



Socio-Economic Impact of the Non-Cooperation Movement in Assam

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ABSTRACT

The Non-Cooperation Movement (1920–1922), led by Mahatma Gandhi under the aegis of the Indian National Congress, represented a decisive phase in India's anti-colonial struggle and generated significant socio-economic repercussions in Assam.

This study examines the movement's socio-economic impact in Assam with particular reference to political mobilisation, indigenous economic initiatives, women's participation, and the evolving consciousness of tea plantation labour communities. Employing an analytical historical approach based primarily on secondary sources, the paper analyses boycott campaigns, promotion of swadeshi industries, nationalist education, and constructive social programmes associated with the movement. The findings indicate that these initiatives stimulated local economic activities, encouraged social reform, and fostered political awareness among diverse sections of Assamese society. Although the movement did not immediately achieve self-rule, it contributed to the consolidation of nationalist identity, expansion of public participation, and growing resistance to colonial economic policies. The study argues that the Non-Cooperation Movement acted as a catalyst for enduring socio-economic transformation and political awakening in Assam, shaping the region's subsequent engagement in India's broader freedom struggle.

Keywords:

Assam nationalism, Opium and Excise, tea plantation labour, women's participation, anti-opium campaign, colonial economy, socio-economic transformation.

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INTRODUCTION

The rise of Indian nationalism during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries marked a crucial phase in the political and intellectual history of the Indian subcontinent. Following the Revolt of 1857, often regarded as the First War of Indian Independence, a gradual yet profound transformation occurred in the political consciousness of the Indian people. The consolidation of British colonial rule, the expansion of Western education, and the development of modern communication networks collectively contributed to the emergence of a broader sense of national identity. These developments fostered a new awareness of political rights and aspirations among the educated sections of society. Within this wider context of national awakening, Assam also experienced the gradual growth of nationalist sentiments that eventually culminated in organized political activity during the Non-Cooperation Movement (1920–1922).

One of the most significant factors influencing the growth of modern political awareness in India was the spread of English education. Western political ideas such as liberty, democracy, equality, and nationalism profoundly shaped the outlook of the emerging educated middle class. Although Assam remained geographically distant from the major political centres of colonial India, it was not isolated from these intellectual developments. Educated Assamese youth encountered modern political thought through educational institutions, literature, and interaction with wider intellectual networks. As a result, colonial rule increasingly came to be interpreted in the light of ideas of self-government, civil rights, and national dignity. The emergence of an Assamese intelligentsia, influenced by both indigenous cultural traditions and Western liberal thought, thus laid the intellectual foundation for political mobilization within the province.



Print culture further played a pivotal role in nurturing political consciousness in Assam. The late nineteenth century witnessed a significant literary and cultural revival, particularly associated with the publication of the journal Jonaki. Prominent literary figures such as Lakshminath Bezbarua, Chandrakumar Agarwala, Padmanath Gohain Barua, and Hemchandra Goswami contributed immensely to the cultural regeneration of Assamese society. Their writings revived interest in Assam's historical heritage and encouraged a sense of regional pride and collective identity. Newspapers and periodicals, including Usha, Banhi, and The Times of Assam, became important platforms for public debate and the dissemination of nationalist ideas. Through these intellectual and literary initiatives, regional consciousness in Assam gradually aligned itself with the broader currents of the Indian national movement.

The political climate of India underwent further transformation after the First World War (1914–1918). Indian political leaders had supported the British war effort with the expectation that meaningful constitutional reforms would follow. However, the introduction of the Montagu–Chelmsford Reforms of 1919 offered only limited concessions through the system of dyarchy, leaving substantial authority in the hands of colonial administrators. This partial reform generated widespread dissatisfaction and created favourable conditions for mass political mobilization.

In Assam, these developments intersected with regional aspirations and leadership. Leaders such as Nabin Chandra Bardoloi and Tarun Ram Phukan actively mobilized public opinion, while organizations like the Assam Association connected local political concerns with the national movement. When the Indian National Congress adopted the programme of Non-Cooperation under Mahatma Gandhi in 1920, Assamese leaders endorsed the movement and integrated the province into the wider nationalist struggle. The movement subsequently transformed political awareness into organized action and laid the foundation for broader socio-economic and political change in



Assam.

OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this study is to examine the socio-economic impact of the Non-Cooperation Movement (1920–1922) in Assam. It aims to analyze political mobilization, economic changes, and social transformation in the province, highlighting the role of leaders like Tarun Ram Phukan and Nabin Chandra Bardoloi etc. The study also evaluates participation of students, peasants, women and tea garden labours.

METHODOLOGY

The method used in this study is historical and analytical in nature. It is based mainly on secondary sources such as books, journals, research articles, government records, and contemporary newspapers, which are critically examined to ensure accuracy and reliability.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The issue of non-cooperation movement had special significant in the history of India. Assam participation in this struggle was also magnificent, seven works has been published on the issue of non-cooperation movement and Assam participation in this struggle has a part of Indian main stream.

H.K. Barpujari edited "the political history of Assam" vol-1 which provides a broad idea about the growth of national consciousness in Assam against the British colonial rule and also about the emergence to several public and political associations during the period of freedom movement.

"Land mark in the freedom struggle in Assam", by K.N. Dutta, "Planter Raj to Swaraj", though light on the history of Asomiya literature by Dimbeseswar Neog the Jorhat sarbajanik sabha-1^a role in socio- political awakening of charit by S. Kakati Sharma "Asamiya Bhasa unnati Sadhini Sabha" in Jonaki by K.C Sharma history of the freedom



movement. In India by R.C Mazumdar is some of the most prominent work which provides several information relating to the present study.

"Bharatar Swadhinata Sangramat Asomar Bhumika" (Assamese book) writer by Laxminath Tamuli are the book which mention that before 1920-22 the British came 44,12000 rupees by selling of opium but after 1920-21 British sold opium of rupees 35,85,000 from the above mention sale we come to know that after 1920-21 the Assamese people were socially developed. Through we get to know about the revolutionary movement.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE NON-COOPERATION MOVEMENT IN ASSAM

Political Mobilization and Expansion of the Movement

The adoption of the Non-Cooperation programme by the Indian National Congress at the Calcutta session in September 1920 significantly influenced political developments in Assam. The resolution encouraging non-cooperation with the colonial government was strongly supported by Assamese leaders, particularly Nabin Chandra Bardoloi, Tarun Ram Phukan, and Chandranath Sarmah. Bardoloi, who attended the Calcutta session, returned to Guwahati and actively campaigned to secure support from the Assamese intelligentsia for Gandhi's programme. Through letters and public meetings, he appealed to lawyers, journalists, and educated sections of society to join the movement.

A special session of the Assam Association was held at Guwahati on 11–12 October 1920 to discuss the issue. Delegates from different districts participated along with students from Cotton College and Earle Law College. The meeting endorsed Gandhi's programme and called for the boycott of legislative councils, government institutions, and foreign goods. The leaders also declared that they would not contest elections to colonial councils. Soon after, the Assam Association transformed itself into a provincial branch of the Indian National Congress, thereby integrating Assam with the broader national movement.



The movement gained further momentum through public meetings and tours organized by Assamese leaders across the Brahmaputra Valley. Gandhi's visit to Assam in 1921 provided additional inspiration and strengthened the organizational structure of the movement.

Economic Impact and the Boycott of Foreign Goods

The Non-Cooperation Movement had a significant impact on the economic life of Assam. One of the central programmes of the movement was the boycott of foreign goods, particularly British textiles. Inspired by Gandhi's call for swadeshi, people across Assam began rejecting imported goods and promoting indigenous products.

In several towns and rural areas, foreign cloth was publicly burned as a symbolic protest against colonial economic dominance. Tailors in certain places refused to stitch garments made from imported cloth, and shopkeepers gradually stopped selling foreign goods. Merchants in Guwahati also played a role in promoting swadeshi commerce. The opening of swadeshi shops and the encouragement of indigenous products helped reduce the dependence on foreign imports.

The revival of traditional spinning and weaving also became an important economic outcome of the movement. The charkha (spinning wheel) was widely promoted, and khadi emerged as a symbol of national identity. Assamese women, who already possessed strong weaving traditions, contributed significantly to the production of hand-woven cloth. Their work received appreciation from national leaders and helped strengthen the economic dimension of the swadeshi movement.

Opium Consumption and Excise Revenue

Another important social reform associated with the Non-Cooperation Movement in Assam was the campaign against opium consumption. Congress volunteers travelled from village to village explaining the harmful effects of opium and encouraging people to abandon the habit. Public meetings were organized where individuals from different social groups pledged to abstain from opium, liquor, and other intoxicants.

The impact of this campaign is clearly reflected in the decline of opium consumption



during the early 1920s. Historical data indicates that opium consumption in Assam fell sharply during the initial phase of the movement.

Table 1

Opium Consumption in Assam (Selected Years)

YEAR	OPIUM CONSUMPTION
1874 - 75	1674
1885 – 86	1446
1915 - 16	1560
1919 - 20	1747
1920 - 21	614

Note. The sharp decline in 1920–1921 reflects the influence of the anti-opium campaign associated with the Non-Cooperation Movement.

The decline in opium consumption also affected colonial excise revenues. Provincial statistics demonstrate a noticeable reduction in both excise and opium revenues during the early years of the movement.

Table 2

Provincial Excise and Opium Statistics (Including Manipur)

TOTAL	1920-21	1921-22	1922-23	1923-24
Excise Revenue Rs. 1000	7535	6158	5681	6225
Opium Revenue Rs. 1000	4412	3917	3586	3810
Opium Consumption	615	1048	998	884



Note. The decline in revenue during the early 1920s indicates the effectiveness of the anti-opium and anti-liquor campaigns.

Women's Participation and Social Reform

The Non-Cooperation Movement marked a new phase in the participation of women in Assam's public life. Although social reform initiatives had begun earlier, the movement provided a broader platform for women to engage in political and social activities.

Prominent women leaders such as Chandraprabha Saikiani, Rajabala Das, Nalinibala Devi, and Bijuli Phukan played important roles in mobilizing women across the province. They travelled extensively to villages and towns, encouraging women to participate in constructive programmes such as spinning, weaving, and social reform activities.

Women were also actively involved in campaigns against social evils such as child marriage, opium consumption, and untouchability. Their participation helped strengthen the social dimension of the nationalist movement and contributed to the growth of women's organizations. The establishment of the Assam Mahila Samiti in 1926 further institutionalized women's involvement in nationalist and social reform activities.

Communal Unity and Social Harmony

The Non-Cooperation Movement also played an important role in strengthening communal harmony in Assam. Gandhi emphasized the importance of Hindu-Muslim unity for achieving Swaraj, and the Khilafat Movement provided an opportunity for cooperation between the two communities.

In Assam, public meetings were organized where leaders emphasized the need for maintaining communal harmony. In several places, Muslims voluntarily refrained from cow slaughter in order to maintain cordial relations with the Hindu community. Reports from contemporary newspapers indicate that despite communal tensions in other parts of India, Assam largely remained free from communal riots during this period.

This spirit of cooperation reflected the historical tradition of coexistence in the region and contributed to the strengthening of the nationalist movement.



Revolutionary Tendencies among Youth

Although the Non-Cooperation Movement was based on the principle of non-violence, its sudden suspension in 1922 created disappointment among many young activists. Some sections of the youth began exploring revolutionary methods to achieve independence.

Influenced by developments in Bengal and other regions, a few revolutionary organizations began to appear in Assam during the mid-1920s. Groups associated with the Anusilan Samiti and other revolutionary networks attempted to mobilize youth and collect resources for militant activities. However, such movements did not gain widespread public support in Assam, as the majority of people continued to adhere to Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence.

CONCLUSION

During the freedom struggle the Indians all over the country to hand in hand to drive out foreign power end to attain the independent. Like others parts of India Assam also effectively participated in the freedom making process Assam participated in the Gandhi's struggle for freedom I.e. the non-cooperation's and civil disobedient movement was worth mentionary. Participating in the India freedom struggle Assam was advance on the national séance in attaining independence of India. The social base of both non-cooperation and civil-disobedient movement in Assam magnificent as the intellectuals, students, women and even the peasants also took active part in this movement as a result for which a great transformation had come up with in the society and economy of Assam during this period. This study is basically an overview of the socio-economic impact of the non-cooperation movement in Assam.

From the above it is apparent that non-cooperation movement had strong economic and social repercussion in the Brahmaputra valley. From its early stages it had assumed a mass character. Many students snapped their academic careers by boycotting government institutions like Cotton College. Attempts were made as study centers but also turned in to training centers for budding congress workers. The valley was



profoundly stirred and unparallel scenes of fervor devotion and sacrifice were witnessed everywhere. Many persons gave up their highly profitable profession. (Gohain Baruah:2001: 79,84)

One of the most important impacts of the movement was the growth of Swadeshi goods which led to development of a indigenous industries in the region. Basically the handloom industries got the boost. Due to the tremendous resistance to intoxicating drugs like opium, Ganja and liquor the movement saw the beginning of the gradual eradication of Assam. (Ibid)

The tremendous participation of Muslims in the movement and the maintenance of communal Unity was a significant feature of the movement of Assam. Apart from the Assamese community members of other communities like the Marwari's Bengali's Nepali's and certain sections of tribal people also actively participated in movement. Its influence affected the large sections of women as well. Thus the varied dimensions of the non- cooperation movement were felt throughout the Brahmaputra.

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