
UNIT 3 EVOLUTION OF WORLD SYSTEM (UPTO WORLD WAR-II)*

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3.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, you will get an overview of the world system through various civilizations; rise of the West; rise of conflicts, and the causes of First and Second World Wars. After going through this Unit, you should be able to know:

- World system through the age
- Causes of First World War
- Treaty of Versailles and
- Causes of Second World War

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The insatiable wants of humans led to the finest discoveries in the world and yet also caused wars at an unimaginable level. Humans gave up their nomadic style of living in favour of permanent settlement. They built agriculture to provide food and fodder. Urbanization also took its root. This promoted trade and led to the facilitation of communication. The origin of writing also aided in better communication. But soon the early forms of development fell into abyss after the advent of Dark Ages. Dark Ages brought the rein of superstition and religion and logic and rationality took a backseat. The Dark Ages soon ended for betterment of society and European civilization became the dominant in international relations. The rule of West caused the dissemination of ideas of rationality, logic, debate and reason. Scientific temper was celebrated. And the advent of industrial revolution brought in the provision of basic necessities, comfort of industrial

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goods and further development of means of communication and transportation. But the greed of acquiring more and more profit from the sale of manufactured goods led to expansion of their territories and converting far away regions and societies into colonies. This gave rise to imperialism and colonialism. The fight to retain their colonies and acquire more led to the two World Wars and immeasurable loss of human lives.

3.2 FROM ANCIENT TO MODERN

The history at the world level commenced with the establishment of successive ancient civilizations. The hunter-gatherer community gave up nomadism in place of permanent settlement, developed agriculture to produce crops for food, looked for avenues for trade and exchange and also set up urban cities. Mesopotamia civilization, now part of Republic of Iraq, is regarded as the cradle of civilization as it gave birth to three major civilizations from 3500-1500 BCE- the Sumerian, the Babylonian and the Assyrian. Other early civilization developed in ancient Egypt along the River Nile and it ended with the rise of Roman Empire. The two prominent developments of the civilization were one, agriculture which led to permanent settlement and the proliferation of urban cities and secondly, writing that facilitated exchange and communication. Around 1600 BCE, Shang dynasty sowed the seeds of Chinese civilization which corresponded with the Bronze Age. Earliest civilization in South Asia arose in Indus river valley, now part of Pakistan, and it flourished between 2600 and 1900 BCE. Ancient India whose borders stretched from modern day Afghanistan to Bangladesh, arose in 500 BCE and gave birth to the golden age of classical Hindu culture and rich Sanskrit literature.

Around 1000 BCE, also known as the period of classical antiquity saw the emergence of various civilizations in the area of Mediterranean Sea. It led to the establishment of two prominent cities – Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome. But the classical world soon descended into chaos when nomadic people mounted an attack on the great ancient civilizations and the era came to be notoriously known as ‘Dark Ages’ that spread from Mediterranean to China. It not only affected Greek and Romans but also all the developed civilizations of Eurasia. In the 5th and 6th centuries, Europe was disrupted by the constant barbarian invasions of Germanic and Slav people who later settled there. In the 9th and 10th centuries, Vikings, Magyars and Saracens carried out further invasions. The prominent was the rise of Mongols, the nomadic people in 1206 and 1405 whose empire stretched from eastern frontiers of Germany and from Arctic Ocean to Turkey and Persian Gulf. Mongol invasion left a deep impact on world history, changing the political organization of Asia and large parts of Europe and the ethnic composition of many regions by uprooting and displacing them. But it also opened the routes and connected Europe with Asia and Far East.

3.3 RISE OF WEST

Around 1500, Europe based civilization became the dominant civilization in the world. Westernization became synonymous with modernization. Non-Western societies started imitating Western countries for their growth in political, economic, cultural and social spheres. From fifteenth century and continuing till early seventeenth century, Portuguese, Spanish, British, French and Dutch

explored India and Far East. They started trading in spices, tea, cane sugar, tobacco, precious metals, and slaves. Rise of West brought immense changes at the world level. Politically, Peace of Westphalia signed in 1648 created independent and sovereign states with strong central governments. Breakdown of feudalism and advent of market and capitalist society brought socio-economic changes. Industrialization started developing in Britain in mid-eighteenth century becoming the workshop of the world.

Culturally, the rise of West brought in Renaissance in Italy in Middle Ages. The European intellectuals highlighted the ideas of reason, rationality, scientific temper, debate and critical enquiry that led to the growth of technological advance and scientific civilization. With the advent of technology and scientific temper, Western countries moved out to establish trade links to an extent that they secured their trading relations with other countries by keeping them as colonies. Therefore, scramble for colonies started. Building of land and maritime transportation and communication lines facilitated trade and migration of people. But this 'incipient globalization' as Scholte calls it, came to an end with the outbreak of the First World War in 1914.

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

Note: i) Use the space given below for answers.

ii) See the end of Unit for tips for your answer.

1) What is meant by Renaissance?

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3.4 FIRST WORLD WAR

The First World War started with the declaration of war on Serbia by Austria Hungary on July 28, 1914. It was fought between Allied and Associated powers on one side and Central powers on the other side. The former included France, British Empire, Russia, Italy, USA which joined three years later, and Japan. Central powers comprised of Germany, Austria Hungary and the Ottoman Empire.

3.4.1 The Factors Responsible for the First World War

A) After the French Revolution of 1789, nationalism became an important factor in international relations. This led to unity as well as divisions. For example: German and Italian reunifications were the result of national aspirations. Dissolution of Ottoman Empire and demands for national independence in Balkans and other East European countries are credited to the rise of nationalism. On one hand, where nationalism brought the freedom of countries and also led to unification in some. On the other hand, nationalism also sowed the seeds of conflicts and tensions. Britain propagated the theory of 'white man's burden' and Germany upheld the 'supremacy of Aryan race'. Such ideas created the 'Other' and 'Us' divide in society.

- B) Economic imperialism was another significant factor that contributed to the First World War. The advent of Industrial Revolution created the grounds for colonialism and imperialism. Big imperial powers wanted to occupy new colonies to buy cheap raw materials for manufacturing finished goods, buy cheap laborers and the market to sell the manufactured goods. In this horde of occupying new colonies and to build the political, military and economic strength resulted in many rivalries and conflicts.
- C) Formation of secret alliances was another reason. After the Franco-Prussian war, Germany tried to keep France weak. Bismarck was the undisputed leader of Germany for twenty years and dominated European politics also. A secret alliance was concluded between Germany and Austria-Hungary against Russia after the Congress of Berlin while the League of Three Emperors between Germany, Austria-Hungary and Russia was in place. Later, Germany entered into a Dual Alliance with Russia in a Reinsurance Treaty. Italy also joined sometime later. This Triple Alliance was formed to isolate France. After the fall of Bismarck, many counter alliances came forth. France-Russian entente challenged Triple Alliance. In 1904, the disputes between France and British were resolved and they signed *Entente Cordiale*. Disputes were also settled between Russia and Britain in 1907 and they signed a Treaty of Friendship. A Triple Entente was thus formed. This divided the major European powers into two camps – Triple Alliance and Triple Entente and each one befriended other nations to enhance their military strength.
- D) Another reason was the race for armaments. Entire Europe was shaken by the might of Napoleon's army and his adventures. The other nations also had to build up their militaries to defeat him. After Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo, new powers emerged and they also joined the arms race. Germany, Russia, Austria-Hungary started acquiring more military power. Japan's military strength was not only a concern for China and Korea but also Russia and United States. War became the major factor for establishing superiority in international relations.
- E) Following the arms race, Anglo-German naval rivalry became predominant. Britain was the sole superpower who was the king of seas till the end of nineteenth century. After Germany under young Emperor Kaiser William II strengthened its navy, Britain left its isolation and jumped to counter the rising Germany in the seas.
- F) Absence of an effective international organization was one of the main reasons for breakout of the First World War. Though an informal group of major European powers named Concert of Europe came into being but it could not abate the rising conflicts. Imperial rivalries and arms race could not be arrested. It was not a formal organization and did not have the representation of the world countries. The two Hague conferences did discuss peaceful settlement of disputes and the institution of arbitration was also included. But peaceful resolution of disputes could not be brought in.
- G) The negative role of press was also considered a significant point for culmination of the First World War. Forty years prior to the war, several governments made sincere efforts to ease the tensions simmering between countries but press played the major spoil sport in creating war psychology amongst the masses.

- H) Personal ambitions of leaders were also responsible for the First World War. Kaiser William II of Germany wanted to build up naval supremacy and was not willing to accept any compromise. Russian Czar and his wife were overly ambitious and was instrumental in provoking Serbia against Austria-Hungary.
- I) Rivalry between Austria and Serbia deteriorated the international situation. Austria-Hungary wanted to expand its empire by annexing Slav territories and having access to seas. On the other hand, Serbia represented Slav nationalism and was working for the union of Southern Slavs. The tension between these two was further exacerbated by the intervention of Russian Czar and his wife.
- J) The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, Austrian heir apparent and his wife on June 28, 1914 hit the final nail in the coffin. The allegation was put on Slav extremists of Serbia. Austria gave 48 hours ultimatum and demanded – to stop all anti Austrian propaganda, to arrest and prosecute the Serbian authorities involved in the assassination, to dissolve the terrorist organizations, and to allow Austrian officials to visit to participate in the trial of conspirators. Serbia agreed to most of these conditions but Russia promised assistance to Serbia that made the latter change her attitude. Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia and other countries soon joined in.

Germany, even after the war had started, persuaded Austria to adopt a soft approach. Russia mobilized its forces on July 30, 1914 and came to the aid of Serbia. Germany asked Russia to withdraw and when Russia did not oblige, Germany launched an attack on Serbia and Russia on August 1, 1914. France was also an ally of Russia. Germany also attacked France on August 3 and invaded Belgium to enter France from Belgium borders. Britain too entered the war as it wanted to protect Belgian neutrality. Bulgaria and Turkey joined on the side of Germany and Austria-Hungary. They were known as Central Powers. France, Russia, Britain, Serbia and many other countries were called Allied and Associated powers. Italy remained neutral for some time but then joined Allies when Britain promised her territories after the war. Germany forced United States to enter the war after the former were sinking US ships in the Atlantic. Russia withdrew from war after the Bolshevik Revolution. Germany surrendered unconditionally in November 1918. Central powers were defeated and peace treaties were imposed on them.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- Note:** i) Use the space given below for answers.
ii) See the end of Unit for tips for your answer.

1) Explain the causes of First World War.

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3.4.2 Peace Treaties

Number of peace treaties were signed between the Allies and Central Powers during 1919-1920 and the most important of them was The Treaty of Versailles signed between Allies and defeated Germany. Separate treaties were signed with other defeated powers- Treaty of St. German with Austria on September 10, 1919 and Treaty of Neuilly with Bulgaria on November 27, 1919; Treaty of Trianon with Hungary on June 4, 1920.

3.4.3 Treaty of Versailles

It was the most humiliating treaty imposed on Germany. The German delegates were not even consulted. They were invited to Paris but were put in far away hotels surrounded by barbed wires and policemen. They were called only when the draft was ready for the handover. And the second time, they were called for signing it. German delegation was not allowed to sit on the main table and they were escorted by armed guards like criminals. The provisions in the Treaty were also very harsh. Germany lost territories practically from all the four sides and were distributed to most of her neighbouring countries. She also lost overseas territories. In total, she lost fifteen per cent of her territory and one tenth of her population. Huge reparation costs were imposed on Germany to recover losses made by victors. She was crippled militarily. Her army's strength was reduced, was not allowed to have naval aircrafts, submarines and air force. The objective of Treaty of Versailles was to end war and ensure lasting peace. But the Second World War began just after 20 years, 2 months and 4 days after signing of Treaty. League of Nations failed to prevent the outbreak of the Second World War.

3.5 THE SECOND WORLD WAR

The Second World War began with the German attack on Poland on September 1, 1939. Britain and France came in defence of Poland and launched an attack on Germany on September 3, 1939. Soon many countries waged war on Germany. Japan attacked China. Italy remained neutral for sometime but finally joined Germany in June 1940. After Germany had victories over many countries, she launched war against Soviet Union on June 22, 1941. USA entered war after Japan bombarded Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. It was fought between the Allies (Britain, France, Soviet Union, USA and their allies) and Axis powers (Germany, Italy and Japan). It ended with the unconditional surrender of Italy, Germany and Japan.

3.5.1 Causes of the Second World War

- 1) **Treaty of Versailles:** The treaty was a diktat on Germany. France was defeated by Germany in 1871 and wanted to avenge this insult. In Paris conference, France humiliated Germany and the treaty deprived her of her territories, colonies, and military strength. Hitler took the leadership and decided to avenge the insult in Paris conference.
- 2) **Failure of Collective Security System:** Collective Security system was devised after the First World War to provide security to the victim of aggression by either imposing economic sanctions on the aggressor or by lending military support. This was to be done under the auspices of

international organization, League of Nations. But League of Nations proved ineffective. During the inter war years in 1931, Japan invaded China and took control of Manchuria province. Japan defended her act by stating it was a police action and not an aggression. League of Nations believed in the promises of Japan that it would vacate from Manchuria once the safety of life and property of Japanese are assured but it did not do it. Rather Japan established puppet Manchukuo regime. When League of Nations asked member nations not to recognize it, Japan being a permanent member and big power left the international organization. In 1935, Italy waged a war on Abyssinia and brought her under Italian empire. League of Nations imposed economic sanctions and declared Italy as an aggressor. Since no military action was taken, Italy did not care much. League of Nations did not take any action against Germany when she repudiated military clauses of Versailles Treaty, remilitarized Rhineland or annexed Austria or dismembered Czechoslovakia. Failure of collective security system caused another World War.

- 3) **Failure of Disarmament:** Paris Peace conference decided that the ultimate objective of world peace could be ensured if the armaments are reduced to a point of defense. But none of the countries took it seriously and the horde for arms continued. Germany was disarmed and victor nations were to be disarmed later. The latter never did it. Germany left League of Nations and declared formally that she was no longer bound by Treaty of Versailles. Thus, Germany began the accumulation of weapons that paved the way for armed conflict.
- 4) **World Economic Crisis:** It began in 1929 with sudden stoppage of American loans to European countries. Germany was heavily dependent on loans for its industrial progress. It proved to be the worst affected country where 7lakhs people were left unemployed. Germany stopped making payments of reparation. Nazi dictatorship under Adolf Hitler took over the reins of the country. Japan also took advantage of economic crisis and established puppet Manchukuo regime in Manchuria in 1932. Italy also conquered Abyssinia.
- 5) **Rome-Berlin-Tokyo Axis:** Germany, Italy and Japan formed an anti-communist front by concluding Anti Comintern Pact in 1936-37. It was aimed at imperialist expansion. They discouraged peaceful settlement of disputes and glorified war. They victimized smaller nations like China, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Albania and Poland. Their aggressions and war like acts went unpunished.
- 6) **Problem of National Minorities:** Large national minorities were left in new nation states created in Europe after the First World War. For example: Large German minorities were in Poland and Czechoslovakia in the company of non-Germans, Russian minorities were in Poland and Rumania; Hungarian minorities were in Rumania and Yugoslavia; and German and Slav minorities were in Italy. This aroused the feeling of dissatisfaction and fear among minorities. Hitler aroused the sentiments of national minorities and demanded union with their member states. He annexed Austria and destroyed and dismembered Czechoslovakia and invaded Poland to bring Germany under one political umbrella.

- 7) **Failure of League of Nations:** The international organization was formed with the objective of maintaining peace and harmony at the world level. But it could not protect smaller states against aggression by big powers. USA itself did not become the member of League of Nations despite it being the principal architect of the League and promoter of disarmament and collective security. Germany and Russia were not invited to become its members. Germany joined the League in 1926 but left it in 1933. USSR came in 1934 and was expelled after invasion of Finland. Japan exited in 1933 and Italy in 1937. There were many other loopholes in the organization. Decisions could be taken only through unanimous vote that was difficult to get. It did not have its own armed forces and therefore could not prevent the attack. Most of the members paid only lip service to the ideals of League.

- 8) **German attack on Poland:** On September 1, 1939 Germany attacked Poland. When Britain and France ignored USSR’s attempt to ally with them, Hitler entered into a non-aggression pact with Stalin. The two countries had resolved to divide Eastern Europe into their spheres of influence. Hitler wanted justice for his German minorities in Poland and therefore, he attacked Poland in the West and USSR moved its troops in Poland from East. Britain and France had assured Poland of their assistance in case of any attack. Therefore, they attacked Germany to defend Poland. Many other countries launched an attack on Germany that led to Second World War.

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

- Note:** i) Use the space given below for answers
ii) See the end of Unit for tips for your answer
- 1) Explain the causes of Second World War.

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3.5.2 The Second World War Begins

Germany attacked Poland on September 1, 1939 and USSR came to the aid of Germany to divide its territories. Italy did not enter the war till 1940 but when France was on the verge of surrender, Italy declared war on France from the side of Germany. League of Nations expelled USSR when she attacked Finland. After Germany had defeated most of her European neighbours, she attacked Soviet Union on 22 June 1941. United States was opposed to the war. Neutrality Act was passed in 1937 that prohibited sale of armaments to all countries engaged in future wars. But when the war broke out and Germany was attacking the Western democracies, America weakened the Neutrality Act. America came up with Cash and Carry Act in 1939 that allowed countries at war to buy weapons in cash and put those weapons in their own ships. Thus, USA began supplying armaments to friendly countries such as Britain and China.

USA finally entered the war in December 1941. America and Japan had tense relations. In July 1941, France agreed to Japan on the right to set up naval and air bases in Indo-China. America in response froze Japanese assets. On December 6, President Roosevelt made a personal request to Japanese Emperor to maintain peace. But, on December 7, Japan bombarded American naval fleet based at Pearl Harbor. Few hours later, Japan declared war on USA and British Empire. On December 11, USA was attacked by Germany and Italy. The war assumed global proportions. Italy surrendered unconditionally on September 3, 1943. But Germans entered Rome and the war continued. Allies captured Rome on June 4, 1944. On May 7, 1945 German government surrendered unconditionally all land, sea and air forces of the Reich. The war in Europe ended on May 8, 1945. The Second World War finally ended with Japan being occupied by Americans. On 6 August 1945, America dropped the first ever atom bomb on the city of Hiroshima and on 9 August, 1945 on Nagasaki. On August 10, 1945 Japan asked for peace but the surrender documents were signed only on September 2, 1945.

3.6 LET US SUM UP

In ancient times, humans gave up their nomadic style of living in favour of permanent settlement. Urbanization also took its root after agriculture. This was followed by advent of trade and communication. However, this progress was soon challenged by the Dark Ages, which brought the reign of superstition and religion while logic and rationality took a backseat. The Dark Ages soon ended for betterment of society and European civilization became the dominant in international relations. The rule of West brought the ideas of rationality, logic, debate and reason. The industrial revolution brought in the provision of basic necessities, comfort of industrial goods and further development of means of communication and transportation. But the greed of acquiring more profits led to rise of imperialism and colonialism. The two World Wars in the first half of the 20th century was a result of the fight to retain possession of colonies and acquire more areas.

3.7 REFERENCES

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3.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) You answer should highlight following points
 - Renaissance highlighted ideas of reason, rationality, scientific temper, debate and critical enquiry
 - It led to the growth of technological advance and scientific civilization

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) You answer should highlight following points
 - Rise of nationalism after French Revolution in 1789
 - Economic imperialism
 - Formation of secret alliances
 - Arms race
 - Absence of an effective international organization etc

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

- 1) You answer should highlight following points
 - Treaty of Versailles
 - Failure of Collective Security System
 - Failure of Disarmament
 - World Economic Crisis
 - Rome- Berlin-Tokyo Axis
 - Problem of National Minorities
 - Failure of League of Nation
 - German attack on Poland