

AGGRESSIVE POLICY OF ITALY

Before the First World War, Europe was divided into two rival and hostile camps. Italy was a member of Triple Alliance (Germany, Austria and Italy). When the First World War broke out, Italy did not join the war in favour of the Triple Alliance. **According to the secret Treaty of London, 1915, Italy was assured that Trentino, the South Tyrol, Istria, Trieste, part of Dalmatia should be given to her.** But the Paris Conference disappointed Italy very much. Italy did not receive those assured territories. Italy felt dejected, disappointed and aggrieved with the Paris Conference. After the war, Mussolini captured power in Italy and followed an aggressive foreign policy. **The main object of his foreign policy was expansion and to enhance the position and glory of Italy in international politics.** Mussolini mentioned population pressure as the justification of Italy's territorial expansion. In Mussolini's word, **"We are hungry for land, because we are prolific and intend to remain so."** Flouting the terms of the Peace Treaty, Italy resolved to expand her territories. Mussolini thus declared, **"We want to break the**

territorial and military claims that confine us in our sea. It is a conflict between two ages, two ideas."

Italian foreign Policy may be divided into two parts: (a) **Anti-German upto 1934** and (b) **Pro-Germany after 1934**. Previously, Italy was anti-Germany. When the Nazis tried to capture Austria for the first time in 1934, Italy sent her army to protect Austria because Austria was a buffer state between her and Germany. But when Britain signed the **Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 18 January, 1935**, Mussolini realized that Britain was guided by her own interest. This was a clear betrayal on the part of Britain. When Germany sent troops to Rhineland violating the terms of the Versailles Treaty, Italy realized the helpless condition of Britain and France in international politics. Mussolini now felt that he would gain more from German friendship than Britain and France.

CORFU INCIDENT, 1923

Mussolini always wanted to enhance the prestige of Italy in the eyes of foreign nations. The first incident which enhanced Italy's prestige was the Corfu incident of 1923. An Italian general with his staff was killed by Greek bandits on 27 August, 1923. Mussolini now demanded heavy compensation from Greece and occupied the Corfu Island. An Inter-Allied Commission of Enquiry was appointed to investigate the Corfu incident. On the basis of the recommendations of the Committee, Greece had to pay compensation to Italy and Italy also evacuated Corfu Island.

ACQUISITION OF FIUME, 1924

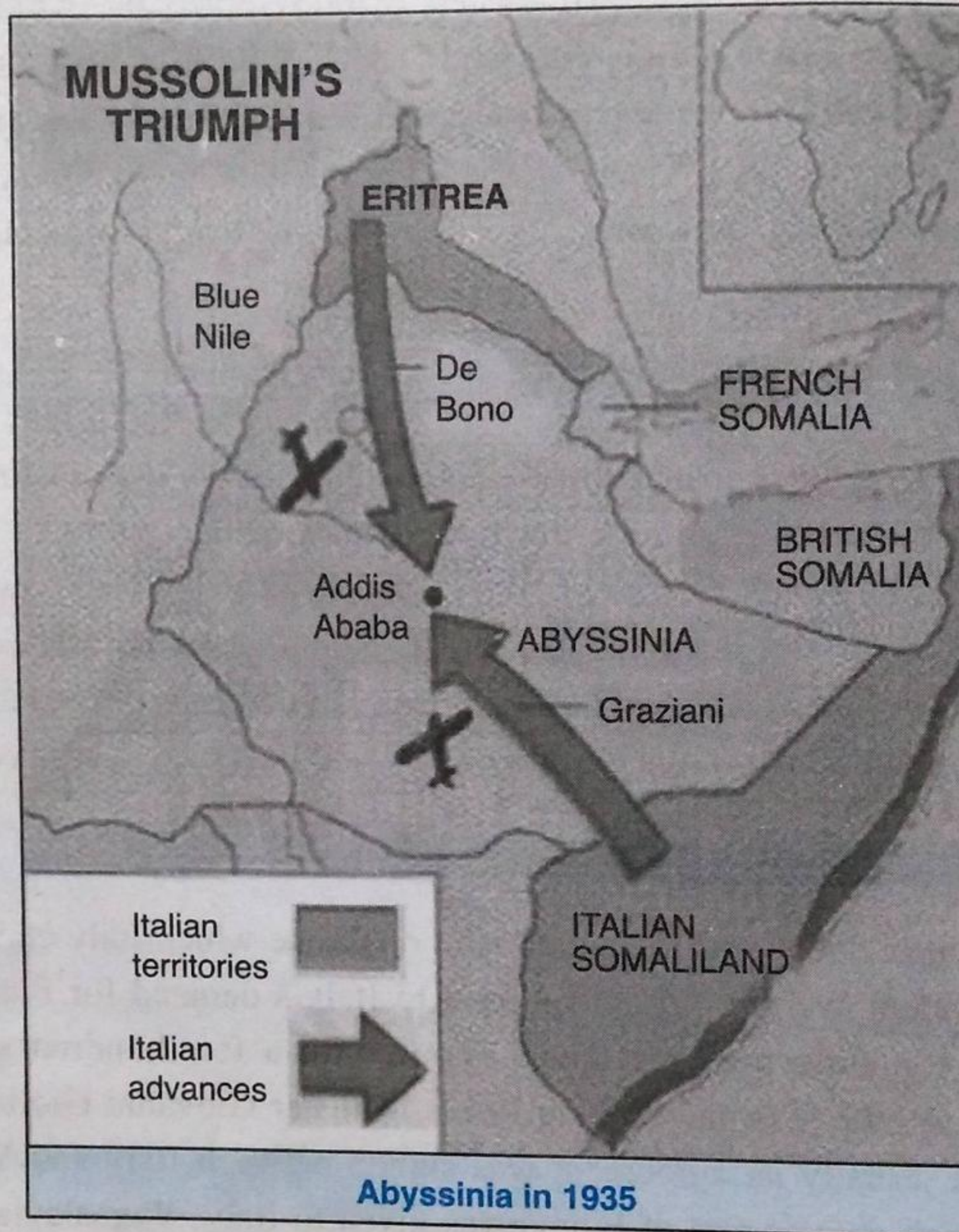
The next important incident was the acquisition of Fiume which Italy claimed at the Peace Conference. But President Wilson did not respond to Italy's demand for Fiume. **Gabriele D'Annunza**, a famous romantic poet, occupied Fiume with a few hundred supporters before Yugoslavia had time to take. The new Italian Prime Minister Giovanni Giolitti was ultimately able to drive him out. Finally an agreement was signed between Italy and Yugoslavia on 27 January, 1924, by which greater part of Fiume was given to Italy. Yugoslavia got the adjacent port of Barro with economic facilities in the main harbour.

ANNEXATION OF ABYSSINIA, 1935

Abyssinia or Ethiopia was an independent state of East Africa. This country became a target of Italy for a number of reasons.

1. In 1896 Italian army was defeated in the battle of Adowa while Italy tried to conquer the region. Italy wanted to wipe out the humiliation of defeat at Adowa.
2. Italy's existing colonies Eritrea and Somaliland were not very rewarding. Italy thus needed colonies for more space, more food for her growing population and more markets for Italy's exports.

3. Abyssinia was rich in raw materials and mineral wealth.
4. Like Germany Italy equally suffered from the Great Depression. The victory at Abyssinia would easily divert attention of the people from internal troubles.
5. This would please the nationalists, colonists and enhance Mussolini's popularity in the country.



King Haile Selassie of Abyssinia appealed to the League of Nations for arbitration. The League declared Italy as aggressor and applied economic embargo. But these were useless because this embargo did not include sale of oil and coal to Italy. Mussolini defied the League and declared King Victor Emmanuel as the Emperor of Abyssinia in 1936.

Taking advantage of Italy's Abyssinia attack, Germany now sent troops to the demilitarized zone of Rhineland in March, 1936. Germany thus violated the Versailles Treaty and Locarno Pact clauses. Italy now realized the helpless condition of Britain and France in international politics. Italy had full admiration of Germany for her role during Abyssinia conquest. Italy came closer to Germany and made understanding with Hitler by forming the Rome-Berlin Axis. So in the Second World War Mussolini joined Germany and declared war on Britain and France.

ANNEXATION OF ALBANIA, 1939

On the Albania issue, the relation between Italy and Yugoslavia became bitter. In 1912, the independent Albania state was set up and the country became a member of the League of Nations in 1920. Italy then advanced huge sum of money for Albania's internal development and gradually Albania became a protectorate of Italy. Taking advantage of chaos there, Italy invaded Albania in 1939 and annexed the whole country to the Italian empire. Italy then signed with Germany **the Pact of Steel in May, 1939**. Mussolini now promised full military support to Germany in case of war.

SPANISH CIVIL WAR, 1936-1939

The constitutional monarchy in Spain under King Alfonso was not very efficient. In 1929 General Rivera seized the power in a bloodless coup. The people supported the dictatorship for the fear of the Bolshevik Revolution. In the Corporation election of 1931, the Socialist Republican Party gained majority and demanded the abdication of the Spanish King. The King abdicated and a Republican government was formed. But this government became unsuccessful due to worldwide economic depression. The Rightist Party got majority of seats in 1933 election and formed the government but the Socialists opposed the government. In 1936, the Parliament was dissolved and in the next election a popular Front of the Republicans, Socialists and the Communists came to power. The supporters of the Popular Front now attacked the Rightists. In July, 1936, the Rightist politician Calvo Sotelo was murdered by the police. This incident created a terror in the minds of the Rightists and they were convinced that the only way was to restore a military dictatorship. In this situation, a group of generals planned to capture power and using Calvo Sotelo's murder as a pretext, they began a revolt against the Popular Front. Very soon, General Franco took the leadership and a civil war began. The question of 'ism' was an important factor in the civil war.

Since 1933, Mussolini took interest in the Spanish affairs and decided to help the Monarchists against the existing government. But the victory of the Leftist Party in the election alarmed Mussolini. Both Hitler and Mussolini wanted to prevent the spread of Bolshevism in Europe. Russia, on the other hand, expected revolutionary ideas to achieve success in Spain. Now Hitler and Mussolini gave Franco military help in this war. Mussolini knew very well that from Spain, French industries in Marseilles could be easily bombed. Thus Italy would be able to establish his supremacy in the Mediterranean.

Italy, Germany and Russia now continued their help to the rival parties. A large number of foreign volunteers came to Spain to take part in this war of ism. Twenty seven European States formed the Non-International Committee and decided not to give any kind of help to either party in this civil war. The Committee prohibited entry of the battleships of Germany, Italy, Britain and France to Spain. Disregarding this decision, Italy and Germany sent help to General Franco. In 1939, civil war came to an end when Franco and his rebels won the battle. The Spanish Civil War was thus transformed into an European War and paved the way to the Second World War.

Aggressive Policy of Japan

Aggressive policy of Japan was one of the important causes for the outbreak of the Second World War. Japan was the first major aggressor with the successful invasion of Manchuria. The League of Nations failed to control the aggressive policy of Japan. Taking advantage of the failure of the League of Nations, Germany introduced conscription again in March, 1935. Encouraged by this, Mussolini captured Abyssinia in 1936. There was a half-hearted resistance from the League, Britain and France. Japan now made a full scale invasion of Northern China in 1937. By this time, it became clear that the League of Nations was totally ineffective. After signing the Anti-Comintern Pact with Germany in 1936, Japan began invasion of the other parts of China. During this time, the relation between America and Japan deteriorated. America assisted China against Japanese aggression. American President Roosevelt demanded the withdrawal of Japanese force from China and declared an embargo on oil supplies to Japan on July, 1941. Both the powers started negotiations. This negotiation failed because America insisted on Japanese total withdrawal from Indo-China and China which Japan refused. Without any declaration of war, Japan now made a sudden aerial attack on Pearl Harbour destroying 350 American aircrafts, five battleships and 3700 men. The Pearl Harbour attack now brought America into the Second World War.

(2) ANGLO-FRENCH APPEASEMENT POLICIES

Meaning of Appeasement

Appeasement is a diplomatic policy of making political or material concessions to an enemy power to avoid war. This term is often applied to the foreign policy. Actually appeasement was followed by Britain first and later on by France. The purpose of this policy of Britain was to avoid war with aggressive powers such as Germany, Italy and Japan by giving way to their demands, provided the demands were not too unreasonable. The Anglo-French appeasement policy was largely responsible for the outbreak of the Second World War.

Great Britain, France and the United States had the power and resources to check the aggressive actions of Germany, Italy and Japan during the 1930s. But they failed to do so on account of the policy of appeasement followed towards the Axis Powers. For their own interests, these powers followed this policy during 1920s to 1937.

Policy of Appeasement followed by Great Britain

During the inter-war period, the British policy of appeasement rested on five bases.

Firstly, Great Britain had an intense fear of Communism of Soviet Russia. On account of the activities of Soviet Russia, there developed an apprehension of Communist uprising in Great Britain. As a result, Great Britain hated the Soviet Union and was very willing to assist any country which was opposed to the Soviet Union. The English people were apprehensive about the

spread of Germany, Italy and Japan acted on this fear of Soviet Russia of Great Britain and carried on their aggression in the guise of anti-Communism.

Secondly, another aim of the British policy was to maintain the balance of power in international politics, although ultimately it ended in failure. Both Great Britain and France were not willing to fight a war against the combined forces of Germany, Italy and Japan. Unreliability of the military strength of France was another important cause.

Thirdly, another cause for following this policy was the differences between Great Britain and France on the issues of collective security, reparations, disarmament and German recovery. Great Britain held the view that as a result of reparation Germany would develop economic depression which was not desirable. A weak Germany would be an open invitation to Communist expansion.

Fourthly, Internal weakness of Great Britain after the First World War was another cause for Great Britain's policy of appeasement. It was her economic condition which created her fear of Communism. Chamberlain favoured this policy due to economic problems that had risen after the Great Depression such as high unemployment rate. The financial condition was also not so stable. He wanted to take time to strengthen British defence because the country virtually had no air force ; the navy and army were insufficient . This became clear when the Anglo-French army failed to intervene during Japan's attack on China, Italy's aggression on Abyssinia and Germany's occupation of Prague.

Finally, the British policy of appeasement was due to her inability to understand correctly the character and ambitions of the Axis Powers. Chamberlain, the architect of British policy of appeasement, believed that Hitler meant business and would honour his word if the injustice was removed. But this expectation ultimately failed.

Policy of Appeasement followed by France

It is true that France was victorious in the First World War, but even then her statesmen were terribly afraid of Germany. The question which dominated France at the Paris Peace Conference was how the settlement could serve the permanent interests of French security. The peace Settlement did not satisfy the French people. France was given a joint Anglo-American guarantee against unprovoked German aggression. But this guarantee remained merely on paper.

Secondly, the morale of the French army was not very high at that time. The materials of the French soldiers were insufficient. The productive capacity of the French factories was about a third of the capacity of the German factories. Between 1934 to 1938, Germany spent four times as much as French on national defence. On the other hand, France did not keep her armed forces fully prepared for war. She ignored tanks and aviation because the French generals suffered from a belief in outmoded military theories.

Thirdly, France had lost more men in the First World War than any other country. A horror of war haunted the French people. The French opinion was so firmly attached to peace that it was not prepared to fight another war to stop the aggression of Germany, Italy and Japan.

Fourthly, France was afraid of Communism and the Soviet Union. The French politicians wanted to save the country from Bolshevism. Thus France was prepared to appease both Germany and Italy to save their own country. France was very eager to have Italian friendship at any cost. Thus at the time of Abyssinian crisis, France followed a policy of appeasement towards Italy. France played a similar role during the Civil War in Spain. France did not help the democratic government of Spain against General Franco. It has been rightly said that Munich represented the climax of the policy of appeasement.

There were two distinct phases of appeasement.

Mid-1920s to 1937 : The appeasement policy was seen during the Dawes and Young Plans which tried to appease Germany. During this period, there was vague feeling that war could be avoided at all cost. Gradually Hitler violated the clauses of the Treaty of Versailles and the Locarno Pacts. In this situation, the League of Nations appeared to be helpless. Britain thus followed the policy of appeasement towards Germany. Chamberlain then tried to settle disputes by personal contacts with the leaders of Germany and Italy.

During 1933-39, Hitler completely destroyed the democratic institutions at home and started the process of Nazification of Europe. The decisive point was Hitler's support to Mussolini's Abyssinian adventure. The Italian victory at Abyssinia was a grave blow to the League of Nations because this action of Italy proved the ineffectiveness of collective security system. Actually Britain and France were not militarily and economically prepared for war and were anxious to avoid any action which might provoke Italy into war with them. Germany and Italy intervened in the Spanish civil war on the pretext of saving Spain from communist Russia. Here again Anglo-French power failed to prevent Germany and Italy.

By the treaty of Versailles, Rhineland had been declared demilitarized zone. Ignoring this clause of the treaty, Germany occupied Rhineland. At this point England and France would have taught Hitler a lesson. Instead they gave Hitler a chance to increase his power at home. In March, 1938, Hitler occupied Austria (Anschluss). Britain and France protested only and it revealed again the weakness of Britain and France. Actually appeasement led Hitler to believe that no one would oppose his expansionist policy. Hitler's claim for Danzig and Polish Corridor was more reasonable than his claim on Sudetenland. It was difficult for Britain and France to defend Poland, but the case of Czechoslovakia was different. Chamberlain should have backed the Czechs against Hitler's aggression. But at Munich, Chamberlain again followed a policy of appeasement. It was agreed there that Sudetenland would be handed over to Germany immediately. Germany along with other three powers guaranteed the rest of Czechoslovakia which was a vague one.

In 1937 onwards, Chamberlain became the Prime Minister of England: He wanted to give appeasement a new character. His policy was to find out what Hitler wanted and convince him that reasonable claims could be met by negotiation rather than by force.

Thus the Anglo-French appeasement policy encouraged Hitler again and again and jeopardized the balance of power in Europe and thus precipitated the Second World War.

Answer the following questions.

1. Aggressive nationalism of Italy and Germany was responsible for many acts of violence which eventually led to the Second World War. In this context explain:

a. Italy's invasion of Abyssinia in 1935.

b. The Spanish civil war of 1936.

c. Austria's union with Germany in 1938.

2. With reference to the foreign policy of Mussolini, answer the following questions:

a. How did Mussolini help Austria to deal with the threat from Nazi Germany in 1934?

b. Why was Abyssinia war considered as a turning point in Mussolini's relationship with Hitler?

c. Mention two important alliances signed between Hitler and Mussolini.

d. The Munich Conference represented the climax of the Anglo-French policy of Appeasement and Hitler's greatest triumph.

3. Why did Mussolini's involvement in the Second World War lead to the collapse of Fascism in Italy?

4. What is meant by the term 'Appeasement'? Why was this policy adopted?