

Departmental Colloquium: New Interventions in the History of Partition

Feeding into Partition? The Bengal Famine of 1943 and the Carving of Communal Identities

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Recent scholarship around partition has opened up the need for a *longue durée* approach in order to understand the tremendous and horrific violence that has characterised Partition. This talk takes the audience back to 1943, the year that saw the start of the most devastating famine that Bengal had ever seen. We shall analyse the nature of societal dislocation in Bengal – how the constant exposure to death, disease and hunger created a ‘brutalization of consciousness’, at the same time creating a complete dependence on relief measures. An analysis of the nature of complexities of relief/rehabilitation is then drawn up to show how communal politics inserted itself deep into the relief process. The famine, hence, became a crucial juncture in the 1940s, which consolidated community-based mobilizations not only by organised political parties, but also by various ‘volunteer’ organizations like the Hindu Mission. This

was also the time, when, under the pretext of relief, these volunteer groups were able to consolidate their slogan of ‘Hindu Unity’ amongst the Depressed Classes. Communal politics around everyday relief measures irrevocably turned community identities into communalised ones, eventually feeding into the horrific violence of 1947.



Registration and
Information

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16:15 CET (Zoom)

Image: A picture envisioning the brighter future of Bengal after the famine of 1943-44. - Wikimedia Commons.