

## Partition's Legacies

**By Joya Chatterji. 550 pp. Albany, State University of New York Press, 2019.**

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Gathering together 13 essays that span more than two decades of scholarship, *Partition's Legacies* not only captures the best of Joya Chatterji's writing, it reminds us of why her oeuvre as a whole has been so influential. Each of the works in this volume has been published elsewhere, but while some are well-known and widely cited, others—especially those first published as part of edited volumes—are brought to the reader's attention for the first time.

The volume is divided into four parts: I. Identities, Decolonisation, Nation-Making; II. Refugees, Mobility, Migration; III. Immobility; and IV. Citizenship. It begins with a rather personal preface in which the author pays tribute to an early teacher who sparked her love of history. In these brief pages, she reveals snippets of her life as she describes the arduous business of conducting archival research throughout her career, and discusses the development of her writing. Before the articles begin, there is an introduction from David Washbrook, who in seven pages covers not just the essays in the book under review, but manages to sum up Chatterji's entire oeuvre to date with all the warmth and praise that is her due.

There is no need here to summarise each of the 13 pieces and their arguments, for Chatterji does that with precision at the beginning of each one. Rather, I would like to use this review to bring out the wider themes that tie together the work, beyond the obvious connection to the partition of British India and the province of Bengal in 1947.

The first theme that emerges is a relentless drive to question the received wisdom about partition. Expanding on or anticipating themes from her first two books, Chatterji shows us time and again in these essays that Muslims were not everywhere the key drivers of partition, that Punjab was not the only province where interesting historical problems arose, and that the migrations of partition did not occur all at once, but lasted for nearly three decades. As much as any other scholar in the field of partition studies, and more than anyone else for the study of Bengal, Chatterji has spent the last few decades methodically unpicking and then rebuilding our understanding of the long process of partition.

A second set of themes centres on rethinking migration. Here the research is grounded in a study of Bengalis, but the insights are directed at the global community of scholars who wish to understand migration more clearly. From the early works on the migration of Bengali Hindus to West Bengal, Chatterji is able to bring out the agency of refugees in making partition a reality (chapter 2). She emphasises the role of refugees in creating new notions of citizenship through their demands for relief and rehabilitation (chapters 5 and 13), and through their contribution to development (chapters 6 and 7). She considers not just international migration, but internal movement to princely states at partition (chapter 12) or from urban to rural areas afterwards (chapter 9). Of the many innovations here, I would like to linger on two. On the one hand, in studying movement, Chatterji pays

as much attention to staying as she does to leaving. Across three chapters (7, 9, and 10), she considers who does not move and why, and in so doing challenges the notion, widely influential in migration studies, that being in a network with other migrants is the key to movement. Instead, in vivid and sometimes heartbreaking prose, she shows that having poor health or looking after those with poor health can help explain why some individuals and family units who were part of networks and had reasonable education and some capital ended up getting 'stuck' in the Bengal delta (chapter 10). This helps bring out the most significant conceptual contribution in this material, which is the idea of 'mobility capital', developed in chapter 7. Drawing on Bourdieu, Chatterji shows the connection between economics and politics in motivating, enabling, and sustaining migrants.

In addition to these two main themes, we are reminded of the empathy at the heart of much of Chatterji's work, something that comes out in her approach to her subjects and her sources. Chatterji's career spans the height of the so-called rivalry between the Cambridge School, which studied South Asia's high politics, and the Subaltern School, which homed in on the marginalised. And yet, time and again in these essays she connects high and low politics. She demonstrates that, whether one looks at partition from on high or from below, it was not a precise surgical operation, but rather a messy, complex, and long-lasting set of events (chapter 1) and that people on both levels worked to cooperate to ameliorate the messiness (chapter 4). She proves that the experience of refugees was varied, and that policies, and their successes and failures, emerged not from on high, but as a result of negotiation with refugees themselves (chapters 5, 8, and 13).

Above all, one cannot help but notice the scholarly strength and dexterity on display in this volume. These are not light and easy think-pieces, penned in haste after reading half a file. They average around 40 pages, each accumulating around a hundred footnotes. This is a testament to the meticulousness with which Chatterji makes her careful, precise, and often stunning arguments. This heft is matched by an equal, if not greater, agility. For, although she relies on official archival records to a greater or lesser extent in most of the pieces, the collection shows her expansive ability to read different sources—an essential quality when official records can be so hard to come by. A handful of pieces see her digesting hundreds of interviews gathered by her incredible research assistants in order to understand why some people become migrants and others do not (chapters 7 and 10). In chapter 8, she lingers over a single report of an anthropological mission sent to understand why self-settled refugees in West Bengal fared so much better than those settled by an official scheme. Elsewhere, she 'reads' the diminishing scope of Muslim graveyards to illustrate the circumscribed lives of Muslims in West Bengal (chapters 9 and 10), or uses two community histories to understand the way migrants connect their own stories to larger histories (chapter 6). As a scholar broadly in the same field, I read the essays expecting I would know what they say and yet was struck by the clarity, persuasiveness, and sheer punch of the arguments put forward. Even the essays one has read before do not disappoint in a second reading.

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