

Departmental Colloquium: New Interventions in the History of Partition

# First Sparks: The Calcutta Riots of 1946

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The Calcutta riots of August 1946 have received very little historical attention, despite being a seminal eruption of Hindu/Muslim violence at the end of colonial rule in South Asia. The violence that took place in Calcutta, beginning on August 16th, in many ways set the mold for the annihilating communal violence associated with the partition of the sub-continent in 1947. Indeed, the violence in Calcutta directly influenced reprisal pogroms, first in Noakhali, and then in Bihar,

even by the end of 1946. What historical scholarship has been produced on the Calcutta riots has mostly focused through the narrow lens of communalism, criminality and policing. When one looks at the violence that rocked Calcutta in August of 1946 through an even slightly more broad-angled lens, however, it can be seen that the larger historical context is one defined by war, hunger, scarcity of all kinds, gross overcrowding in Calcutta, and a logic of “belonging” forged in the crucible of famine. In this presentation I will attempt to sketch this wider context, and locate the Calcutta riots from within an expanded trajectory of structural violence, displacement, qualified belonging and contested urban space. While the Calcutta riots must of course be understood as communal, they also must be understood in the much more complex context of the times in which they occurred.



Registration and  
Information

Thursday 09.02.2023  
16:15 CET (Zoom)

Image: Calcutta's poor from a line to buy kerosene at 6 a.m. Each little cubicle may contain a shop and living quarters for a family ranging possibly from 6 to 12. Sanitary facilities consist of an open street drain. Source: <http://www.library.upenn.edu/collections/sasia/calcutta1947/>