CHAPTER FIVE

"PARTITION AND THEREAFTER"

5:1 PARTITION OF INDIA AND ITS IMPACT ON WATER TRANSPORT:

Before the partition of India in 1947, Assam was connected with West Bengal and the rest of the present Indian territory by rail, road and waterways. After partition, Assam and other territories of the North-East Region were linked with the rest of India through a narrow strip of land, without any rail, road and water communication.\(^1\)

In December, 1949 Pakistan had completely stopped all routes between Assam and the rest of India, via., East Pakistan. At this time the country faced a serious transport problem and thereby the whole economy of the state faced a serious crisis.\(^2\) With the disruption of rail and waterways the trade on the jute and tea was adversely affected. Commercial strategy and political consideration rendered inevitable, the establishment of a rail link between Assam and North Bengal on the one hand and the rest of India on the other,

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1 Vakil, C.N.: Economic Consequences of Divided India, A Study of the Economy of India and Pakistan, 1950, p.208
2 Goswami, P.C.: The Economic Development of Assam, 1988, p. 207
immediately after the partition. Because the water route had entirely depended on the goodwill of the Pakistan Government; which was far from expectations. 3

Soon after the partition of the country the Govt. of India took-up the question of the rail link and appointed an officer in November, 1947 to make an aerial survey of the 12 mile wide Indian territory lying between East Pakistan and Nepal. This preliminary survey was followed by a ground survey, and in January, 1948 the Govt. decided to construct a rail link within the Indian territory. This construction was started on 27th January, 1948 and it took about 2 years 6 months for completion. 4

After partition the absence of rail and water routes between Assam and the rest of India had considerably handicapped the bargaining capacity of the Govt. of India in its trade relation, with Pakistan. A good deal of commercial and industrial prosperity of the country depended on the supply of raw jute and tea from North Bengal and Assam. Moreover, the North-East Region had to import some of the essential commodities from the rest of the country and export tea, jute, timber and petroleum products. Inland

3 Vakil, C.N.: Economic Consequences of Divided India, A study of the Economy of India and Pakistan, 1950, p. 208
4 Ibid., p. 208
waterways which linked different centres of West Bengal and Assam had passed through East Pakistan. The relationship between the two countries was not satisfactory. So after partition the transportation of goods along the waterways (waterways via East Pakistan) had been jeopardised. In 1949 the Pakistani Authority had held-up the Barges carryin. jute from Assam on their ways to Calcutta. Because of these difficulties on running the steamer services it became necessary to reorient the water communication between Assam and Bengal with a view to providing a direct link with other centres in India and minimising the time and distance required in the movement of the vessels through Pakistan. The Central Board of Transport, therefore, recommended the investigation of the Ganga Barrage Multi Purpose Project which envisages the provision of a direct navigable route from Assam to the West Bengal through Indian territory. At this time the Commerce Ministry, Govt. of India, had taken an initiative in co-ordinating the inland water transport in this region with the railways.

After the partition, the R.S.N. and I.G.S.N. Company had their virtual monopoly of traffic between Assam and Calcutta. They used to run commercial services between Assam and Calcutta. Before the completion of the Assam rail link

5 Vakil, C.N.: Economic Consequences of Divided India, A study of the Economy of India and Pakistan, 1950, p.424
In January 1950, the steamer companies, however, continued to carry about 80 percent of jute and considerable quantities of petroleum product from Assam to Calcutta.\(^5\) In addition to steamers there were about 500 flat bottomed boats each with a capacity between 200 and 1000 maunds at Dhubri port area alone, which carried timber between Assam and Bengal. They, however, charged higher rates.\(^7\) The water transport during that period could provide direct transport between Assam and Calcutta, which the railway could not.

There were considerable loss of time when steamers transit through East Pakistan. The fleets had to pass there several check-posts and follow different formalities within the Pakistani territories. On the Assam and Calcutta route there were eight check-posts in the Pakistani areas. The time required at each check-post was about 4 (four) hours. On the way about 10% of the total time for the voyage was required to observe the formalities. Moreover, they charged customs duties at the rate of 6 pies per maund, at each border crossing by the steamers. These customs duties lead to the increase of freight rates by the steamer companies.

The above factors were responsible for the loss incurred by the R.S.N. Company from 1947 to 1953 and the I.G.S.N.Company in 1947 to 1949.\(^3\)

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7 Medhi, Shyam Bhadra,: Transport System and Economic Development in Assam, 1978, p.28
8 Ibid., p.28
Even after the construction of the Assam rail link in 1950 the importance of waterways had not diminished. From 1950 to 1958 the rail link was breached by flood water during monsoon every year causing disruption of communication for several days. The rail link passed through difficult terrains and had posed many problems in its maintenance. Several breaches occurred in the years 1950, 1952, 1954 and 1955 as a result of which traffic to and from Assam was suspended for a considerable period. Duration of the breaches occurring in each monsoon and the cost of repairing for the same are stated in Table No. 20.

**TABLE NO. 20**

THE DURATION OF BREACHES AND THE COST OF REPAIRING OF THE ASSAM RAIL LINK IN THE MONSOON, FOR SOME YEARS.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Duration of breaches (days)</th>
<th>Cost of repairing works (Rs. in lakh.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>68.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>113.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>38.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>7-8</td>
<td>6.21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Govt. of India, Ministry of Transport and Communication, New Delhi, Report of the Inland Water Transport Committee, June 1959, p. 20

9 Govt. of India, Ministry of Transport and Communication, New Delhi, Report of the Inland Water Transport Committee, June 1959 (Gokhale Committee), p. 20
Again in January, 1950 the Assam Rail link had been breached for two months by the Tista river. Apart from financial loss to railways the impact of these breaches had brought considerable loss to the economy of the state, as these occurred during the season for export of tea and jute products. Road transport was similarly, affected for 3 to 4 months, each year by flood. So water transport via East Pakistan served the entire exports and imports for the time when rail and road links were breached by flood. The Indian Tea Association in its Annual Report for 1950 also mentioned that it was of the utmost importance to ensure that the steamer routes are thoroughly maintained.

After partition in 1947 the importance of water route in Cachar District increased greatly. River transport had a special role to play in the movement of traffic to and from Cachar District, which served as origin and destination of a large bordering area comprising Tripura and Mizoram. Before partition, Cachar had three lines of communication to Calcutta, viz.;

a) the rail-river-rail route, via Chandpur

b) the all rail route, via Santahar, Mymensingh and Akhaura, and

c) rail route from Chittagonj.

10 Govt. of India, Ministry of Transport and Communication, New Delhi, Report of the Inland Water Transport Committee, June 1959, p. 21
All these three routes began to have uncertain after partition. So river route played a dominant role at that time. In the year 1954 water transport traffic from Calcutta to Cachar increased by 11 lakh maunds against 4 lakh maunds in 1946. Similarly, river borne export to Calcutta rose to about 9 lakh maunds in 1954, against about 4 lakh maunds in 1946.

After partition, the I.G.S.N. Company and R.S.N. Company Limited, commonly known as the Joint Steamer Companies had been altered in India and a separate company was formed in Pakistan. The Pakistan unit was separated by the formation of the Pakistan River Service Limited, in which the Pakistan Govt. had a substantial interest. 11

With partition the smooth movement of the Inland Waterway Vessels, on the Assam Calcutta route, via East Pakistan had been affected in a number of ways. 12 The chief among them were;

11 Report of the Committee on the working of the Central Inland Water Transport Corporation Limited, New Delhi, May-1971, G.C. Baveja, Joint Secretary, Planning Commission, Chairman, p.3

1) Trouble created by the Pakistani crews.
2) Non availability of trained Indian crews.
3) Delay in clearing customs at the border.
4) Pakistan Govt's over-all refusal to co-operate with the Steamer Companies.
5) Pakistan Government's refusal to allow instal radio, telephone in Indian river vessels in the Pakistani area.

5 2 EARTHQUAKE AND WATER TRANSPORT:

The great earthquake in the years 1897 and 1950 had greatly affected the inland navigation in Assam. Both the earthquakes caused great devastations to buildings, roads, bridges and water channels. In both the earthquakes river banks were crumbled and fell into the river. Depths of the rivers were diminished by raising the river beds. In the earthquake of the 12th June 1897, the Guwahati-Jamunamukh section of the Assam Bengal Railway had badly affected.13

The 1950's earthquake caused considerable changes in the courses of the Brahmaputra and some of its tributaries, resulting in deterioration of the navigable channels, particularly in the upper reaches of the Brahmaputra.14 After

13 Goswami, F.C.: The Economic Development of Assam, 1988, p. 204
the earthquake of 1950 the steamers could not go up to Dibrugarh, as the depth of the river diminished. The steamer services were terminated at Disangmukh 46 miles downstream of Dibrugarh. After termination of the main line of steamer services at Disangmukh, Dibrugarh and other major tea producing areas above Disangmukh faced severe difficulty in exporting their tea. Only feeder services were operated up to Dibrugarh by the steamer companies. Again in 1961, the Joint Steamer Companies had further restricted the main line service. They ran their vessels only up to Neamati. Due to changes in the course of the rivers and lack of suitable berthing sites the services in the following sections were closed by the Joint Steamer Companies from 1954 onwards.

I. On the Brahmaputra River:

a) Amingaon-Guwahati, Tezpur-Neamati (alternate day) Express Service closed on 1st February, 1954.

b) Dhubri-Goalpara (alternate day) service closed on 1st February, 1954.

c) Tezpur-Neamati (alternate day) service closed on 16th September, 1955.


16 Ibid., p.69

17 Ibid., p.69
d) DisangmuKh - Dibrugarh, feeder service closed in October, 1956.

e) Badati feeder (daily) service closed on 1st June, 1960.

II. On the Barak River:

a) Badarpur - Looba feeder service.

Before the earthquake of 1950, most of the tributaries of the Brahmaputra and the Barak were easily navigable by country boats without any conservancy work. Tributaries like Subansiri, Buri Dehing, Dhansiri, Kapili, Dhaleswari and Katakhal were navigable by steamers without any difficulty. Owing to the earthquake in 1950 river beds came up and the depth of the rivers almost throughout the entire length was reduced making it difficult to maintain proper navigation. The river beds required dredging at certain places. The flat river beds, of the Brahmaputra failed to contain more water in it, so during monsoon heavy floods followed by erosion of the river banks have become a regular feature. This leads to the instability in the construction of the permanent ghats for ashoring of vessels. 18

After partition the water transport between Assam and Calcutta was, however, maintained via East Pakistan. It was stated that the relationship between the two countries was far from being satisfactory. So, immediately after partition the steamer companies had faced some problems, imposed by the Pakistani Authority. In spite of these difficulties, a substantial volume of traffic between Assam and Calcutta was conducted through waterways. But in September 1965, when the Indo-Pakistan conflict broke out, the Pakistani authorities had closed the water route between Assam and Calcutta, via East Pakistan.¹⁹

The outbreak of hostilities between the two countries was a serious set-back to the water transport in Assam. By closing the water communication to Calcutta the Pakistani Authorities had considerably damaged the importance of the water transport in respect of inter state trade. The Pakistan Government had seized altogether 166 steamers, flats and barges of different Inland Water Transport Operators in 1965.²⁰ The steamers were detained at the time of transit through

¹⁹ Report of the Committee on the working of the Central Inland Water Transport Corporation Ltd., New Delhi, May-1971, p.4-5
²⁰ Refer Table No.21.
TABLE NO. 21
VESSELS SEIZED BY PAKISTAN IN 1965

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of I.W.T. Operation</th>
<th>Seized by</th>
<th>At Calcutta</th>
<th>At Assam</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Bengal Assam Steamship Co.Ltd.</td>
<td>Steamers 6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flats 11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. East Bengal River Steam Service Ltd.</td>
<td>Steamers 8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flats/Barges 40</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Indian Shipping</td>
<td>Steamers 3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flats/Barges 15</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The Pioneer Shipping Co.Ltd.</td>
<td>Steamers 1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flats/Barges 2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Great India Boating Co.</td>
<td>Steamers 1</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flats/Barges 5</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flats/Barges 5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Hind Lines Private Ltd.</td>
<td>L.C.T. 1</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Barges 7</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Hindusthan Shipping Co.Ltd.</td>
<td>Barges 2</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Rivers Steam Navigation Co.Ltd.</td>
<td>Steamers 15</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flats/Barges 40</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Steamers/L.C.T. 37</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flats/Barges 129</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pakistan. Prior to the closure of the water route in 1965, a considerable volume of traffic between Assam and Calcutta was carried by water transport. About 93% of tea and 90% of jute produced in Assam were exported through water transport.\textsuperscript{21}

With the closure of the water route the importance of water transport was diminished and the financial position of the steamer companies got deteriorated.\textsuperscript{22} Imports of food grains, sugar, coal, fertilizer, cement, iron and steel machinery etc. declined.\textsuperscript{23} By 1965 the traffic of the Joint Steamer Companies declined to a very low extent. Table No. 22 depicts the goods traffic carried by Joint Steamer Companies for the Years 1962, 1963, 1964 and 1965. The Regional Transport Survey of Assam also emphasised this abrupt decline of traffic in 1965 with the closure of the water route from Assam to Calcutta.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{21} Govt. of Assam, Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Economic Survey, Assam, 1970, p.43

\textsuperscript{22} Record note of the discussion held, in the office chamber of the Transport Minister, Government of Assam, on 22nd January, 1971 at 11(eleven) A.M., with members of the C.I.W.T.C., Ltd. (A Govt. of India undertaking), From I.W.T. Directorate File, Guwahati.

\textsuperscript{23} Report on Logistics Demand Survey for Movement of Goods in N.E. Region for C.I.W.T.C., Ltd., by National Productivity Council, p.2

\textsuperscript{24} Medhi, Shyam Bhadra,; Transport System and Economic Development in Assam, 1978, p. 35
### TABLE NO. 22

**GOODS TRAFFIC CARRIED BY U.S. COMPANIES**

( in tonnes )

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Imports</th>
<th>Exports</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>3,34,391</td>
<td>3,35,739</td>
<td>7,20,130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>4,41,338</td>
<td>3,43,440</td>
<td>7,84,778</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>4,26,776</td>
<td>3,41,575</td>
<td>7,68,351</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>1,96,919</td>
<td>1,17,313</td>
<td>3,14,232</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Govt. of India, Ministry of Shipping and Transport, Report of the Inland Water Transport Committee, October, 1970.

To remove the resultant deadlock of water transport, arrangement had been made for the co-ordination of rail road and water transport. Arrangement had also been made to run internal river services based on two rail heads, one on the broad gauge from Calcutta at Jogighopa and the other on metre gauge from Barauni at Dhubri. But such co-ordination was not effective. "It was estimated that about 1000 tonnes

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of cargo a day would be available at Jogighopa for movement by the river route, but as a result of the general trade recession and also due to the increase in the rail transport capacity there is at present hardly any traffic available at Jogighopa for movement by the river route. In fact inland water transport has practically come to a stand still.  

At the time of Indo-Pakistan hostilities in September, 1965, the fleet strength of the R.S.N. Company Limited was 354 vessels, including 71 steamers, 37 tugs, 1 launch, 175 flats and 51 barges. The Pakistan Government seized 55 vessels of the R.S.N. Company Ltd. The transit value of the cargo of the detained steamers was about Rs.3.19 crores (Lok-Sabha Secretariat, Lok-Sabha Debate, February 22, 1966, Column 1474). Pakistan had detained 16 percent of the fleets of the R.S.N. Company and 30 percent were stranded in Assam. So in 1965 the R.S.N. Company suffered a loss of about Rs.244 lakhs. In spite of this huge loss efforts were, however, made to run the services of the Company, specially between Jogighopa and Dibrugarh. It was expected that the impounded fleets of the Company by Pakistan would be returned and the river services resumed via Pakistan.

28 Report of the Committee on the Working of the Central Inland Water Transport Corporation Limited, New Delhi, (Bhaveja Committee), 1971, p.5
EMERGENCE OF BANGLADESH AND WATER TRANSPORT:

It has already been stated that as a result of the Indo-Pakistan hostilities in September, 1965 the waterways between Assam and Calcutta were closed. Consequently, the fleets of the R.S.N. Company (up to 3rd May 1967) and of the Central Inland Water Transport Corporation Limited (from 3rd May 1967) a Government of India undertaking were almost lying idle. During this period the rail and road transport had established themselves to overcome the difficulties created by Pakistan closing the waterways.

After the emergence of Bangladesh (erstwhile East Pakistan) as an independent sovereign nation the officials of the Government of India and Bangladesh met several times in 1972 to discuss the possibilities of reopening of the waterways between Assam and Calcutta via Bangladesh. Consequently, a protocol was signed between India and Bangladesh on inland water transit and trade on 1st November 1972 for the maintenance of river services between Assam and Calcutta via Bangladesh. So the deadlock in inland waterways caused by Indo-Pakistan war in 1965 came to an end.

30 Govt. of India, India 1974, A Reference Annual 1974, p.294
The river services on Calcutta-Assam-Calcutta, Calcutta-Cachar-Calcutta (for Cachar, Mizoram and Tripura) and Calcutta-Bangladesh-Calcutta were started by the C.I.W.T.C. Ltd. in November 1972. On 20th November, 1972 the then Chief Minister of Assam Mr. Sarat Chandra Sinha inaugurated the river services between Assam and Calcutta, via Bangladesh at the Pandu Port (near Saraighat Bridge at Guwahati).

In the inaugural speech the Chief Minister had expressed the willingness of the Assam Government to become a share holder in C.I.W.T.C. Limited. As recommended by the Bhagawati Committee (1970), the Government of India, had invited the Government of Assam to become a share holder of the C.I.W.T.C. Limited by participating in the equity capital of the corporation to the extent of 10 percent. Accordingly, the Assam Government became a share holder of the C.I.W.T.C. Limited.

31 A letter from Director, I.W.T. and C.S.S. Assam to Secretary, to the Govt. of Assam, Transport Department, 4th January, 1973.
The so created C.I.W.T.C. Limited, a Govt. of India undertaking, started functioning in the Assam-Calcutta route. It was estimated that the resumption of the river traffic between Assam and Calcutta via Bangladesh would provide a big boost to the economic development of the North-East Region. It was estimated that the river borne transit traffic between Calcutta and Assam would be of the order of 600,000 tonnes annually.\(^3\)

Actually, the Assam-Calcutta route which opened on 20th November, 1972 was not a new thing, only it was closed from September, 1965. On 19th November, 1972 two steamers had left from Calcutta for Narayanganj and Guwahati respectively, with full load of cargo and on 20th November, 1972 a steamer with flats loaded with 5,000 tea chests left for Calcutta.\(^3\)

\(^{32}\) Govt. of Assam, Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Economic Survey, Assam, 1972, p. 49

\(^{33}\) A letter from Director, I.W.T. and C.S.S., Assam, to the Secretary, Govt. of Assam, Transport Department, 4th January, 1973.