

Epidemic Malaria, Semi-Arid Tropics and ‘Colonial Development’: The Cases of North and East India, 1871-1920

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This paper suggests that epidemic malaria was an especially important factor in the low population growth regime from the early 1870s to the late 1910s. In addition, studying epidemic malaria will improve our understanding of the impact of colonial development on population change and the well-being of the people. Epidemic malaria was a notorious killer in Punjab and the western United Provinces, but in fact it was a danger well beyond this region. Epidemic malaria was also widespread in Bengal in the second half of 19th century, where it was generally called the ‘Burdwan Fever’. It was also prevalent in tea plantation areas, such as the Duars in North Bengal. We will take up both the cases of North India and the cases of East India. This paper relies heavily on historic studies by British malariologists during the first half of 20th century. In addition, it surveys other previous studies, synthesizes them and assesses the role of epidemic malaria in the demographic and disease history. In this paper, we try to apply GIS methods to the cases of Bengal by using primary data to verify their hypotheses. We will also clarify ecological conditions which intensified the human damage of epidemics in India. We will particularly focus on climatic conditions, that is to say, high temperature and semi-aridity. These conditions led to very serious types of epidemic malaria.