

Magadh Mahila College

Patna University, Patna

HISTORY

B.A. – II

PAPER – IV

HISTORY OF MODERN EUROPE

Unit – 2

NAPOLEONIC ERA

**Topic: - The Rise of Napoleon
and His Reforms**

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Introduction

THE DIRECTORY (1795-99) had thoroughly discredited itself on account of its weak internal and foreign policies. There was general discontent in the country on account of the following causes:

- (1) Internal disorder had increased considerably.
- (2) The Directors were corrupt and incompetent.
- (3) The financial crisis caused by inflation on account of the liberal issue of the "assignats" could not be controlled.
- (4) In the external field, the war did not go well for some time against the Russians and Austrians in Italy.



The Brumaire Coup (November, 1799). Hence there was a very strong urge for a strong government to cope with the deteriorating internal and external situation. Sieyes, one of the Directors, in collusion with Napoleon planned a military coup. The two houses of legislature, were persuaded to shift to St. Cloud, 5 miles away from Paris on the plea that there was a danger of mob violence in Paris. Those Directors who did not support the coup were removed and Napoleon and his army took charge of Paris. Then he went to St. Cloud and dispersed the councillors by force and the rule of the Directory came to an end; and a new form of government called the Consulate was installed. Napoleon was appointed First Consul for ten years- with all administrative and military powers.

Napoleon's Character. It will be interesting to study the life of this man who staged the "Brumaire Coup" and became the military dictator and who controlled the destinies of France and of Europe for the next 16 years.

Napoleon was an ambitious man, and had great confidence in his own ability. He called himself the "man of destiny".

He had tremendous faculty for organization and was a genius in generalship. He was extremely popular with the soldiers and knew those who fought under him well and had always a word of cheer for every soldier. He was a great orator and could inspire his army with tremendous zeal courage at crucial times. In short, he was a rare combination of a soldier and statesman.

Early life. He was the son of Charles Bonaparte, a lawyer of Ajaccio (Corsica). The family was of Italian origin. He was born on 15 August 1769. His great ambition as a boy was to free Corsica, his home island, from the yoke of the French and so he wished to be a soldier, therefore, he was sent to the military school at Brienne (France) and then later to Paris. Being a foreigner and of uncouth manners, he was bullied by his schoolmates and quite often there were violent scenes between them. After completing his military training he joined the French army. In addition to his proficiency in military Science, he was deeply interested in Mathematics, History and Political Science.

During the early days of the Revolution he had sympathy with the Revolutionaries but he did not take an active part in it. In 1795, when the Convention passed the law of the Two-third, there was mob violence in Paris and the government called in General Napoleon to deal with the situation. He did his task with remarkable speed and earned a name for thoroughness and efficiency.

In 1796-97 he led the revolutionary forces in Italy against Austria and won overwhelming victories and forced her to sign the treaty of Campo-Formio.

His successful Italian campaign made him the idol of France.

In 1789-99 he was sent to Egypt, but returned to France in time to overthrow the directory in 1799 by staging the, "Brumaire Coup".

He was appointed first consul for ten years in 1799, but in 1802 he was made first consul for life.

In 1804, the Senate passed a decree, saying, "the, Government of the republic is entrusted to an emperor" and by an overwhelming vote of 5,372,329 to 2,569 he was elected Emperor of France. He was crowned with great pomp and show and though the Pope was present at the ceremony he did not allow him to place the, crown on his head. He put it on his head himself!

So once again France had a monarchical form of government with an emperor as its head after undergoing so much bloodshed and misery to abolish monarchy! But the French Empire- the so-called First Empire- was very different from the French Bourbon monarchy. It was efficient and depended on the willing support of the people. It was an heir of the French Revolution and whatever good there was in it, was maintained and preserved by the French Empire.

Policy. One of the greatest generals of the world, Napoleon was also a great administrator and organizer and the first task before him was to bring order in the internal administration. From 1799 to 1804, he had comparative peace at home and therefore he devoted all his attention to carrying out a number of reforms.

His policy was based on (a) Centralization and consolidation of power; and (b) Conciliation and healing the wounds of the Royalists and the Church and all those who had suffered at the hands of the Revolution.

Reforms

His was the dominant figure in drafting the Constitution of the Consulate. (See Chapter IV for details.)

The Convention believed in excessive decentralization and during its regime the elected local governments in departments and communes enjoyed vast powers. Napoleon wanted to concentrate all power in the hands of the First Consul. Therefore, though the elected councils were allowed to exist, their entire power was vested in the prefects, sub-prefects or mayors who were all appointed by the First Consul and carried out his orders. The elected bodies met rarely,

The police in big cities like Paris was also controlled by the Central Government.

Thus Napoleon succeeded in establishing a system of administration more centralized than even that of Richelieu and Mazarin. The people acquiesced in the loss of their power because they had tremendous faith in Napoleon and they had suffered much during the Revolution. They wanted peace and stability.

Napoleon wanted to guard his regime against any financial crisis. He knew the causes of the downfall of monarchy and the Directory and therefore he took steps to put the Consulate on firm financial foundations. The "assignats" had already been repudiated in 1797 and to stabilize the financial condition of the Consulate, he took the following measures:

- (a) Severe economy was introduced in public expenditure.
- (b) Rigorous collection of taxes was ordered. Arrears were collected.
- (c) Corrupt and inefficient officials were punished severely.
- (d) The Bank of France (1800) was established and a Sinking Fund was instituted.
- (e) A special fund called the "Extra-Ordinary Domain" was raised from indemnities imposed on the vanquished countries to meet the expenses of the Army, Therefore, Napoleon's wars were not at all great drains on the French exchequer. He made his enemies pay the expenses of the war.

He invited the emigres back to France and promised to restore their property if it had not been already sold. They were allowed to hold public office. All political prisoners were set free.

The civil constitution of the clergy had created a breach with the Pope. Napoleon wanted

to be friend the Pope for the following reasons:

- (a) A vast majority of Frenchmen were Catholics. They had been alienated by the civil constitution of the clergy and by the worship of "Reason". Napoleon wanted their political support because a large number of them backed the Count of Provence, the future Louis XVIII. He thought that if they were conciliated, he would undermine the Count's influence.
- (b) He himself was a deeply religious person. After prolonged negotiations with the Pope he succeeded in arriving at an agreement known as the Concordat.

The terms of the Concordat were:

- (i) The Pope accepted the work of the Revolution and, reconciled himself to the confiscation of church property and the suppression of the monasteries.
- (ii) The Republic promised to pay the arrears of the salaries of the clergymen, which had been suspended in 1794.
- (iii) The First Consul would nominate the bishops who would be invested by the Pope.
- (iv) The bishops would appoint the priests.
- (v) The non-juring clergy were released from prison.

The churches were reopened.

Thus the schism between the Church and the State was healed. *

During the Revolution, the Convention had started the work of codifying the laws, but it could not be completed. Laws still differed from department to department and town to town.

Justice was not fairly administered as even the judges were elected and so they could not afford to displease their electors by being "independent" and fair. So Napoleon appointed a committee and with its help carried out the following reforms:

- (a) The multiple legal system was repealed and a uniform system was substituted.
- (b) The laws were codified and the following codes were compiled:
 - (i) Civil Code or Code of Napoleon.
 - (ii) Code of Civil Procedure.
 - (iii) Code of Criminal Procedure.

- (iv) Penal Code.
- (v) Commercial Code.

(c) The judges were to be appointed by the Central Government. But certain flaws were still left in the administration of justice:

- (i) Women were not assigned the same position as men, and
- (ii) Punishments were still very severe.

Napoleon realized the importance of education in building up national character; hence a new system of education was introduced. French had already become the language of instruction under the Convention. The following further steps were taken:

(a) Every commune would have a Primary School under the supervision of the Prefect or Sub-prefect.

(b) Secondary and Grammar Schools whether Private or Public would be under the control of the Central Government.

(c) Every town, as far as possible, would have a High School.

(d) Technical schools would be opened under the control of the government.

(e) The University of France would maintain uniformity in the educational system and all public schools and their teachers would be approved by it.

(f) All teaching was based on:

- (i) The principles of Christianity;
- (ii) Loyalty to the Head of the State; and
- (iii) Obedience to the rules and regulations of the University.

But lack of funds and shortage of lay teachers were responsible for a large number of private Catholic schools.

(a) A large number of highways, bridges, canals, etc., were constructed. Old roads were repaired.

(b) Large marshy lands were brought under cultivation and a period of general prosperity followed.

(c) French palaces were beautified with art treasures brought as booty from Italy and other places.

(d) A Legion of Honours was instituted in May 1802.

(e) A new class of nobility was created. It constituted a great pillar of support for the Empire.

The course of the French Revolution had helped Napoleon to rise to power and he proudly said: "I am a child of the Revolution". He glorified its principles and tried to spread them abroad. Yet having grasped power he undid some of the work of the Revolution and aptly remarked: "I destroyed the Revolution". He carried out far-reaching reforms which ushered in an era of progress and prosperity. The people acquiesced in his dictatorship because they were weary of the atrocities of the Revolution. The common man did not want the recrudescence of the "terror"; he wanted a strong centralized government which would give him peace and stability. Though Napoleon re-established the institution of monarchy, yet he based his administration on the Revolutionary theories of equality of 'all men.

The aim of his reforms was to consolidate whatever was good in the Revolution and to conciliate those who had suffered at its hands without compromising the essential principles of Equality, Liberty and Fraternity. His conciliation of the Church and the emigres did not restore their pre-Revolution privileges or power.

Napoleon's claim to greatness does not rest entirely on his genius as a great general and his brilliant and manifold victories but also on the numerous peaceful reforms, he carried out in the internal sphere. His judicial reforms, his educational system, his religious agreement Endured for a long time and that is a great tribute to his organizing and reforming zeal and capacity.

Suggested Readings:-

1. Meenakshi Phukan : Rise of Modern West
2. G. Clark : Early Modern Europe
3. Raghbir Dayal : Modern European History
4. Jain and Mathur : World History (1500 – 1950)
5. G.M. Trevelyan : Social History of England
6. Parthsarathi Gupta (ed.) : आधुनिक पश्चिम का उदय
7. लाल बहादुर वर्मा : आधुनिक यूरोप का इतिहास
