

## **Bengal Partition: A Disastrous Effects On Transportation System At Initial Years Of 1947**

**Dr. Suparna Chaudhury**  
**Assistant Professor in Geography**  
**S.B.S.S.Mahavidyalaya: Goaltore, Paschim Medinipur**

### **Abstract:**

Fifteenth August 1947, the first day of free India was celebrated with much exuberance and elation but this joy was tainted by despair because country has been divided. Among the various factors, railway and road connections were also taken into consideration at the drawing of International boundary. A well knit co-ordination of transport system should be implemented for the sustained economic growth for both state at that time. The partition of the country caused the severely rundown of the transportation system in the years following Independence. But several problems raised the transportation system in the wake up of partition. After partition shortage of foods, scarcity of trained men and financial stringency restricted the development in both states at that time.

### **Introduction:**

India achieved Independence at midnight of 14-15th August, 1947. Large parts of the two new nations were engulfed by communal violence. There was a mass exodus of people from both states across the new borders. The two governments were also initiated to sign several agreements on trade and travel between the two countries (Bandyopadhyaya, 2017). Before Independence, Bengal was always a single economic, cultural and ethnic zone. The Radclifts line (line between India and Pakistan) split the Bengal into two halves, East Bengal and West Bengal. West Bengal became a state of India and East Bengal became a province of Pakistan. These two halves were connected with each other. The fertile East Bengal produced food and raw materials which were consumed by west and Industrialised west produced manufactured goods which were consumed by east (Wikipedia-2019). This mutually beneficial trade and exchange was severely disrupted by the partition because Rail, Road and Water communication routes were severed between the two. After partition, West Bengal suffered a severe food shortage problems because fertile rice producing districts of Bengal went to the eastern half. The financial stringency restricted the development of roads which has to be determined in the light of national, local resources and needs. (Puri and Mishra, 2016). In July 1947, the district of Sylhet was transferred to East Bengal from Assam which was left with no direct rail link with the rest of India (Bandyopadhyaya, 2017). The transportation system comprises several modes of transport including rail, road, Inland waterways and air ways (Roy, 2000). But partition mostly affect the rail, road and shipping. After partition shortage of foods, scarcity of trained men and financial stringency restricted the development (Husain, 2012). One of the most ticklish problems faced by the two countries was that of the distribution of transport routes. The most prominent attempts to organize some railway strike all over the country on 9<sup>th</sup> March, 1949 (Chandra, Mukherjee,

**Mukherjee, 2007**). They need the assistance of road transport. In India owing to the partition many of the roads were disconnected and certain pockets cannot be easily reached and their surplus products cannot be made available to other parts of the state (**Panday-2001**). 22th February, Bombay went on strike in sympathy and public transport system was paralysed, roadblocks were raised, trains were burnt. One million people were killed. Trains full of dead bodies travelled across the border in both directions (**Chattopadhyay, 2016**). Independence and partition both affecting the future projections of the two nations. Freedom also arrived with the pain of partition. Violence continued because of long caravans of thousands 1948 refugees began their journeys across the border, rival groups took revenge on one another. Trains were stopped and passengers were butchered indiscriminately and mercilessly. Often trains would arrive at their destinations carrying only corpses (**Azad, 2015**). Transport disconnected the vital link between production centers, distribution areas and ultimate consumers.

### **The problem of Coordination in different transport mode:**

Rail and Road transport are complementary each other. Since railways cannot reach every nook and corner of the country. The road frequency provides an important link between farmers in the villages and the nearest railway station. Due to partition of Bengal, many of the previous roads from west to east were disconnected. Certain pockets cannot be easily reached and their surplus products were not available to other parts. The Indian railway system is also the largest nationalized transportation in the country. The partition of the country in 1947 had a disastrous effect on railways. The diversion of north-western railway deprived the Indian portion of the majority of workshops, maintenance and repair facilities. The loss of the port of Karachi led to the diversion of traffic to Bombay causing a great deal of congestion and creating a transport bottleneck in the Bombay port. About 6,950 miles track and corresponding equipment's went to Pakistan, leaving 33,985 miles in India. One result of the partition was the emergence of Bombay as the Principal port of supply for the western region of the country because Karachi went to Pakistan. Following partition, another dislocation took place in Eastern India. The whole Assam Railway was cut off from the rest of the Indian system. Similarly the division of the Bengal-Assam railway left the Assam railway without any workshop or a link with rest of the railway system. These lines carried almost all freight traffic from these regions. Because of the partition of Bengal, one had to reach Assam only by crossing Pakistan's territory since railroad of Assam went to Pakistan. On the eve of India's Five Year Plans (1951-1956) Indian railways were in utter doldrums. By 1950, Indian reconnected Assam to the rest of the country's rail network by building a 229 km meter gauge rail link through the Siliguri Corridor. This problem was solved by constructing 149 miles long Assam Link in 1949. So, the problem of rehabilitation and replacement was neglected by the economic depression, food shortage, acute shortage of hardware, conditions of war years accentuated by the special features of partition. The importance of shipping in our country at that time with a long coastline and a large maritime trade cannot be easily appreciated but the movement of goods between port to port are affected by both railways

and coastal ships. Though Partition has brought about a shrinkage of the coastline under the charge of the Central Lighthouse Department. After partition India's foreign trade is carried on through the five major ports of Calcutta, Bombay, Madras, Cochin and Visakhapatnam. The loss of Karachi threw an additional strain on the Bombay port to which a part of the traffic previously handled by the Karachi port had been diverted. The bottlenecks of the railway system, inadequate connection in the hinterland, congestion of port and lack of technical personnel, crisis of mercantile marine created the problem for the carriage of essentials supplies through overseas and coastal shipping due to partition of Bengal. At the time of Independence the railways under severe strain and therefore the first plan was devoted mainly the rehabilitation and modernization of rolling stock and of fixed assets. Civil Air transport can play a vital role in emergencies as was evidenced in the evacuation after partition and in West Bengal and Assam in 1949-50. On account of the heavy replacement demands, the need for expansion could not be fully met in the first plan. The second plan also had to make a substantial provision for rehabilitation of aged assets. State participation in public road transport is intended to achieve greater efficiency and economy in operation and management.

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