

The Rat Race: A documentary exposing the inadequate state response to vermin and disease in Mumbai

The Rat Race is a 2010 documentary examining the life of a team of night rat catchers working in a government department in Mumbai, India.



To this documentaries credit it makes serious steps in covering the entirety of the rat catchers existence. It shows their struggles as the students among them try to both work and meet the requirements of their course of study, as they battle to fulfill nightly quotas, their frustration in working conditions as they are displeased with rampant casualisation and the pay cuts, the mundane work, the religious sensibilities of the Hindu population who abhor the killing of animals, their giving up their passions to properly fulfill the requirements of this role, and the suspicions of the wider

community as they work at night. It shows the cycle of their working life through the hiring of new recruits and the retirement of another after thirty-seven years on the job.

The men are poorly equipped, going out every night to hunt the rats armed only with a torch, a piece of wire and a stick. They stun the rats by blinding them with their torch before bludgeoning them, they also use traps and poison to a lesser extent, their department is woefully underfunded so they use very primitive means of vermin control. After the Rats have been killed and counted, two-hundred are selected at random to be tested to determine if they have any traces of plague.

The killing of rats is a control implement following a plague in Surat, Gujarat in September 1994. Like the Black Death in Europe it was spread by fleas from rats, it was found in both the pneumonic and bubonic form. The state's response was woefully inadequate with with no official proper instructions for containment, pandamonium broke out as people fled the epicentre of the outbreak with an estimated half a million internally displaced people. Medicines ran out through panic buying. Through a coordinated international response the plague was eventually contained by mass applications of pesticides and antibiotics. Fifty-three people lost their life in that instance.

The City of Mumbai has only forty-four rat catchers, they do not have the manpower or the proper equipment to do their job properly. The vastly overcrowded conditions without proper sanitation in the shanty towns and slums of Mumbai are conducive to the growth of rat populations and epidemics. Despite the best efforts of the rat catchers under arduous conditions rat populations continue to rise along with Leptospirosis and other associated diseases. There is an estimated 88 million rats in Mumbai, so rather than small scale eradication the key to overcoming the problem of vermin in Mumbai would be to eliminate squalor and massively improve living conditions.

The documentary is admirable for paying much attention to life and times of ordinary people in Mumbai. A major weakness was that it doesn't give enough time to explain the history of the outbreak of disease throughout India, nor does it spend much time discussing the poor sanitation that is the ultimate cause for the spread of vermin and disease in Mumbai. The film is an exposure of a pathetic vermin control program that borders on a joke.

According to a recent [report](#) by the Stockholm international Peace Research Institute, India just moved from 6th to 5th place for the greatest military spending annually, with a 5.5% increase from 2016 -17 to \$63.9 billion. The report states "The Indian Government plans to expand, modernize and enhance the operational capability of its armed forces motivated, at least partially, by tensions with China and Pakistan." While the ruling class waste a tremendous amount of money preparing for war, the working class is forced to live in poverty and squalor. The old maxim runs true; imperialist war abroad is always accompanied by the imposition of austerity measures at home. The ruling class give a blank cheque for the military, yet there are no funds for rodent control, sanitation and other essential social programs. This social crime must not be allowed to continue, the capitalist economic system that gives rise to such transgressions against humanity must be abolished.

Further reading

World Socialist Web Site, [Global military spending at record \\$1.7 trillion](#)

