

Nazism and the Rise of Hitler

Nazism was a political ideology which flourished in Germany and influenced world politics. A genocidal war started in Germany before the Second World War. It resulted in the mass killing of Europeans in different inhuman ways.

After the Second World War, an International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg was setup to prosecute Nazi war criminals. The tribunal sentenced only eleven Nazi leaders and many others were imprisoned for life. The Allies did not want to be as harsh as they were after the First World War.

Birth of the Weimar Republic

Germany was a powerful empire in the early years of the 20th century. It fought the First World War (1914-1918) together with the Austrian empire and against the Allies (England, France and Russia).

At the first stage of war, Germany occupied France and Belgium. Later the Allies were strengthened by the US entry in 1917. They defeated Germany and the Central Powers in November, 1918.

The defeat of Imperial Germany and the resigning of the emperor gave an opportunity to parliamentary parties to change German polity.

A National Assembly met at Weimar and established a democratic Constitution with a federal structure. Deputies were elected to the Reichstag, German Parliament on the basis of equal and universal votes cast by all adults including women.

1. Genocidal War: killing on a large scale leading to destruction of large sections of people.
2. Allies: A state formally cooperating with another for a military or other purpose.
3. Imperial: connected with an empire.

Chapter Syllabus

- Birth of the Weimar Republic
- Hitler's Rise to Power
- The Nazi Worldview
- Youth in Nazi Germany
- Ordinary People and The Crimes Against Humanity

Peace Treaty of Versailles

By signing the Peace Treaty of Versailles, Germany lost

- its overseas colonies, one-tenth of its population and 13 per cent of its territories.
- 78 per cent of its iron and 26 per cent of its coal to France, Poland, Denmark and Lithuania.
- £6 billion as compensation for war.
- Resource-rich Rhineland occupied by Allied armies.
- Moreover the Allied powers removed military forces from Germany to weaken its power. They believed that Germany was responsible for the war and damages that Allied powers faced.

The Effects of the War

The First World War, both psychologically and financially affected Europe in the following ways

- Europe became a continent of debtors from creditors.
- The Weimar Republic was forced to pay a huge compensation.
- Socialists, Catholics and Democrats who supported the Weimar Republic were criticised and came to be known as November criminals by the conservative nationalists.
- After the First World War, soldiers were placed above civilians and the media glorified their trench life but in reality they lived miserable life in trenches⁴.
- Aggressive war propaganda⁵ and national honour occupied the public attention.
- Support grew for conservative dictatorship.

Political Radicalism and Economic Crisis

- Political radicalisation was only increased by the economic crisis of 1923.
- This was the time when the Spartacist League began to rise.
- Spartacist League was based on the pattern of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia.
- The people of Berlin demanded for soviet-style governance.
- The Weimar Republic suppressed the uprising of the Spartacist League with the help of the war organisation called the Free Corps.

⁴ Trench: A long deep hole dug in the ground in which soldiers can be protected from enemy attacks.

⁵ Propaganda: An information used to promote a political cause or point of view.

⁶ Reparations: Money that is paid by a country that has lost a war.

⁷ German Mark: former currency of Germany.

⁸ Wall Street Exchange: The name of the world's biggest stock exchange located in USA.

⁹ Placards: A printed or hand-written notice or sign for public display.

- The Spartacists later founded the Communist Party of Germany.
- Germany had fought the war largely on loans and had to pay war reparations⁶ in gold. This result in depletion of gold reserves when resources were insufficient.
- When Germany refused to pay in 1923, France occupied Germany's industrial area, the Ruhr, which was rich in coal.
- Germany retaliated the economic crisis by printing paper currency. However, excess circulation of printed currency resulted in a sharp fall of the value of the German mark⁷, due to which prices of goods increased. This crisis came to be known as hyperinflation in Germany.
- The Americans introduced the Dawes Plan which helped Germany to overcome the crisis. The plan made changes in the terms of reparation to relieve the financial burden on Germans.

The Years of Depression

There was some economic stability in Germany between 1924 to 1928. In Germany, investment and industrial recovery were totally dependent on the USA. However, this support from USA was withdrawn when the Wall Street Exchange⁸ crashed in 1929.

Between 1929 and 1932, the national income of the USA fell by half. The effects of this recession in the US economy were felt all over the world. The German economy was severely hit by the economic crisis.

The main effects of recession in Germany were

- By 1932, industrial production was reduced to 40 per cent.
- Workers lost their jobs or their wages were reduced.
- The number of unemployed people increased to 6 million.
- On the streets of Germany, men started moving with placards⁹ around their necks saying, 'Willing to do any work'.
- Unemployed youths played cards or simply sat at street corners, or desperately queued up at the local employment exchange.

- As there were no jobs the youth took to criminal activities and depression became common.
- The economic crisis created deep anxieties and fears in people.
- The savings of the middle classes, especially of salaried employees and pensioners, decreased when the currency lost its value.
- Every member of the society was affected by this economic crisis and was filled with the fear of **proletarianisation**¹⁰.
- Unemployment weakened the power of bargaining of the organised workers.
- Big business was in crisis.
- Peasants were affected by the sharp fall in agricultural prices.
- Women felt depressed as they could not feed up their children properly.

Unstability of Weimar Republic

- The Weimar Constitution had some internal defects which made it unstable and vulnerable to dictatorship.
- It was impossible to get a majority for one single party due to proportional representation.
- Moreover, Article 48 gave the President the powers to impose emergency, suspend civil rights and rule by decree.
- The Weimar Republic faced 20 different Cabinets in 14 years, each lasting for an average 239 days.
- People lost confidence in the democratic parliamentary system, which did not offer any solutions.

Check Point 01

1. What proportion of its territories was lost by Germany under the Peace Treaty of Versailles?
2. Which plan of America helped Germany to overcome the Hyperinflation crisis?
3. When did the Wall Street Exchange crash?
4. The German economy was severely hit by _____.

Hitler's Rise to Power

Hitler was born in 1889 in Austria. Socio-economic and political conditions of Germany led to the rise of Hitler.

After Versailles Treaty, Hitler joined the German Worker's Party in 1919 which was later renamed as the National Socialist German Workers' Party. It was later on to be known as the Nazi Party.

¹⁰ Proletarianisation: To become impoverished (very poor) to the level of working class.

¹¹ Treason: The crime of doing something that could cause danger to your country.

¹² Messiah: A leader who people believe will solve the problems of a country or the world.

In 1923, Hitler planned to seize control of Bavaria, which he marched to Berlin and captured power. However, he was arrested, imprisoned for treason¹¹ and later released. As a result of economic crisis in Germany in 1929, Nazi propaganda gave hopes of a better future to the German people. In 1928, the Nazi Party got only 2.6 per cent votes in the elections to the Reichstag, the German Parliament. But by 1932, it had become the largest party with 37 per cent votes.

Promises Made by Hitler

Hitler was a powerful speaker. His passionate speeches and promises inspired German people.

Promises made by Hitler were as follows

- He promised to build a strong nation, undo the injustice of the Versailles Treaty, restore the dignity of the German people and create opportunities for unemployed people.
- He promised to give employment and a secure future for the youth.
- He promised to remove foreign influences and to resist all foreign conspiracies against Germany.

Hitler's New Style of Politics

The Red banners with the Swastika, the Nazi salute and the ritualised rounds of applause after every speech were new developments at the time of Hitler.

Nazi propaganda regarded Hitler as a **messiah**¹², a saviour, who had arrived to help German people in a time of economic and political crisis.

The Destruction of Democracy

On 30th January, 1933, President **Hindenburg** offered the Chancellorship to Hitler. It was the highest position in the Cabinet of ministers after gaining power.

After acquiring the power, Hitler started to destroy the structures of democratic rule. A mysterious fire broke out in the German Parliament in February and it gave an opportunity to Hitler to assume all his powers.

A Fire Decree was announced on 28th February, 1933. Under the decree various civic rights which were guaranteed by the Weimar Constitution were suspended like freedom of speech, press and assembly.

Elimination of Communists

The communists were the main enemies of Hitler. Most of the communists were sent to newly established Concentration camps.¹³ The suppression of the communist was severe in Hitler's regime.

The Enabling Act

- On 23rd March, 1933, the famous Enabling Act was passed, which gave Hitler all powers to sideline parliament and rule by decree.
- This act established dictatorship in Germany. All political parties and trade unions (except the Nazi Party and its affiliates) were banned.
- The Nazi state established complete control over the economy, media, army and judiciary.
- Apart from the already existing regular police in Green uniform and the SA or the Storm Troopers, the Nazi government introduced Gestapo (the secret state police), the SS (protection squads), criminal police and the Security Service (SD).
- All these newly organised forces had extraconstitutional powers. It made the Nazi state is the most dreaded (fearful) criminal state.
- People were detained in Gestapo torture chambers, rounded up and sent to concentration camps, deported at will or arrested without any legal procedures.

Economic Reconstruction

Hitler gave the responsibility of economic recovery to the economist Hjalmar Schacht who wanted full production and full employment through a state-funded work-creation programme.

As a result, the famous German superhighways and the people's car, the Volkswagen, were made.

Success in Foreign Policies

In foreign policy, Hitler acquired quick successes which were

- Hitler withdrew the League of Nations in 1933 and reoccupied the Rhineland in 1936.
- In 1938, under the slogan, *One people, One empire and One leader, Austria and Germany* were integrated by Hitler.

- In 1938, Hitler seized the German-speaking Sudetenland from Czechoslovakia and then took over the whole country. England supported this act of Hitler as it thought that Versailles Treaty was too harsh for Germany.
- Schacht had advised Hitler against investing hugely in rearmament (process of increasing the amount of weapons) as the state was dependent on deficit financing.

The Second World War

Hitler chose war to overcome economic crisis, as he thought that resources were to be accumulated through expansion of territory.

In September 1939, Germany invaded Poland and this started a war with France and England.

In September 1940, a Tripartite Pact was signed between Germany, Italy and Japan. It strengthened Hitler's international power.

By the end of 1940, Hitler became very powerful. Puppet regimes which supported Hitler was established in a large part of Europe.

Hitler attacked the Soviet Union in June, 1941. It was a historic mistake made by Hitler. The Soviet Red Army defeated Germany at Stalingrad and reached to Berlin. After that the Soviet army established their hegemony over the Eastern Europe.

In the beginning of the Second World War, USA was not involved. However, when Japan occupied French Indo-China and planned to attack USA naval bases in the Pacific Ocean, the USA entered the Second World War. Japan supported Hitler and bombed USA base at Pearl Harbour.

The Second World War ended in May 1945 with Hitler's defeat. Japan surrendered in August 1945, after the US dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The Nazi Worldview

Nazi ideology was similar to Hitler's worldview. According to this, there was no equality between people, but only a racial hierarchy¹⁴ was present.

In this view, blond, blue-eyed, Nordic German Aryans were at the top, while Jews were located at the lowest rank. All other coloured people were placed in between depending upon their external features.

¹³ Concentration Camps: A camp where people were isolated and detained without due process of law.

¹⁴ Puppet: A person or group whose actions are controlled by another.

¹⁵ Hegemony: Control by one country over other countries.

¹⁶ Racial hierarchy: People are organised into different level according to their race.

Hitler's racism was inspired from the ideas of Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer.

Darwin, a natural scientist tried to explain that plants and animals were created through the concept of evolution and natural selection.

Herbert Spencer introduced the idea of 'Survival of the Fittest'. According to this idea, only those species survived on Earth that could adapt themselves to changing climatic conditions.

These ideas were used by the racist thinkers and politicians to justify imperial rule over conquered people.

The Nazi thinkers believed that the strongest race would survive and weak ones would perish.

According to them, the Aryan race was the fittest and had to retain its purity, become stronger and dominate the world.

The other aspect of Hitler's ideology was related to the geopolitical concept of Lebensraum, or living space.

He believed that new territories had to be acquired for settlement and to increase the area of the mother country.

Hitler intended to extend German boundaries by moving Eastwards, to concentrate all Germans geographically in one place.

Establishment of the Racial State

Nazis wanted only a society of pure and healthy Nordic German Aryans¹⁷. They alone were considered as 'desirable', while other communities were classified as 'undesirable'.

Jews, Gypsies and Blacks living in Nazi Germany were considered as racial inferiors who threatened the biological purity of the 'superior Aryan' race. They were widely persecuted¹⁸.

Even Russians and Poles were tortured by the Nazi government. The captured civilians were being forced to work at slave labour.

In Nazi Germany, Jews were the worst sufferers. Jews had been stereotyped¹⁹ as killers of Christ and usurers²⁰. Jews lived in separately marked areas called ghettos²¹.

17. Nordic German Aryans: It is a branch of those who were classified as Aryans. They lived in north European countries.
18. Persecuted: systematic and repeated punishment of those belonging to a group or religion.

19. Stereotype: A fixed idea or judge that many people have about a particular type of person, but which is not true in reality.
20. Usurers: Moneylender charging very high rate of interest.

21. Ghettos: Where people of the same race live, separately from the rest of the population.

22. Pseudoscientific: false or pretended to be scientific.

23. Suspects: The act of making plans.

Hitler's hatred of Jews was based on pseudoscientific theories of race, which could be realised only through their total elimination.

From 1933 to 1938, the Nazis territorialised, persecuted and segregated the Jews. From 1939/1945, the Nazis aimed to kill the Jews in the ghettos of Poland.

The Racial Utopia

The Nazis tried to realise their racial ideal through the Holocaust. They looted the occupied Poland. The mass murder. North-Western Poland was made part of Germany. Poles were forced to leave their homes and properties, which were then occupied by Germans.

Poles were deported to the other part called the 'General Government'. Members of the Polish intelligentsia were murdered in large numbers in order to keep the entire class of people under their control.

Polish children who looked like Aryans were recruited as 'race experts' and if they passed the race tests, they were raised in German families. If they failed in these tests, then they were sent to orphanages where many of them were perished.

Check Point 02

1. Name the birth place of Hitler.
2. Who was the proponent of the theory - 'Survival of the Fittest'?
3. When did the Nazi Party become the largest party in Germany?
4. Which act helped to establish dictatorship in Germany?
5. In _____ Hitler seized the German-Speaking Sudetenland from Czechoslovakia.

Youth in Nazi Germany

Hitler believed that a strong Nazi Society could be established by teaching Nazi ideology to the children. A control over the child both inside and outside the school was required.

For this following measures were adopted

- All schools were cleaned and purified.
- Children and teachers of Jews and Gypsies were driven out of schools.

- The school textbooks were rewritten. Germans and Jews could not sit and play together.
- Racial science was introduced to justify Nazi ideas of race.
- Stereotypes about Jews were popularised even through maths classes.
- Children were taught to be loyal, submissive, hate Jews and worship Hitler.
- Sports like boxing was introduced to encourage violence and aggression among children. Hitler thought that boxing could make children iron-hearted, strong and masculine.
- Youth organisations were made responsible for educating German Youth in the 'Spirit of National Socialism'.
- Ten-year-old children had to join *Jungvolk*²⁴.
- In 1922, the Youth League of the Nazis was founded. After four years, it was renamed as Hitler Youth.
- At 14, all boys had to join the Nazi youth organisation 'Hitler Youth'.
- To control the youth, all other youth organisations were banned.
- After a period of rigorous ideological and physical training, youth had to join the Labour Service at the age of 18. Then they had to serve in the armed forces and enter one of the Nazi organisations.

The Nazi Cult of Motherhood

In Nazi Germany, young people and even children, were repeatedly told that women were radically different from men.

According to the Nazi ideology, the fight for equal rights for men and women, was quite wrong and it would destroy society.

Boys were taught to be aggressive, masculine and hardworking while girls were told to become good mothers and bring up pure-blooded Aryan children.

Women had to maintain the purity of the race, distance themselves from Jews, look after the home and teach Nazi ideology to their children.

In 1933, Hitler declared that the mother was the most important citizen, but all mothers were not equally treated.

Those mothers who produced racially desirable children were awarded, given favoured treatment in hospitals, concessions in shops, theatres and even in the railways.

Honour crosses were given to encourage women to produce many children. Honour cross of bronze was given for producing four children, silver for producing six children and gold for producing eight or more children.

Women who maintained contacts with Jews, Poles or Russians were punished or imprisoned. Many received jail sentences and lost civic honour for this criminal offence.

The Art of Propaganda

The Nazi regime used language and the media effectively to describe their activities. They never used the words 'kill' or 'murder' in their official communications, but used *euphemisms*²⁵.

Mass killings were called *special treatment*, *final solution* (for the Jews), *euthanasia* (for the disabled), *selection and disinfection*.

'Evacuation' meant deporting people to gas chambers for killing them. The gas chambers were called 'disinfection-areas'.

Role of Media in Propaganda

The role of media in promoting Nazi Propaganda was as follows:

- Media was carefully used to win support for the regime and popularise its worldview. Nazi ideas were spread through visual images, films, radio, posters, catchy slogans and leaflets.
- Socialists and liberals were represented as weak and degenerate and attacked as malicious foreign agents.
- Propaganda films were made to create hatred for Jews. The most infamous film was *The Eternal Jew*.
- In Nazi Germany, Orthodox Jews were stereotyped and marked. They were shown with flowing beards, wearing kufans. However, in reality it was difficult to distinguish the German Jews from other German people.
- Jews were referred to as vermin (insects), rats and pests. Their movements were compared to those of rodents.

²⁴ *Jungvolk*: Nazi youth group for children below 14 years of age.

²⁵ *Euphemisms*: An indirect word or expression use for one considered to be too harsh.

Ordinary People and The Crimes Against Humanity

Many ordinary people genuinely believed that only Nazism could bring prosperity and well-being for them. Some Germans opposed Nazism, but the large majority of Germans had no courage to protest.

Charlotte Beradt in her book *Third Reich of Dreams* described that Jews started believing the Nazi's stereotypes about them. The Nazi propaganda haunted the Jews and they were immensely suffered.

Knowledge about the Holocaust

World became aware about the Nazi atrocity level and violent act during the last year of its regime. The atrocities and sufferings that Jews had experienced during the Nazi killing operations are called the Holocaust.

People know about the Holocaust by the documents preserved by the Jews in many ghettos. The documents included diaries, notebooks, created archives (the place where historical documents or records are stored), etc. The Nazi leadership tried to destroy all these evidences when they started losing the war. Today many of the evidences of Holocaust are kept in various Museums of the world.

Check Point 03

1. Name the author who wrote the *Third Reich of Dreams*.
2. Which Nazi Youth Organisation consisted of all German boys of 14 to 18 years of age?
3. What was the name given to gas chambers by Nazis?
4. The most infamous film to create hatred for Jews was _____.
5. The book *'Third Reich of Dreams'* was written by _____.

SUMMARY

- After the defeat of Germany in the First World War and the resignation of the emperor, the parliamentary system came at Weimar and established a Democratic Constitution with a federal structure. This was termed as the 'Weimar Republic'.
- This government was forced to sign the Treaty of Versailles with the Allied powers, whose terms were very harsh and humiliating.
- Germany could not manage the financial crisis and faced hyperinflation in 1923, when prices of goods of daily use increased sharply.
- The years of the Great Depression (1929-1933) further damaged the German economy, when production and employment reduced drastically.
- This multiple crisis in the German economy paved the way for Hitler's rise to power.
- Hitler promised to build a strong nation, undo the injustice of the Versailles Treaty, restore the dignity of the German people and provide opportunities for the unemployed people.
- After acquiring power, Hitler started dismantling democratic rule by suspending civil rights like freedom of speech, press and assembly.
- The Enabling Act of 1933, which gave Hitler all powers to sideline Parliament and rule by decree.
- Hitler's racism was borrowed from the ideas of Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer. The Nazi thinkers believed that the strongest race would survive and weak ones would perish.
- Hitler started implementing his ideas about creating a 'pure' racial community of Nordic Germans. Jews, Gypsies and Blacks were classified as 'undesirable' and widely persecuted by various measures.
- Hitler's hatred of Jews made them the worst sufferers in Nazi Germany.
- Hitler believed that a strong Nazi society could be established by teaching Nazi ideology to the children.
- The youth had to join Jungvolk from the age of 10 till they became adults.
- Women's roles in Nazi Germany were limited to being good wives and productive mothers who raised pure-blooded Aryan children. Women who maintained contacts with Jews, Poles or Russians were severely punished.
- The atrocities and sufferings that Jews had experienced during the Nazi killing operations are called the Holocaust. The world came to know about this by diaries, notebooks and archives preserved by the camp inhabitants of that period.