

**Dr Joya Chatterji**

**The Bengal Diaspora: Bengali Settlers in South Asia and Britain: a Comparative and Interdisciplinary Study  
End of year report for 2008**

**Highlights:**

In the past year the research team has concentrated its focus on the following sets of issues:

- on *movement* both across and within borders as a fluid, ongoing and open-ended process. Dr Chatterji is working on a model of migration and diaspora which regards 'home' and 'away' as a *single socio-cultural field* whose characteristics are shaped by migration, and which in turn shape patterns of mobility, sociability and hierarchy in this 'diasporic field';
- on the interaction between new and old migrants and in the Bengal borderlands and in the UK;
- on the contested politics of diasporic space: eg in 'Banglatown', London, and 'Bihari camp', Dhaka;
- on community rituals and memorials of migration (comparing Bengali Mela celebration in London and 'Bihari' Muharram observance in Dhaka);
- on a comparative study of 'origin myths' of migration in the delta and UK;
- on citizenship and migration: looking at how migrants have shaped citizenship laws, but also at how they have understood, experienced and practised 'transnational citizenship'.
- on 'making visible' groups that have been overlooked in previous research (women, brides/grooms, illegal migrants)
- on exploring new 'sites' previously un/ under-researched

The research points to the value of an interdisciplinary approach which deploys historical method alongside historical anthropology, ethnography and sociology, and which combines an analysis of macro-level structures and processes with micro-level subjectivity and agency.

**Progress of the project:**

- Identification of fieldsites in South Asia and the UK
- Compilation of bibliography of work on Bengalis in the UK, South Asia. Completion of substantial literature reviews, and compilation of statistical data on UK and South Asia
- Drawing up of interview schedules, initial contacts in fieldsites
- Completion by Dr Jalais of interviews at three sites in the Bengal delta (Dhaka, Dinajpur borderlands, and Kolkata)
- Completion by Mr Firoz of interviews at three sites in the UK (Tower Hamlets, Newham and Greater Manchester)
- Completion by Dr Jalais of the translation and transcription of the interviews conducted at two sites in the Bengal delta.
- Completion by Mr Firoz (and an assistant) of translation and transcription of the interviews conducted at two sites in the UK.
- Archival research and collection of sources by the PI Dr Chatterji
- Research and interviews in 'Banglatown' by Dr Alexander.
- Contacts developed with other interested experts/researchers/projects
- Contacts developed with community groups – Brick Lane Circle Seminar, Swadhinata Trust, Network Bangla, Drishtipat