
Partition of India

Postcolonial Legacies

Edited by Amit Ranjan

1950 riots and fractured social spaces

Minority displacement and dispossession in Calcutta and its neighbouring areas¹

Subhasri Ghosh

In the annals of 1947 Partition historiography, communal riots occupy a pivotal position. On the Bengal side, the corpus of works (Pravas Chandra Lahiri, *Pak Bharater Ruprekha*; Tathagata Roy, *My People, Uprooted: A Saga of Hindus of Eastern Bengal*; Prafulla K. Chakrabarti, *The Marginal Men: The Refugees and Left Political Syndrome in West Bengal*; Dinesh Chandra Sinha, *1950: Raktaranjito Dhaka, Barisal Ebong*; Sandip Bandyopadhyay, *Itihaasher Dikey Firey: Chhechollisher Danga*) essentially focuses on how the mayhem triggered by the 1946 Great Calcutta Killing spurred a whole train of communal frenzy in eastern India prior to independence and how the ‘riots, which preceded partition gradually petered out after the Proclamation of Independence.’² As Suranjan Das contends, ‘While other regions of India continued to be struck by periodic bouts of Hindu-Muslim violence, West Bengal remained relatively free of the communal virus.’³ However, such statements deny the historical truth.

To negate such argument, this chapter attempts to explore a somewhat ‘sporadic localised’ riots in Calcutta and its twin city across the river – Howrah – in February–March 1950. The aim is not only to show that West Bengal was not ‘free of the communal virus’ but also to analyse what sparked the riots and their hidden implications. In comparison to tomes of literature on the Hindu migrants thronging eastern India, scholarly work on the plight of the Muslim minorities is surprisingly thin. It is left to the erudition of scholars like Joya Chatterji⁴, Sekhar Bandyopadhyay⁵ and Anwesha Sengupta⁶, who have highlighted the predilection of the Muslims in the newly independent and newly carved out state of West Bengal. Belonging to the same genre, this study throws light on the

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