

The yearning of the western European countries for expansion of the empire and acquire new territories (colonies) resulted in these countries going to Asia and Africa. Thus they established their colonies and expanded their rule. Consequently, there arose a competition between European nations to establish colonies.

This greed for colonisation among the western European nations caused the economic, social and cultural ruin of the Asian-African countries. The result of this on world politics was such that the First World War, Bolshevik Revolution in Russia etc. took place.

So dear students, let's study about these details.

Western Europe and Colonialism in Asia-Africa

The western European countries wanted to expand their empire in Asia-Africa. Their greed for colonisation did not spare even their neighbouring countries. Spain had taken control over Netherland, Belgium and Luxemburg. Later on, some of their provinces were captured by France. When the Portuguese king died without an heir, Portugal came under the rule of the Spanish king because of his blood relation. So for six decades, the monopoly of establishing colonies in non-European countries was with Spain.

Similarly, Italy and German states became the victim of the greed of France and Austria. When the European powers were tightening their grip over the Asian and African nations, many of the European nations which had become free, following the footsteps of England, made many of the Afro-Asian nations their colonies.

Colonialism in Asia : After strengthening its grip over India, England expanded its empire in Sri Lanka, Myanmar (Burma), Singapore and Malaysia. England entered China also. But due to the opium trade between England and China, there were wars (1839-1842) which came to be known as Opium Wars in history. China lost this war and thereby lost five of its ports to England where England could carry on their trade and thus expanded their empire. Taking advantage of China's weakness, Japan, Russia, Germany, France, Belgium and America also acquired trade and political rights.

Enormous oil resources in the desert region of West Asia attracted the Europeans to establish colonies there. England, Germany, Russia and America established oil companies in Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain and made efforts to take care of their own interests.

Colonialism in Africa : The Dutch established its colony for the first time at the end of 15th century in South Africa. After that, England and France established their colonies in Cape and Algeria in North Africa respectively. The vast provinces of Africa seemed quite suitable for acquiring raw material and selling ready products post Industrial Revolution, because of which European countries competed to establish colonies. King Leopold of Belgium seized the vast provinces of Congo and established his rule. England established its colonies in Egypt, some provinces of East Africa and some of South Africa. France established its colonies in Tunisia, Morocco and West Africa provinces. Germany established its empire in some provinces of East and West Africa. Italy captured the African provinces around the Red Sea. Spain and Portugal also seized some provinces of Africa. A conference for the European nations was held in Berlin (1884-85) in the midst of this competition to establish colonies. Different African territories were divided among the European nations at the end of the conference. Thus the colonial dominance of different European nations was established over the entire Africa.

While on one hand, the greedy European nations were trying to colonise various Asian- African territories, on the other hand, Germany and Italy had completed the process of its respective political unification. Thus, the unified Germany plunged into the competition of industrialisation, commercialisation and colonisation. Thus, these quickly changing global phenomena had exploited some of these countries politically, economically and socially due to which their development had stopped. This had led to the First World War.

Factors that caused First World War

The First World War could be considered as one of the most heartbreaking and unforgettable events of the modern world. Many factors were responsible for this. The First World War began on 1st August, 1914. Germany had defeated France in the Sedan War because of which France had to sign the Frankfurt Treaty (1871) according to which France had to pay a war fine as well as give away two of its provinces, Lorraine and Alsace, to Germany. France had not been able to overcome this humiliation. Thus, the Frankfurt Treaty itself was the cause of the First World War. The end of a war sowed the seeds of a future war.

(1) Economic Factors : England had established its vast empire in Asia and Africa in the 19th century. It exploited its colonies economically and became rich. Due to industrialisation and swift colonisation, Europe required huge quantity of raw material. In the last quarter of the 19th century, Germany had started the competition to procure the markets in Asia and Africa. Germany started supplying cheaper goods in comparison to England and France. The Afro-Asian markets that England and France dominated, were thus, broken up by Germany. Consequently, there was an intense economic competition between Germany and England.

(2) Militarism : Military force was necessary and important for the competition that the European nations got into, for expansion. England, France, Austria, Russia etc. had begun expanding their military power. While in countries like Japan, Italy and Germany, compulsory military training had started. Production of weapons was increased under the pretext of self-defence. Thus, militarism got an impetus and military competition added to economic competition created a serious atmosphere of war.

(3) Groupism – Secret Treaties : Groupism and secret treaties played a major role in the First World War. The world was divided into two groups before the First World War. On one side was the group of Germany, Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria and Turkey while on the other side was the group of England, France, Russia and Japan. A feeling of jealousy, enmity, mistrust, fear and hatred evolved between the groups which was an important factor of the First World War.

(4) Feeling of Fierce Nationalism : The independence of Belgium and Greece and the unification of Germany and Italy were the result of nationalism. But later, the feeling of nationalism took an extreme and narrow form in Europe. Economic jealousies, competitions and colonialism in Europe had increased so much that the national interest of each other began to clash. Leading European nations began teaching extreme and destructive nationalism to its people. Love for own nation and hatred for the other nations was encouraged. The German Chief Kaizer William was the other originator of nationalism and colonialism. He was overambitious and believed in ‘world leadership’. He wanted to get things done according to his will with the help of his grand military power. The feeling of war spread across other nations, as in Germany, and this had resulted in the First World War.

(5) Role of Newspapers : The newspapers of the European nations aroused so much of hatred among people with their mutual, derogatory, provocative, exaggerated and false write ups by spitting venom against rival nations that the rulers of the respective nations could not even make efforts for establishing peace and harmony.

(6) Philosophy about War : The policy of “War is Welfare” took root in Europe. The German writer Trotsky published maxims like “Only the mighty deserve to live” and “War alone is the national need”. Nietzsche, the German writer, expressed war as “a sacred work”.

The Prince of Austria and his wife were assassinated by being shot at by a member of the Serbian terrorist organisation “Black Hand”. Austria blamed Serbia for the involvement in the act and gave an ultimatum to hand over the culprit to Austria within 48 hours. Serbia declared its ignorance in the matter. Without listening to anything from Serbia, Austria declared war on Serbia. The First World War had begun with this.

The First World War

In the First World War, 24 nations supported the Allied Nations and 4 nations supported the Axis Nations. Initially, Germany made noteworthy victories in Europe. It ruined the French army. It fought many submarine wars and destroyed the ships of the Allied Nations. Many soldiers and civilians died because of tanks and poisonous gases. In 1917, the Russian Revolution started, so Russia withdrew from the war. Germany was very strong at this time. It managed to drown an American steamer 'Lusitania' in which 147 American soldiers died. Consequently, America joined the Allied Nations for the war in April, 1917. With that, countries like Panama, Greece, Cuba, China and Siam joined the Allied Nations. Thus the Allied Nations became stronger. German army could not withstand the American troops. The whole position of the war changed. Bulgaria in September, 1918, Turkey and Austria in October, 1918 joined the Allied Nations. The German leader Kaizer abdicated his position and ran away. Germany surrendered to Allied Nations on 11th November and signed a ceasefire treaty and the war came to an end.

Effects of First World War - Immediate effects

(1) Destruction of men and material : Approximately 6.5 crore people took part in the war, atleast 1 crore died, about 2 crore were injured and around 70 lakhs were rendered permanently handicapped. More number of people died because of starvation and other forms of killings and epidemics that broke out after the war. The total war expenditure was quite high.

(2) Social Change : During the war, since majority of the men, of all nations, were on the warfront, women shouldered the responsibility of the family and occupation. They stepped out of their homes and successfully took over the responsibility in the different professional fields. The self-confidence of their being equivalent to men, enhanced. Consequently, the demand, for women to exercise their franchise, was raised. During the war, the production of things of basic necessity had reduced. So problems like scarcity, unemployment, starvation, strikes, lockouts etc. raised their heads. People suffered a lot and children's condition was pathetic.

(3) The Treaty of Versailles (June, 1919) : At the end of the First World War, the unconditional surrender of Germany in front of the Allied Nations, brought an end to the war. Then, the Allied Nations undertook the "Peace Process" in Paris, in which, some 58 commissions were formed and 145 sessions were organised. The agreement made with Germany during the Paris Peace Process, was made in the Mirror Palace at Versailles. Thus it came to be known as the Versailles Treaty. There were four provisions in the Treaty of Versailles: (1) Regional arrangement (2) Reduction in troops and disarmament (3) The arrangement of distribution of gains at the end of the war and war fine (4) Other provisions. The American President Woodrow Wilson, British Prime Minister Lord George, French President Clemenco and Italian President Orlando played an important role in this Treaty. Germany was found responsible for the war. A war fine of 6.5 billion pound was imposed on Germany. It had to give away the Ruhr region to France. Its Rhine river had to be opened for international sea route. The Rhineland region on French border was disallowed from being a fortress as well as this mineral-rich region was given away to France for 15 years. Most of the German organisations were confiscated. Alsace and Lorraine were to be returned to France. Besides this, Germany was to give to France and other Allied Nations, a large quantity of coal and iron, annually, as the benefits of war. Germany was made to sign these terms and conditions on gunpoint and forcibly because of which there was bitterness and desperation amongst Germans. Consequently, the German economy failed miserably.

(4) Long term effects : There was a feeling of revenge in signing the Treaty with the nations that were defeated in the war. Peace could not be established with the Treaty. Socialist Russia was not given a place in the League of Nations. America did not join the League of Nations. That's why, it can be said that, the reason for the Second World War was in the Peace Process of the First World War itself.

The Russian/Bolshevik Revolution (1917)

The Russian Revolution (1917) is considered as an important event in world history. The Russians had been oppressed and suppressed by the Czar (tsar) of Russia. The Russian Czars, who inherited the position, were all dictators and enjoyed uncontrolled rule over people. People did not have any rights during this period. The Czars were so cruel and pitiless on people that if anyone demanded for any rights, he was tortured, suppressed and severely punished or condemned to be sent to the bone-chilling and dead cold of Siberia. This uncontrolled and oppressive Czarism, became the reason for grief, poverty and suffering among people. The Russian farmers, labourers and peasants were not getting enough income, despite working very hard. They became very poor.

Under the leadership of Father Gapon, a large rally was taken out to the Czar's residence, Winter Palace (22nd January, 1905, Sunday). These people were unarmed, while some had the Czar's picture in hand with captions like "Long live, the little white lord of Russia" written on it. The Czar's army opened fire on these innocent people, because of which thousands of innocent people died and the snow in Petersburg, where the Czar's palace was situated, turned red with blood. This day is known as "Bloody Sunday" in history. Around this time, a large number of Russians got provoked and became restless as the weaknesses of the Czarism had become obvious when a small nation like Japan had defeated a massive nation like Russia in the Russia-Japan war (1904-05). In order to pacify the angry Russians, an announcement to call for a Duma Legislative Assembly, which had not been called for years, was made. Eventually, four such Duma were called. But before it can take steps to satisfy the citizens, it had been called off.

On 8th March, 1917, the oppressed workers of Petrograd called for a strike. The Czar sent his troops to suppress this event. But the army refused to shoot these people. As a result, the revolution began. After the fall of the Czarism, the power fell into the hands of the leader of the Menshevik group (Minority). Except for Lenin, everyone in Russia was happy with the fall of the Czar. But Lenin believed in the importance of labourers as propagated by Karl Marx, while the Menshevik group believed in the importance of the middle class. As a result, Lenin instigated the Bolsheviks against the Mensheviks and in November, 1917, declared the final revolution and got the reins in his hands. This came to be known as the Socialist Bolshevik Revolution.

Thus, the 300 years old Czarism came to an end and for the first time, Russia was without a Czar.

Efforts for World Peace

The League of Nations

The horrors of the World War explained the absolute necessity of world peace to the nations of the world. And for this, a need for an international organisation was felt. So it became necessary to think actively and immediately about world peace. The American President Woodrow Wilson had contributed substantially in the establishment of the League of Nations. The 14 points suggested by Woodrow Wilson were presented during the "Paris Peace Process" on 10th January, 1920. The League of Nations was formed.

Aims of the League of Nations

- (1) To maintain international peace and security.
- (2) Every nation to respect the unity and integrity of other nations.
- (3) To give up the policy of war.
- (4) To develop international relations.
- (5) To solve international disputes peacefully, through negotiation or mediation.
- (6) If any nation ignores the League of Nations or its mediations, it would be declared as a 'rebel' nation.

The League of Nations, established for world peace, did not manage to keep a control over the imperialist policies of the superpowers and in 1939, the Second World War began.

Exercise

1. Answer the following questions pointwise.

- (1) Discuss the process of establishment of colonies in west Europe, Asia and Africa.
- (2) Explain the factors responsible for the First World War.
- (3) Mention the effects of the First World War.

2. Write short notes on.

- (1) Russian Revolution
- (2) The Events of the First World War.
- (3) Aims of the League of Nations.

3. Give reasons.

- (1) The League of Nations was established after the First World War.
- (2) 22nd January, 1905 is known as “Bloody Sunday” for Russia.

4. A. Choose the correct options from those given below.

- (1) In which Treaty was the seed for the First World War sown ?
(A) Versailles (B) Treaty of France and Britain
(C) Frankfurt (D) Treaty of Germany and Hungary
- (2) Which Treaty was signed at the end of the First World War ?
(A) Treaty of Versailles (B) Latern Treaty
(C) Secret Treaty (D) Frankfurt Treaty
- (3) Which provinces did France lose with the Frankfurt Treaty ?
(A) Denzing provinces (B) Provinces in west Russia
(C) Alsace and Lorraine provinces (D) Provinces in England

