

# Impact of Partition of India

## Part II (1+1+1 System) Geography Hons.

**Paper: V**

**Module: IV**

**Topic: 4.4**

On August 15, 1947 the territories of India and Pakistan came into existence. The territorial organization of the then India in general terms was as follows:

- The old provinces of British India were retained in units of India known as states and not provinces.
- The 'native' states in India merged with the Indian Republic and the princes were pensioned off.
- The Jammu-Kashmir State remained as an unresolved question between India and Pakistan and it continues to remain as such even today.

After beginning Pakistan consisted of two parts, Eastern Pakistan and Western Pakistan. Later Eastern Pakistan seceded from Pakistan and came to be known as Bangladesh in 1971 which the Western Pakistan came to be known as Pakistan.

**From geographical perspective the major impact on the society can be categorized into the followings:**

- Huge number of refugees belonging to religious minorities crossing over the border
- Demographic changes due to migration
- Overcrowding in border districts, towns and cities
- Emergence of ethno-cultural, ethno-religious minorities leading to inter-ethnic conflict
- Influx of people in the metropolis of Kolkata resulting to over-urbanization
- Logistics of rehabilitation of refugees
- Rise in the number of unemployed
- Violent inter-ethnic/communal riots
- Loss of territorial resources, i.e. fertile agricultural land, in this case an extensive area under jute crop, forest lands, loss of huge mangrove forests in the deltaic region of Sunderbans
- Sharing of water resources between upper and lower riparian states
- Border disputes related to demarcation of boundary running through riverine delta areas and flat alluvium plains
- Inadequate transport and communication network system between newly created independent nations
- Inadequate infrastructure for inter and intra-regional trade and commerce
- Enclaves on either side of the border

### *Economic impacts of partition*

**Agricultural Production:** West Punjab and Sind traditionally formed a great source of food supply so much so that they were called the granary of undivided India. But since the two regions came to belong to Pakistan after the partition, India was hit hard so far as food production was concerned. Already the state of her agriculture was not healthy. Productivity remained very low.

**Industry:** The industrial sector suffered considerably from the impact on agriculture, for reasons of the traditional linkage of industries with the agricultural sector for deriving raw materials produced in the agricultural sector. Two major industries, namely, jute and cotton, were struck hard because of their deprivation of basic inputs. Moreover, a number of industries including cotton textiles, hosiery, rubber products, copper, silk and woollen textiles, soap and glass were adversely affected by loss of internal markets to the extent that a substantial section of the consumers of these goods henceforth belonged to Pakistan in the wake of the partition.

In addition the riots that ensued after the partition led to a massive migration of skilled labour from India to Pakistan. A majority of the skilled workers and artisans were incidentally the people of the Muslim community. As they left India for settlement in Pakistan, the factories in West Bengal and Punjab had to starve for want of skilled hands. Last but not the least, the state of West Bengal lying in the border areas could not encourage the industrialists to locate their production centres in Kolkata and its hinterland as they felt it unsafe to do so in view of the frequent riots.

Viewed from today's perspective, this might seem to be far-fetched, but during the period under review this was a stark reality. The industrialists actually considered it unsafe to have their industrial location in the border areas. They had a tendency to shift their units in the interior. This overall attitude had a serious nature of distorting effects on the pattern of industrial location in India in general and West Bengal in particular, at least in the early phase of the post-partition period.

**Jute:** The biggest calamity in the jute sector arose from the fact that nearly 80% of jute production went out of hands because of the partition. The reason was obvious; the lion's share of the acreage under jute cultivation went to East Pakistan. Ironically, the capacity of production of raw jute was almost fully retained in India. The Indian capacity of producing jute products in the mills henceforth solely hinged on the mercy of Pakistan to supply raw jute to India.

**Cotton:** The cotton textile industry also met with a similar fate. The industry suffered in several ways. India's share in the output of raw cotton in undivided India was about 60%, while the corresponding share in the mill output was as high as 95%. Secondly what was worse for India was the fact that the areas growing high quality long and medium staple cotton went to West Punjab and Sind. Thirdly, India lost a sizeable amount of internal market to the tune of an estimated 1000 million yards because of the partition. The country also lost her earlier advantage as an exporter. However, this loss did not matter much so far as the economy of West Bengal is concerned because the state is not a cotton grower.

**Minerals:** The partition did not pose a threat to India's mineral production in general. Pakistan got roughly 3% of total value of mineral output of undivided India. Production of iron ore, copper, manganese and bauxite virtually remained unaffected for India. The only case of mineral in respect of which India suffered a setback from the partition was gypsum, a vital input for heavy chemicals.

**Irrigation:** A large of the Punjab Plains and the Lower Indus Valley in Sind went to Pakistan. For nearly one hundred years has seen comprehensive irrigation facilities growing in the region on the basis of canals. The Indus basin irrigation system was the earliest development of irrigation in northern India. This period irrigation system was particularly important in the Indus basin which went to Pakistan after partition. One scheme alone, the Sukkur Barrage Scheme in Sind, added to the permanently irrigated part of Pakistan more than the total cultivated tract of Egypt.

Up to the time of partition, the British Indian Government had spent 160 crores of rupees in irrigation works in India, in particular in western Punjab and Sind. The partition of India in the west led to almost the total inclusion of the existing irrigation system in Pakistan.

In the east the Pakistan led to the bifurcation of the Bengal delta, the Ganga-Bhagirathi channel flowing south into Indian territory while the Padma-Brahmaputra-Meghna channel flowing into the Bay of Bengal through Bangladesh. The bigger part of the Bengal delta falls within the territory of Bangladesh. This means that the large part of the Sunderbans of the active delta region falls within Bangladesh. It also disturbed the port of Kolkata by affecting the water flow of the Hooghly river. This necessitated a massive spending of money on the Farakka Project. It also led to Water Agreement between the two countries for appropriate allocation of waters that could best serve the interests of both.

### *Demographic impacts*

**Population pressure:** In terms of human resource the loss was enormous as it received about 16 million uprooted, homeless refugees who had to be rehabilitated at once. The streams of migration have never stopped as far as the eastern states are concerned. The subsequent political and social unrest known as Naxalbari movement that generated from North Bengal during the 1960s and later spread to several districts in West Bengal and Kolkata, also owes its origin to partition. The redistribution of land i.e. land reform process became a socio-political necessity because a huge number of people belonging to marginal and landless class had to be provided for. Even after seventy years of independence, the state houses about 14.7 percent people living below the poverty line. The population density of the state is nearly three times that of national average (The population density of India has gone up to **382 persons** per square kilometre in 2011), 1029 persons per square kilometre (2011). Therefore the relative state of under-development may be partially attributed to partition.

As far as the situation arising after 1971-72 is concerned, the socio-cultural and geopolitical implications are extremely complex. There has been a continuous international migration causing more strain on the economy. The ethno-linguistic and ethno-cultural conflict in adjoining states of Assam and Tripura are particularly significant. The large numbers of ethnic groups living in this part have heterogeneous social, cultural and economic characteristics and some of them have become minorities in their own states. This has created further demand for self-determination leading to political instability.

**Refugee rehabilitation:** The question of rehabilitating the people coming to India came next. The need that was the uppermost was to provide shelter and food to them and to protect them from possible epidemic. This was by itself a tough challenge for a country that was already densely populated. This caused a serious strain on West Bengal in particular because the state's economy was relatively weak with limited means of agriculture and industry. The refugees coming into India left behind wealth and property

much more valuable than the outgoing refugees. The partition led to an uneven distribution of area and India had to share a greater burden of the population in proportion to the land share.

### *Geopolitical impacts*

The geopolitics has been defined as the legitimate study of climate, location, natural resources, topography, and other geographical factors to assess their impact on the power, foreign policy, and military strategy of states. The multi-dimensional nature of the geopolitics of South Asia needs special attention. This geographical region is not contiguous with each other but shares a boundary with India. Therefore South Asian identity is not geo-politically defined and without the varied characteristics of Indian diversity it cannot be explained. India was founded on the principles of varied democracy whereas Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka are occasionally democratic, by and large majoritarian states, ruled by dominant religious communities. This ideological difference is reflected in the foreign policies of the South Asian nations. Moreover, the geo-strategic issues have become significant in post 9/11 scenario when the entire worldview has changed as far as the geo-strategic relations between nations are concerned.

The ground reality is extremely complex in South Asia with rivalries, politics of confrontation and the issue of identity among partitioned nations. The mistake of partition has resulted from communal disharmony and hatred fanned by vested interest groups. The neighbouring countries are sometimes maintaining the pre-partition strategy and this is detrimental to the development of South Asia. Bangladesh particularly has become a haven for terrorist and religious fundamentalist groups who are carrying a proxy war with India. The Maoist activities in Nepal are another source of direct threat to India and Bhutan. North Bengal situated at the tri-junction of Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh is particularly vulnerable. The porous border through Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and northern states facilitate free movement of people. The geopolitical situation is a direct impact of unwise partition of territories the implication of which is far-reaching. In order to achieve a lasting peace in the sub-continent a pragmatic foreign policy and settlement of unresolved issues such as sharing of water, border management, settlement of border disputes, disbanding of terrorist outfits are of prime importance.

**Conclusion:** India should put greater emphasis on border management to stop cross-border migration and initiate a process of economic rehabilitation of the refugees, and deported people from across the borders. These uprooted social groups are subjected to social and cultural alienation and suffer from poverty and deprivation. India has a major security concern in the border regions, which is a legacy of partition. Thus in order to solve the problem of terrorism and geopolitical instability these issues needs to be addressed properly.

## Boundaries and Frontiers

**Boundaries:** Boundaries separate the sovereignty of one state from that of its neighbours. In general no state has rights of tax collecting, of conscription, of law enforcement or of military occupation outside its boundaries.

**Frontiers:** Frontier is an area at the margins of the integrated territory of a state or any political unit into which expansion may take place. It was that zone in which at a given moment the force of expansion of two neighbouring states tended to mutually neutralize each other.

### *Difference between frontiers and boundaries:*

1. Frontier are outer –oriented and its main attention is carried outward towards the peripheral areas, but boundaries are inner-oriented since they reflect the territorial limit of the sovereignty, which is done by the governments concerned.
2. Frontier is a manifest of centrifugal forces whereas boundary that of centripetal one.
3. A frontier is an integrating factor between states on either side; a boundary is a separating factor.
4. Frontier is neither a manifestation of a legal concept or political concept; but the boundary is purely a legal concept and expressive of the judicial law.
5. Frontiers are natural as they are transitional between geographic region rather than between state. Boundaries are purely political in origin and functions.
6. Frontiers are areal whereas boundaries are linear in character.
7. Frontiers are a phenomenon of the past and boundaries are a phenomenon of the present.