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## The emergence of nation states in Europe in the context of industrial revolution, colonialism and imperialism

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### Abstract

The present paper entitled “The Emergence of Nation States in Europe in the Context of Industrial Revolution, Colonialism and Imperialism” seeks to explore the history of Western Europe in the context of various changes, mainly changes in the Polity, Economy and Religion from 15<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century. The European Civilization has been regarded as the cradle of Western civilization, with reference to ancient Greek and Roman civilization. In this paper, I would seek to highlight in brief the transformations that Europe underwent from the 15th century which ultimately made Europe irresistible to the people of other continents. We need to analyze these transformations from the perspectives of polity, economy, society, religion, science and technology, art and sculpture. There was development almost in every sphere. I would like to initiate with the political developments of certain European states like Spain, France, England and Russia. I shall then tend to focus on the economic aspects- the Commercial Revolution, with special reference to the transition from feudalism to capitalism. In this context, I would like to discuss Mercantilism, Laissez Faire and ultimately Industrial Revolution. The present paper also seeks to focus on The Thirty Years’ War and The Treaty of Westphalia (1648) and its significance on the history of Western Europe. I also intend to focus on the impact of Industrial Revolution with special reference on England, France, Germany, Belgium and Russia. My objective is also to highlight on the concept of colonialism and imperialism and in this context, I intend to project upon the impact of Industrial Revolution and how the Industrial Revolution paved the path of colonialism and imperialism.

**Keywords:** aphorisms, centralised bureaucracy, cosmology, absolutism, concordat, gentry, mercantilism, laissez-faire, physiocrats, Christian missionaries

### Introduction

The ‘Nation-State’ and ‘Nationalism’ are terms frequently applied to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. They were invented by the historians in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. ‘Principe’ (The Prince), was written by Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527) in 1513. Machiavelli was a historian and dramatist and Florentine Diplomat wrote his book in the hope that it would inspire a Prince to fulfil Dante’s dream of a Unified Italy. Machiavelli may be judged as the advocate of Limited Monarchy, of the Rule of Law and of Liberty. ‘The Prince’ provided the basic grounds on which constitutional structures have to be remembered. Some of his cynical aphorisms are best remembered. ‘The nearer people are to the Church of Rome, the more irreligious they are.’ War should be the only study of a Prince.

Certain changes occurred in the European society, economy and polity in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, suggesting that the Middle Age had ended and a new era had begun. The Papacy, the symbol of the spiritual unity of Christendom lost much of its appeal in the wave of Protestantism which by then was gaining its ground. In Western Europe, nation states emerged under these circumstances. Centralised bureaucracy came to replace medieval governments. Secular values prevailed in politics. At the same time, scientific discoveries shook faith in the traditional cosmology. The systems of Aristotle and Ptolemy were undermined by Copernicus, Galileo and Kepler.

The strengthening of royal power in some quarters did not herald the advent of Absolutism. In France, the restraints on the king were so great that scholars doubted whether under Francis I, the French Government was more consultative or less decentralised.

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In England, after the advent of Tudor Monarchy, it was the Parliament which asserted itself. In the Holy Roman Empire, the Imperial Diet asserted against the Emperor of the two most famous political treatises of the period, the "De La Republique" (1577) of Jean Bodin favoured Constitutional Monarchy, while the "Leviathan" (1650) of Thomas Hobbes propagated Absolute Monarchy. From the beginning of the late 15<sup>th</sup> century, the kings of France, England and Spain tried to change the constitutions of their kingdoms in order to increase their powers.

**Spain:** The development of modern Spanish Monarchy began with Ferdinand of Aragon (1479-1516) and his wife, Isabella of Castile (1474-1504) of Habsburg Dynasty. As in France and England, the monarchs in Spain wrested power from the nobles and strengthened the royal government. Under Phillip II (1556-98), it stood at the pinnacle of political and cultural power, until undermined by the hostility of France and England and by the revolt of the Netherlands. King Phillip II was the absolute master of Church in Spain. His famous invincible Spanish Armada was however smashed and destroyed by England in 1588.

**France:** Francis I (1515-1547), an ambitious and capable ruler, was the first of the New Monarchs in France. He negotiated with Pope Leo X, the Concordat of Bologna and gained a large degree of control over the Catholic Church in France. He was the contemporary of Henry VIII of England. Later on, France came to be ruled by the Bourbon Monarchs, like Louis IV. Louis VI became the main subject of discussion in due course of time.

**England:** England emerged as a very powerful state in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, mainly because of the competency of its Tudor Royal Dynasty. The Dynasty was set up in 1485 (Battle of Roses) and it grew very powerful during the time of its rulers, Henry VII and Henry VIII. Henry VIII (1509-1548) and its successors – Edward VI (1548-53), Mary I (1553-58) and Elizabeth I (1558-1601) created the Church of England. The Tudor monarchs strengthened the monarchy considerably. The dynasty consistently sought the support of the lesser gentry and middle classes. The merchants did not challenge the political power of the gentry and the crown as long as they were given freedom in commerce. Under Henry VIII, middle class lawyers like Thomas Cromwell rose to the highest ranks in the royal government.

**Russia:** In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Eastern Europe displayed the opposite tendency to the advance of Princely Absolutism in the West. Here the landowning class achieved a political independence that weakened the power of the Monarchy. The towns entered a period of decline and the propertied class reduced their peasantry to servitude. The grand principality of Moscow emerged as a new and powerful despotism. Ivan III was the Emperor of Russia in the second half of 15<sup>th</sup> century. By his marriage with the Byzantine princess, Sofia, Ivan also laid claim to the traditions of Constantinople. His grandson, Ivan IV, the Terrible (1533-84) was the first to use the title Tsar and was very ruthless. The accession of the Romanov Dynasty in 1613 witnessed the period of gradual recovery. Till 1613, Russia remained isolated from the West. Despite its relationship with the Greek civilization, it knew nothing of the Renaissance. It was equally untouched by Reformation and Counter-Reformation Movement of Western Europe in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century.

**Commercial Revolution in Western Europe:** Mercantilism was the economic theory and practice common in Europe from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It was

the economic counterpart of Political Absolutism. The theory was popularised by Thomas Munn in England, Jean Baptiste Colbert in France and Antonio Serra in Italy. It was given currency by the Scottish economist Adam Smith in his Wealth of Nations (1776). The Mercantile theory held that colonies exist for the economic benefit of the mother country and are useless unless they help to achieve profit. The mother country should draw raw materials from its possessions and sell them finished products, with the balance favouring the European country. Under this theory, a country's development was to be assessed on the basis of gold she has possessed in her royal exchequer. The trade should be monopolistic, with foreign intruders barred. Most of the European countries sent exploring expeditions in all directions in order to get direct control of the treasures of the East, especially spices. When a New World was opened up, the quest of gold and silver gripped the Europeans. In trading with distant countries, the English merchants had learned that it was necessary to bind themselves into a company. It received a Charter from the Crown with a monopoly of trade. Thus the English East India Company was founded in 1600, the Dutch East India Company in 1602 and the French East India Company in 1664.

The colonies played a very important role in the system. They were required to supply the mother country with raw materials. The raw materials were to be procured from the colonies, manufactured at the mother countries, and then sent back the finished products to the colonies for sale. The colonies were also supposed to provide the markets. Thus the concept of colonialism ultimately grew up to be a very popular one and the major European powers intended to prosper by promoting colonialism.

Later, Mercantilism was severely criticized. Advocates of *laissez-faire* argued that there was no difference between domestic and foreign trade and that all trade was beneficial. They denied the idea that a nation could grow rich only at the expense of another and argued that trade was, in reality, a two-way affair. Faith in mercantilism waned during the 18<sup>th</sup> century because of French physiocrats who advocated the rule of nature whereby trade and industry would be left to follow a natural course.

### **The Thirty Years' War and the Treaty of Westphalia**

The Thirty Years' War (1618-48) arose out of a religious revolt in Bohemia ultimately leading most of the European states to involve in it. The war came to an end in 1648 when 194 European rulers, great and small, were represented at the Congress of Westphalia. The purely German problems were resolved. In 1645 and 1646, with the aid of French and Swedish mediation, the German territorial rulers were granted a large decree of sovereignty. Calvinism within the Europe was granted official toleration. It was the beginning of a new order in Europe, and Sweden, for all her military power, was forced to respect it. For more than a century, the Settlement of 1648 was regarded as the principal guarantee of peace and order in Central Europe.

One great result of the Peace of Westphalia was the secularisation of politics. Religious wars came to an end in Europe. The right of the Prince to choose his religion was confirmed by the Peace of Westphalia. The chief result of Thirty Years' War was the final dissolution of Christendom. Henceforth, there would be National States, which acknowledged no allegiance to the Pope. Individual sovereign states became the central forces of political life.

Relations between sovereign states were subject to mutually accepted rulers. By 1648, national states and national cultures were emerging in Western Europe.

**Industrial Revolution:** The term 'Industrial Revolution' was first used by the French in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. England was the first country to witness Industrial Revolution. The dream of Francis Bacon of using the knowledge of nature for human welfare thus became fulfilled in England.

**Factors precipitating Industrial Revolution:** By the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Britain and France possessed large accumulation of capital. Successful merchants' investors and adventurers accumulated their assets from shipping and colonial plantations. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there had been tremendous increase in population of most of the European countries. The European countries also witnessed Agricultural Revolution. It increased food production. New techniques were introduced in England. Example may be given of John Kay's Flying Shuttle (1773), James Hargreaves's Spinning Jenny (1765), multiplying the power of the weaver. In 1769, James Watt invented the Steam Engine. The increasing use of coal and iron was another determining factor of the Industrial Revolution. Humphrey Davis's invention of the Safety Lamp in 1815 ushered an important development in the mining industry. The process of making steel from iron also underwent great improvement.

Improved communications were necessary for the exchange of goods. The improvement of roads was more widespread. The use of Steam Engine in locomotive began in 1800. The Steam Locomotive was first made practical use by a colliery worker, George Stephenson. His first Rocket Locomotive tested in 1829, was able to move at a speed of 20 miles per hour.

**Causes of Industrial Revolution in England:** In England, there was comparative freedom from state interference, a large measure of political stability, widespread knowledge of science and technology and greater security for person and property. Compared with France, Britain had progressed much further in the breakdown of economic regulations. Compared with Germany, she had the advantage of a national unity. Compared with Holland, she had coal and iron abundance.

On the long-term causes of the English Industrial Revolution, there were attributed four factors: the change in economic policy from Mercantilism to Laissez-Faire (Free Trade), the expansion of British commerce, the increase in productivity owing to new machines and dedication of the entrepreneurs. The most important factor was the accumulation of capital in Britain in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The pace of economic development accentuated when capital was made available at the lower rate of interest. Interest rates fell from 7 to 8 percent, at the beginning of the century to 3 or 4 percent in 1750. There was also remarkable development of English banking.

The immediate cause of increasing productivity, however, was undoubtedly technical progress, the use of power driven machinery, the use of coal and iron, factory production and improved communications. The Industrial Revolution would not have been possible without the existence of large and accessible markets- at home and abroad. The expansion of markets was made possible, particularly, by reduced prices. Demographic factor was also responsible for the Industrial

Revolution. An increasing population encouraged the process of the Industrial Revolution. France comparatively showed a long spell of demographic impotence. Along with these, there developed a strong network of banking services in England. International banking houses was set up in London. In 1800, London was the commercial-financial capital of Europe.

Britain became the workshop of the world from the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The Napoleonic Wars strengthened its grip on the seas and weakened France's access to raw materials. It was not till before 1830 that France began the task of modernisation and even in 1850, there was little that deserved to be called on Industrial Revolution. Germany remained almost stationary until 1850. It had to wait until the Zollverein. In Italy, industrialisation was impeded by political disunity and lack of raw materials.

**Spread of Industrial Revolution to other European Countries:** Its impact fell upon Belgium. Antwerp emerged as great commercial and financial centre. Belgium had access to the emerging markets of France, Germany and Britain. France was more slowly industrialised. She had lost both colonies and markets during the long wars. French industries developed after 1830 (July Revolution). Alsace and Lorraine became concentrated with new factories. Alsace and Lorraine were also the areas enriched with mineral resources.

Germany was originally more backward than France. The formation of customs union (Zollverein), including by 1833 most German states, removed many trade barriers. In 1839, with aid from British capital, the first important German railway was built from Dresden to Leipzig. Up to 1830, German economy was predominantly rural. The unification of Germany by 1871 created the largest effective single market in Europe. By 1875, Germany was producing more coal and iron than Belgium and France. By 1910, it was the largest industrial producer in Europe. This phenomenal growth was attributed to the adoption of latest technology, high literacy of the people, her rich resources of iron and coal. As J.M. Keynes observed with little exaggeration: "The German Empire has been built more truly on coal and iron than blood and iron." Ruhr regions of Germany were very much enriched in mineral resources.

Industrialization in Russia was uneven. Russian resources were immense but its institutions were primitive. As late as 1900, about 80 percent of the people derived its income from the soil. The Czarist government threw its full weight behind railway construction after 1857 and behind heavy industry after. The abolition of serfdom by the famous declaration of Czar Alexander I also acted as a very important factor behind the transformation of Russia from agricultural state to industrialisation.

The first of the Asiatic countries to feel the impact of industrialism was Russia. By 1880, it was felt that the solution of India's economic difficulties was the development of modern industries. The factory system appeared in the 1850s with the building of cotton and jute mills. Until 1914, India depended entirely upon imports for her machinery. The First World War (1914-1918) gave a stimulus to the development of iron and steel industry, and also chemical industries, oil and water power. The factory system brought to an end the 'domestic' system of industry. The growth of factories led the people to move from the rural districts to urban areas. Many new cities like

Manchester, Leeds and Birmingham became centres of factories. Factories were built in the regions of coal and iron.

The Industrial Revolution enabled the European powers to establish economic control over Asia and Africa. Apart from providing raw materials to the European powers, these countries became the scene of international conflict. There were Anglo-French rivalry in Asia and Africa, Franco-Italian and Franco-German rivalry in Africa, Anglo-Russian rivalry in Central Asia. From 1900, Germany's superior industry as much as its strongest military power in Europe. Germany developed to such an extent that the other major European powers-England and France began to feel insecure and jealous.

### **The concept and the emergence of Imperialism**

Imperialism may be defined as the extension of control or influence by one people over another. From 1816 to 1870, imperialism did not play a vital factor in the policies of the great powers. By 1815, France had lost most of her colonial possessions in America and in the East. During the 1870s, there was a shift in the attitude towards the colonies. By 1880, new imperialism was gaining in strength and there was scramble among the major powers to establish colonies. It opened the countries of Africa and Asia to European influence on a fair greater scale than ever before.

### **Factors accentuating Imperialism**

Economic factors played an important role in the growth of imperial expansion. The accumulation of excess capital generated by industrialization led the big nations to find new markets, new sources of raw materials and good investments. Lenin elaborated the argument in his brilliant tract "Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism" in 1917. Lenin emphasized the importance of finance capital to find new outlets for investments. After 1870, Germany, France, Belgium and other nations were able to satisfy their home markets and began to look for more open markets overseas. For this purpose, Africa and Asia suited admirably. There was also the increasing need of raw materials for the industries at home.

**Social Factors:** The pressure of population and growing unemployment in the European countries were important factors in the imperialist expansion. The surplus population could earn its living in the colonies. In the century before World War II, more than 60 million people left Europe.

**Political Factors:** Empire-building was an essential element in international prestige. France sought to recover her prestige after her humiliating defeat in the Franco-Prussian War by carving out an empire in Africa. Germany and Italy were young nations coming up with the zeal that they must spread over the globe.

**Religious Factors:** The New Imperialism also had a religious fervour. More often, the Christian missionaries were the purveyors of colonialism. In effect, the flag tended to follow the Cross. This has been wonderfully represented by Demond Tutu in his writing. He once said "When the Missionaries came to Africa, they had the Bible and we had the Land. They said 'Let us pray'. We closed our eyes. When we opened them, we had the Bible and they had the Land."

**Other Factors:** There were also other motives which promoted Imperialism. An urge for scientific discovery and

for the exploration of unknown territories helped to open up Africa.

**Spread of Imperialism to Asia:** Persia and Central Asia became European spheres of influence. The tide of European imperialism was checked by Japan who became a great power in Asia by her victory over Russia. British expansion to India was somewhat counteracted by French advances in Indo-China. French advances in Indo-China were counteracted by British advance into Burma. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, apart from India, British advancements were made into Burma (1885) and China (1858). Anglo-French rivalry in India had led to a series of clashes which ultimately forced the French to withdraw in 1773. The English East India Company brought many Indian powers like the Marathas, the Sikhs and the Mysoreans under their control. The Battle of Buxar (1764) paved the way for British control over Bengal. The Mutiny of 1857 seriously threatened the rule of the British. It was, however, suppressed. In 1858, the East India Company was abolished and the Government of India passed into the hands of the British Crown.

In this paper, I have tried to depict how the emergence of nation-states in the European countries actually brought about a change in the era of human civilization, from the 'Dark Ages' of the Medieval period to the birth of a 'Modern World'. While 'The Prince' by Niccolo Machiavelli and 'Leviathan' by Thomas Hobbes advocated in favour of 'absolutist monarchy', the theory of mercantilism by Adam Smith and the other economic theorists tried to promote colonialism for the benefit of the nation-states. In the religious field, the Thirty Years' War and the Peace of Westphalia led to the weakening and the final dissolution of the power of the Pope and the Church. Henceforth, the states became independent political entities devoid of any papal domination. Finally, the Industrial Revolution of the 18<sup>th</sup> century paved the way for the emergence of capitalism and technological innovations. Beginning with England, the spread of Industrial Revolution in the other European countries paved the way for economic development. This in turn helped in overseas imperial expansion. New markets, increasing demand and supply of raw materials and greater investments led to overseas trade, growing employment and accumulation of capital in the hands of the states. The spread of imperialism led to British expansion in other countries, including India. Thus, in the field of economy, society, religion, culture, science and technology, Europe underwent a major transformation with the emergence of nation states and capitalism.

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