

CHAPTER- VI

POST PARTITION TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATION OF NORTH

BENGAL

Since the early years of the forties of twentieth century, it was clearly revealed that the demand of Indians for independence would not be postponed for long time. The Quit India Movement of 1942, role of Indian National Army and Subhash Chandra Bose, the Naval Mutiny of 1946, forced the colonial Government of India to grant independence to India.¹ Besides, the role of the Home Government of Great Britain under the Labour Party which always supported for the cause of Indian freedom, post-war internal problems of the colonials powers which encouraged the process of decolonization all over the world, international pressure from great powers like the USA and China supporting the cause of Indian freedom and British futile attempts through several 'Missions' were mostly responsible for granting independence to India.²

A burning debate since the early days of independence has been persistent among the scholars on the issue of inevitability of Partition of India. Though some scholars have opined that the Partition could have been averted if the Indian leaders were prepared to leave their demands in the line of religion.³ In spite of anti-Partition demonstration and propaganda by some Indian parties, personalities and groups of people in several places of India, the British Government as declared by Lord Mountbatten on 3rd June, 1947 quite perceived that, 'it has been impossible to obtain agreement either on the Cabinet Mission, or any other plan that would preserve the unity of India ... and the only alternative to coercion is partition'.⁴ The events following the Cabinet Mission's proposals in 1946 were mostly responsible for Partition.⁵ In fact, the constant demand of Pakistan by the Muslim League, non-acceptance of Cabinet Mission Plan by the major

parties of India, Direct Action Day of the Muslim League followed by communal riots in several provinces mainly eastern and western sides of India, apprehended the British Government that it would be better for them to quit India by transferring the power to Indians as soon as possible.

The British Indian Government with the negotiations of the Muslim League and other national parties created two independent states according to the line of religion. The Indian Independence Bill was presented before the House of Commons of Great Britain on 4th July, 1947; approved by the House of Lords on the 16th and finally received the assent of the king on Friday, eighteenth July.⁶ The Partition of certain provinces of eastern and western sides of India viz. Bengal and Punjab was logically the outcome of Muslim League's demand for separate statehood for the Muslims.⁷ The Indian Independence Act of 1947 provides, "The Dominion of Pakistan will include the territories which on August 15 are included in the provinces of East Bengal and West Punjab".⁸ While India remained as a unified nation when its boundary was concerned, new born Pakistan suffered much by its divided two eastern and western wings viz. East Pakistan and West Pakistan having an uncommunicated land gap of thousands of miles by foreign nation between the two which was only communicated by air services.

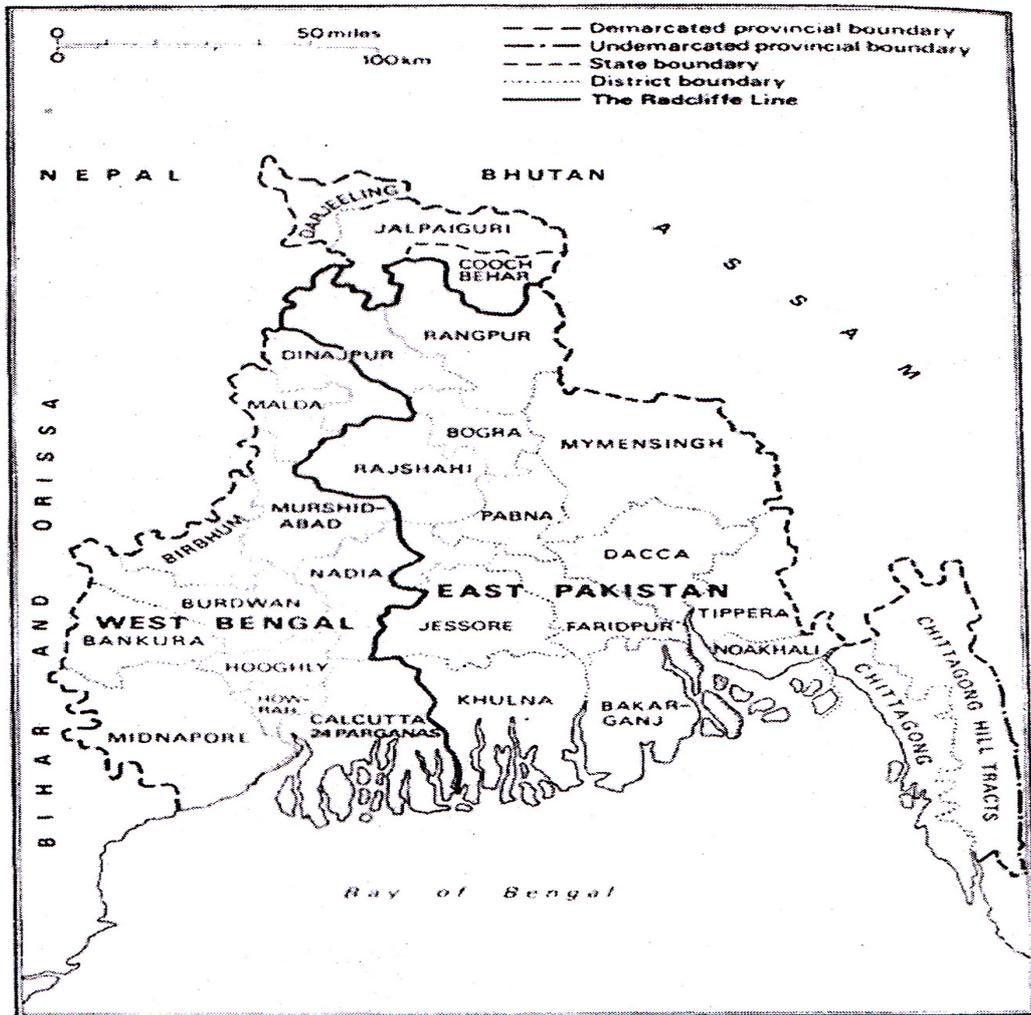
Since the 'Great Partition' was made, Bengal became one of the severely affected provinces suffered much by the so-called Partition of India in 1947. The Indian Independence Act provides that Bengal as constituted under the Government of India Act of 1935 will cease to exist and two new provinces i.e. East Bengal and West Bengal will come into existence after the Partition though it was almost a week before placing the Bill to the House of Commons, The function of demarcating the boundary between the eastern and western parts of Bengal was entrusted to the 'Bengal Boundary

Commission' constituted by the Governor General on 30th June, 1947, Reference No. D 50/7/47/R, after the Muslim majority districts of the province had decided in favour of Partition. The members of the Commission as well as their Chairman were appointed and their 'terms of references' were drawn in consultation with the leaders of the principal Indian parties. This Commission consisted of Sir Cyril Radcliffe (Chairman), Mr. Justice Bijan Kumar Mukherjea (Calcutta High Court), Mr. Justice Charu Chandra Biswas (Calcutta High Court), Mr. Justice Abu Saleh Muhammad Akram (Calcutta High Court), and Mr. Justice S.A. Rahman who were instructed to 'demarcate the boundaries of the two parts of Bengal on the basis of ascertaining the contiguous majority areas of Muslims and non-Muslims.⁹ In doing so, it will also take into account other factors'.¹⁰ Moreover, The Commission after preliminary meetings received large number of memoranda and representations by interested parties through public sittings at Calcutta from 16th July, 1947 to 24th July, 1947, where arguments were presented by numerous parties on both sides.¹¹

The Commission faced several issues while demarcating the boundary line between East and West Bengal. Amongst these North Bengal related matters were closely connected with four districts viz. Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Malda and Dinajpur where the Commission received several representations from opponent parties. However, 'in absence of any reconciliation on all main questions' the Commission declared the 'Award' by gazette notification on eighteenth August, 1947 though argument arose intending to accuse Lord Mount Batten to have influenced Sir Radcliffe for drawing the line in India's favour.¹²

Map No-6.1

Division of province of Bengal on the basis of Radcliffe Award



Source: Sir Cyril Radcliffe Award, The Schedule, Annexure A

The districts of North Bengal was the part of undivided Rajshahi Division. Only the native state of Coochbehar was ceded to it after its merger to Indian union. While drawing the line, Radcliffe, as stated by Lucy Chester, “seems to have preferred existing administrative lines, using district, tehsil, *thana* and even village boundaries”.¹³ The following table shows the division of *thanas* (police stations) of Rajshahi Division between East and West Bengal on the basis of the Award.

Table No-6.1

Division of thanas of districts of Rajshahi Division between West Bengal and East Pakistan

District	Total no. of <i>thanas</i>	West Bengal	East Pakistan
Darjeeling	12	Pulbazar, Sukhiapokri, Darjeeling, Jore Bungalow Rangli Rangliot, Mirik, Kurseong, Kharibari, Siliguri, Phansidewa, Kalimpong, Gorubathan (All of <i>thanas</i> were included to West Bengal)	-----
Jalpaiguri	17	Rajganj, Jalpaiguri, Mal, Mitiali, Maynaguri, Nagarkata, Dhupgori, Madarihat, Falakata, Kalchini, Alipur Duars, Kumargram,	Tetulia, Panchagarh, Boda, Dabiganj, Patgram
Malda	15	Harischandrapur, Kharba, Ratua, Gajole, Bamangola, Manikchak, English Bazar, Malda, Habibpur, Kaliachak	Bholahat, Gomostapur, Shibganj, Nachole, Nawabganj
Dinajpur	30	Raiganj, Itahar, Hemtabad, Kaliaganj, Kushmandi, Banshihari, Gangarampur, Kumarganj, Tapan, Balurghat (western side of Calcutta-Siliguri main line)	Atwari, Baliadangi, Thakurgaon, Ranisankail, Pirganj, Birganj, Haripur, Bochaganj, Kasharul, Khansama, Biral, Dinajpur, Chiribandar, Parbatipur, Nawabganj, Ghoraghat, Balurghat (eastern side of Calcutta-Siliguri main line), Phulbari, Porsha, Patnitala, Dhamoirhat,

Source: Sir Cyril Radcliffe Award, The Schedule, Annexure A

It is perhaps the transport and communication network of North Bengal that suffered most due to Partition of Bengal. Though the district of Darjeeling as a whole was included to West Bengal, the Radcliffe line was drawn such a way that the district was separated geographically like an island from other parts of West Bengal.¹⁴ Again, from the angle of transport and communication, Darjeeling was remained aloof from other parts of West Bengal except the adjacent district of Jalpaiguri. Though the Darjeeling Himalayan Railways did not experienced any mutilation as the line confined within the

district of Darjeeling; it seems that the Partition made the line useless as it was previously connected directly by Calcutta-Siliguri main line which was cut off by the Partition. Moreover, Tetulia which had been playing the role as the gateway of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri district from the southern districts since the beginning of development of road communication in that region, having been placed under East Bengal, the pre mentioned districts were disconnected to other parts of West Bengal for having no direct road communication.

Jalpaiguri is the first district mentioned in Annexure- A of Radcliffe Award that was divided by the Bengal Boundary Commission in 1947. Its five prosperous *thanas* viz. Tetulia, Panchagarh, Boda, Dabiganj, Patgram were handed over to East Bengal. Tetulia, an important junction of road communication system, having been fallen into the hands of East Bengal, Jalpaiguri lost its main trunk line of communication. Side by side, the natural communication system of the district of Jalpaiguri which was closely connected to neighbouring Rangpur districts of East Bengal in pre partitioned days by rail, road and river, were also interrupted due to bifurcation of the province. In comparison to roadways, the district of Jalpaiguri faced a strong obstacle to its railways for the Partition as all of its railways were closely connected to Eastern Bengal. First of all, the main line towards North Bengal termed as North Bengal State Railways, a branch line of Eastern Bengal State Railways that linked North Bengal with that of Calcutta, was forced to stop operation as the entire southern portion of the route between Haldibari, the extreme corner of Kooch Behar state after which the railways entered in Jalpaiguri district came to the hands of East Bengal. Similarly, a large part of the Barnes-Lalmanirhat section of Bengal Duars line had gone to East Bengal at the time of partition.¹⁵ Consequently, the railways ceased to be confined to the district.

The district of Malda achieved to sustain its communication with Calcutta, the capital of West Bengal through the district of Murshidabad and Nadia for having the *thana* of Kaliachak within the district by the division of *thanas* on the basis of the Radcliffe Award between East and West Bengal, though five of the *thanas* of the district concerned viz. Bholahat, Gomostapur, Shibganj, Nachole and Nawabganj went to the hands of East Bengal. If Kaliachak had not been included to West Bengal in 1947, the position of North Bengal would be as same as East and West Pakistan from geographical point of view. Similar to the districts of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri, the district of Malda suffered from Partition from the angle of communication. Its main line of communication of railways and roadways were cut off. Godagari-Katihar section (76.50 miles within the district) of Eastern-Bengal Railways which was opened for traffic in 1909 were bifurcated by the Radcliffe Award. This section of meter gauge line had to be satisfied to operate till Singabad of Habibpur *thana* due to transfer of next pre-mentioned five *thanas* to East Bengal after Partition. Again, the main line of communication of the district connected by one of the main District Board Road extended between Nawabganj and English Bazar, total 32.50 miles in length, 12.79 miles of which was metalled, bridged and drained throughout; that had been maintaining the trading and administrative relations between Rajshahi district, Nawabganj, Sibganj, Gomostapur on one hand and the *diara* and English Bazar on the other.¹⁶

Though Dinajpur was slightly a Muslim majority (ratio between Muslim and non-Muslim population according to 1941 census was 50.2 and 49.8) district, it was divided between East and West Bengal. Ten *thanas* of that undivided district came into West Bengal and the remaining with Dinajpur, the district headquarter went on East Bengal. Same to the case of other divided district of Bengal in terms of the Radcliffe Award, newly appeared district of West Dinajpur had to face a great difficulty while its

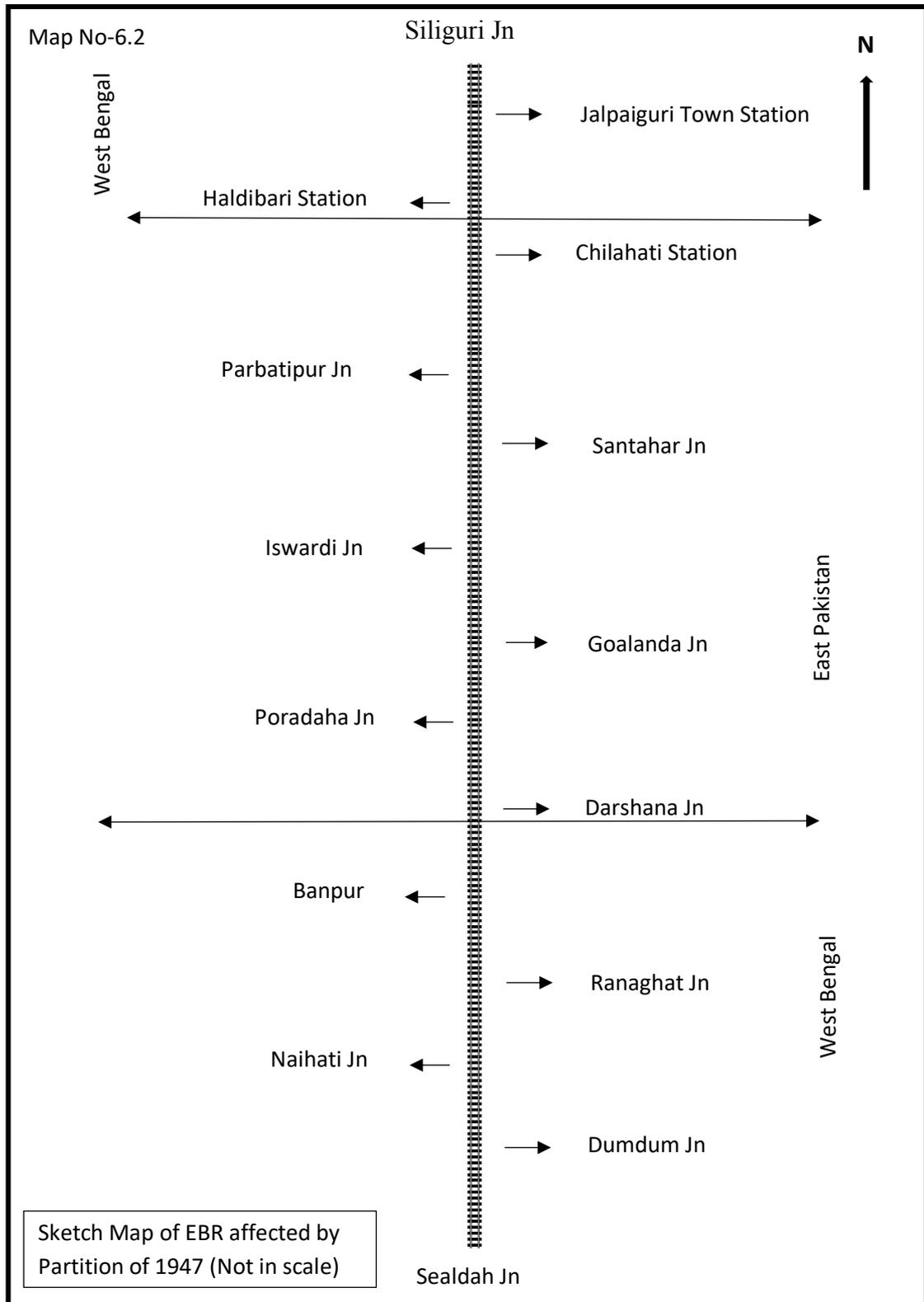
communication network was concerned. The age-old long-run Murshidabad Road which maintained the communication between Murshidabad and Dinajpur; thence between Dinajpur and Darjeeling (Darjeeling Road) from the beginning of colonial rule, was cut off by the division of the province. Similarly, all other district roads which communicated administrative and commercially important places of West Dinajpur with the district head quarter and other such places of post Partitioned Dinajpur district in pre independent days were also closed. While the district was well served by the Calcutta-Siliguri broad gauge line and Parvatipur-Katihar meter gauge line in pre-Partition days; the Radcliffe line having been drawn in such a way that the whole of the broad gauge line within the district had been fallen into East Bengal. Similarly, Parvatipur having been fallen into East Bengal by the decision of Bengal Boundary Commission, West Dinajpur had to satisfy her for having a segment of Parvatipur-Katihar meter gauge line confined between Radhikapur and Raiganj, 20 miles in length.¹⁷

Coochbehar in comparison to other districts of North Bengal was not included to West Bengal in 1947 as it was not a part of British empire in India though it was a feudatory and tributary state under the Government of British India. However, the 'Instrument of Accession' was signed between the Government of India and the ruler of Cooch Behar on 28th August, 1949 by which 'the king of Cooch Behar ceded full and extensive authority, jurisdiction and power of the state to the Dominion Government of India'.¹⁸ It became a part of the state of West Bengal on 1st January, 1950 'by means of an order under S. 290 (a) of the Government of India Act of 1935'; almost immediately after which the Government of West Bengal passed the Cooch Behar Act, 1950 for configuring Cooch Behar as a district with administrative set-ups.¹⁹

The Radcliffe Award had no interest on Cooch Behar as it was not a part of Bengal Presidency. Before its merger with India Cooch Behar was surrounded by Assam in the east; Jalpaiguri in the north and north-west; by East Bengal now Bangladesh in the west, south and south-east. The district of Rangpur in East Bengal surrounded the Coochbehar state from the west, south and south-east corner while the international boundary was laid down in 1947. Generally, it is thought that there was no boundary dispute between Coochbehar and the then Bengal or East Bengal - whatever the case might be, as there was not a single line utilised for the same in the Radcliffe Award; it can be positively stated that the issue of 'Indo-Bangladesh Enclaves' also known as the 'Chitmahals' though originated long before the starting of British rule, was also persistent during Partition.²⁰ If the issue was solved by Radcliffe, the future history of Indo-Bangladesh relation related to it might not hampered.

The Cooch Behar state possessed 'a tolerably good system of roads' during the Raj.²¹ The road network of Cooch Behar in pre-Partition days was basically connected with its counterpart of the neighbouring district of Rangpur through which it maintained its connection with Calcutta, the headquarter of the then Bengal Presidency.²² Similar to the neighbouring district of Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar also suffered heavily from that of Partition. Its fundamental road scheme, which was as stated by Durgadas Majumdar, "to construct roads mainly in the north-south direction and establish connections with road systems of Rangpur on the one hand and of the Western Duars on the other, to utilize the river crossing facilities existing in these districts and establish the east-west communications by a circuitous route" was completely upset.²³ While the railways was concerned, the state of Cooch Behar faced a total upset due to Partition. Unlike the district of Jalpaiguri, all of the branch lines of Cooch Behar remained moribund as most

of the lines were coming from Rangpur district which was transferred to Pakistan due to Partition. Its communication with Calcutta and Assam, both were discontinued.



Source: Amiya Basu(Ed). *Banglay Bhraman*. Pratham Khanda. Kolkata: Prachar Bibhag. Purba Banga Railway. 1940 (In Bengali)

Now let's have a look to the internal navigation of North Bengal during the time of Partition. The Bengal rivers, except the district of Darjeeling, always had been proved the eligibility for being a potential natural means of transportation since the unknown past. Most of the rivers of Bengal except the Ganges and a few others have been originated and fed by springs and *jhoras* of North Bengal and passing hundreds of miles through the plains of East and West Bengal or vis-à-vis met the Ganges or Brahmaputra river system. Thus being an integral part of any one of the major river system of Eastern India, the North Bengal rivers proved the best way for being a natural system of communication in undivided Bengal. For example, most of the rivers of Cooch Behar having been flown down through Rangpur district of present Bangladesh, major portion of total volume of trade were carried on by rivers from the marts of Cooch Behar and other parts of undivided Bengal through Rangpur districts.²⁴ Similarly, major part of internal and external exports of most of the agricultural produces and timbers from all corners of North Bengal were carried through rivers.²⁵ Even during the time when the railways had been penetrated almost all the districts of North Bengal, the river borne traffic was also very high in any of the districts of North Bengal.

It was found earlier that the World War II gave an impetus to indigenous river traffic of Bengal due to engagement of railway cargos and lorries for the war supply. Side by side, shortage of gasoline and tyres also collapsed the internal road transport system. In comparison to these, the indigenous river transportation system not only survived but got a boom.

The courses of rivers of North Bengal itself seems to be a curse which was faced acutely at the time of Partition of 1947. The courses of rivers were also bifurcated by the Radcliffe Award though there were provisions to 'take into account other factors', one

of which was certainly the existing river system.²⁶ It is interesting to note here that the Muslim League demanded whole of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri district to include in East Bengal 'to have control of the catchment basin of the river Tista for the maintenance of flow of that river and for resuscitation of other North Bengal rivers', but that that proposal was boldly defended by the report submitted by Justice B.K. Mukherjea and Justice C.C. Biswas, non-Muslim members of Bengal (Pre-Partition) Boundary Commission on 29th July, 1947.²⁷ However, consideration of that 'other factor' for Partitioning North Bengal rivers was dismissed by the Commission and the courses of North Bengal rivers were divided according to the division of *thanas*. Therefore, the traditional river transport system of North Bengal had been using basically for inter-regional trading activities had been collapsed due to Partition.

It is still quite surprising why no reference of river transport statistics have been found since the early years of Partition, though, it is logical to say that the Partition which cut up the courses of North Bengal rivers into pieces, resulted the collapse of riverine trading relations of North Bengal with eastern districts of pre-partitioned Bengal. Yet, in comparison to the Governmental effort for the development of roadways and railways in North Bengal, it is evident that neither the Government of India nor the Government of West Bengal tried to revive the riverine communication system. Therefore, the series of 'Statistical Abstract of West Bengal' or any of the Government version since the Partition did not mention anything about this. It can be assumed that the separation of North Bengal rivers from chief river routes of Bengal through East Bengal due to bifurcation of courses of rivers for Partition, Governmental efforts for setting up road and railway communication with bridging major rivers between districts for administrative and other purposes were the probable causes for the disappearance of river communication system in North Bengal.

Despite these, a small scale of riverine trade of agricultural commodities and potteries were also still existed in most of the districts of North Bengal when the rivers rose in rainy seasons between river side village hats or collection centres and towns or exporting depots.²⁸ But that picture was also disappearing rapidly due to gradual shortage of depth of water in the rivers for sedimentation and the rapid development of road communication and transportation system in all the nook and corner of the districts of North Bengal.

Table No-6.2

Road mileage Statistics by Types in North Bengal districts excluding Cooch Behar for the year ending 31st December, 1947 (in miles)

Types	West Dinajpur	Malda	Darjeeling	Jalpaiguri	Total	
Works & Buildings Dept.	0	0	329.4	259.8	589.2	
District Board	578.4	633	353.3	752.7	2317.4	
Municipality	0	41.4	54	15.1	110.5	
Total	578.4	674.4	736.7	1027.6	3017.1	

Source: Government of West Bengal: Works and Building Department: *Administration Report for the period from 15th August 1947 to 31st March 1949*. p. 7.

As a result of partition, new born state of West Bengal came to be divided into ‘two severed parts, the northern districts being separated from the southern tracts by a foreign territory.’²⁹ It is clear from the above paragraphs that all the ways of communications viz. roadways, railways and waterways of North Bengal had been split up due to Radcliffe Award. It is also applicable to the overall scenario of new born West Bengal. Therefore, the basic need after the Partition was to restore the broken communication network of North Bengal especially to link up the communication network of North Bengal with

that of other parts of West Bengal to communicate Calcutta by crossing the Ganges. A large portion of Calcutta-Siliguri Railway line having been intercepted by East Bengal, the only alternative route via Sakrigalighat, Manihari Ghat and Katihar with a slow crossing on the Ganges at Sakrigalighat was remained in the hands of travellers of North Bengal at that time.³⁰ Thus, K. Lahiri, rightly observed consulting with Government documents that ‘the main present need of the Northern region is an arterial road to connect it with Calcutta’, starting from Tildanga, nearest railway station opposite the Ganges in the district of Murshidabad and leading up to Balurghat in West Dinajpur through ‘Malda, Gazol, Banshihari, Gangarampur and Patiram with a branch from Bangshihari to railway station Kaliaganj on the Katihar-Parvatipur railway route’.³¹ He further added that an extension road from Kaliaganj through Raiganj up to Bihar border might be constructed to communicate Kisanganj of Purnia section of Bihar-Assam National Highway later on.³²

Roads were classified after independence as National Highways, State Highways, District Board roads and other minor roads maintained by PWD, Municipalities, District Boards, Union Boards and other agencies. But, West Bengal at that time was, as stated by A.K. Mitra, Superintendent of Census Operations and Joint Development Commissioner, West Bengal for 1951 census, “deficient even in arterial roads while the district board and village feeder roads are inadequate. The extent of this deficiency can be appreciated only by comparison with other states of India and the advanced countries of the west”.³³ The roads though few in number, length and proportion; in comparison to other types, which were maintained by the Works and Buildings Department, were in good condition. But, the condition of village roads mostly maintained by self-governing union boards were too worse to pass even in bullock carts between June to October. However, keeping in mind that there were also few fair weather motorable roads in the

villages those are mostly maintained by the district boards. But the district board roads were hardly maintained regularly, even their surface were not smooth as mostly these roads were ‘earth banks with or without soiling raised from low fields on either side’.³⁴ The following table shows the basic road statistics of four districts of North Bengal at the very beginning of independence. It is true that the Partition of India was a major setback for the Government documentation and publication also. The political turmoil faced by the Partition hindered the Government agencies to collect adequate data for preparing authentic statistical abstract of any subject. Therefore, any statistical report published for the year of 1947 was, according to N. Chakravarti, Director of Provincial Statistical Bureau, Government of West Bengal in 1948 and editor of Statistical Abstract: West Bengal 1947, “not therefore perfect, nor is it complete”.³⁵ However, the following table will give an outline of road statistics of four districts of North Bengal at the time of Partition.

Table No- 6.3

Road mileage both metalled, Unmetalled and Village roads maintained by PWD, district and local boards at the time Partition (in miles) of North Bengal districts excluding Cooch Behar

District	PWD	District and local authorities			
		Metalled	Unmetalled	Total	Village road
Dinajpur	14.6	34	10	44	617
Malda	0	41	240	281	519
Jalpaiguri	131.7	242	443	685	63
Darjeeling	370	21	332	353	---

Note: Length of Metalled and Unmetalled road maintained by PWD are not found separately.

--- denotes data not found.

Source: Government of West Bengal: Provincial Statistical Bureau: Statistical Abstract: West Bengal 1947, Superintendent Government Printing, Alipore, West Bengal, 1948, pp-171.

It is clear from the above table that most of the roads of above mentioned districts were maintained by the District and local authorities like District Boards, Union Boards, Municipalities and others. These roads were mostly unmetalled. However for total mileage of roads Jalpaiguri district possessed the highest position. While the PWD was concerned, its sharing in total percentage of road maintenance in North Bengal districts was very limited except the district of Darjeeling as always. The notion of special fascination of road development of Darjeeling through the chief Government agency or PWD thus proves again. It is found from the table that Jalpaiguri, the only district in North Bengal more or less maintained an equal ratio in road development from all the road developing agencies.

The Government of West Bengal since its inception tried its best to develop road communication network of West Bengal.³⁶ The Government tried to resume all the works which were a part of the 1st phase of road development plan or Nagpur Plan relating to Provincial Highways and Major District Roads of unified Bengal Government. But amongst such kind of 30 works of all-over Bengal, only one i.e. Gangarampur-Ibrahimpur District Road in present Dakshin Dinajpur district was the part of North Bengal.³⁷ Besides, in 1947, the District Development and Consultative Committees of various districts were directed to submit their revised recommendations for roads in consultation with the superintending Engineer for the inclusion in Government's Road Development Programme to meet the exigencies arising for Partition. Similarly, steps were also taken to draw up in consultation with I.G.P, a special Border Road Programme in the districts bordering on East Pakistan for meeting up same

exigencies created in these areas by dislocation of normal means of road transportation due to division of the province.³⁸

In this connection, it is proper to have a look on the road administration of chief Government agency at the early years of independent West Bengal. It was the 'Works and Buildings Directorate' which was responsible for road development and maintenance in Bengal presidency since the 1930's.³⁹ Although, the question arose regarding the issue of expansion of Works and Buildings Directorate in connection with the implementation of the Road Development Programme in West Bengal and it remained under consideration of the Government.

The organization under that department underwent some changes in 1947. The Northern Circle was abolished. Of the three divisions under it viz. Rajshahi, Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling, entire Rajshahi Division having fallen into the hands of East Bengal Government, other two divisions were amalgamated and the reconstituted Darjeeling Division was placed under the Presidency Circle. As regards to the Central circle, the jurisdiction of Berhampur Division underwent slight changes by including West Dinajpur and Malda district to it. However, a new division designated as the North Bengal Road Construction Division was opened with effect from 1st February, 1948 under the Development Circle for road construction in North Bengal. Sri A.K. Ghosh, Officiating Executive Engineer, was placed in charge of the division with effect from the date.⁴⁰

In connection with the with the implementation of road development programme in West Bengal a separate Roads Organization was set up under the Works and Building Directorate in 1948. A post of Deputy Chief Engineer was sanctioned for taking charge of the Road Development Branch. Sri P. C. Neogi was appointed to that post with effect

from 13th May, 1948.⁴¹ Subsequently, a post of special Chief Engineer was created w.e.f. 27th December, 1948 for taking charge of the Road Development Branch and all the circles viz. Road Planning Circle, Road Construction Circle No-I and Road Construction Circle No-II came under the superintendence of that office. North Bengal Road Construction Division which was formerly under the Development Circle was placed under the Road Construction Circle No-II. In addition to this, a new division under Road Construction Circle No-II designated as Malda Construction Division was opened on 9th June, 1948. Sri J.K. Banerjee was the first Executive Engineer of that division. Side by side, a new division designated as the Survey Division No-II under the Road Planning Circle was opened with effect from 11th June 1948.

Two new subdivisions designated as the Mechanical and Transport Subdivision and water Craft Subdivision were created under that division. While the former was intended for overhauling and maintenance of machineries purchased for mechanised construction of roads, the latter was intended to for transport of road materials by river routes. Since the merger of Cooch Behar state with Indian Federation and inclusion of Cooch Behar as a district in West Bengal, Cooch Behar State Public Works Department was merged with the Works and Building Directorate of West Bengal. After this merger steps were taken to absorb the staff of the former Cooch Behar Public Works Department in the Works and Building Directorate and Shri B.L. Garr, late Chief Engineer was appointed as the temporary Executive Engineer.

Now, let us look at the road finance till the beginning of 1950's. The Jayakar Committee under the chairmanship of M. R. Jayakar in 1927 reported that the Central Government should take active responsibility for funding towards the construction of new roads and repairing the old ones. It resulted the accumulation of a fund coined as

‘Central Road Fund’ in 1929 by imposing a tax surcharge on petrol in order to provide annual grants to provinces to lessen their financial burden for continuing their road developing activities.⁴² Other taxes viz. revenues and custom duties on imported motor vehicles, bicycles and spares, excise duties on tyres, any receipt under Indian Motor Vehicles Acts imposed on road users were also merged with that fund. Till the Central Government decided to formulate post war road development programme starting from 1946-47, as Sukla Bhaduri remarks, “the cost of developing an improved system of road communication in the province was being met almost exclusively from the Central Road Fund”.⁴³ Besides, a National Highways grant were also provided in addition to that fund to the provinces for contracting and maintaining National Highways. In addition to these, a special funding from the Central Government were also received to continue the ‘Border Road Programme’ in the districts bordering on East Bengal. On the other hand, various district boards and municipalities in West Bengal were provided a portion of Motor Vehicles Tax on ad hoc basis in order to enable them to incur immediate expenditure on essential road repairs.

The Government of West Bengal also entirely from its State Road Plan Fund started a grant in aid scheme for the improvement of village roads by local enterprise though it was decided that small road projects not exceeding Rs.15000.00/- would be done by that scheme though provision was made for taking one third burden of such work by local contribution.⁴⁴

It’s the time to have a look on road development programmes of North Bengal for the first three years of independence. The Government of India adopting the Twenty Year Road Development Programme of British Indian Government, gave utmost priority on constructing national highways. In this connection it is interesting to say that at the

very early year of partition, portion of NH34 lying in the districts of Malda and West Dinajpur were not existed as it today. It was Bihar-Assam National Highway, presently NH31 and Siliguri-Gangtok National Highway were the national highways those traversed some portion of North Bengal. However, work was in progress on Kamala Tea Estate of Bagdogra section of Bihar-Assam National Highway which the Government of India desired to be thrown open for traffic by 15th May, 1948, but only 9.75 miles from Bagdogra to Bihar border was under execution by the Government agency of West Bengal till the end of March, 1949.⁴⁵ A direct road link was established between Bihar and Assam through the districts of Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar with the completion of works on a link up alignment of Bagdogra section in 1950.⁴⁶ Simultaneously, works of a new bridge over Rambijhora on Siliguri Gangtok National Highway was also in progress and nearing completion till march, 1950.

Annual Administrative Report of Works and Buildings Department, Government of West Bengal fails to provide sufficient data regarding road development for the year 1947-48. However, it is found that special fund was allocated to West Dinajpur District from the Motor Vehicles Tax Receipts for repairing some deplorable roads with bridges under the district board. It was utilised by the Government agency. Between 1948-50, it was found that North Bengal attracted much importance of the Government and some important roads were started to be constructed from the provincial revenues which were the following –

- (1) Construction of a main road on the eastern side in Part II of the Kalimpong Development Area.
- (2) Construction of the west main road on the eastern side in Part II of the Kalimpong Development Area.

- (3) Construction of approach road Nos. 5 and 19 in Part II of the Kalimpong Development Area.
- (4) Laying 2" semi-grouting on the road surface of the 1st mile of the Ghoom-Simana Bustee Road.

Besides, 82 miles of fair weather roads in West Dinajpur under the District Board was permanently taken over by the Government for administration, control and maintenance. Side by side, consequent upon the decision of employing heavy earth cutting and earth moving machineries both as a measure of paucity of labours, three sets of earth cutting machineries with ancillaries were purchased by the department in 1949. But heavy repairing of these machineries cost through private agencies, proposals were forwarded to the Government for sanction for setting up a well- equipped Central Workshop with two field units at Krishnanagar of Nadia district and Malda.⁴⁷

The Partition of India in 1947 has arisen so much hostility and conflict between India and Pakistan that several border skirmishes and three full-fledged wars between two brother nations have been occurred. Though all the confrontations were chiefly concentrated to the western boundary of India and it was only in 1971 when eastern boundary was the chief battle ground for assisting Bangladesh liberation war; Central Government of India apprehended the necessity to strengthen the communication network of bordering districts of East Bengal. Therefore, special fund were allocated to the bordering districts for road development. Similarly, air strips at Jalpaiguri and Balurghat in West Dinajpur were started to be constructed by the Works and Buildings Department of West Bengal for military as well as transportation purpose. Construction of Jalpaiguri air strip was completed in 1949⁴⁸ and construction and extension of air strip

at Balurghat with an well communicating road leading to district head quarter was in progress till March of 1950.⁴⁹

It is found earlier that the river communication in North Bengal almost collapsed caused by the Partition. The Governmental policy for stressing upon the road development by opening new routes side by side maintaining and repairing old ones with bridges also hindered the possibility of reviving the system. However, due to shortage of railway wagons for transporting road construction materials the Works and Buildings Department decided to use navigable water channels and issued permits to indigenous water carriers. Hence the report says, "Acute difficulty was nevertheless felt in movement of materials to North Bengal districts including Malda and West Dinajpur...in the matter of movement of coal for brick burning and steel to these districts. To supplement the normal movement amenities, the road and river routes were explored and the departmental watercrafts and trucks were employed for transshipment of materials over the Ganges and movement of materials from riverine points to interior areas particularly of Malda and West Dinajpur."⁵⁰

It is clearly perceived from the Census Report of 1951 why the Government of India or its provincial counterpart of West Bengal tried to develop the road communication system of North Bengal. It is found from the report that Government's intention towards the construction of a trunk road or arterial road between Ganges and Balurghat through Malda, Gazol, Bansihari, Patiram with two extensions- one from Bansihari to Raiganj via Kaliaganj and second from Gazol to Bamangola was to open up a vast agricultural tract and to link up existing busy trading centres. Similar to this, extension of Jalpaiguri-Siliguri State Highway up to Haldibari and Dewanganj hat at Cooch Behar district, extension of Bihar-Assam Highway through Cooch Behar district, road project from

Mainaguri to Changrabandha in Cooch Behar were taken for improving tobacco and jute trade of Cooch Behar, side by side providing important road connection between Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling districts. At the same time rehabilitation of Siliguri-Gangtok National Highway, road projects of Bagdogra-Kamala Tea Estate and Matigara-Phansidewa road were also taken for improving Sikkim trade and jute trade of Siliguri region respectively.⁵¹

As stated earlier Assam used to maintain its railway communication with Calcutta and other parts of India through EBR. From Parvatipur Jn. On EBR a line through Lalmanirhat, Moghalhat, Gitaldaha, Bhurungabari, Pateswari and Sonahat went up to Golokganj of Assam. Except Gitaldaha and Golokganj all of the stations of this line fall into the hands of East Pakistan which disconnected the rail communication not with Assam, but a major part of former CSR. Therefore, the Government of India restore the railway communication with Assam in 1947. It was the famous Assam Railway Link Project. The project was sanctioned to implement on 26th January, 1947. On 26th January, 1950 the railway was opened for traffic. The following table shows how the railway succeeded to reconnect its communication with Calcutta.

Table No- 6.4

New routes of Assam Railway Link Project

From	To	Gauge	Under the jurisdiction of
Calcutta	Sakrigali Ghat	Broad	E.I.R
Manihari Ghat	Kisanganj	Meter	E.I.R
Kisanganj	Siliguri	Meter	D.H.R

Siliguri	Bagrakote	Meter	New line
Bagrakote	Madarihat	Meter	B.D.R
Madarihat	Hasimara	Meter	New line
Hasimara	Alipurduar Jn.	Meter	C.S.R
Alipurduar Jn.	Fakiragram Jn.	Meter	New line

Source: Karnail Singh. *A Complete Story of the Assam Rail Link Project*. Government of India, Ministry of Railways. 1951. pp. 1-5.

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