



Echoes of Partition: The Aftermath and Enduring Impacts of the Split at the 38th Parallel



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Articles

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Introduction

Seventy-eight years after the division of the Korean Peninsula into North and South, the upheaval has left lasting impressions on its people, both explicitly and implicitly. The Korean Peninsula had been a united territory for centuries under the Joseon dynasty until it fell into the hands of Japan in 1910. In 1945, following the defeat of Japan in World War II, the allied powers agreed to liberate Korea, and divide the Korean peninsula at the 38th parallel of latitude, and place it under the international trusteeship until the Koreans were ready for self-rule.



Image source: *Britannica*

The division was understood as a temporary one until; two occupational zones started organizing their own separate governments, with the pro-Communists formulating a government in the north under the supervision of the Soviet Union and the pro-democrats organizing a government in the south under the guidance of the US. Like any other partition, violence erupted in this one too, leading to a range of struggles and attacks on both sides. Military confrontations shortly after the division intensified to an extent, resulting in the infamous Korean War of the 1950s, further exacerbating the Cold War tensions. Despite the ideological and political differences between the North and South, many Koreans still long for the gradual unification of Korea as a single peaceful state.

Impacts: Partition of the Korean Peninsula

The partition of the Korean Peninsula has swayed and touched many aspects of the lives of Koreans. In addition to immediate impacts such as large-scale migrations, exploitation of women and children by USSR soldiers in the North, massive food scarcity, and widespread impoverishment among the Koreans, certain other prolonged impacts also affected them.

Economic Impacts

Following the partition, over two million Koreans migrated from the North to the South, resulting in adverse imbalances in the structure of the economy.

In 1945, the North had superiority over heavy industries like metals, electric power and chemical industries, while the South had an upper hand over light industries, machinery production, agriculture and commerce.

Lack of reliable data has made the task of assessing the North Korean economy strenuous. The South-Korean-based 'Bank of Korea' has been estimating the gross domestic product (GDP) of North Korea since 1991 with the aim of comparing the production and growth of both the nations. As per the available reports, the per capita GDP of the North and South since the Partition was stagnant until the 1980s. Subsequently, there has been steady growth in South Korean per capita GDP, while the North faced a firm declining trend with sluggish and outdated economic output. The centralized planned economy of the North vis-à-vis the market-oriented economy of the South can be considered the major cause of this visible economic contrast. Today, the South Korean economy has become one of the most advanced and productive economies in the world, promoting industrialization, technology, innovation and export-driven growth. Meanwhile North Korea has become a hyper-militarized state creating nuclear arms race threats to all its historic foes.

Social Impacts

The forced separation of countless families following the division has continued to create a lot of hardships among the people in these regions. Heavily restricted communication and travel between the two nations make reunion aspirations almost impractical. This, in turn, has caused a loss of cultural connections and detachment from their family roots.

Park's Memoir in Order to Live: A North Korean Girl's Journey to Freedom by Yeonmi Park, a North Korean defector, provides us loads of firsthand data regarding the dreary life under the bigoted rulers of North Korea. North Korea imposed strict restrictions on its citizens by suppressing dissent, limiting freedom and subjecting its people to a pervasive propaganda machine that promoted the ruling family and its ideologies.

Cultural Impacts

The partition has brought quite a lot of variations in the cultural aspects of the North and South Koreans with regards to values, beliefs, norms, and language. Though North Korea has continued preserving the traditional Korean culture, its citizens have been heavily controlled by the rulers. Restrictions on the cultural expressions of the North Koreans led to even the denial of their basic right of choice in matters of clothing, cuisines, festivals and religious beliefs. Nevertheless, the South Korean cultural industry flourished swiftly and the fame and glory of K-pop, K-Drama and its fashion and entertainment industries over time have reached their zenith.



A recent World Report released by World Rights Watch disclosed that over 1000 North Koreans fled to the South in 2019. The North Korean rulers retaliated to this by tightening their border control measures, resulting in a reduction in the rate of people fleeing the country. In 2020 and 2021, the numbers were just 229 and 48 respectively. Even after successfully fleeing to the South, the defectors encounter a lot of hardships, including trafficking, violence, and denial of educational and humanitarian assistance. As illegal immigrants, they live with the persistent terror of deportation. Furthermore, several other restrictions were foisted on outside influences by cutting off almost all its communication lines to South Korea in 2020. Deeply ingrained anti-imperialistic and anti-western sentiments and the promotion of loyalty to the ruling family by force and extreme nationalism have also widened the divide between the North and South.

Political Impacts

The masterminds behind the Korean division plan were US policymakers. Though it was a plan of the US to prevent the Soviets from occupying the entire Korean Peninsula, the proposal was accepted by the Soviets without even deliberating with the Koreans. The oblivious Koreans were astounded by the decision to partition the Korean peninsula. The geopolitical aspirations of foreign players like the US, Japan, the USSR and China resulted in the domination and promotion of their ideologies, thus escalating the already existing tensions in the Peninsula. The North emerged as a separate nation under the leadership of Kim Il-sung, adopting a Communist regime and evolving into the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. This dictatorial regime characterized by Single-Party rule has been sustained by three generations of the Kim family with absolute power and dominance using heavy repression and massive suppression of its people.

Whereas Syngman Rhee, a zealous nationalist and pro-capitalist, led Southern Korea and officially named it the Republic of Korea. Though initially the country faced a lot of political instability and military rule, over the years, through various struggles and movements, South Korea has become a nation with a liberal democratic political system and sovereignty over its people. Multi-party rule and provisions for free and fair elections are the major reasons for its political stability.

Post-World War II, the Cold War crisis intensified the ideological divide, leading to three years of the Korean War from 1950 to 1953. An official estimate of the death toll from the war is approximately 3 million, mostly civilians. Unofficial estimates are far higher.

Conclusion

A way forward for ceasing all tensions ongoing to this day on the Korean Peninsula and establishing confidence-building measures could only be made possible by reciprocal and collective talks between the North and South Korean heads of state.

The historic Inter-Korean summit of 2018 was seen as a sign of buoyancy as the leaders of both countries met and had peaceful negotiations over the demilitarized zone.



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, (left) and South Korean President Moon Jae-in walk(right) raised their hands after signing a joint statement. Source: Korea Summit Press Pool/AFP/Getty Images

“The two leaders solemnly declare ... that there will be no more war on the Korean Peninsula and a new era of peace has begun,” the declaration said. Three goals of the summit declared by the then South Korean leader, Moon Jae-in, were:

1. Resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue and establishment of permanent peace.
2. Development of sustainable inter-Korean relations.
3. Realization of a new economic community on the Korean Peninsula.

Five years after the summit, how successful have these goals been? This is still a question worth considering. This would only be possible by limiting the outside forces pulling the strings behind these two nations and by bringing equilibrium between all its major stakeholders. From time immemorial, the Korean Peninsula is under the influence of world powers like China, the USA, and Russia. Conflicting interests among the member states of international organizations and the preeminence of US decision-making have made the roles of these organizations minimal in terms of effectiveness in bringing out a strife-free solution.

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I am a graduate with a Master's degree in history from the University of Madras. My research interests are in the areas of Indian history, World history, International Relations and Indian economy. I have qualified UGC-NET (History) and I'm passionate about delivering the best learning experience in the field of History.

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The Destroyed Self in the Partition: Destructive Plasticity in Manto’s *Cold Flesh* and *Open It!*

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Introduction

The Partition of India in 1947 was a horrific event usually retold regarding human savagery and brutality. A process that divided the population through national boundaries. The migration after this displaced and dislocated people from their ancestral places. This forced migration disrupted the subcontinent’s individual and collective psyche—literature written before the Partition proves this argument. In Khushwant Singh’s terminology, pre-partition literature discussed a subcontinent that seems like a utopia in the face of post-partition literature (Nisar 9726). The idea of the communal violence that occurred after the Partition is shocking, as communally violent narratives were rare in the pre-partition era (Bhalla 3120). It becomes important to investigate this identity reformation of the subcontinent, where Trauma studies can help envisage this issue.

The shift from this pre-partition utopian era happened after the riots of 1947. These events retold in fiction by writers like Manto are horrifying. One of the most common features of these narratives is the people who populate them. They are ordinary beings who are involved in these tales of brutality. But the idea of a utopian pre-partition era might work as an imagined lacuna in understanding pre-partition India. Shashi Joshi critiqued the concept of this tolerant utopia based on stereotypes that existed in pre-partition literature (148-49). Even Alok Bhalla, who previously claimed a pre-partition utopia, acknowledged the existence of these fragmentary rifts between people (3120-123).

There is a considerable gap between minor incidents and the mass killings after the Partition. The sudden shift can be interpreted and understood through people’s traumatic experiences as a catalyst.