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Joya Chatterji
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The Spoils of Partition

The partition of India in 1947 was a seminal event of the twentieth century. Much has been written about the Punjab and the creation of West Pakistan; by contrast, little is known about the partition of Bengal. This remarkable book by an acknowledged expert on the subject assesses partition's huge social, economic and political consequences. Using previously unexplored sources, the book shows how and why the borders were redrawn, as well as how the creation of new nation states led to unprecedented upheavals, massive shifts in population and wholly unexpected transformations of the political landscape in both Bengal and India. The book also reveals how the spoils of partition, which the Congress in Bengal had expected from the new boundaries, were squandered over the twenty years which followed. This is an original and challenging work with findings that change our understanding of partition and its consequences for the history of the sub-continent.

JOYA CHATTERJI, until recently Reader in International History at the London School of Economics, is Lecturer in the History of Modern South Asia at Cambridge, Fellow of Trinity College, and Visiting Fellow at the LSE. She is the author of *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition* (1994).

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The Spoils of Partition

Bengal and India, 1947–1967

Joya Chatterji
University of Cambridge

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Abbreviations

AICC	All-India Congress Committee
AIHM	All-India Hindu Mahasabha
BPHM	Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha
CPI	Communist Party of India
CPI(M)	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
FB	Forward Bloc
FBM	Forward Bloc (Marxist)
FBR	Forward Bloc (Ruikar)
FRBI	Fortnightly Reports of Border Incidents in West Bengal
GB IB	Government of Bengal Intelligence Branch
GB SB	Government of Bengal Special Branch
KMPP	Krishak Majdoor Praja Party
MLA	member of Legislative Assembly
NAI	National Archives of India
NMML	Nehru Memorial Museum and Library
NVBKP	Nikhil Vanga Bastuhara Karma Parishad
PSP	Praja Socialist Party
RCPI	Revolutionary Communist Party of India
RSP	Revolutionary Socialist Party
SFR	Secret Fortnightly Report
SPM	Syama Prasad Mookerjee
SUC	Socialist Unity Centre
UCRC	United Central Refugee Council
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
WBMHA	West Bengal Ministry of Home Affairs
WBPCC	West Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee
WCR	Weekly Confidential Report
WPI	Workers' Party of India

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Glossary

adhiar	sharecropper
adivasi	original (tribal) inhabitant
anjuman	association (Muslim)
antahpur	inner chambers of the household
atmiya	one's own, related by blood
atmiya-swajan	kinsfolk
babu	traditional (Hindu) title of respect; Anglo-Indian term (pejorative) for western-educated Hindus
bangaal	native of eastern Bengal (pejorative: unsophisticated rustic)
bastuhara	refugee
benami	nominal transfer (of property) in another person's name
bhadralok	gentlefolk
bustee	tenement, slum
char	sandbank
crore	ten million
dada	lit. elder brother; leader of party, faction or gang
desh	nation, province, native place, village
dewan	finance minister or financial steward
dooars	lit. gateway; foothills of the Himalayas
gherao	lit. to surround; to gather round threateningly and hold captive
ghoti	native of western Bengal
go-korbani	cow-sacrifice
goonda	ruffian, thug
jamaat	(Muslim religious) association
jhi	maidservant
kisan sabha	peasant association
lakh	hundred thousand
lascar	sailor, naval soldier

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lathi	bamboo stave
lungi	long loincloth
maidan	field, park
mastaan	a rowdy, gang-leader or boss of a locality
maund	82.28 pounds (or 40 *seers*)
mofussil	district, countryside
mohalla	neighbourhood
muhajir	lit. pilgrim; Muslim refugees in Pakistan
nawab	a (Muslim) prince or viceroy
pargana	administrative unit, revenue district
pice	1⁄64th of the old rupee
pie	1⁄192nd of the old rupee
samaj	society
sangathan	unity, consolidation
sardar	boss, gangleader, foreman
satyagraha	lit. truth-force; campaign led by Gandhi
sharki	arrow
shiksha	knowledge
shuddhi	ritual purification (Hindu)
tebhaga	in three parts
thana	police station or criminal district
zamindari	landholding on which revenue is payable, large estate
zulum	oppression

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Preface and acknowledgements

This book investigates the partition of India and in particular of Bengal: the rationale behind it, as well as its consequences. This has required a perspective which is sensitive to the continuities and changes in the sub-continent since 1947. In consequence, the book's approach has been deliberately and necessarily historical, and as far as possible the analysis has been grounded in primary sources.

In its turn, this approach has determined the scope of the analysis, both geographical and temporal. Sadly, in 1947 the archives and academies of India also were divided between the two successor states, and since that time scholars on one side have faced great obstacles in gaining access to sources on the other. Moreover, many key documents of the government of East Bengal were destroyed in the civil war of 1971, which has made comparing developments in India and Pakistan even more difficult. Hence the focus of the analysis has been on the Indian side of the border. The study ends in 1967, in part a consequence of the difficulties of gaining access to primary materials, whether public or private, for the period after that date. But there are other reasons why the book ends in 1967. Events in both West Bengal and India took a dramatically different turn in the late 1960s and early 1970s, so there is a logic, both for the narrative and for the analysis, to concluding the account with the elections of 1967. These limitations notwithstanding, the work will, I hope, demonstrate the advantages of bringing a historical perspective to bear upon our understanding of the Great Divide and of India after independence.

The focus of the work is on West Bengal and on India, but it has, I believe, a relevance beyond South Asia. It suggests comparisons with other new polities produced by the great partitions of the twentieth century, whether in Europe, Asia or Africa, and with other mass migrations brought about by partitions. The overall purpose has been to make the work accessible to readers who are not specialists in the study of South Asia, and this has influenced the conventions I have adopted in regard to translation and transliteration. Place names are spelt in the way

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they were at the time or are most familiarly known – hence 'Calcutta', not 'Kolkata', and 'Midnapore', not 'Medinipur'. The names of individuals are given as they themselves chose to spell them and are recorded in library catalogues – hence 'Syama Prasad Mookerjee' rather than 'Shyama Prasad Mukherji'. Translations from the Bengali are my own (unless specifically stated as being the translations of others); I have tried to give the 'sense' rather than being slavishly literal. Transliteration of Bengali words looks to Sanskrit roots rather than phonetic pronunciations; hence I use 'bhadralok', not 'bhodrolok', and 'samaj' rather than 'shomaj'.

Straddling as it does a period of change and upheaval, the book has had to take a view on how to deal with entities and terminology which changed during the period, and again the approach has aimed at ease of understanding. After India adopted its constitution in 1950, 'premiers' in the provinces were known as 'chief ministers', and the 'provinces' were known as 'states': I have always plumped for the most appropriate and intelligible word given the context. The terms 'western Bengal' and 'eastern Bengal' refer to geographical regions of the undivided province; 'West Bengal' and 'East Bengal' describe the new political units after 1947. After 1956, 'East Bengal' came to be known as 'East Pakistan', but I have stuck with 'East Bengal' so as not to confuse the reader.

This book has taken an unconscionable time to produce. The research which underpins it began long ago, and it has been written in fits and starts while many other things have made calls upon my attention. I have incurred many debts along the way, and it is a great pleasure to be able at last to acknowledge them. I began this research while still a Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, and am grateful to the Masters and Fellows for their generous support. Thereafter, fellowships at the Hinduja Contemporary Politics Project at the Centre of South Asian Studies, Cambridge (1995–8), Wolfson College, Cambridge (1997–2000), and at the MacArthur Foundation and the Malaysian Commonwealth Studies Centre (1999–2000) provided financial or institutional support for the research. Since 2000, the Department of International History at the London School of Economics has helped with research costs and with a vital term of sabbatical leave: I am grateful to my colleagues at the LSE for their assistance and their interest in this work.

Between 1995 and 2000, a quartet of able research assistants gave me invaluable help. I am indebted to Amrita Banerjee, Manjira Datta, Rakhi Mathur and Sharmistha Gooptu for their efficient and timely assistance in gathering some of the material on which this study is based.

A historian's debt to archives and libraries is a particular pleasure to acknowledge. My thanks are due to the National Archives of India and

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the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library in New Delhi. In Calcutta, staff at the West Bengal State Archives, the archives of the Communist Party of India (the Bhabani Sen Granthagar o Gabesana Kendra), the archives of the Special Branch and the Intelligence Branch of the Police, and the National Library were extremely helpful. In Cambridge, I record my appreciation of the staff at the University Library, the Centre for South Asian Studies and the library of the Faculty of Oriental Studies; and in London at the British Library for Political and Economic Science, and at the India Office collection at the British Library.

In Calcutta, Surjya Sankar Roy gave me access to the private papers in his personal collection; I am grateful to Sri Roy and his family for their kindness. Partha Bhattacharya facilitated my access to the police archives on which this study heavily depends: warm thanks to him and his efficient colleagues at Lord Sinha Road. Several friends and colleagues – Iftekhar Iqbal, Meghna Guha Thakurta, Sekhar Bandyopadhyaya, Ranabir Samaddar, Tetsuya Nakatani, Uditi Sen and Willem van Schendel – have shown me unpublished work on related subjects: I am grateful for their generosity in this regard. Others have led me to published work and sources relevant to the book: I thank Ananya Kabir, David Feldman, Joan Pau Rubies, John Lonsdale, Mushirul Hasan, Ornit Shani, Tim Hochstrasser and Sumantra Bose for their advice.

The arguments of the book have been rehearsed at conferences and seminars too numerous to list, but I express my gratitude to all those whose comments and criticisms have helped to sharpen the focus of this work. Early versions of parts of chapters 1, 3 and 4 have been published as articles; I have benefited from the comments of the editors of the volumes in which they appeared. Samita Sen, MacGregor Knox, Thomas Hillas, Shalini Sharma and Ben Rogaly read drafts of some chapters, and Gordon Johnson and Tapan Raychaudhuri read drafts of the whole book: all of them made valuable suggestions. Tanika Sarkar followed my progress with this project and was full of encouragement, for which I am deeply grateful. I owe special thanks to Rukun Advani and Permanent Black Press for encouraging me to publish this work. Indeed, their anonymous reader's comments were a huge help in getting the final version into better shape. I also derived much encouragement from the readers at Cambridge University Press for their perceptive understanding and valuable advice. Anil Seal read every line of every draft and had much to say about the flaws in style and argument. Any errors and infelicities which remain are, of course, my responsibility.

Friends and family sustained me through some very difficult times; heartfelt thanks to them all. In addition to giving me wise counsel and affection, Samita Sen, Sara McManus, Shohini Ghosh and Shalini

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Sharma acted as willing sounding boards to my rambles and recollections about Bengal. They know how much I owe them. Samita Sen, Anindita Chatterjee-Ray and Kim Ray put me up in Calcutta at various stages of my research: I am grateful for their generous hospitality.

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Some debts, sadly, can no longer be acknowledged in person. My father, Jog Chatterji, would have been proud and delighted to see this book published, although he would surely have challenged some of its conclusions. Peter McManus would have shared my pleasure and relief at its publication, even if – during our long walks and talks in improbable settings in Histon and Cottenham – he remained bemused by my fascination with matters fiscal and financial. Raj Chandavarkar, on the other hand, would undoubtedly have understood these preoccupations. It is a matter of lasting regret that I was not able to show him the final typescript; the book would have gained much from his suggestions and insights. My aunt, Snehalata Mukherjee, and my uncle, Khirodenath 'Kalu daktaar' Chatterji, in their own ways inspired this work, as did Pritish 'Tantu' De and Amar Raha, since all of them played a part in the events it describes. Had I not heard stories of their great daring as an impressionable child, this book – in a way a memorial to them – would never have been written.

My debts to Anil are too numerous to be listed: suffice it to say that this would have been a far worse book without him. My son Kartik has never known me when I was *not* the busy, 'stressed', would-be author of this seemingly never-ending work: his patience, good humour and affectionate tolerance through it all have been astonishing. This book is dedicated to them both.

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