessly attacked.

To be continued...

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ZITS



By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman