

Ghoshal, Anindita. 2022. *Revisiting Partition: Contestation, Narratives and Memories*. New Delhi: Primus Books. Pages xvii+494. Price INR 1450. ISBN 978-93-5572-147-1.

Amit Ranjan

Even after 75 years, the study of the Partition of British India in 1947 remains an ambitious project for many scholars. Over the years, not only historians but also people trained in other academic disciplines have attempted to interpret the Partition in their ways. As a result, there is a deluge of literature on the theme; nevertheless, scholars' interest in the Partition study will not end because many dimensions remain unveiled. Moreover, the "long shadow" of the Partition impacts the politics and social relationships in Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan. Looking at the Partition and its aftermath in Bengal, Anindita's book is a collection of scrupulously written articles.

The first part of this book begins with a chapter, *Partition and Community Relations in Bengal* (39-54), by Sekhar Bandyopadhyay. Instead of addressing religious minority issues raised by the Muslim League in colonial India, the Partition of India in 1947 created new minorities. In post-partition India, there were still 42 million Muslims, reduced later to 35 million, while Pakistan had 20 million non-Muslims (p, 41). Partition further created tension between the new majority and minority religious groups. Caste was a determining factor when deciding the place of rehabilitation for refugees from East Bengal to West Bengal. Also, *gothi-bangal* rhetoric unfolded. The second Chapter, *Other Voices: The Tales of the Namasudra Refugees amidst the Making of a Nation* (55-75) by Sipra Mukherjee, observes that during and after the Partition, Namasudras crossed the border to become a part of a different nation. However, it was not an easy thing to do. In the third chapter, *'Refugee' or Not: A View from Post-Partition Bengal (1947-1971)* (76-97), Pallavi Chakravarty talks about the phases of migration in India and Pakistan. The chapter also focuses on changing the definition of "legal" and "illegal" refugees. The refugees who came to India, as chapter four, *Children of Charity: The State and the Refugees of Bengal* (98-111) by Tista Das shows, in some cases, fought to get help from the government. An organisation called the

Amit Ranjan (amitrانjan.jnu@gmail.com) is Research Fellow at the Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore.

United Central Refugee Council and political activists, mainly belonging to the Communist Party of India, worked to help refugees from all castes and classes (p, 109). Chapter five, *East Bengal: An Imagined Community, a Cultural Identity and a Collective Quest for a Hireath* (112-135) by Nandini Bhattacharya, discusses how after the refugees settled, they had to struggle to make their ends. More than men, several educated women from the middle class faced hostility from the patriarchal family and society (p, 127). It took time for the family and society to accept the new reality.

The second part of this book begins with chapter Six, *Price of Adjacence: The Impact of Partition on North-East India* (143-178) by Sajal Nag, whose research shows that there was not much question about the transfer of land and Hindu-Muslim issues in northeast India. In northeast India, Partition caused the division of tribal communities such as Khasis between the two countries. Over the years, many Khasis have crossed into the Indian side of the border (p, 166). Sylhet is discussed in chapter seven, *Unheard Story of an Unspoken Partition: Recovering the Cultural History of Partition in Assam, 1947* (179-200) by Binayak Dutta. The referendum commissioner reported rampant violence and intimidation during Sylhet's referendum (p, 183). Congress's campaign, as Dutta observes, was inclusive, while League's messages were communal and sectarian (p,185). Chapter eight, *The 'Embeddedness' of Partition: Analysing the Char Areas in Assam* (201-222) by Gorky Chakraborty, examines *char* (sandbar) areas of Assam. Due to their dressing, cultural values, and religious beliefs, the "mainlanders" often see the *char* dwellers as "Bangladeshi". Such an identity construct is more mental than real (p, 214). Barak Valley is a space of conflict between Assamese and Bengali speakers. The differences are discussed in chapter nine, *Unsettling Remnants of Displacement Experiences: Partition Writings from Barak Valley* (223-237) by Suranjana Choudhury. In 1947, the local population instantly categorised the displaced and newly arrived people as outsiders and foreigners. Migration generated intermittent tensions and agitations between the host and migrant population (p, 224).

Part III of this volume starts with chapter 10, *The Living Labyrinth of 'Prolonged Partition'* (245-266) by Syed Ferdous who, after talking exclusivity of certain groups and areas by the Partition scholars, observes that in the early years of the Partition in East Pakistan, the Bangalee Muslims did not resent the presence of the "Biharis", as they were keen "to overthrow Hindu *zamindar-mahajan-bhadralok* (landlord-moneylender-middle class) hegemony" (p, 252). This bonhomie was, however, short-lived, as tension rose over bias in government jobs in favour of "Bihari Muslims", which was resented by the Bengalee Muslims. 1971 events further marginalised the "Bihari Muslims". Aninidita Ghoshal's chapter *Two Nations in One: Discrimination, Deprivation and Division of Pakistan (1947-1971)* (267-287) discusses differences in value systems, morals, the practice of culture, identities, and languages gradually caused discontentment, which the Pakistani leaders did not address while imagining about the nature and structure of the country (p, 268). Chapter 12, *The Unhomed's Homecoming: Migration, Memory and Muslim Identity in Post-Partition Bengal, 1947* (288-317) by Rituparna Datta, observes that many refugees could get out

from nostalgia of *desh* (homeland). When frequently asked, the refugees would initially name the place of their birth as a “foundational home” followed by the “displaced home” or the current nationality (p, 295). In chapter 13, *The Partition and Cinematic Enterprise: The Case of the Lahore-Based Film Industry* (318-332), Urvi Mukhopadhyay talks about the significance of Punjab for the Bombay film industry and the condition of the Lahore film industry before and after the Partition of India. The chapter also discusses how Pakistan remained connected with the Bombay film industry after the Partition and why differences seeped.

Part IV begins with chapter 14, *Post-Partition Boundary Demarcation and the Peoples’ Movement: Reflection on Berubari (1947-2015)* (339-351) by Rup Kumar Barman. To settle the boundary disputes, in the 1950s India decided to give a part of Berubari to Pakistan, which locals and the West Bengal government opposed. After the liberation of Bangladesh in 1971, to facilitate better relationships, India and Bangladesh signed Land Boundary Agreement in 1974; nonetheless, problems were resolved only in 2015 after the Indian parliament ratified the agreement. Over the years, as chapter 15 *Bengal Partitioned, Bengal Claimed: Ethno-Religious Politics across the Bengal Border* (352-370) by Debhatta Chowdhury shows, political groups and factions have emerged in West Bengal that take up issues related to Bangladesh and Bangladeshi migrants. The chapter looks at the foundation and objectives of the groups such as *Amra Bangali*, *Nikhil Banga Nagrik Sangha*, and *Banga Sena*. Chapter 16, *Refugees and Politics: Leftist Agitation in Nadia (1947-1957)* (371-405) by Subhasri Ghosh, examines how, in the long term, left political parties made electoral gains because of the help they provided to the refugees. In the 1957 assembly elections, CPI emerged as the largest opposition and steadily progressed to form a left-front government in 1977 (p, 401). In chapter 17, *Bengal Partition and the Communist Movement: Refugees in Burdwan (1947-1960)* (406-425), Kakali Mukherjee looks at the Partition of Bengal and the communist movement in the Burdwan district of West Bengal, where the party had some base (p, 407).

The last part, chapter 18, “I am Myself, a “Minority” in My Own Country...” (431-448), is the editor’s interview with Tanvir Mokammel, a renowned filmmaker of Bangladesh.

Despite such excellent papers in this book, some significant issues are conspicuously missing: First, how the unequal agrarian relations communalised peasants who became political assets for the Muslim League during the last years of the Pakistan movement. Second, the role of “Bihari Muslims” in the formation of Pakistan would have added more weight to this excellent volume. Third, as the volume looks at Bengal, a chapter on the role of Hindu Mahasabha and prominent Hindu leaders from the province in its Partition could have been compared with the activities of the Muslim leaders. And finally, a chapter on a very short-lived united Bengal plan and how it was derailed should have been added. Having said that, those who have edited books can understand how tough a job it is: sometimes, you need a chapter on a theme but, due to various human reasons, fail to get it. Also, one cannot cover all themes in a single volume as there are editorial limitations. Overall, this book is an important read for anyone interested in researching the Partition of Bengal.