

“Memoirs of a Chota Sahib” by John Rowntree

TEXTUAL QUESTION ANSWERS

(From AHSEC/NCERT Flamingo Supplementary Reader)

Understanding the Text

1. What is the significance of the title “Memoirs of a Chota Sahib”?

Answer: The title signifies the author’s recollections as a young British officer (Chota Sahib) during his time in Assam under British rule. “Chota Sahib” refers to a young or junior British official in colonial India. The memoir captures his personal observations and fond memories of life in Assam.

2. What impressions of the lifestyle of the British in Assam do you get from the text?

Answer: The British in Assam led a comfortable and privileged life. They lived in well-maintained bungalows, employed Indian servants, and enjoyed leisurely activities like fishing, shooting, and travelling in the countryside. Their lifestyle was in stark contrast to that of the local people.

3. What were the author’s impressions about the Assamese people?

Answer: The author had a deep admiration for the Assamese people. He found them to be gentle, hospitable, friendly, and good-humored. He appreciated their simplicity, cultural richness, and peaceful nature.

4. What did the author remember about his bungalow in Shillong?

Answer: The author remembered his Shillong bungalow fondly. It was surrounded by greenery, flowers, and fruit trees. The kitchen was separate, connected by a covered walkway. He particularly remembered the sweeping view from the front verandah and the garden filled with colorful flowers.

5. What does the author say about the changes that took place after Independence?

Answer: The author notes that many aspects of life in Assam changed after Independence. The British officials left, and the old lifestyle faded. Government departments became more Indianized, and modernization altered the simplicity of earlier times. He reflects on this with a sense of nostalgia and loss.



ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS (SHORT & LONG ANSWERS)

◆ Short Answer Questions (30–50 words)

1. Who was a 'Chota Sahib'?

Answer: A 'Chota Sahib' was a young British officer serving in colonial India. The term refers to the junior members of the British administrative service during the Raj.

2. What fond memories does Rowntree have of his Shillong home?

Answer: Rowntree recalls the beautiful garden, the peaceful bungalow surrounded by trees, the pleasant climate, and the breathtaking view from the verandah. These aspects made Shillong his favorite place.

3. What was the relationship between the British and the Assamese people, as described by the author?

Answer: The relationship was largely cordial. The British maintained a certain aloofness due to their administrative roles, but many like Rowntree admired and respected the Assamese for their hospitality, gentleness, and culture.

4. How did the author feel about his departure from India?

Answer: The author felt a deep sense of loss and nostalgia. Although he accepted the changes brought by Independence, he missed the warmth, culture, and charm of the Assam he once knew.

5. What kind of flora surrounded the author's bungalow in Shillong?

Answer: The garden had colorful flowers such as orchids and rhododendrons, fruit trees like guava and pineapples, and many shady trees that made it a picturesque and peaceful place.

6. Why is Shillong special to the author?

Answer: Shillong was special because it was his summer headquarters and offered scenic beauty, pleasant weather, and cherished memories of his life there as a Chota Sahib.

7. What type of administrative work did the author do in Assam?

Answer: As a British officer, Rowntree was involved in administrative tasks like maintaining law and order, implementing government policies, and interacting with local officials and people.

8. How did the monsoon affect life in Assam, according to the author?

Answer: The monsoon transformed the landscape into lush greenery. The author describes it as a time of beauty, although it also made travel difficult and brought challenges like flooding.

9. What did the author say about the hospitality of Assamese people?

Answer: He admired the Assamese people for their sincere and warm hospitality. He found them to be generous hosts who welcomed him warmly during his visits to villages.

10. How did John Rowntree describe the natural beauty of Assam?

Answer: He described Assam as a land of rivers, forests, hills, and lush tea gardens. He appreciated its tranquil scenery, wildlife, and the overall harmony of nature.

◆ **Long Answer Questions (120–150 words)**

11. How does John Rowntree portray his experiences in Assam as a British officer?

Answer: John Rowntree's portrayal is affectionate and nostalgic. He speaks of his administrative role with a sense of duty, but his real attachment was to the beauty of the land and the warmth of its people. He fondly remembers the lifestyle in his bungalow, the scenic hills of Shillong, and the daily life of the Assamese people. He expresses admiration for their simplicity, kindness, and culture. Although he was a representative of colonial authority, he does not speak from a superior position but as someone who genuinely loved the land. His tone is reflective, and his memories are filled with gratitude and wistfulness for a world that no longer exists.

12. What contrast does the author draw between the British lifestyle and that of the local people?

Answer: The British lived in relative luxury with bungalows, gardens, and several servants. Their lives were structured and privileged. In contrast, the local people led simpler lives, often facing hardships. However, the author appreciates the depth and richness of Assamese culture and their contentment despite modest means. He doesn't view this contrast in a critical way but highlights it to show how two very different ways of life coexisted. His reflections show growing respect and emotional closeness toward the local people as time went by.

13. Describe the author's love for nature as reflected in "Memoirs of a Chota Sahib."

Answer: Rowntree's deep love for nature is evident in his vivid descriptions of the Assam landscape. He lovingly describes the gardens around his bungalow, the flowers, the hills of Shillong, and the lush monsoon forests. He appreciated the natural beauty of Assam not just as a backdrop but as something that shaped his daily life and moods. His connection to the landscape is emotional, showing how much he valued peace, solitude, and beauty.

14. What changes does the author notice after Indian Independence?

Answer: After Independence, Rowntree observed that the British administrative officers were replaced by Indians, and the colonial way of life faded. The simplicity and innocence of earlier days gave way to modernization and bureaucratization. The landscape and social structure remained, but the personal charm and relationships he once enjoyed were no longer the same. These changes filled him with nostalgia.

15. How does the author depict the Assamese society in the memoir?

Answer: He depicts Assamese society as kind-hearted, peace-loving, and deeply rooted in culture and tradition. The people are shown as courteous, welcoming, and spiritually rich. He appreciates their festivals, music, and simple lifestyles. His portrayal is warm, respectful, and based on lived experiences rather than colonial stereotypes.

16. Comment on the tone and style of the memoir.

Answer: The tone is nostalgic, warm, and reflective. The style is descriptive and personal, blending factual accounts with emotional impressions. Rowntree writes as someone revisiting a cherished memory rather than recording historical events. His use of vivid imagery and gentle humor enhances the reader's connection with the place and people.

17. What did the author cherish most about his life in Assam?

Answer: The author cherished the natural beauty, the peaceful lifestyle, and the affectionate relationships he formed with the Assamese people. He also valued the sense of purpose and adventure that came with his administrative duties, along with the deep emotional ties he developed with the land.

18. Describe the role of nature in shaping the author's memories.

Answer: Nature plays a central role in the memoir. The sights, sounds, and seasons of Assam are deeply etched into Rowntree's

memory. The monsoons, the flowering trees, the misty hills, and the wildlife all contribute to a vivid sensory experience. Nature becomes a character in itself, shaping his mood and enriching his recollections.

19. How does the memoir reflect the complexity of colonial relationships?

Answer: While the memoir is affectionate, it subtly reflects the layered relationship between colonizer and colonized. Though Rowntree personally admired the Assamese people, the structure of colonial power remained in place. The memoir reflects his genuine warmth but also a certain unspoken distance and privilege inherent in British rule.

20. What message does the author convey through “Memoirs of a Chota Sahib”?

Answer: The memoir conveys that human relationships, natural beauty, and cultural experiences create deep emotional bonds. Rowntree’s reflections emphasize respect for other cultures, the value of simplicity, and the pain of inevitable change. His message is one of gratitude, loss, and the universal longing for a time gone by.