



GS FOUNDATION BATCH FOR CSE 2024

World History - 03

**(Imperialism, Colonialism and the
First World War +
Socialism and Communism)**

Imperialism and Colonialism

- When a country is occupied, settled or controlled by another country so that its resources could be used for the benefit of the mother country, the phenomenon is known as imperialism or colonialism. These words are often used interchangeably, but they have certain differences.
- Imperialism involves the establishment of political control by one power over another. It is associated with the process of empire building. On the other hand, colonialism entails the setting of one country by another.
- Throughout world history, several instances of imperialism and colonialism can be found. Each of these instances was different from the other in terms of methods, scope and impact. For instance, both India and Australia were part of the British Empire. While Australia was thoroughly colonised to the extent that its culture has become heavily Anglicised, the same is not true for India. The British never actively tried to settle India. They were only interested in establishing and maintaining their political and economic hegemony.

Causes of imperialism and colonialism:

- From the 16th-18th centuries, many countries such as Portugal, Spain, Italy, France, England, Holland and Denmark established extensive trading relations with Asian, African and Latin American countries.
- Initially, their main objective was trade, but soon, their ambitions turned towards political hegemony in order to exploit these regions.
- The discovery of new lands and new trade routes also facilitated colonialism.
- During this period, the population of Europe had also increased and that immigration was encouraged.
- From the very beginning, European oceanic trade wars and 'Armed Trade'. Success for merchant capitalists depended on their ability to control supply and establish monopolies. Thus, European merchants received naval support from their respective states. This military support also gave them immense coercive power while dealing with native rulers.
- The biggest cause of modern imperialism was the industrialisation of Western Europe. Colonies were valuable sources of raw material and served as captive markets for finished industrial products. As industrialisation spread throughout Europe, the pace of imperialism kept increasing.
- The weakness of Asian and African countries, the decline of big empires and their technological backwardness allowed the Europeans to establish their hegemony with relative ease.

The process and phases of colonialism:

- In some Asian countries, Europeans occupied territories, defeated local rulers and established their direct rule. India, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Indonesia, Egypt and South Africa are some such countries.
- In some countries, the colonising powers established their 'Spheres of Influence' i.e. these European powers became patrons of the local rulers who were reduced to the position of puppets. Direct rule was never established however European interests were secured through such puppet rulers. Such a system emerged in China and the Middle East. Southern China was forced to open her doors to European trade after the First Opium war and the Treaty of Nanking. By this treaty, the Europeans were given the right to set up their own settlements, govern their own people, sell certain products and preach Christianity.
- Often, the colonial competition was resolved through direct conflict between colonising powers. E.g. The Carnatic wars.
- However, European countries did not necessarily resort to violence in order to settle colonial questions. The 'Scramble for Africa' began in the 1870s after the unification of Italy and Germany (1870-71). Tensions were high and destructive wars seemed inevitable. In this background, Germany organised the Berlin Conference of 1884 and Africa was partitioned peacefully.
 - Southern and western Africa went to the British.
 - Germans controlled central and eastern Africa.
 - The northern and western parts of Africa came under French control.
 - The Italians received small colonies in eastern Africa.
 - Central Africa was given to the Belgians.
- This new phase of imperialism after the 1870s was known as Neo-Imperialism. It was characterised by:
 - The entry of new players such as Germany, Italy and Russia.
 - As compared to the previous phase of imperialism, new imperialism was much more rapid. While the previous phase beginning in the 16th century, had been going on for more than two centuries. Under new imperialism, almost the entire world was rapidly colonised within 20 to 30 years.
 - While old imperialism had been driven by mercantile capitalism, industrialisation was the main driving force behind new imperialism.
 - Old imperialism was guided primarily by economic interests. On the other hand, nationalism emerged as a contributing factor for new imperialism.

Consequences

Economic Consequences:

- Colonialism resulted in the enrichment of the colonising powers and the impoverishment of the colonised countries. Colonialism coincided with the growth and progress of capitalism (mercantile, industrial and finance capitalism). A common

feature of these phases was the exploitation of the colony for the benefit of the mother country.

- The wealth of the colonies was systematically and continuously drained by this process. It has been estimated that after 1906, roughly 1/4 to 1/3 of India's national wealth was drained to England every year. Other colonies had similar experiences. The main instruments of this drain were:
 - Direct plunder
 - Heavy rates of taxation
 - De-industrialisation
 - Commercialisation of agriculture
 - Using the colonies resources for imperial wars
 - Development of modern infrastructure in the colony as a means of investing accumulated wealth to extract profit and dividends while accelerating the process of exploitation.

Political Consequences:

- Colonisers established direct or indirect rule in Asia, Africa and Latin America. This led to a decline of local dynasties and the surviving rulers became colonial puppets.
- Colonisers introduced new politico-administrative systems and concepts such as nation-states, democratic institutions, separation of powers, equality etc. were also introduced by them. This helped in modernising the political outlook of the colonies.
- Imperialism drew a spectrum of reactions from the colonised people ranging from acceptance to non-violent protests to violent revolts and rebellions. In most of the world, popular nationalist movements based on modern political ideas emerged and gathered momentum in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Earlier, they were aimed at ending exploitation but later they tried to establish modern liberal democratic rule with guaranteed fundamental rights.
- Global conflict also intensified as industrialised nations competed for enlarging their empires.

Socio – cultural consequences:

- The colonists introduced modern education, Western liberal thought, social and physical sciences along with modern means of transport and communication. This had a massive impact on the native culture and society. It resulted in the emergence of an educated urban middle-class which provided leadership in the political and economic and cultural spheres. By and large this food for modern liberal ideas such as individual freedom, equality, human rights and fraternity.
- The colonists, at the insistence of native liberals, initiated social reforms against superstitious practices and social evils. Women in these colonies became the focal point of reforms.
- The introduction of modern means of transportation and communication generated the feeling of unity among the natives. By creating shared spaces they also brought down traditional social barriers such as caste, religion and gender.

World War I

The First World War was fought between the **Central Powers** i.e. Germany, Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire on one side and the **Entente Powers or Allies** i.e. Britain, France, Russia, the USA and Italy on the other.

It proved to be the largest, bloodiest and most destructive war that had been fought till then. The immediate trigger for the war was provided by the **assassination of the Austrian Crown Prince, Archduke Franz Ferdinand at Sarajevo by a Serbian nationalist**. However a deeper analysis is needed to understand the real reasons for the war.

Causes

Germany had emerged as the master of Europe after its unification in 1871 by defeating France. France had been humiliated badly and the German Chancellor Bismarck was convinced that it needed to be kept diplomatically and militarily isolated. France alone would not dare challenge German power. Thus, he devised a system of secret peacetime military alliances known as the **Bismarckian System**.

- In 1882, he had secured a Triple Alliance of Germany, the Austro-Hungarian empire and Italy.
- In 1887 he also secured an alliance with Russia through the Reinsurance Treaty.

This system collapsed soon after Bismarck resigned and a system of **counter alliances** emerged.

- 1894 – Franco Russian alliance
- 1904 – Entente Cordiale between Britain and France
- 1907 – Triple Entente involving Britain, France and Russia

Suddenly, two armed camps with mutually exclusive interests had emerged. This made the possibility of a European war extremely likely.

The 19th century had seen the surge of **nationalism** in Europe. It was especially prevalent in the **Balkan region**. This was problematic because the Balkans were sandwiched between two large and culturally diverse empires who wanted to arrest the rise of nationalism. These were the **Ottoman Empire and the Austro-Hungarian Empire**.

Austria had time and again frustrated Serbian nationalism because it was



considered to be the greatest threat to the integrity of the empire. On the other hand, **Russia**, which was seen as the leader of the Pan-Slav movement, considered itself to be the **champion of Serbian nationalism**. Thus, they found themselves at increasing odds with the Austrians.

The **Germans** found themselves in a difficult situation. Since **Austria was their only remaining reliable ally** in Europe, they had no option but to support it in case of a war with Russia.

Britain and France were convinced that Russia would not be able to withstand a combined Austro German onslaught and were resolved to defend Russia.

The emergence of this situation had been preceded by a **series of crises** which had steadily increased tensions and pushed Europe towards war.

- 1st and 2nd Moroccan Crisis (1906, 1911)
- Bosnian Crisis (1908)
- 1st and 2nd Balkan Wars (1912, 1913)

Nationalistic competition also played a major role in the buildup to the war. All European powers wanted to assert their economic and military superiority. This poisoned the already tense situation even further. To a large extent, this feeling of national competition was fuelled by the **industrial and imperial race**.

Driven by nationalism, **militarism** became an important part of European life during the period preceding the war. In the backdrop of uncertainty, European powers started seeking security in the strength of arms. It was believed that a credible deterrence could be created only by having a strong military. This led to an **arms race**. However, this was a false sense of security as was to be proven shortly.

Tensions were heightened further due to the **radical nationalist propaganda** of the European press. Leaders in all countries were forced to assume an aggressive external policy. This left very little room for negotiations and de-escalation, as they were under intense public pressure not to appear weak.

By the end, Europe was sitting on a heap of gunpowder, only a **spark** was needed. This was provided by the assassination of the Austrian Crown Prince.

In 1898 itself, Bismarck had prophesied that a war would engulf Europe and it would begin because of the 'Eastern Question'. His prophecy was proven true when Austria declared war on Serbia.

Consequences

Human consequences

The war resulted in the largest number of deaths as compared to all previous conflicts. Almost 80 lakh people had died and more than 1.5 crore were wounded.

This was the first war where the number of casualties was higher among noncombatants than soldiers.

The war displaced millions from their homes. This created a massive humanitarian crisis. These displaced people had no homes, no property and sometimes not even a country.

The war claimed entire generations. The most badly affected were the youth. In some countries such as Britain, Germany and Belgium, almost the entire generation of young men was wiped out. This created a major demographic crisis.

Due to the immense human misery, Europe was plunged into an atmosphere of pessimism and hopelessness. The trend of Nihilism and Atheism increased.

Economic Consequences

The war completely destroyed European industry. Most countries had to borrow heavily from the USA in order to rebuild their economy. They shifted the huge burden of this debt to their colonies. As a result colonial exploitation intensified.

Europe had lost its position as the industrial powerhouse of the world. It was replaced by America and Japan.

European financial institutions started collapsing. This further aggravated the economic crisis. Inflation started running wild and the currencies of some European economies failed completely.

Political consequences

The political map of the world was transformed. Germany was broken up and some of its territory was given to France and Poland.

Hungary was separated from Austria

The colonies of Austria and Germany in Asia and Africa were divested from them and placed under the mandate of Britain and France.

The league of Nations was created in 1919 with the objective of peace and disarmament. This was the first practical expression of internationalism in the world.

The hardships faced by Russians during the war led to the Russian Revolution (1917).

Socio-cultural consequences

World War I was the most technologically advanced war to have been fought till date, in which biological and chemical weapons were used. Intense research had gone into the development of these weapons. After the war, this knowledge resulted in the advancement of the chemical and medical sciences.

The war had liberated women in some respects. When all the able-bodied men had been called to the front, women had entered the workforce in large numbers. Having tasted social and economic independence, they were not ready to return to their traditional roles after the war. This led to a series of feminist movements resulting in some political reforms, which is established political equality with men.

The war also heightened the issues of the working class and the idea of socialism became popular in many countries, especially after the success of the Russian revolution.

Questions:

- The First World War destroyed the old, so that the new could take its place. Comment.
- The Great War was as dramatic in its consequences, as it was horrifying in its buildup. Discuss.

Socialism and Communism

Origin and growth in different phases

- In the late 18th and early 19th century, many writers and thinkers started questioning the capitalist mode of production, which had created a huge gap between the haves and the have-nots.
- The emergence of class consciousness among the workers had given credence to their concerns. They started suggesting ways in which the relationship between industrialists and workers should be regulated. In this background, various theories and suggestions were put forward.

1. Utopian Socialists:

- They emphasised that the industrialists themselves should act as trustees of the workers. They suggested that industrialists should voluntarily ensure workers rights such as:
 - Minimum wages
 - Job security
 - Medical and life insurance
 - Free education
 - Proper housing etc.
- Some important utopian socialist were early 19th century English and French industrialists. The most important among them were Robert Owen, Charles Fourier and Henri de Saint-Simon.

2. Fabian Socialists:

- The favoured state regulation of the relationship between the capitalists and workers through laws. They wanted to bring a gradual change in the condition of the workers and supported state intervention in the market mechanism. Important Fabian socialist included George Bernard Shaw, Sydney web and Beatrice Webb.
- Both utopias and Fabians faced criticism when their policies were not able to restrict the widening gap between the haves and have-nots.

3. Scientific Socialists:

- They made a scientific enquiry of the economy in a historical context. In this regard the pioneers were call Marx and Frederick Engels, who published their 'Communist Manifesto' in 1848. The tools used by them were historical materialism and Marxist dialectics.
- They differentiated between the industrial mode of production and the previous models and concluded that unlike previous phases, the have-nots in the industrial phase have the ability to bring change. This is because of their class consciousness i.e. the awareness of belonging to a distinct class with distinct interests which are different from the interests of the industrialists.

- Class consciousness would enable them to agitate for their interests. However these would not be fulfilled by the industrialist because of conflicting interests. They professed that a revolution would take place in which the bourgeois class would be overthrown and a dictatorship of the proletariat would be established.
- The workers would organise a socialist state, which would own, regulate and distribute resources. Its primary objective would be to ensure equal redistribution.
- Finally, the state would wither away and a classless, stateless society would remain. Resources would be produced by the people living in communes. There would be no private property and each person would produce as per his ability and consume as per his needs.
- The Communist Manifesto was well received and many political movements and parties based on Marxist ideology emerged in Europe.
- Two major international meetings of communists took place in Paris in the 1870s and 1880s. It was here that the slogan “Workers of the World Unite” was given. The tradition of celebrating 1 May as labour Day also began here.
- The Communist ideology was more popular in Russia and Eastern Europe than in Western Europe.

Consequences/ Significance/ Impact:

- With the emergence of socialism, ideological differences with capitalists emerged. The supporters of either ideological block started promoting the benefits of their ideology and denouncing the other.
- Many reforms were initiated in the Western Europe in countries with regards to workers rights. Late entrants into the industrial revolution were slow and reluctant to bring these reforms. As a result, socialism became immensely popular in Russia and Eastern Europe.
- The emergence of Communist ideology led to massive revolutions in Russia and China which were inspired by Marx but were quite different in their application and scope.
- In Russia, Lenin organised a planned and violent overthrow of the state by mobilising workers, peasants and soldiers. In China, Mao brought a similar revolution with the help of peasants only. This belied Marxist claim that communism could prevail only in heavily industrialised societies.
- The Cold War was a direct consequence of this clash of ideologies. The USSR led the Communist bloc whereas the USA led the capitalist. The world divided itself between the two poles and a multifaceted global conflict and competition started.
- Because of the socialist ideology, the prestige and status of peasants and workers improved considerably. Their bargaining power, especially in the democratic setup became considerable and the concept of welfare politics picked up speed because of this ideology.
- The effects of socialism can also be seen in culture, philosophy and art. In this context, the writings of Leo Tolstoy and Maxim Gorky hold special significance.

Relevance of socialist ideas in the 21st-century:

- Since the end of the Cold War and the victory of capitalism, the relevance of socialism has come under question.
- Modern thinkers believe that the state has an important role to play in reducing the gap between the rich and the poor. The very idea of justice has been equated to the provision of basic minimums. According to them, it is possible to establish a fair and just society if not an absolutely equal society.
- It has also been contended that socialism is important for the success of capitalism. In the absence of equality it would be impossible to ensure free and open competition without which capitalism would fail.
- The development of a healthy, educated and skilled labour force is essential for the success of capitalist economies. In this context, the state is well-equipped to intervene in the social sector.
- Capitalism is more likely to succeed if the consumers have high purchasing power. This can be ensured by removing poverty through social intervention and by providing equal opportunity to all sections.
- The perverse effects of capitalism can be restricted through timely and adequate state regulation. The state has emerged as not only a regulator, but also as an arbiter between the market and the consumers.
- In the absence of strong and independent regulatory institutions, corrupt practices, monopolies and cronyism may emerge.
- Socialist ideas are especially relevant in developing countries such as India, where the state must take on the added responsibility of ensuring economic progress along with equitable redistribution. India has been able to lift millions out of poverty because of its socialist credentials.
- Cutting edge research in the sciences and humanities is conducted by state funded institutions which also produce industry leaders.
- Public Sector Enterprises such as the Railways, GAIL, NTPC, etc. and Public Sector Banks do not only ensure economic stability but also accessibility and affordability.
- In the absence of adequate state intervention, inequality may rise and this can lead to social strife or political extremism. The Naxalite movement is a result of the same.
- Therefore socialist ideas would remain relevant till the time that the gap between the rich and the poor continues to exist.