



Inoculation Time (or how a policy has worked)

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Bombay c. 1959:

Wretched needle, attached to syringe full of benign bacteria, called vaccine. Aimed at my thigh, a sign of pain to come. I shriek and kick and cry. Nurses, father, mother, doctor try to convince a loudly protesting me it will be fine.

Mumbai c. 1979:

The busy senior consultant has panic on her face. Ward rounds, MR meetings, OPDs; in running the rat-race she'd forgotten about her daughter's prophylactic dates. For years. Now, until her 11-year-old's high fever abates she can't be sure whether it's polio, measles or a minor viral case.

Navi Mumbai c. 1999:

It's absurd. The Casualty nurse has pricked the little mite. A small 'enh-hney' escapes the babe when she re-swabs the site. The little creature squirms a bit and goes back to sleep. The mother, swathing it in a shawl, is tearful. She will keep the memory of that painful moment until tonight.

Anywhere in Urban India c. 2009:

The five-star lobby is filled with still-in-love young couples. Festoons on ceiling, toys on floor, an aquarium with bubbles blown by plastic fish. Nurses' uniforms have flowers. The little patients are entertained, given tiny golden stars for not throwing tantrums over 'needle'ss troubles.

Circa almost 2020:

In the village where I live, the 'sui' is now a rite. Posters remind parents and schools of polio-Sundays. Even the illiterates, I find, are aware of the compulsory 'teeka'; though the black dot, the red thread, are still believed in, and even sought, yet, in their scheduled visits to the PHC, they don't lag behind.