

Magadh Mahila College

Patna University, Patna

HISTORY

B.A. – I

PAPER – IV

RISE OF MODERN WEST

Unit – 3

**Topic: - The Congress of Vienna
(1814-15)**

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Introduction

" Immediately after Napoleon's fall in 1814 and his "retirement" to Elba, a Congress of European diplomats was summoned to meet at Vienna to give peace to "a tired and timid generation" and to deal with a number of political problems consequent upon the upheavals caused by the Wars of Revolutionary France and those of the Napoleonic period.

All big and small countries of Europe, except Turkey, were invited. Vienna was chosen as the venue of the Congress in view of the leading part played by Austria in the final overthrow of Napoleon. As a tribute to her noble part in the struggle, her Chancellor Count Metternich was selected to preside over its deliberations.

THE PROBLEMS BEFORE THE CONGRESS

(1) Problem of France. What should be the future government and boundaries of France and what punishment should be meted out to her for causing so much bloodshed during the last 25 years?

(2) Reconstruction of the Political Map of Europe. The wars waged by Revolutionary France and Napoleon had completely changed the political map of Europe. Over 200 petty states in Germany had been abolished and the Holy Roman Empire had ceased to exist. New states like the Confederation of the Rhine, the Kingdom of Westphalia, the Grand Duchy of Warsaw and the Kingdom of Italy, etc. had been created by Napoleon. Boundaries of old states like Austria, Prussia and Russia had been altered several times. In short, the up-heaval of the last 25 years had brought about vast political changes in the boundaries of European states. Therefore, the Congress of Vienna had to redraw the political map of Europe and was confronted with the problem of whether to restore or not the old princes who had been dispossessed of their States by France.

THE LEADING PERSONALITIES AT THE CONGRESS

"The Congress was a pageant," and was associated with much gaiety, feasting and merry-making. The representatives of various countries indulged in an eating and drinking orgy to celebrate their deliverance from the tyranny of Napoleon.

In this galaxy of monarchs and diplomats, the following persons stood out by virtue of their towering personality and they played a significant part in the deliberations of the Congress.

(1) Foremost among them was **Tsar Alexander I**, a great idealist and dreamer who was swayed at times by the high ideals of the gospel of Christianity and sometimes was dominated by selfish motives. He was a curious combination of "shrewdness with mysticism, ambition with compassion." He was young, imaginative and liberal in his outlook, but was "changeable and egoistic and influenced by fear." On the whole, he stood for a just and fair settlement.

(2) **Emperor Francis I** of Austria was obstinate and narrow minded and reactionary in his outlook. "Keep yourselves to what is old, for that is good" was his principle.

(3) **King Frederick William III** of Prussia was slow, timid and weak and a great traditionalist. He was terribly fascinated by the Tsar and was extraordinarily reverential to the Emperor.

(4) Metternich was the most commanding personality from 1815 to 1848. This period in European History is called the "Era of Metternich." He was the central figure in European diplomacy and was "without a peer in his age or in his style." He was a shrewd statesman and was a pastmaster in diplomacy, tact and finesse. Like his master, the Emperor, he was also a great reactionary and the most vehement opponent of liberalism. He distrusted all innovations and new ideas and therefore tried his best to maintain the old order.

(5) **Lord Castlereagh**, the representative of Great Britain, was essentially liberal in his outlook, and was an astute statesman, who wielded considerable influence in bringing about compromises when there were deadlocks among the allies.

(6) **Talleyrand**, who represented France, was cunning, shrewd and quick to take advantage of the differences among the allies. He had a very keen sense of observation and could exploit the weaknesses of others to his own advantage. He served France ably and saved her from utter humiliation by flattery, chicanery and intrigue. He was so successful in his mission, that, though a representative of the vanquished country, he played a leading role in laying down the policy which formed the basis of the settlement of Vienna. The "Big Four" Austria, Great Britain, Russia and Prussia, had to admit him to their counsels.

THE AIMS OF THE CONGRESS

The deliberations of the Congress had been temporarily suspended by Napoleon's escape from Elba. After his final defeat at Waterloo, it once again continued with its meetings. Its aims were as follows:

(1) To Redraw the Political Map of Europe. The wars of the last 23 years had so changed the political boundaries that it was impossible to restore all the European states which existed in 1789. It was not easy to restore the Holy Roman Empire, as the boundaries of some states had been altered several times. The 200 and odd German princes who had been dethroned by Napoleon could not be restored. Notwithstanding this difficulty the Congress still aimed as far as possible to restore the old rulers to their original boundaries.

(2) To secure permanent Peace in Europe. Revolutionary ideas should be nipped in the bud: never again should France be allowed to spread the principles of Revolution. All germs of liberal opinion must be promptly destroyed.

Therefore, the Congress aimed at suppressing all revolutionary movements, wherever they raised their head. For the next ten years or so, the Congress tried to suppress liberalism in Europe by means of the "Concert of Europe" or by means of an alliance of Great Powers.

(3) To surround France by a Ring of strong States. France should not be allowed to disturb the peace of Europe in future, and hence she should be surrounded by strong and powerful states on her frontiers. To achieve this end, Prussia, Netherlands and Sardinia were made strong by the addition of large territories so that they might form a bulwark against any further French aggression.

(4) To distribute the Spoils of War among the Allies. All those countries which had fought against France were to be rewarded at the cost of France and those who had helped her. Therefore territories snatched away from France or her allies were distributed among those who had fought against France. In short, the aim of the Congress was to "divide among the conquerors the spoils of the conquered."

The Congress mainly worked on the following threefold principles:

(1) The Principle of "Legitimacy". Metternich's aim was "to restore as far as possible the "rightful" rulers to their old states. This idea was in agreement with the principle of "legitimacy" which was ably propounded by Talleyrand who cleverly won over Tsar Alexander I to accept this principle and thus saved France for the Bourbons.

In pursuance of this principle, the Bourbons were restored in France and to the thrones of Spain and the Kingdom of Two Sicilies. The House of Orange was restored in Holland, the House of Savoy got Sardinia and Piedmont, and Austria regained Tyrol.

(2) The Principle of "Balance of Power" or "Compensation". But the principle of legitimacy could not be applied to all the States, because during the course of the long wars Great Britain had conquered and annexed a number of colonies belonging to France or to her allies. All of them could not be restored. The British navy had played a very significant role in defeating Napoleon and her services could not be ignored by the Congress. Therefore, she was allowed to appropriate most of the conquered colonies like Mauritius, Tobago, Malta, etc, But those countries besides France which had lost their territories, were compensated in order to maintain the balance of power. Holland got Belgium; Sweden which had lost Finland to Russia was compensated with Norway, and Austria which has renounced her claim to the Austrian Netherlands was rewarded with territories in Italy.

(3) To Suppress the Republics. The Congress which was dominated by absolute monarchs and reactionary diplomats was hostile to republics and so the Republics of Genoa and Venice were not restored.

DIFFERENCES AMONG THE BIG AND SMALL POWERS

(1) The Future of France. The "Big Four" wanted to decide everything themselves and ignored the small powers like Spain, Portugal and Sweden. The latter invoked the Treaty of Paris and claimed an equal say in determining the future of France and Europe. Talleyrand took advantage of this cleavage and played the role of a mediator, thus securing for France a voice in the deliberations of the Congress.

(2) Differences over Poland and Saxony. Differences also arose between the "Big Four" over the question of the future of Poland and Saxony. Tsar Alexander, on the eve of the battle of Leipzig, had promised Austria and Prussia a share of Poland. But after the battle he changed his mind and now he wanted to appropriate the whole of Poland. In order to win over Prussia, he proposed that Saxony should be given to her.

Metternich was suspicious of the Tsar's intentions and would not approve of the aggrandizement of Russia and Prussia at the cost of the whole of Poland and Saxony respectively. So supported by Castlereagh he opposed the proposals, and it seemed that the differences between Russia and Prussia on one side and Great Britain and Austria on the other might lead to the failure of the Congress or even to another war. But Talleyrand's diplomacy and tact once again stood him in good stead and he eventually suggested a compromise.

Poland was to be repartitioned between Russia, Prussia and Austria, but Russia kept the lion's share—the so-called "Congress Poland"; Austria retained Galicia; Prussia got Posen and the Corridor. Two-fifths of Saxony was also given to Prussia.

THE TERRITORIAL SETTLEMENT

Having ironed out the differences, the following territorial readjustments were agreed to by the Congress:

(1) **France** was limited to her boundaries of 1792 (these had been reduced to those of 1790, after the battle of Waterloo, by the Second Treaty of Paris).

(2) The Bourbons were restored and Louis XVIII returned to his ancestral throne.

(3) **Holland** received Belgium, and the House of Orange was restored to the United Kingdom of Netherlands. Thus a strong barrier State in the north-east of France was established.

(4) **Prussia** was considerably enlarged by the addition of the following territories:

- (a) She retained Posen and the Corridor in Poland.
- (b) Sweden gave her Pomerania.
- (c) Two-fifths of Saxony was annexed by her.
- (d) She also recovered her Rhinish provinces and Cologne and Treves.

Thus a formidable state was created in the east of France as a barrier against French aggression.

(5) **Austria.**

- (a) She was compensated for the loss of Austrian Netherlands by the cession of Lombardy and Venetia in Italy.
- (b) She recovered Tyrol, Illyrian provinces and Salzburg.
- (c) She also got Galicia from Poland.

(6) A German Confederation was formed under the leadership of Austria,

(7) Russia got the lion's share of Poland. She also got Finland from Sweden.

(8) Sweden was compensated for the loss of Finland by the annexation of Norway which was taken away from Denmark.

(9) Sardinia got Piedmont, Savoy, Nice and Genoa, and thus a powerful slate was created in tile south-cast of France.

(10) Great Britain retained most or her colonial conquests including Malta, Heligoland in the North Sea, Ionian Islands", Cape Colony, Ceylon, Mauritius, St. Lucia, Tobago and Trinidad. She paid £6,000,000 to Holland as compensation.

(11) Empress Marie Louise got the Duchy or Parma.

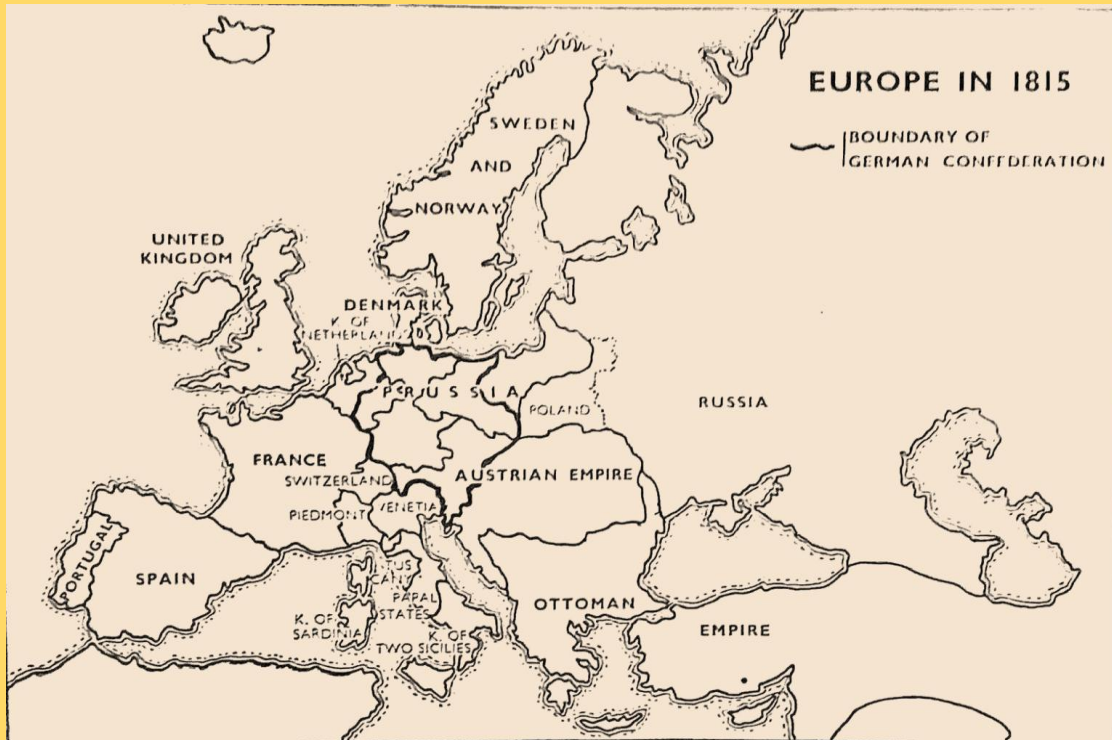
(12) Princes of Modena and Tuscany were restored.

(13) Papal States were restored.

(14) The kings of Spain und Naples were restored.

(15) Switzerland received three more cantons.

(16) Hanover became a kingdom.



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
