

Making Peace, Making Riots

The decade of the 1940s was a turbulent one for Bengal. War, famine, riots and partition – Bengal witnessed it all, and the unique experience of each of these created a space for diverse social and political forces to thrive and impact lives of people of the province. The book embarks on a study of the last seven years of colonial rule in Bengal, analysing the interplay of socioeconomic and political factors that shaped community identities into communal ones. The focus is on three major communal riots that the province witnessed – the Dacca Riots (1941), the Great Calcutta Killing (August 1946) and the Noakhali Riots (October 1946).

However, the study does not limit itself to an understanding of communal violence alone; it also studies anti-communal resistance, especially the Gandhian model of peace-keeping to enable a complete understanding of a communal riot. It analyzes the Bengal famine, tracing the nature of breakdown of Bengali society, and their dependence on relief and rehabilitation – which came thickly coated in communal colours and transformed community perceptions into communal identities. These events were closely tied with the politics around the Secondary Education Bill and the transformation of the Muslim League from an arm-chair organization to a more popular party demanding Pakistan, with a distinct socialist colouring and a support base not just among Muslims but also some sections among the Scheduled Castes.

This book moves beyond the binary understanding of communalism as Hindu versus Muslim and looks at the caste politics in the province, and offers a thorough understanding of the 1940s before partition.

Anwesha Roy is Marie Curie Post-Doctoral Research Fellow in Gandhian Politics at the Department of History, King's College London. She completed her PhD from Jawaharlal Nehru University and was a Charles Wallace Scholar to Britain in the year 2014.

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Communalism and Communal Violence, Bengal 1940–1947

Anwesha Roy



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For Ashavari

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Abbreviations

AICC	All India Congress Committee
AIML	All India Muslim League
AIWC	All India Women’s Conference
BPCC	Bengal Provincial Congress Committee
CWMG	Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi
DIB	District Intelligence Branch
FIC	Famine Inquiry Commission
GOB	Government of Bengal
IB	Intelligence Branch
MARS	Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti
NAI	National Archives of India
NMML	Nehru Memorial Museum and Library
SB	Special Branch
SC	Scheduled Castes
SDO	Sub-Divisional Officer
WBSA	West Bengal State Archives

Glossary

<i>Abala</i>	helpless woman
<i>Abwab</i>	finest or cesses levied by the landlord upon the peasants.
<i>Ahimsa</i>	non-violence
<i>Akhara</i>	gymnasium/ a place for wrestling
<i>Andolan</i>	a movement/ struggle
<i>Atar</i>	also called itar, is a sweet smelling oil or perfume
<i>Bhadralok</i>	a social class among Bengalis, generally comprising of prosperous, well-educated people.
<i>Bhog</i>	food offerings to Hindu deities
<i>Bhookh Michil</i>	Hunger March
<i>Brahmacharya</i>	celibacy
<i>Bustee</i>	slum
<i>Chadar</i>	cloth
<i>Chheni</i>	Chisel
<i>Dal-bhaat</i>	lentil curry and rice, a staple diet among Bengalis
<i>Darshan</i>	the auspicious act of seeing a holy person or a deity
<i>Ejabar</i>	Complaint
<i>Ghar Wapasi</i>	Homecoming; usually refers to the ‘re-conversion’ to Hinduism, of ‘lower’ castes, who had earlier been converted to Christianity or Islam.
<i>Ghat</i>	a flight of steps leading down to the river, often a place where Hindu cremation ceremonies take place.
<i>Goalas</i>	Milkmen
<i>Godown</i>	a warehouse
<i>Goonda</i>	a thug or a bully
<i>Gulail</i>	catapult
<i>Hartal</i>	closure of shops and offices as a sign of protest.
<i>Hat</i>	a local, rural market
<i>Janmashtami</i>	Hindu festival celebrating the birth of the God Krishna
<i>Jauhar</i>	Hindu practice of mass self-immolation by women to avoid capture/rape by invaders, usually after defeat in a war

xvi	<i>Glossary</i>
<i>Jumma</i>	Friday Prayer of Muslims
<i>Kalma</i>	the Muslim confession of Faith
<i>Kalwars</i>	artisans working with scrap metals
<i>Kasai</i>	butcher
<i>Khals</i>	small water bodies
<i>Khichuri</i>	also called Khichdi, is a dish made in South Asia by boiling together lentils and rice.
<i>Kripa</i>	grace or mercy
<i>Krishak</i>	farmer
<i>Lathi</i>	a long and strong stick
<i>Lungi</i>	a loose garment wrapped around the waist, extending to the ankles, usually worn by males in South Asia.
<i>Madad-i-maash</i>	Tax free lands given by Mughal Emperors as charity to pious/religious/worthy recipients.
<i>Malechbha</i>	or Mlechha, is a derogatory term for one who does not practice Hinduism.
<i>Mochi</i>	shoe-maker
<i>Mofussil</i>	countryside
<i>Mohalla</i>	neighbourhood
<i>Mussalman</i>	Muslim
<i>Namaskar</i>	a form of respectful greeting among Hindus
<i>Namaz</i>	Islamic prayer to be observed five times a day
<i>Patha</i>	male goat
<i>Phen</i>	starchy water that is drained out after the rice has been boiled.
<i>Pir</i>	a Muslim holy man
<i>Prarthana</i>	prayer
<i>Purdah</i>	Veil
<i>Ram-dhun</i>	Singing the name of Ram
<i>Ramzan</i>	the ninth month of the Islamic calendar and observed by Muslims across the world, celebrating the revelation of the Holy Quran to Prophet Mohammad.
<i>Rathajatra</i>	a Hindu festival, signified by the symbolic pulling of the <i>ratha</i> or chariot of the God Jagannath.
<i>Sadhana</i>	disciplined practice
<i>Salam</i>	salutation, usually also a form of greeting among Muslims
<i>Sangathan</i>	unity
<i>Sankharis</i>	Conch-shell workers in rural Bengal.
<i>Shiva Ratri</i>	a Hindu festival celebrated annually in honour of the God Shiva
<i>Shuddhi</i>	purification
<i>Teata</i>	Multi-mouthed Lance
<i>Thana</i>	a police station, often refers also to the area that comes under the jurisdiction of a particular police station.