UNIT 12: PARTICIPATION OF ASSAM IN THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT

UNIT STRUCTURE

12.1 Learning Objectives

12.2 Introduction

12.3 Partition of Bengal and its Impact upon Assam

12.4 The Non Co-operation Movement in Assam

12.5 Assam and the Civil Disobedience Movement

12.6 The Quit India Movement in Assam

12.7 Grouping Controversy and Independence

12.8 Let Us Sum Up

12.9 Further Reading

12.10 Answers to Check Your Progress

12.11 Model Questions

12.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to–

- explain the partition of Bengal and its impact on Assam,
- discuss the role of Assam in the Non-Co-operation Movement,
- describe the role of Assam in the Civil Disobedience Movement,
- discuss the Quit India Movement and its impact on Assam.

12.2 INTRODUCTION

In the previous units, you have learnt the revolt of 1857 in Assam and the agrarian uprisings that occurred in different parts of Assam in protest against the oppressive policies of the British Government. This protest movement against the foreign rule made the people of Assam politically conscious and subsequently helped in the rise of Assamese nationalism.

In this unit we will discuss the participation of Assam in every phases of national movement, namely, the Non-Co-operation Movement, the Civil Disobedience Movement and the Quit India Movement.

During that period, nationalism in Assam was at its infant stage. In comparison to the Brahmaputra Valley, the Surma Valley was more conscious about the partition plan as they had close touch with Bengal. Initially, the reaction of the people of Assam to the Partition of Bengal was muted. They were more concerned with regional issues than mainstream politics. Hence, they failed to realise the implications of the act of partition. At the individual level, the Assamese intelligentsia tried to point out elaborately the issues at stake. They made it clear that if Assam was tagged on with the more advanced districts of Bengal, the Assamese people would have to face unequal competition from the Bengalese of East Bengal in every walk of life. If the seat of administration was shifted to Dhaka, then Assam proper would not receive the same attention as it did. But the protest of the intelligentsia was limited to the writing of letters and articles in the Press.



LET US KNOW

The European planters welcomed the partition scheme as the name of Assam was retained in the nomenclature of the newly created province of 'Eastern Bengal and Assam'. Their only fear was that in case the name Assam was removed from the nomenclature of the new province, the sale of their tea marketed as 'Assam Tea' might be affected.

In Bengal, the partition was opposed by the people on many accounts, the most important one being the communal aspect involved in the partition plan. But the people of Assam gradually got alarmed at the partition because of the possibility of domination by the non-Assamese elements. The people of Assam feared that in the proposed province of 'Eastern Bengal and Assam', the Assamese would lose their separate identity and the people would be deprived of their legitimate share in the government. The Partition of Bengal made the people of Assam convinced about the destructive motives of British rule. In the Surma Valley, public resentment was more strongly expressed.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1: Mention the new provinces to be created by the partition of Bengal.

.....

Q2: When did Bengal partition?

.....

Q3: Who was the leader of the voluntary organisation of the *Seva-Sangha*?

.....

12.4 THE NON CO-OPERATION MOVEMENT IN ASSAM

The Swadeshi movement which mainly arose out of the anti-partition agitation had quickened the sense of national oneness and solidarity of India. The idea was slowly gaining ground even in the Congress. In 1906, Dadabhai Naoroji had declared Swaraj to be the objective of the Congress. But it was only when Mahatma Gandhi activity entered the arena of Indian politics to fight for India's independence with new methods and techniques that the Indian National Congress opened a new page in the history of India's struggle for freedom. The Punjab atrocities and the Khilafat agitation were the most important events which evoked a great discontent all over India. In 1919, the infamous Rowlatt Acts were passed by the British Government arming it with extraordinary repressive powers.

Mahatma Gandhi organized a passive resistance movement against such repressive measures. Hartals and mass demonstrations were organized in many parts of India. The government repressed the movement with a heavy hand. The worst feature of the repression was the terrible massacre by General Dyer of the unarmed people that assembled at Jallianwalla Bagh in Amritsar. It is known as the Massacre of Jallianwalla Bagh (1919). Martial law was proclaimed in Punjab. This Jallianwalla Bagh tragedy and Gandhiji's emergence as the undisputed leader not only helped in the growth of an all India political awareness among all sections of the

picketing before the liquor and opium shops were the chief items in the programme for the achievement of Swaraj. Preparations for a no-tax and no-revenue campaign were also made at selected places.

Women also equally participated with men in the Non Co-operation Movement in Assam. Women held meetings in various places to keep up the tempo of the movement. Women were usually not arrested during the Non Co-operation Movement in Assam but there is no doubt that a new awakening came amongst them.

The Non Co-operation Movement failed to achieve its immediate goal of establishing Swaraj in India. The British Government tried hard to suppress the movement and the jails were filled with political prisoners. But its apparent failure must not blind us to the fact that the movement had a tremendous impact on the people. It marked the beginning of Assam's active participation in all India politics. Assam joined the main stream of nationalist upsurge. The repressive measures of the British Government against the Non Co-operators instead of demoralising the people made them determined soldiers of the freedom movement. Gandhiji suspended the Non Co-operation movement in 1922 because of a violent incident that took place at Chauri Chaura in Bihar where 22 policemen were killed.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q4: Name the British officer associated with the Jallianwala Bagh Tragedy.

.....

Q5: When was the infamous Rowlatt Act passed?

.....

Q6: When did Mahatma Gandhi visit Assam?

.....

12.5 ASSAM AND THE CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE MOVEMENT

The spirit of the Indian National movement became slow after the suspension of the Non Co-operation Movement and was revived only with

with firmness and he was assisted by Hem Chandra Barua and other leaders like Omeo Kumar Das, Dr. Bhubaneswar Barua, Siddhinath Sarma, Debeswar Sarma, Lakshmidhar Sarma, Satradhikar Goswami of Garmur and many others.

Women also participated in the movement. Chandraprava Saikiani and Durgaprova Bora came forward to resort to picketing before the Cotton College at Guwahati. Arrest and imprisonment, beating and lathi-charge on men and women, and attachment and confiscation of property of the villagers for failure to pay the land revenue by the government became the order of the day. The participation of students greatly hampered the British exploitative policy and the British Government, therefore, had to take immediate steps to prevent students from joining the political movement. J. Cunningham issued a circular (26 April, 1930) to all the Headmasters of government and non-government schools. The circular, known as the **Cunningham Circular**, forbade students to associate themselves with any political movement. It was clearly stated in the Circular that the parents or guardians would have to give an undertaking in writing that their son or ward would refrain from political activities. The undertaking was to be signed before the students were readmitted to the schools. But the circular failed to prevent the students from participating in politics. Rather, it provoked a sharp reaction throughout the country. Students all over Assam protested against the Circular in the form of boycott of educational institutions, picketing in front of school and college gates and *bringing out processions* shouting anti-circular slogans, etc. The governmental repression on the students encouraged the establishment of new schools. The Kamrup Academy of Guwahati, Sibsagar Vidyapeeth, Public High School of Dibrugarh and other schools were established at that time. These were all private schools, and had no connection with the government.

The impact of the Civil Disobedience Movement was also felt among the hill tribes of Assam. Gandhiji's call for Civil Disobedience inspired the Nagas to shake off British rule. The Kubai Nagas were the first to raise the banner of rebellion against the British in the wake of the Civil Disobedience Movement.

the newly installed Saadulla ministry was beset with a number of problems. Most important was the immigration of people from the Eastern part of Bengal. The Assamese viewed this to be a threat to their culture and identity. Another was the contribution of money by the Saadulla Government to the war-fund. Money was deducted from the salary of the government officials, organizing competitions, shows, etc. The Student community of Assam offered protest against the efforts of the government to raise money for the war-fund. Unable to face such protest and denunciation from people all over Assam, Saadulla tendered his resignation as the Chief Minister in 1941.

The failure of the Cripps Mission had closed the door for all future negotiations, For Gandhiji, the only possible solution now appeared to be for the British to quit India. The idea was gradually formulated into the Quit India Movement. The Congress Working Committee that met at Wardha on 14 July 1942 discussed Gandhiji's idea of launching a mass movement in the country demanding the immediate withdrawal of the British power from Indian soil. It adopted a resolution to this effect, which was notified in the All India Congress Committee's session held at Bombay on 7-8 August, 1942. Thus, the Quit India Movement was started in India with the slogan of Do or Die. But before the Congress could start the movement, the government was quick to arrest almost all leaders of Congress by the next day. The sudden arrest of the leaders by the British Government produced instant reaction among the people of Assam as well. There was a mass upsurge in Assam. Most of the prominent Congress leaders of Assam were arrested following the adoption of the Quit-India resolution. Md. Tayebulla, Gopinath Bardoloi and Siddhinath Sarma were arrested at Dhubri. Some other leaders such as Pitambar Deb Goswami and Krishna Deb Goswami were also put behind bars. In the different districts of Assam like Kamrup, Nagaon, Darrang, Sibsagar and other places, mob violence took place. People in these places attacked government properties and damaged railway and telegraph lines.

An exemplary act of bravery was shown by Kanaklata Baruah, a young girl of eighteen years from Gahpur. She led a huge crowd with a national tricolour flag in her hand to hoist it at the Gohpur police station, the British

12.7 GROUPING CONTROVERSY AND INDEPENDENCE

At this juncture, the British Labour Government sent a cabinet mission under Sir Patric Lawrence to negotiate with Indian leaders the terms for the transfer of Power to Indians. The Cabinet Mission proposed the establishment of a Constituent Assembly to frame the future Constitution of India. Accordingly elections were held in India in 1946 to form the Constituent Assembly. The plan of the Mission to 'group' Assam with Bengal for creating a predominantly Muslim Zone in Eastern India was strongly opposed by the people of Assam. According to this plan the Assam representatives to the Constituent Assembly would have to sit in a Section with the Bengal representatives. The leader of Assam Congress, Gopinath Bordoloi stressed on provincial autonomy, he pleaded the separation of Sylhet district from Assam and Jinnah's claim to include Assam in Pakistan as a Muslim dominated Province, he hold the mission that it was absolutely impossible. On the other hand, Saddulah, leader of the Muslim League in Assam, tried to impress upon the delegation that it was the Muslims who actually constituted the majority of the population in the province. He opposed the idea of transferring only Sylhet to Pakistan instead he suggested that whole province might be attached to Bengal. There was a storm protest against the decision of Cabinet Mission Plan from every corner of Assam. With the blessings of Mahatma Gandhi who supported strongly Assam's stand and ability of Gopinath Bordoloi to convince the other Indian leaders about the justness of Assam's case. This led to the ultimate failure of the Grouping Plan of Cabinet Mission. Meanwhile, Lord Mountbatten was appointed as the last Viceroy of India. He immediately began to work on a scheme for the partition of India. When power was ultimately transferred by the British government to the people of India on 15th August, 1947, Assam emerged from her subjugation to foreign dominion for twelve decades as a free unit of the Dominion of India which was formally transformed into the Republic of Indian Union.

Ans to the Q No. 2: 1905

Ans to the Q No. 3: Ambikagiri Roy Chaudhary

Ans to the Q No. 4: General Dyer

Ans to the Q No. 5: 1919

Ans to the Q No. 6: 1921

Ans to the Q No. 7: 1930

Ans to the Q No. 8: 1927

Ans to the Q No. 9: Omeo Kumar Das and Siddhinath Sarma

Ans to the Q No. 10: 1942

Ans to the Q No. 11: March, 1942

Ans to the Q No. 12: Shanti Bahini, Mrityu Bahini



12.11 MODEL QUESTIONS

(A) Very short questions (Answer each question in about 50 words)

Q1. Why was Bengal partitioned?

Q2. When did Gandhi visit Assam?

Q3. In which year the resolution of *Purna Swaraj* was passed?

Q4. Name two martyrs of Quit India Movement of Assam?

Q5. Who was leader of the Muslim League in Assam?

Q6. Who headed Cabinet Mission?

(B) Short questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)

Q1. What is Cunninghum Circular?

Q2. What role did Assam play in the Quit India Movement?

Q3. Write short notes on:

a) Chauri Chaura incident

b) Cunningham Circular

(C) Long questions (**Answer each question in about 300-500 words)**

Q1. Discuss the effects of the Partition of Bengal in Assam.

Q2. Explain the impact of Non Co-operation Movement in Assam.

Q3. Describe the impact of Civil Disobedience Movement in Assam.

Q4. Discuss the role of students of Assam in the Freedom Struggle.

*** ***** ***