

Calcutta Riots of August 1946: Muslim Experiences from the Troubled Times

By

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On August 16, 1946, Calcutta was subjected to an inexplicable violence that was unprecedented in the annals of carnage in the city. Popularly coined as the Great Calcutta Killing, the communal riots are memorialised in popular discourses as a testimony to the culpability of the Muslim League ministry, particularly H.S. Suhrawardy, in facilitating Muslim communal onslaughts on Hindu inhabitants of the city. In course of vicious rioting, members of both the religious communities were brutally attacked: Hindus were killed by Muslim mobs, while Muslims were subjected to the communal rampage of Hindu goons.¹ There exists a rich literature on violence that was inflicted on Hindus in Calcutta.² What is often elided in these accounts is the fact that many Muslim residents, irrespective of their political positions, became victims of Hindu communal forces and were internally displaced. But it was not an undifferentiated picture of violence, as there were multiple instances when Muslim residents were saved by their Hindu neighbours and vice versa. This paper revisits the Calcutta Riots of August 1946 to bring to the fore the diversity and complexity of Muslim experiences, which is often neglected in the grand narratives of communalism and communal violence. Along with examining stories of displacements, trauma, and violence, the paper investigates instances of help, protection, and kindness that showed familiar bonds of neighbourliness and remained resilient despite communal polarity. In the final section, the paper reads a few letters written by Muslim residents both to the Congress and to the Muslim League that underscore an erosion of faith in their respective political parties, especially at a time when both parties claimed to represent and protect Muslim interests in the region, albeit in their own specific ways.

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Prelude to Riots: Communal Propaganda, Pamphleteering, and Escalation of Violence

In an article published in *Dawn* in August 1946, a concerned resident of Calcutta, Mr. A. K. Pillai, tried to explain the possible causes of the appalling calamity,

Let us honestly face the question why has the Direct Action Day resulted in such terrific fury in Calcutta alone. It is to be remembered that Calcutta remains a predominantly Hindu city in a Province where Muslims have the majority. Even where the Hindus and Muslims agreed as on the holding of the Rashid Ali, it turned out to be anything but a peaceful observance in Calcutta. This largest of the Indian cities has also the largest underground population of unsocial elements who as a rule do not distinguished (*visi*) between community and community or between temple and church and mosque. A Hindu shop, a Mohammedan shop, a European bank and Government post office all become equally the target. Besides, Calcutta has more deep rooted terrorist activities than any other place in India.

Calcutta is also the city where wealth and poverty have reached their respective heights and depths. To social stability nothing can be more disturbing than such a glaring disparity. This disparity has a most disquieting feature about it in the singular circumstance that nearly the whole of this fabulous wealth is concentrated in Hindu hands while its Muslim population is obviously the most poverty stricken. In such a hopeless ill balanced situation, the slightest excitement would furnish the explosive factor. On the present occasion quite possibly extraneous agencies might well have fanned the fire.³

The letter captured the agony that pervaded public life in Calcutta in the decade of 1940 and confronted its ability to integrate and reconcile the differences that existed between different religious communities, which in this context meant Hindus and Muslims living in the city. It is usually believed that the last few years of British rule in Bengal, particularly since the Riots of 1946, was the most significant period of communalisation of social and political relations of the region. In this letter, where a Hindu individual was writing in *Dawn*, the Muslim League's mouthpiece, blaming not the Muslim community but the "antisocial elements" for creating communal troubles in Calcutta, however, showed how it was still possible to rise above communal barriers and to think about how riots and especially, the violence associated with it affected all religious communities and social classes. Taking a cue from this, the first section evaluates the escalation of violence preceding the riots that made it possible for the communal fury to unfold in Calcutta, in which propaganda played a prominent role. As the section will show, various political groups and membership organisations belonging to both religious communities played a part in it.

Calcutta was a predominantly Hindu city in the Muslim majority province of Bengal that recently elected a Muslim League government in 1945.⁴ Towards the end of the British rule, the situation in Calcutta was notably volatile because of a combination of factors, including social, political,

economic, and moral dislocation caused by the Famine of 1943–44, food shortage, wartime destruction, rising unemployment, communal mobilisation, extreme starvation, sporadic violence, and failure of political negotiations between Congress and the Muslim League over the question of transfer of power created a deep cynicism and destroyed the moral psyche of the city.⁵ Sir. F. Burrows, Governor of Bengal, wrote that the long-term causes of the Calcutta Riots were the protracted “struggle for power between Hindus and Muslims, in which Calcutta was a focal point, the weakening of authority which is an inevitable consequence of our impending departure, the dislocation of normal life of Calcutta by war and famine, and the presence of a Muslim minority in a predominantly Hindu city.”⁶ What happened in August 1946 was not just a communal clash that the city had witnessed time and over again. Rather the Calcutta Riots were characterised by a new form of violence that specifically targeted members of the “other” religious community. Sumit Sarkar writes, “[m]urder was the primary objective in the Calcutta riots, not—as often in earlier communal outbreaks—desecration of temples or mosques, rape, or attacks on the property of relatively privileged groups belonging to the opposite community.”⁷ More important than the scale of horror and carnage, was the pattern of violence, for the communal violence of 1946 consisted of acts of brutality, torture, and destruction to annihilate and massacre the “other” community.

The Great Calcutta Killings were certainly not engineered by the All India Muslim League. But their call for Direct Action did result in communalisation of local politics.⁸ The failure of negotiations among leading political parties was interpreted by local leaders and politicians in their own distinctive ways, as they tried to do a face to face “communal sorting out” of their differences on the ground.⁹ That such an extreme solution would result in one of the most vicious bloodbaths in history was perhaps not adequately foreseen. On August 4, 1946, a conference of Muslim League representatives was held at Zakaria Street, Calcutta, to consider the programme for Direct Action Day. It was later elaborated and circulated through local newspapers, pamphlets, and posters. The League President gave orders to observe the day in a peaceful manner to show support for the League’s decisions, regarding the withdrawal of acceptance of Cabinet Mission proposals and the policy of attaining Pakistan.¹⁰ The Calcutta District Muslim League called for a “complete *bartal* and general strike in all spheres of civic, commercial and industrial life,” except in emergency services.¹¹ Non-Muslims were also called upon to join hands with Muslims in their fight for Pakistan. A mass procession and a meeting were organised at the Ochterlony Monument and H.S. Suhrawardy, the then Chief Minister of Bengal, was scheduled to preside over it. Muslims were asked to congregate in Maidan to display their solidarity and united strength.

Francis Taker observed that throughout the first half of August, speeches of political leaders belonging to both Congress and the Muslim League were inflammatory and violent in nature.¹² Though the Muslim League urged its supporters to observe Direct Action Day peacefully, M.A. Jinnah’s statement of “bidding goodbye to constitutional method,” was open to

various interpretations.¹³ In Calcutta, the League leaders gave notably provocative public utterances. Abul Hashim, a prominent politician from the Bengal Provincial Muslim League (BPML) declared, “where justice and equity failed, shinning steel would decide the issue.”¹⁴ Nazimuddin, the previous Chief Minister of Bengal, stated that “there are 150 different ways to cause trouble particularly as the Muslim League is not restricted to non-violence.”¹⁵ H.S. Suhrawardy stated in unequivocal words that bloodshed and disorder were not necessary evils in themselves if resorted to for a noble cause and among Muslims, no cause was dearer or nobler than Pakistan.¹⁶ Local leaders carried on extensive mobilisation in various localities. The police reported that there was an increase in mob activities.¹⁷

Several provocative pamphlets that were circulated during this time testify to the rampant communal propagandism that preceded Direct Action Day. A pamphlet that gained considerable popularity had fiery words written on it,

It was in his month of *Ramzan* that the holy *Quoran* was revealed! It was in this month of *Ramzan* that 313 Muslims were victorious through the grace of God over many *Kafers* in the battle of Badr and the *Jehad* of the Muslims commenced! It was in this month that ten thousand Muslims marched to Mecca and were conquerors and thus there was the establishment of the kingdom of Islam. By the grace of God we are ten crores in India but through bad luck we have become slaves of the Hindus and the British. We are starting a *Jehad* with Your Name in this very month of *Ramzan*. We promise before You that we entirely depend on You. Pray make strong in body and mind-give Your helping hand in all our actions- make us victorious over the *Kafers*—enable us to establish Kingdom of Islam in India and make proper sacrifices for this *Jehad*—by the grace of God may we build up in India the greatest Islamic kingdom in the world.¹⁸

Another Bengali leaflet, signed by Rafiuudin Ahmed Siddiqui and A.K.M. Fazlul Kader Chowdhury, the President, and the Secretary of the District Muslim League respectively, was intercepted by the Intelligence Branch. It was titled “Call” and it stated that “*Muslim India is facing its gravest crisis today. A clarion call has come to ‘wake up Muslim India.’ March on with your standard flying high. We are now at war with reality.*”¹⁹ The various pamphlets circulated by the Eastern Pakistani Mohajahed Corps had titles like, “Our Sacred Soil Which We Shall Turn Into Pakistan By Our Might” or “Death to Caste Hindu Congress and Death to Constituent Assembly.”²⁰ Urdu newspaper *Asre Jadid* wrote that “to the Muslims Direct Action means a fight and a fight imply violence.”²¹ Various meetings held under the aegis of the Muslim League and Anjuman-e-Mofidul Islam urged Muslims to join the Muslim National Guards, in order to “sacrifice” for the achievement of Pakistan.²²

Communal propaganda, however, was not the preserve of any political group. A Hindu Mahasabha leaflet titled “16th August—Beware” played on the fear and prejudices of the Hindu public. The leaflet claimed that Direct Action Day supported the League’s demand for Pakistan and although the Hindus and non-Muslims of Bengal were opposed to it, and to assist or

join the *hartal* would amount to supporting the demand for Pakistan.²³ Another pamphlet issued by the Hindu Welfare League, which was intercepted by Intelligence Branch, stated that the League had instructed Muslims to intensify communal feelings, breed hatred against Hindus, and perpetuate violence on the Hindu residents.²⁴ Intelligence Branch record mentions a pamphlet that stated that an individual named Habibur Rahman had issued a statement, referring to a “verbal circular” approved by Jinnah and the Muslim League Working Committee. The pamphlet claimed that Rahman, who had left League in favour of Congress, had disclosed that the circular had called for a wholesale destruction of the Hindu population in Calcutta.²⁵ Another Hindu pamphlet retorted, “*Hindoo—Ankhe Phar kar paro! Chhati par hat dhar kar shobo* (Read this leaflet with open eyes and reflect for a moment with your hands placed on your bosom)- Is it a communal riot? Is it not a declaration of war against you? Danger is ahead. Take measures to protect yourself. This way lays your safety.”²⁶

The official view maintained that later enquiries proved sections of both communities foresaw and prepared against the impending trouble, but neither party planned to start the rioting.²⁷ Nor did the administration predict the impending carnage that engulfed the streets of Calcutta with such ferocity. On August 15, 1946, an “Acid Debate” took place in the Bengal Assembly, when the Bengal Government under League Ministry announced its decision to declare August 16, a public holiday to avoid trouble. The Bengal Provincial Congress Committee held a meeting to protest the decision of the League government because according to Congress, the demonstrations for Direct Action Day were communal and anti-national in character. They blamed the Muslim League Government for imposing the “fiat of the League” on the entire people of Bengal, with all the authority and sanction of Governmental power behind them. Had the political parties taken a non-militant stand and allowed a one-day strike to take place, the subsequent history might have been different.

Violence on Ground: Displacements of Muslim Residents

The observance of Direct Action Day inaugurated a spate of rioting for five consecutive days. Official reports documented that three thousand people died and seventeen hundred were injured, although unofficial numbers were higher.²⁸ The pervasive nature of the Calcutta Riots blurred the boundaries between victims and attackers. The saviour of one community often turned into the murderer of the other community. The numerous local stories from the Riot days poignantly show how the lives of many residents were shattered, who were forced to leave their homes, who no longer felt secure in places that were predominantly lived by members of the other community. This section highlights local stories of violence and displacements of Muslim residents in the city.

An extract from the confidential reports of the Intelligence Branch described how an old resident from Katua Khoti Lane, Md. Rafuquddin, left his *para* (neighbourhood) on August 16, 1946,

From the morning of 16/8/46 the people of our own *moballa* was preparing for a procession of ML [Muslim League] to attend the meeting at Esplanade. That being a Ramzan day I went to bazar at about 1:30 pm. On the way to bazar I saw some people gather in our locality for procession. At around 2 p.m. I heard slogan “*Allah Akbar*” mixed with great noise from Bazar and saw the procession of our *moballa* (Katua Khoti Lane) proceeding towards Esplanade. As soon the procession reached Jagu Babu’s Bazar brickbats, stones was (*sic*) thrown at it from both sides of the road. As the procession was disorganized the Hindus and Sikhs were attacking it from both sides with *latbi* and daggers. After midnight we heard slogans of *Bande Mataram* and *Jai Hind* gradually approaching our locality to attack the locality. The Police Patrol party came after repeated phone calls from our locality. In the morning we set up peace committee with Hindus of our locality but failed. At about noon we left our house, leaving everything to the mercy of the Hindus and took shelter in Presidency jail. I went to see my house after 2 days and saw it along with other houses were broken and all our household property were looted. *I have lost everything except the lives of my family members.*²⁹

Similar was the fate of Sharfuddin Ahmad. He lived in Chetla, a predominantly Hindu area. He left his house after Muslim families in his locality were attacked by some Revolutionary Socialist Party goons.³⁰

My house at 6 Mahesh Chandra Datta Lane is the only Muslim house situated in a backward area in Chetla, P.O. Alipore. The first report that we heard of riot was from a RSP fellow recently came to my locality living at 7 Mahesh Datta Lane. He began to gather crowds around him and said Muslims gave such exciting statement in front of gurudwara that the Sikhs could not keep their heads cool and that Muslims forcibly entered Kalighat gurudwara. I found he was spreading mischievous lies in my locality fomenting trouble that would victimize my family and relatives. So I asked him what slogans excited Sikh and he said fumbly ‘*Congress Party Dhangsa Hok*’ and denied that he said Muslims entered Gurudwara. So I told my neighbor that he is spreading false rumours. I saw later that the RSP fellow had gathered a number of lathis and dozen low class people in a room 100 yards from my house and so I rang to Khan Bahadur Abdur Rahman, Minister of Bengal who telephoned Alipore P.O. to arrest these men. In the same building one Police magistrate was living who could not find the room of these men. Soon after 50 young men began to tour the area with baton, knives, rocks in Mahesh Chandra Datta Lane alone. All Friday nights conch shells were blown creating false panic and alarm. At 12 I toured my area in a peace squad, which met hostile elements among the Bhadrakalok class in front of a mosque at 12 Moyerpara Road. On the same day at 2:30 four Sikh with 200 Hindus of mixed elements attacked the above mosque and murdered the Imam and another Moulavi. The whole of Saturday night we passed a house where 6 Muslim families have been living for nearly half a century. On Sunday morning on receipt of information from friendly neighbours all the families left the house, leaving everything and fled on foot to house of Khan Bahadur Abdur Rahman, Minister. After this we heard of stray stabbing cases on Muslim in Chetla area and the same RSP fellow responsible for the murder of Ghulam Muhammed Mustafa Chaudhuri who was kidnapped and murdered near our house and thrown into Tolly Nala from

Durgapur Bridge. No Police or Military came. I am staying in a safe Muslim place with my own family. I would not venture to return to my house in a predominantly Hindu area.³¹

While the police record does not mention any further detail about the RSP member who attacked Sharfuddin, it was not uncommon during the Great Calcutta Killing, when members of political groups, including the socialist and secular ones, turned into “protectors” of their “own” community and “killers” of the “other” community.³² This was particularly true for political parties, who had a history of participating in violent agitations.³³ For instance, the notorious Muchipara goondas, like Jagabondhu Bose and Bhanu Bose, who despite being members of a socialist-secular party, like the Congress Socialist Party (CSP), carried on a communal rampage in Muslim neighborhoods.³⁴ These men had been active during the violent anticolonial struggle, and in August 1946, they emerged as defenders of the putative Hindu community and attackers of Muslim communities. As Ishan Mukherjee writes, the nationalist characters of Hindu goons co-existed peacefully with their credentials as leaders of murderous communal groups.³⁵ Because of their connections with mainstream political organisations and their history of participating in nationalist movements, neither the police nor the organised political leadership intervened to stop their atrocities on Muslim residents.³⁶ The result was fateful for men like Sharfuddin, who had to confront these local, yet extremely powerful and communalised goondas. Ashis Nandy writes that “lower caste musclemen” and “criminal elements” who were considered social outcasts or outsiders turned into “heroic protectors” of middle class Bengali Hindus during the communal confrontation.³⁷ Gopal Patha, who was a meat seller, and Jugal Chandra Ghosh, who ran an *akhara* (gymnasium) in North Calcutta, were such men.³⁸ They had strong links with the Hindu Mahasabha and in August 1946, they, like the RSP person mentioned by Sharfuddin, carried out extensive killings of Muslims in various bustees.³⁹

Indiscriminate attacks on members of the other community were a distinctive feature of the August killings. A police report documented the horrific story of a Congress Muslim and an eye specialist, Dr. Jamal Mohammad, who became a victim of communal violence.⁴⁰ Dr. Mohammad lived in Bhowanipore, a locality with a high concentration of affluent Bengali Hindu families, like the houses of B.C. Ghosh and Justice C.C. Ghosh. As violence spread to the southern parts of the city, Dr. Mohammad took shelter in the house of N.C. Chatterjee’s father. The report narrates how he was dragged out of the house and killed at the doorstep of the house of B.C. Ghose. *Morning News* wrote that Dr. Ahmed appealed to the frenzied mob, “Why are you killing me... I am a Congressman and have served the Congress all my life.” Unhinged by his pleas, the Hindu mob killed him with the words, “We don’t care... You are a Muslim and that is enough.”⁴¹ The Kazipara bustee, a Muslim pocket on Debendra Ghosh Road in Bhowanipore, was completely wiped off, which killed around one hundred Muslims.⁴² Muslim residents of Bhowanipore suffered enormous losses, as every Muslim house in the area was destroyed.⁴³

Few days after the savagery, *Morning News* reported the “shocking story” of an unbridled massacre of Muslim men, women, and children, the destruction of Muslim houses and properties, and the incendiarism of Hindu mobs in Saheb Bagan bustee on Satish Mukherjee Road.⁴⁴ This small Muslim bustee was situated in the Kalighat area, a predominantly Hindu locality. A Muslim procession coming from Tollygunge was stoned near Rash Behari Avenue. Some two hundred Muslims fled from the troubled area and took shelter in a mosque in the Saheb Bagan bustee. Soon after, the bustee was attacked by Hindus from the neighbouring locality, who were mostly respectable men of the community. Many inhabitants of the bustee were killed and the mosque was destroyed. The diary of P. Barnes also documented the incident.⁴⁵ Another news report, titled “Savage Cruelty on Students,” detailed how students from Taylor Muslim Hostel in Bow Bazar were evacuated and later, relocated to safer places following communal attacks on the hostel.⁴⁶

Muslims, who lived in other parts of Bengal and came to Calcutta on Direct Action Day to show their support for the Muslim League, were shocked at the communal fury. Retired Lt. Col. M.S. Alam Joarder recalls his memories of the Riot when he was a young boy. Alam was born in the village of Nagdah in Alamdanga, in Nadia district. Alam and his sister used to visit Calcutta almost every weekend, touring famous sites, like the Victoria Memorial and the Zoological Garden. Alam recalls riding the train to Calcutta, which he found to be a beautiful city with lots of attractions. One day in 1946, Alam heard about a big procession on the Grand Trunk Road (now Jessore-Kolkata-Haridaspur Road). Little Alam and his sister wanted to join the procession with their father. But it was too crowded, and his father decided not to take them to Calcutta. Later, his father came home in sweat and blood. An awful Riot had broken out in Sealdah station where Hindus were killing Muslims and Muslims were killing Hindus without any reason. Alam’s father said, “Thank God I came home alive. If I took two of you with me, I would not have been able to save you from the mobs.”⁴⁷

Assaults and attacks were inflicted upon the community who were a minority in a particular area—Hindu houses were burnt and gutted in predominantly Muslim areas, while every effort was made to obliterate Muslim presence in Hindu localities. Locals were often involved in such acts of atrocities. On August 16, 1946, a Muslim procession was attacked at Russa Road, a predominantly Hindu area. This was followed by a general massacre of Hindus in Metiaburz, a predominantly Muslim area.⁴⁸ In Park Circus, a Muslim majority neighbourhood that housed many affluent Muslim families, there was wanton destruction of Hindu households. The houses of Dr. U.P. Basu, retired Principal of Medical College, P.C. De of Indian Civil Service, and B.C. Dutt, an advocate of Calcutta High Court, were ransacked and burnt and their family members were molested.⁴⁹ Similarly, in Hatibagan Market disturbances broke out when a group of Muslims who had taken shelter in the Market were attacked. Later, the armed forces rescued the Muslims from the Market to Nikasipara.⁵⁰ In general, however, police were largely inactive when violence reigned supreme in the city. In most situations, local police withheld from preventing members of their own community to engage in violence,

while in many others, they became silent spectators to the communal drama, refusing to help victims from the other community. The ineffectiveness of the police spoke both to the communalisation of members of the police force as well as to the administrative crisis of the colonial state.⁵¹ The result was a massive dislocation of people, who fell victim to communal violence. The multiple accounts show that Muslim inhabitants in Calcutta were as much victimised by communal violence as Hindu residents; yet popular memories and literature on the Calcutta Riots focus too little on Muslim experiences.

Mobility, Symbols, and Meanings: Internal Migration and Communal Segregation of Urban Space

It was not just the killings, the destructions, the lootings, or the atrocities, but the larger exemplary purpose of communal cleansing that defined the nature of violence during the Calcutta Riots. It was no longer considered safe to live in areas where a particular community was a minority. Violence led to a localised construction of collective fear. Many Muslim residents managed to move to areas inhabited by their co-religionists. For instance, at 86 Vivekananda Road, a Muslim girls' hostel opposite to the Maniktolla Bazar was raided by Hindu students. Some of them were molested, while others were kidnapped. Sergeant. Stiffle rescued twenty-one girls from the hostel, who were then given temporary shelter in Park Circus.⁵² Similarly, some Muslim women, along with the family of Md. Siddiqui, were moved from a Hindu neighbourhood in Debendra Ghosh Road for "safety." Communal violence reconstructed the notion of "safe" and "unsafe" areas. Rumors often intimidated residents of mixed localities, urging them to move to other areas.⁵³ Through such processes, the imperfectly segregated residential pattern in Calcutta was reinforced and given a communal clarity.⁵⁴ This sort of communalisation of space was one of the main effects of the Calcutta riots on urban, social equations.

A letter published in the *Morning News* explained how urban space was reshaped in course of the Riots. A Muslim resident from Calcutta, A. Hamid wrote,

Whoever started the riot one thing is clear as broad daylight that the foundation of Pakistan had been laid in this great city of Calcutta with Muslim blood. The evacuation of Hindus from Muslim localities and vice versa, had established two zones viz Hindu and Muslim in the city.⁵⁵

In another letter written to the editor, Kazi Abdul Quddus argued how internal migration facilitated communalisation of urban space,

The recent happenings in Calcutta and migration from one area to another by Hindus and Muslims are clear pointers to the fact that both communities accept Pakistan in practice. That Muslims have saved the lives of and protected many Hindus in Muslim localities does not detract from the cogency of the argument. Although migration by Muslims and Hindus is said to be on

decrease, there is no doubt that Muslim Calcutta and Hindu Calcutta have come into being and will be larger as days pass.⁵⁶

Control over urban space figured prominently in course of the conflicts. Areas and localities, a *mohalla* or a *para*, came to be categorised and demarcated as Hindu or Muslim, as “our” or “their” in terms of the religious identity of its inhabitants. Often words like “Mohammedans,” “Pakistan,” and “Jai Hind” were written on shops and houses. Tapan Raychaudhuri recalls that it became impossible to enter a Hindu locality wearing a *lungi* or a Muslim locality wearing a *pajama* and *punjabi*.⁵⁷ Such physical markers constructed new symbolic-spatial boundaries within Calcutta, while simultaneously reifying communal identities.

The meanings that were attributed to such symbols (attire, area, and the body itself) had quickly transfigured itself during the riot days into a communal framework. Pradip Kumar Datta focuses on how the “body semiotic” became an important sign of an antagonistic communal divide. It was in the course of the riots that the “body” was itself communalised. Datta writes that riots “take to their [il]logical conclusion...the burden of meaning placed by the urban gaze on the communal signifiers of the body.”⁵⁸ Immediate communal recognition of an unknown body was an obvious fact by the participants in riots. It was here that symbolic identification, for e.g., a Muslim by his *lungi* became vital. The Calcutta Riots of 1946 consolidated the “symmetry between the body and its communal significations.”⁵⁹ Hence, it is not surprising that attempts to annihilate the “body” of the “other” were unprecedented.

Shared Living in Extraordinary Times: Stories of Hindu and Muslim Cooperation

Despite the gory violence, the Riots did not represent a homogenous picture of communal fanaticism. There were multiple instances where people from one religious community saved members from the other religious community.⁶⁰ Such stories of local experiences challenge the monochromatic and rigid categorisation of communal violence by offering alternative examples of human integrity, courage, and benevolence. Few days after the violence, Ebadat Hossain, a resident from North Calcutta, wrote of his experiences during the Riots,

I used to live at College Street where 9 Muslims and 56 Hindus including Shyam Babu, Rakhil Babu or Phani Babu used to occupy different flats. They not only offered us protection but provided food for us for four days. Special mention in addition to the foregoing should be made of Babu Anil Bagchi and Sandhya Rani the actress who along with other saved 2 Muslim families.⁶¹

Similar was the experience of Peary Lall Das of 15/B Shah Aman Lane, Kidderpore. In this predominantly Muslim area, local Muslims saved the lives of hundreds of Hindus of the area.

There are about 500 Hindu dhobis in Mominpore Road, Rajab Ali lane, Ekbalpore Road, Ekbalpore lane, Ibrahim Road and Pipe Road. Through the indefatigable efforts of the Muslims of the localities all the Hindu dhobis were protected and saved and not one of them even suffered molestation. At 4/1 Mominpore Road about 100 Hindu Chamars were saved. In Shah Alam Lane 50 Oriya Hindus and some upcountry Hindu gowalas were also safeguarded by Muslims and escorted to Ekbalpore thana to be sent to the Relief center. But for the magnanimity of Muslims not a single Hindu could have escaped from these areas.⁶²

These letters underlined the various ways by which a section of the population remained calm, retaining the bonds of local neighbourliness. For instance, Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) gave shelter to people belonging to the other religious community and people shared no hostility among themselves inside the building.⁶³ In another instance, a few Muslim families were marooned in Dover Lane, in Ballygunge area, for two days.⁶⁴ When police did not bother to protect them despite their repeated calls for help, a group of local schoolboys defended them with lathis from mob attacks. Similarly, at Garcha Road in Ballygunge, Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh residents held joint meetings and decided to guard the entire area to prevent outside mobs from entering—Hindus were to resist Hindu mobs and Muslims were to resist Muslim mobs.⁶⁵ When the situation became tense, the inhabitants of the locality jointly decided to evacuate Muslims for relocation to safer areas. They were also able to protect the mosque in the area. In Gariahat, a professor named Niren Roy gave shelter to several Muslim workers to protect them from an infuriated Hindu crowd and he stood guard until they were rescued to safety.⁶⁶ In another instance, in Park Circus, Mr. Rehman, an old resident, fought with an irate Muslim mob for more than an hour and saved thirty-six out of a family of thirty-nine Hindus and moved them to safety.⁶⁷ A news report mentioned about a Hindu sadhu in the Burra Bazar area, who gave shelter to six Muslims.⁶⁸ Similarly, Communist leader Krishna Benode Roy and his family were rescued by their Muslim landlord.⁶⁹

The working class in Calcutta, particularly the industrial labour belt around Calcutta, fought formidably against communal forces. Tramway workers, shopkeepers, and textile workers stood firm to defend those who were attacked. *People's Age* wrote, "Hindu and Muslim workers fought together against all fiendishness. The Muslim worker stood up against Muslim mobs. The Hindu worker held back riotous Hindu mobs."⁷⁰ The fact that the Tramway Workers' Union had earlier decided to go on strike on August 16, 1946, helped to minimise the chances of disturbances. So, when the fateful day in August brought in its trial of murder and loot, the organised working class kept away from it, as dockworkers, seamen, trams, gas, and textile workers maintained their solidarity.⁷¹ Particularly notable was the Calcutta Tramway Workers' Union who helped to stop looting in various localities. The union members, along with some students, saved the Victoria Institute Hostel for Girls on Upper Circular Road.⁷² *People's Age* praised them with the

following words: “in the bustees as well as in middle-class localities, these cases actually happened side by side with gruesome butchery and looting.”⁷³

At the other end of the city, jute workers of Alam Bazar, from the very beginning, pledged themselves to save their bustees, housing both Hindus and Muslims.⁷⁴ On August 17, 1946, a local committee was formed in the area, with local Congress and League leaders, who worked alongside the Communist workers. On the same night, when they were attacked and peace was broken, Hindu and Muslim workers showed remarkable unity by bringing out a peace squad. Similarly, seven hundred strikers of the Standard Pharmaceutical Company and three hundred strikers of the National Tannery did not join the riots.⁷⁵ Instead, they hoisted red flags at the factory gate and one of their workers said, “Red flag is guarding our factory, and that is why this riot could not touch our workers.”⁷⁶ Another story from a Muslim Rescue Centre in Park Circus speaks to the spirit of anti-communalism that coexisted with communal violence. When Communist leader Ghulam Quddus, met several Muslim workers of the Brooke Bond Tea Co., and Joya Engineering Works at the rescue centre who were anxious to get back to work, he asked, “[b]ut, there are Hindu workers inside, how can you work together now?”⁷⁷ The workers swiftly replied that “inside we have got our Union.”⁷⁸ The role played by workers, often under the aegis of their respective unions, undeniably played a pivotal role in resisting a communal take-over of certain localities and factories.

Peace processions and peace committees were formed throughout the city, in various mohallas and paras, as violence continued unabated on the streets. On August 17, when a Muslim bustee in Tollygunge was attacked by an outside mob, a vigil of Hindu and Muslim volunteers warded off their repeated attacks.⁷⁹ On the same day, when the military opened indiscriminate fire, the same Muslim bustee gave shelter to one hundred fifty Hindus.⁸⁰ A day later, on August 18, 1946, in the early morning, a peace procession of Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs paraded through Moulali and Taltola area carrying Muslim League, Congress, and white flags, as they chanted slogans like “*Hindu-Muslim ek ho.*”⁸¹ On the same day, Hindus and Muslims in that area met at Moulali Darga to discuss how peace could be restored in the neighbourhood.⁸² Such peace processions were most numerous in Park Circus and Tilajala bustee area.⁸³

Along with ordinary people helping each other, political leadership also took a part in establishing peace in the city. On August 19, 1946, Sarat Bose and Surendra Mohan Bose, along with Suhrawardy made a joint appeal to stop the communal fury.⁸⁴ *Hindustan Times* retorted that the League, particularly Suhrawardy, who was responsible for the Riots was trying to shield his culpability by associating himself with Congress leaders.⁸⁵ Soon after, a peace mission comprising Kiran Shankar Roy, Surendra Mohan Ghosh, M.A.H. Ispahani, Sirdar Niranjana Singh Talib, Shyamsuddin Ahmed, and Giani Mehra Singh toured the affected areas, carrying Congress and League flags.⁸⁶ The All India Congress Committee (AICC) in its draft resolution called upon every citizen to form ward or mohalla peace committees to promote communal harmony.⁸⁷ Surendra Mohan Ghose,

President of Bengal Provincial Congress Committee, formed the Bengal Congress Relief and Rehabilitation Committee to help displaced families.

Bengal had hardly got over the ravages of the famine of 1943, when came the epidemic. Since then, the province has been passing through a state of chronic famine. Now we have got these communal riots. The damages done in these riots can be adequately repaired only by the Government. But circumstances as we are in Bengal, we cannot leave everything to the care of the Government much as we have wished and tried for such a position. It has become so to speak, an unavoidable responsibility for the Congress to look after the wounded and refugees and to arrange their rehabilitation. Hence, Bengal Congress Relief and Rehabilitation Committee has been formed.⁸⁸

Suhrawardy visited the affected areas, while Abul Hashim urged Muslims in Bengal and in India to contribute at least one per cent of their monthly salary to help the victims of the Calcutta Riots.⁸⁹ While leaders across the political spectrum might have been pushed to take a stance against violence and to make a virtue out of the necessity of the situation, it was ordinary people who stood beside their neighbour, amidst savage butchery, resisting the onslaught of brute communalism.

An Erosion of Faith: Organised Political Leadership and Muslim Members

There is a substantial literature on the “blame game” that ensued in the official and political circles in the aftermath of the Riots.⁹⁰ This section focuses on an unexplored question: how ordinary Muslims, belonging to both the Congress and the Muslim League, reacted after the Riots? Whom did they hold responsible for their sufferings? It was gradually becoming clear that the neat distinction between the politics of Congress and of the Muslim League that had partly fuelled the violent outbreak began to lose its meaning among ordinary Muslims. Belligerence and rancour against the organised political leadership were pronounced, as popular sentiments contravened communal partialities. Many people lost confidence in their respective political parties and felt betrayed by their own political leaders. A Congress Muslim, Ashrafuddin Ahmed Chowdhury, who lived in Suhrawardy Avenue, Park Circus, was fiercely critical of the cavalier attitude of the Congress during the Riot days. He wrote a couple of letters to the central leadership of Congress, blaming the party for its inability to help the innocent people. He stated that Congress had succumbed to *goondaism* and to the unsocial activities of the League organisation. He reasonably questioned that if Congress claimed to represent all sections of Indian people, shouldn't the Congress party have come forward, in an organised manner, to defend the hearth, home, and honour of Indian men and women? Instead, they became an onlooker to the dreadful drama of violence. In his letter to AICC, Ashrafuddin stated that the violence that engulfed the streets of Calcutta was a result of the fight for

power between the League and Congress, to which ordinary people fell victim.

Why should the innocent Hindus and Muslims be victims for nothing? It is a fight between the Congress and League organizations. If it is inevitable which appears to be so let the members of two organizations fight it out amongst themselves with whatever arms each can secure and decide the issue once for all. Neither the League people nor the Congress people as a whole understand the nonviolent gospel of Gandhiji. You desire a peaceful transfer of power from the hands of the British Government, but how can that happen when the British is determined to throw you in the arena of fratricidal war. Pray, therefore do not for Heavens sake run after the mirage of peaceful transfer of power.⁹¹

Many nationalist Muslims had to bear the brunt of both the frenzied Hindu mob as well as the Muslim League supporters. Congress leadership failed to protect such men, like Dr. Jamal Mahammad, who had served their party loyally. In another letter to Jawaharlal Nehru, Ashrafuddin underlined the frustration of nationalist Muslims who were caught unaware of Congress's ineptitude and lack of institutional support,

I have shifted my place of residence twice and yet do not feel safe. Bengal Congress organization during the dark days not even cared to enquire of us except in the case of Moulvi Nausher Ali. I am glad to inform you that some individual Congress friends are taking keen interest about us, but they have their limitation. It is a goonda Raj that is ruling us in this province and so we cannot expect any assistance from that quarter to save our lives and property. It is the Ministry itself which is responsible for creating this hell in our part of the country. Although the members of Muslims in the Congress is smaller than that of Hindus in Bengal, yet there are thousands of Muslim Congress members scattered all over the province. Our active Muslim Congress workers in different districts and villages run the risk of their lives all over the provinces in the present conditions created by the League. There is hardly any organisation or sincere friends to give protection to the rank and file of the Muslim Congress in this province. Bengal Provincial Congress organisation do (*sic*) practically nothing except issuing statements in the Press. In one word they are not concerned about us at all. We are on the crossfires. There have been cases in which Congress Muslims have been killed by the Hindus mob in the locality where the cream of Hindu society lives. Those who are at helm of affairs of the Congress in the city of Calcutta did not or dared not to move their little fingers to stop this carnage, for they have no sanction behind them, neither have they any organisation in the real sense of the term to support them. I am stating to you the bitter truth. Now I seek your advice in this vital matter. Please let me know how we should conduct ourselves in these awful days and save our lives both from the hands of the Leaguers and also Hindu mobs. Is there any chance of getting any protection from any quarter? Should we be treated like untouchables by the Congress organisation here?⁹²

He concluded by saying that if Nehru was not invested with the power to face the contemporary situation, he should not continue in the Interim

Government. These letters brought to light not only the variegated perceptions of responsibility but also a deep sense of anguish that arose from a feeling of helplessness. Another Muslim, Abdur Rahman, who was a member of the Muslim League, was disillusioned with the Muslim League attitude. He was fiercely critical of Abul Hashim, the Secretary of BPML.

What Hashem Saheb did when slaughter of men was going on in Calcutta riots. He did not even pass by the side of the League office when thousands of people went to take shelter there. No trace of Hashem Saheb or his followers could be found at the time of rescuing Muslims from Bhowanipore, Sobhabazar, Lattopara area or in giving relief in such cases. The Muslim public took the responsibility of looking after themselves as no help from Provincial Leaguers were obtained. Hashem Saheb was at that time busy in maintaining the girls' of Mannujan Hall in the name of rescuing them. Now we find that the girls are being married with his follower youths and he himself is reported to be the candidate for one of the girls.⁹³

It is true that the League, like the Congress, was quite intensely fractured, and there existed several factions within the party itself. For e.g., the supporters of Suhrawardy, Nazimuddin, or Abul Hashim always did not see eye to eye, though they were a part of the same League party structure. Hence, the anger that Abdur Rahman vented against Hashim might be representative of the groupism that existed within the party, but at the same, it also reflected some of the legitimate anxieties and frustration that ordinary Muslims were developing against the organised political leadership. The fact that it was, to a certain extent, the failure of main political parties to provide an amicable solution to the question of power sharing and in fact, their handling of matters led to the violence; it was even more natural for common people to become cynical of political leaders when communal violence overtook the city. Muslims, belonging to Congress as well as to the League, became disenchanted with their parties, resulting in a decline of confidence in organised political leadership.

Conclusion

Historical and popular literature credit Gandhi for the “miracle” he did in Calcutta by restoring peace and tranquillity in local communities.⁹⁴ He came to Calcutta in October 1946 and then again in August 1947. Relegated from the frontline of Congress politics, Gandhi was given the opportunity to test the continued salience of his methods and philosophy in Calcutta, at a time when the familiar world was collapsing in an exceptional way. Indeed, Gandhi was successful in establishing peace in the region and the city did not witness any major communal conflagration at this scale in the coming years. Yet, under the purported peace, strong undercurrents of hostility continued that only accentuated in the years after Partition. The formation of the new postcolonial nation states stoked new kinds of political thinking that harped on a permanent demarcation of communal space, where Hindus belonged to India and Muslims belonged to Pakistan.⁹⁵ The Calcutta Riots of 1946

initiated a pattern of routine violence, fear, and communal propaganda that was imprinted on political life in West Bengal after Independence. From the beginning of 1949, Calcutta again witnessed a series of episodic violence, culminating in the communal riots of 1950. But this time, in the post-Partition context, it was fuelled with retributive vengeance and directed exclusively against Muslims in the city, who were now categorised as “national minorities” in the new nation state of independent India.⁹⁶

Notes

¹ Sikhs also played a significant part in the communal clashes and mostly sided with Hindus in the city, but the scope of this paper is restricted to the analysis of the Hindu-Muslim relations in the city.

² G.D. Khosla, *Stern Reckoning: A Survey of the Events Leading up to and Following the Partition of India* (Oxford University Press, 1990). Khosla’s work was first published in 1949. While the book is a rich collection of events during and in the immediate aftermath of Partition, the book frames the League and Muslims in general as primary aggressors during the Calcutta Riots of 1946; Dinesh Chandra Sinha and Ashok Dasgupta, *1946: The Great Calcutta Killing and Noakhali Genocide: A Historical Study* (Kolkata: Tuhina Prakashani, 2011). Sinha and Dasgupta focus on stories of the displacements of Hindu residents of the city, whereas an examination of the specificities of Muslim experiences is lacking in their historical narrative; Suranjan Das, *Communal Riots In Bengal, 1905–1947* (New Delhi: SAGE, 1990), Nariaki Nakazato, “Calcutta Disturbances: Colonial Administration, ‘Riots Systems’ and Local Networks,” in *Calcutta: The Stormy Decades*, eds., Tanika Sarkar, and Sekhar Bandyopadhyay (New Delhi, Social Science Press, 2015), and Anwesha Roy, *Making Riots, Making Peace: Communalism and Communal Violence, Bengal 1940–47* (India: Cambridge University Press, 2018), examines the anatomy of the riots, class composition of the rioters, behaviour of the rioting crowd, organisational structure, and the formal-informal networks. This article adds to this scholarship by examining a less studied area: local, daily experiences of ordinary Muslims of the city during the riots of August 1946.

³ A. K. Pillai, “Direct Action Day,” *Dawn*, 1 September 1946.

⁴ I use the word predominantly Hindu or predominantly Muslim area to mean that a particular community was a numerical majority in the locality in 1946. I used the Census of India 1941, Part IV, Bengal to ascertain whether Hindus or Muslims were a majority in each area. R. A. Dutch, *Census of India 1941, Part IV, Bengal* (Simla: Manager of Publications, Government of India Press, Delhi), 74–105.

⁵ For a discussion on the role of famine in destroying the collective consciousness of the city and in facilitating a communalisation of politics, see, Janam Mukherjee, *Hungry Bengal: War, Famine, Riots, and the End of Empire* (India: Harper Collins Publisher, 2015).

⁶ Sir F Burrows (Bengal) to Lord Pethick-Lawrence, August 23, 1946, in, Nicholas Mansergh, and Penderel Moon, eds., *Constitutional Relations Between Britain and India: The Transfer of Power 1942–47*, vol. VIII (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1970), 293.

⁷ Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India, 1885–1947* (Delhi: Macmillan, 1983), 432.

⁸ “Collection of Information Concerning Politics,” Intelligence Branch Records, File No. 1104-46, West Bengal State Archives, Kolkata.

⁹ Sumit Sarkar, ed., *Towards Freedom: Documents on the Movement for Independence in India 1946* Part 1 (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007), xxi.

¹⁰ “Note on the Causes of the Calcutta Disturbances August 1946,” Pyarelal Collection, M.K. Gandhi Papers, File No 148-Government of Bengal, Home Department Political, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Delhi, 7.

¹¹ Pyarelal Collection, File 148, “Notes the Causes,” 10–11.

¹² Sir Francis Taker, *While Memory Serves* (London: Cassel and Company Limited, 1950), 154.

¹³ Dinesh Chandra Sinha, and Ashoke Das Gupta *1946: The Great Calcutta Killings and Noakhali Genocide: A Historical Study* (Calcutta: Tuhina Prakashani, 2011), 64.

¹⁴ Extracts from “Abul Hashim’s Speech in the Legislative Convention,” *Star of India*, April 10, 1946.

¹⁵ Extracts from “Nazimuddin’s Speech,” *Morning News*, August 11, 1946.

¹⁶ Extracts from “Suhrawardy’s Speech,” *The Statesman*, August 5, 1946.

¹⁷ Pyarelal Collection, “Notes the Causes,” File 148, 5.

¹⁸ Pyarelal Collection, “Notes the Causes,” File 148, 15.

¹⁹ “Leaflets Brought to the Notice of IB in connection with Direct Action Day,” Intelligence Branch Records, File No. 717D-46, West Bengal State Archives, Kolkata.

²⁰ “Leaflets Brought to the Notice of IB,” Intelligence Branch Records, File No. 717D-46.

²¹ Sinha, and Das Gupta, *1946: The Great Calcutta Killings*, 6.

²² “Calcutta Muslim National Guards,” Intelligence Branch Records, File No. 634–44, West Bengal State Archives, Kolkata.

²³ Pyarelal Collection, “Notes the Causes,” File 148, 15.

²⁴ “Leaflets Brought to the Notice of IB,” Intelligence Branch Records, File No. 717D-46.

²⁵ “Leaflets Brought to the Notice of IB,” Intelligence Branch Records, File No. 717D-46. The pamphlet claimed that Rahman was a former member of the Muslim League who had recently joined the Congress rank. It stated that Rahman had claimed that League had given orders to all local Muslims to destroy Hindus. It is noteworthy to mention that a notorious goonda, named Habibur Rahman or Habu goonda, played an active role during the riots under the banner of Muslim League. He died on the streets in the ensuing violence, but he remained committed in his loyalty to the League. It is not known whether the pamphlet was referring to Habu goonda or not because if it is the same person Habibur Rahman (or Habu goonda) did not shift his political allegiance as the pamphlet claimed. In this connection, it might be noted that rumours were widespread during the riot days, and it might not be amiss to argue that this pamphlet was trying to create panic among Hindu population in order to communalize them, by spreading rumours about Rahman’s claim. An extensive study of Habibur Rahman is done by Nakazato, “Calcutta Disturbances,” 291–94.

²⁶ “Leaflets Brought to the Notice of IB,” Intelligence Branch Records, File No. 717D-46.

²⁷ Pyarelal Collection, “Notes the Causes,” File 148, 8.

²⁸ Letter of Field Marshall Viscount Wavell to Lord Pethwick-Lawrence, August 21, 1946, in Mansergh, and Moon, eds., *The Transfer of Power*, 273–74.

²⁹ Extracts from “Reports of the IB Officials and Assistants Regarding the Incidents Witnessed during the Direct Action Day Declared by AIML Office of DIG, IB,” Intelligence Branch Records, File No. 717/46(6), West Bengal State Archives, Kolkata.

³⁰ “Reports of the IB Officials and Assistants Regarding the Incidents Witnessed during the Direct Action Day,” Intelligence Branch Records, File No. 717/46(6).

³¹ “Reports of the IB Officials and Assistants Regarding the Incidents Witnessed during the Direct Action Day,” Intelligence Branch Records, File No. 717/46(6).

³² Nariaki Nakazato, drawing upon Paul Brass’s concept of “institutional riot system,” has evaluated the role “specialists” of riots played in August 1946 and Nakazato has given specific attention to the antisocial elements or goondas and their significance during the riot days. Nakazato, “Calcutta Disturbances,” 283–319.

³³ Members from both the Muslim and Hindu community had goonda gangs, who were often members of mainstream political groups, like the Muslim League, Congress Socialist Party, or Revolutionary Socialist Party (India). During the Riots, most of these groups were communalised, as they turned into killers of the other community. For further details about the goonda gangs of Calcutta, see, Nakazato, “Calcutta Disturbances,” 283–96; and Ishan Mukherjee, “*Agitation, Riots, and the Transitional State in Calcutta, 1945-1950*” (Unpublished PhD diss, University of Cambridge 2017), 249–82.

³⁴ Mukherjee, “*Agitation, Riots*,” 1, 2, 262. The term goonda can be loosely translated as goons. For a specific definition of goonda in the colonial context, see, “Indian Political Situation, Memorandum by the Secretary of State for India,” India and Burma Committee. Paper I.B. (45), Nicholas Mansergh, and Penderel Moon, eds., *Constitutional Relations Between Britain and India: The Transfer of Power 1942–47*, vol. VI, no. 28 (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1976), 70–1. >

³⁵ Mukherjee, “*Agitation, Riots*,” 262.

³⁶ Mukherjee, “*Agitation, Riots*,” 263. Mukherjee discusses the goonda-politician-media-police in Calcutta, particularly in the aftermath of the Riots.

³⁷ Ashis Nandy, “The Death of an Empire,” *Sarai Reader* 02 (2002): 14–21, <https://sarai.net/sarai-reader-02-cities-of-everyday-life/>; <https://southasia.ucla.edu/history-politics/independent-india/death-empire-ashis-nandy/>.

³⁸ Debjani Sengupta, “A City Feeding on Itself: Testimonies and Histories of ‘Direct Action’ Day,” *Sarai Reader* 06 (2006): 288–89, <https://sarai.net/sarai-reader-06-turbulence/>.

³⁹ Sengupta, “A City Feeding on Itself,” 290.

⁴⁰ *Calcutta Disturbances Commission of Enquiry*, Record of Proceedings, Minutes of Evidence, vol 3 (Calcutta: Government of Bengal, 1947-48), 177.

⁴¹ “Congress Muslim,” *Morning News*, September 2, 1946.

⁴² *Calcutta Disturbances Commission of Enquiry* vol. 3, 175.

⁴³ *Calcutta Disturbances Commission of Enquiry* vol. 3, 175.

⁴⁴ “Reign of Terror in Kalighat: Murder, Loot, and Destruction by Hindu Mobs,” *Morning News*, August 28, 1946.

⁴⁵ *Calcutta Disturbances Commission of Enquiry* vol. 3. 179.

⁴⁶ “Savage Cruelty on Students,” *Morning News*, 28 August 1946.

⁴⁷ Mohammad Shamsul Alam Joarder, Interview by Farhana Afroz, and Joelle Raichle in Dhaka, January 16, 2012, *The 1947 Partition Archive, Stanford University*, <https://exhibits.stanford.edu/1947-partition/catalog/rp602hw9371>.

⁴⁸ “Commission of Enquiry into the Recent Disturbances in Calcutta, Howrah and 24 Parganas. I.G.P’s Report,” Intelligence Branch Records, File No. 393/46, West Bengal State Archives, Kolkata.

⁴⁹ *Calcutta Disturbances Commission of Enquiry* vol 3, 143.

⁵⁰ *Calcutta Disturbances Commission of Enquiry* vol 3, 17.

⁵¹ The proceedings of the *Calcutta Disturbances Commission of Enquiry* focus on the role played by police in letting the communal fanfare to continue. Meticulous study of

police action during August 1946 is done by Ranabir Samaddar, "Policing a Riot-torn City: Kolkata, 16–18 August 1946," *Journal of Genocide Research* 19, no.1 (2017):1-30. Through an examination of police conduct and crowd conduct during the riots, Samaddar shows how the geopolitical logic of riot, and the administrative logic of police ran against each other. By critically reading the *Calcutta Disturbances Commission of Enquiry* volumes, he uncovers the politics that framed the very discourse of the Commission and shows how that Commission itself was unable to use the knowledge it produced, through its interrogation, in governing the city.

⁵² *Calcutta Disturbances Commission of Enquiry* vol.3, 155.

⁵³ Nandy, "The Death," 14–21.

⁵⁴ For communal patterns of living in Calcutta, see, Pradip Kumar Datta, *Carving Blocs: Communal Ideology in Early Twentieth Century Bengal* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 262–63; Joya Chatterji, "Of Graveyards and Ghettos: Muslims in Partitioned West Bengal 1947–1967" in *Living Together Separately: Cultural India in History and Politics* eds. by Mushirul Hasan, and Asim Roy (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), 222–49.

⁵⁵ A, Hamid, "Letters to Editor," *Morning News*, August 27, 1946.

⁵⁶ Qazi Abdul Quddus, "Letters to Editor," *Morning News*, August 27, 1946.

⁵⁷ Tapan Raychaudhuri, *Bangalnama* (Kolkata: Ananda Publishers, 2007), 151.

⁵⁸ Datta, *Carving Blocs*, 108, 259–60.

⁵⁹ Datta, *Carving Blocs*, 260.

⁶⁰ Anwesha Roy has also explored the efforts of anti-communal resistance in the city during the Calcutta riots. Anwesha Roy, "Calcutta and Its Struggle for Peace: Anti-Communal Resistance, 1946–1947," in *Calcutta: The Stormy Decades* eds. Tanika Sarkar, and Sekhar Bandyopadhyay (New Delhi, Social Science Press, 2015); Roy, *Making Riots, Making Peace*, 171–75.

⁶¹ Ebadat Hossain, "Hindus Save Muslims," *Morning News*, August 31, 1946.

⁶² Peary Lall Das, "Muslim Thanked," *Morning News*, August 24, 1946.

⁶³ Nandy, *The Death of an Empire*, 14–21.

⁶⁴ Sarkar, *Towards Freedom*, 692; Nikhil Chakravarty, "Those Who Fought to Save Brothers," *People's Age*, September 15, 1946.

⁶⁵ Sarkar, *Towards Freedom*, 685; "Workers' and Common Man's Heroism Against Fratricidal War," *People's Age*, September 1, 1946.

⁶⁶ Sarkar, *Towards Freedom*, 685.

⁶⁷ Sarkar, *Towards Freedom*, 692; Nikhil Chakravarty, "Those Who Fought."

⁶⁸ Sarkar, *Towards Freedom*, 685; "Workers' and Common Man's Heroism," *People's Age*.

⁶⁹ "Calcutta in Grip of Insane Lust for Patricidal Blood." *People's Age*, August 25, 1946.

⁷⁰ Sarkar, *Towards Freedom*, 684; "Workers' and Common Man's Heroism," *People's Age*.

⁷¹ Sarkar, *Towards Freedom*, 683; "Workers' and Common Man's Heroism," *People's Age*.

⁷² Sarkar, *Towards Freedom*, 684; "Workers' and Common Man's Heroism," *People's Age*.

⁷³ Sarkar, *Towards Freedom*, 684; "Workers' and Common Man's Heroism," *People's Age*.

⁷⁴ Sarkar, *Towards Freedom*, 693; Chakravarty, "Those Who Fought."

⁷⁵ Sarkar, *Towards Freedom*, 693; Chakravarty, "Those Who Fought."

⁷⁶ Sarkar, *Towards Freedom*, 693; Chakravarty, "Those Who Fought."

⁷⁷ Sarkar, *Towards Freedom*, 693; Chakravarty, "Those Who Fought."

⁷⁸ Sarkar, *Towards Freedom*, 693; Chakravarty, "Those Who Fought."

⁷⁹ Sarkar, *Towards Freedom*, 691; Chakravarty, "Those Who Fought."

⁸⁰ Sarkar, *Towards Freedom*, 691; Chakravarty, "Those Who Fought."

⁸¹ "Peace Procession Parades Streets," *Hindustan Times*, August 19, 1946.

⁸² “Peace Procession,” *Hindustan Times*.

⁸³ “Peace Procession,” *Hindustan Times*.

⁸⁴ “Congress-League Joint Appeal for Peace,” *Hindustan Times*, August 19, 1946.

⁸⁵ “Congress-League Joint Appeal,” *Hindustan Times*.

⁸⁶ N.N. Mitra, ed., *The Indian Annual Register, 1919–1947*, vol 57 (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2000), 187.

⁸⁷ “Draft Resolution, All India Congress Committee Papers,” File No G-60, P1 (Part II), 1946, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.

⁸⁸ “Draft Resolution, All India Congress Committee Papers”. File No G-60, P1 (Part II), 1946.

⁸⁹ Extracts from news report, “Circular by Abul Hashim,” *Dawn*, October 4, 1946. Abul Hashim urged the Muslim public in Bengal to donate money to the Bengal Muslim League Relief Committee for rehabilitating the displaced Muslims.

⁹⁰ Das, *Communal Riots*, 187–92; Rakesh Batabyal, *Communalism in Bengal: From Famine to Noakhali* (New Delhi: SAGE, 2005), 254–69; Roy, *Making Riots, Making Peace*, 164–66. Ranabir Samaddar engages with the issue by exploring urban politics during and in the aftermath of the riots by deconstructing the *Calcutta Disturbances Commission of Enquiry* deliberations on questions of culpability, police action, and positions of political parties at a time when the colonial state was collapsing and losing its control over the city. Samaddar, “Policing a Riot-torn City,” 1–30.

⁹¹ “Letter from Ashrafuddin to Kripalani,” AICC Papers, File No CL-8/1946, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.

⁹² “Collection of Materials for Newsletter etc.,” AICC Papers, File No G-1/1946, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.

⁹³ “Leaflets Brought to the Notice of IB,” Intelligence Branch, IB File No. 717D-46.

⁹⁴ Roy, *Making Riots, Making Peace*, 214–46.

⁹⁵ Sekhar Bandyopadhyay talks about the popular understanding of the communal demarcation of space between Hindus and Muslims in West Bengal. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, “The Minorities in Post-Partition West Bengal: The Riots of 1950,” in *Minorities and the State: Changing Social and Political Landscapes of Bengal*, eds. Abhijit Dasgupta, Masahiko Togwa, and Abul Barkat (New Delhi: SAGE, 2011), 3–17.

⁹⁶ In the Great Calcutta Killings, members of both communities were victims of violence, while in the 1950 riots, it was specifically Muslims who were targets of attacks. Hindus became targets of communal attacks in East Bengal (East Pakistan).