

# **Magadh Mahila College**

**Patna University, Patna**

**HISTORY**

**B.A. – II**

**PAPER – IV**

**HISTORY OF MODERN EUROPE**

**Unit – 2**

**NAPOLEONIC ERA**

**Topic: - CAUSES OF THE DOWNFALL  
OF NAPOLEON**

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## CAUSES OF THE DOWNFALL OF NAPOLEON

Napoleon, "the man of Destiny" and the "son of the Revolution," had a phenomenal rise. The forces of the Revolution threw him into the limelight from comparative oblivion and once he had grasped the public gaze in dispersing the Paris mob with great alacrity and success in 1795, he continued to climb higher and higher till he became Emperor of France in 1804. He so dominated the French and European stage that the period of his ascendancy – the years 1799-1815-is called the "Napoleonic era." His hold on Europe during this period was complete and the destiny of Europe depended on his whims and fancies.



Napoleon was a genius, both as an administrator and as a general. His finest qualities of leadership and generalship always came to the forefront in time of adversity. He was a master of strategy and brilliant campaigning. He was essentially a soldier and his inherent love of conquest and domination in the long run alienated the whole of Europe and roused bitter national animosity against which he could do nothing. The whole of Europe was arrayed against him and finally was responsible for his overthrow.

## Military Causes

**(1) Enormous losses in the Peninsular War, the Russian Campaign and the War of Liberation.** Napoleon was at war for a long time and suffered enormous losses in the three campaigns. During the Russian campaign and the War of Liberation nearly 1,000,000 of his soldiers were killed, and these heavy losses practically exhausted the military strength of France. The flower of the French army had been sacrificed in these campaigns and the new armies were perhaps not of the same mettle.

**(2) French Army not Homogenous but Heterogeneous.** During the Russian campaign, the French army was heterogeneous, consisting of Germans, Poles, Italians, etc., who were not imbued with the Revolutionary spirit of the French and hence they were not as zealous fighters as the French.

**(3) Conscription not popular.** Conscription, which he had to introduce to fight his enemies, was not popular. The new army lacked the ardour of those who had won the battles of Austerlitz and Jena.

**(4) Militant Nationalism of French Armies was Tyrannical.** Napoleon's power was essentially based on his armed strength. He used the militant nationalism of the French soldiers for his personal glory and for the glorification of France. The French armies, in the eyes of the foreigners, were instruments of repression and caused untold miseries. The quartering of French soldiers on foreign soils made them hated and finally led to national uprisings.

**(5) Decline in Napoleon's Military Capacity.** Some historians suggest that with growing age there was a visible decline in his military capacity. He was not as great a genius of campaigning in the final stages of the conflict, as he was in the Italian campaign or in the battles of Austerlitz and Jena. But perhaps it was not so. He showed the same skill and capacity on the eve of the battle of Waterloo also, but he was hopelessly outnumbered. Against overwhelming odds his military genius was ineffective.

**(6) British Naval Supremacy.** The British supremacy at sea was responsible for the loss of overseas colonies and the trade of France. The British navy also carried out

a successful blockade of the Continent and Great Britain could always send help to Portugal and Spain in the Peninsular War.

## Political Causes

(1) Continental System a Great Blunder. The promulgation of the Continental System was a leap in the dark. It could not be enforced without naval superiority which France lacked and was responsible for a good deal of popular discontent against Napoleon, as it led to scarcity of food and the rise in prices. It also finally led to the breach with allies like Portugal, Spain and Russia. Subsequently, there were revolts in these countries and involved him in wars on all sides.

**(2) Too many Enemies.** By his policy of conquest and the introduction of the Continental System he created far too many enemies. The whole of Europe in the last stages of the conflict was hostile to him.

**(3) Rise of Nationalism in conquered countries.** Another blunder that Napoleon made was the complete disregard of the national feelings of the conquered countries. The French Revolution had given rise to nationalism all over Europe, and all nations aspired to be independent and sovereign and wanted to overthrow their reactionary rulers and the old regime. But when Napoleon began to depose the legitimate rulers and placed his own brothers and kinsmen on the thrones of the conquered countries, their national self-respect was hurt. They revolted against Napoleon who was regarded as a usurper trying to enslave them for his personal glorification. The Spanish rising inspired Austria, Prussia and Russia to rise and oppose Napoleon.

**(4) Lack of Diplomatic Foresight.** Napoleon missed several opportunities of retaining his power, On the eve of the War of Liberation and after the defeat at Leipzig, the allies offered him very liberal terms, which he refused to accept in his eagerness to

have his revenge on his foes, It was a very great blunder on his part, particularly when he had lost so heavily in man-power in the Russian Campaign and the War of Liberation.

### Suggested Readings:-

1. Meenakshi Phukan : Rise of Modern West
2. G. Clark : Early Modern Europe
3. Raghubir 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

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