

Scope of Syllabus

Rise of Dictatorships

Causes for the rise of Fascism in Italy and the rise of Nazism in Germany. A comparative study of Mussolini's Fascist and Hitler's Nazi ideologies.

IMPORTANT TERMS, EVENTS, PERSONS AND DATES

- **Hitler** : He was the dictator of Germany and was responsible for the World War II.
- **Mussolini** : He was the dictator of Italy and brought fascism in Italy.
- **Dictatorship** : Dictatorship is an anti-thesis of democracy. It is a rule by a dictator who has got total power of a country which he rules without popular consent.
- **Fascio** : The Italian word "*Fascio*" means *a bundle of sticks tied together*, which signifies that strength lies in unity.
- **Appeasement** : By the policy of appeasement, one means the policy of conciliating an aggressive power at the cost of some other weak country. Britain, America, France, all followed the policy of appeasement before the Second World War.

Rise of Dictatorships in Italy and Germany

The inter-war period (1919-1939 A.D.) saw the rise of dictatorships in Italy and Germany. Though the First World War was fought to "*make the world safe for democracy*", yet the unsettled economic

and political conditions after the War paved the way for the termination of democracy in both these countries.

Dictatorship is an anti-thesis of democracy. It gives no rights to people, tolerates neither opposition nor criticism. It envisages one party rule, controlled by one leader with total authority in his hands.

The Causes of the Rise of Fascist Dictatorship in Italy :

In Italy totalitarianism emerged in the shape of Fascism under the leadership of Benito Mussolini. It emerged as a movement in the Post World War I period not only to meet the challenges of the international communist movement but also to tackle the various economic, political and social



Mussolini and Hitler

problems which confronted Italy. The following were the main causes of the rise of Fascism :

1. Dissatisfaction with the Peace Treaties : Italy had joined the First World War on the side of Britain and France in 1915 A.D. She hoped to get large territories. But the *Paris Peace Treaties* gave her nothing from the defeated German and Turkish empires. So among the Italians a feeling developed that they "*had won the War, but lost the peace.*" The Italians felt badly cheated by their Wartime Allies.

2. Economic Crisis : The War had caused a great economic strain on Italy's economy. At the end of the War, thousands of soldiers, discharged from the army, were now **unemployed**. Even the employed workers were underpaid and their working conditions were not satisfactory at all. There was steep *price rise* and *inflation* in the country. This reduced production and added to the miseries of the common people. Moreover, **War debts** and *deficit budgets* hit them even worst. Trade and commerce declined. It appeared that Italy was heading towards a **communist revolution**, as had happened in **Russia**. So the capitalists in Italy gave financial support to **Mussolini** in the rise of Fascism.

3. Inefficient and Weak Democratic Governments : In 1919 A.D., a *parliamentary government*, based on *male adult franchise*, was introduced in Italy for the first time. But the electorate failed to give a clear majority to any political party. Between 1919 and 1922 six coalition governments were formed in Italy. There came a series of short-lived coalition governments in Italy, with neither consistency nor continuity in their policies. These governments were unable to deal effectively with the frequent *strikes and riots* in the country. In the communist sponsored strikes, the workers often broke the machinery and captured the factories. But the general people and especially, the industrialists, were sick of these strikes and sabotages, etc. They wanted strong leadership to handle the crisis. This was provided by the **Fascist Party** under their leader, **Benito Mussolini**.

4. Fascist Propaganda : It was in this situation that Mussolini formed the Fascist Party in March, 1919. He was a journalist by profession. He emphasized that a strong State was necessary to take the Italian nation forward. Benito Mussolini supported aggressive nationalism. He attracted ex-soldiers, salaried persons, farmers, workers and young people. They formed different groups called **Fascios**. The industrialists were willing to give him financial help, if he fought against the communists and the *socialists*.

5. Class Conflicts : The economy was in crisis and the workers were agitating for higher wages and better conditions of work. Italy seemed to be heading towards a *communist revolution*. The businessmen, landlords and industrialists, viewed the growing strength of *labour unions* with alarm. They provided financial support to fascism to suppress the workers.

6. Rise of totalitarian Ideologies : The **philosophy of Engels**, with great intellectual depth had flourished in Italy for years. But irrational and anti-intellectual philosophy of **Alfred Rocco** appealed to the masses as it glorified power.

In **Russia**, after the **Revolution of 1917**, political power was in the hands of one party. The government had been using terror to enforce obedience. These ideas appealed to the masses in Italy and Germany.

7. Charismatic leader : Mussolini was called *Duce (leader)* as he was able to attract, influence and inspire people by his personal qualities.

Fascism – Its Meaning

The word, Fascism is derived from the Italian word, **Fascio**, meaning a *bundle of sticks*, signifying that strength lies in unity. "**Unity, Strength and Authority**" are the **watchwords** of **Fascism**. Thus, Fascism is a system or form of dictatorship in which the whole authority of the state is vested in a single person. All citizens must obey him without rhyme or reason.



Rise of Mussolini

In 1922 A.D., the Communists began a general strike in Italy. They created chaos and disorder everywhere. Mussolini formed the Fascist Party in March 1919 which attracted people from all sections of society – ex-soldiers, farmers, workers, salaried persons and the youths. In 1921, elections were held in Italy. Mussolini's party could not get majority. It won only 35 seats as against 122 seats of the socialists. Yet the Fascists grew in number and power. The Socialists refused to co-operate with Giolitto (Prime Minister) Government and called a strike. The Fascists feel confident enough to stage their march to Rome (Mussolini's March on Rome) to crush the strike. Thousands of his Fascist armed men, known as **Black Shirts**, (wore black uniform) attacked Rome on October 28, 1922. They took over whatever came their way. **King Victor Emmanuel III of Italy** invited Mussolini to become the **Prime Minister**. Mussolini became the *real ruler of Italy*. He declared himself as the **Duce**, i.e., the leader of the country. He began the *reign of terror*. The Communists and the Trade Unionists were arrested, imprisoned and executed.

The Main Principles of Fascism and Mussolini's Aims

The following were the main principles of Fascism and Mussolini's Aims :

1. Opposition to democracy, rights and liberties of the people. There must be total stress on **duties** and **obligations**.
2. There must be the **rule of a single party** and a **single leader**, with full authority in his hands.
3. There must be **absence of opposition**. No criticism of the leader on any account was allowed.
4. **State** was more important than the individual, who must bow before it.
5. Emphasis must be laid on *nationalism*, *national spirit* and *national unity*.
6. There must be full support for imperialist and aggressive foreign policy to make the country gain in status in international community.

7. They favoured equal control over all sections of society, i.e., capitalists, industrialists, landlords, labourers, peasants and artisans.



In Italy, Benito Mussolini, Duce, rekindled his country's pride through a military-style dictatorship. He provided jobs in a time of high unemployment by starting major building projects. Mussolini came to power in October 1922 A.D. following his 'March on Rome' – an armed demonstration that forced Italy's King Victor Emmanuel III to grant him absolute power.

8. They regarded quality more important than quantity and the Fascist leaders who embodied the will, sentiments and emotions of the people were symbols of a nation's pride.

Impact of the Rise of Fascist Dictatorship

Benito Mussolini remained the **dictator of Italy** from **1922 to 1945**, till his death. The impact of the rise of Fascist Dictatorship in Italy is mentioned below :

(i) Restoration of Law and Order : Mussolini restored law and order by banning all other political parties.

(ii) Economic Reforms and Prosperity : Mussolini's economic policies laid emphasis on self-reliance. He brought the economy on track. He reduced government expenditure, improved basic infrastructure and reclaimed land for agriculture.

(iii) Aggressive Foreign Policy : Mussolini promoted *national spirit in Italy* through his Fascios. He made military training compulsory for the youth and made efforts to enhance the naval

power. He also followed a vigorous and aggressive foreign policy to revive the past glories of the Roman Empire and to make Italy a great nation. He used to proclaim, "**Italy must expand or perish**".

Besides these positive impacts, there were many negative effects of Fascism in Italy. All efforts were made to curb political freedom. After gaining power, Mussolini became a dictator and took all the military and civil powers into his own hands. All political parties except the Fascists were banned. Press was censored. The freedom of speech and organising meetings were also prohibited. Mussolini crushed his opponents brutally.

But all this did not help him and Italy much. She joined the World War II against Britain and France, and was defeated in 1943 A.D. With it, the Fascism also came to an end. **Rome** was conquered by the **Allies** in 1944 A.D.

The Rise of the Nazi Dictatorship in Germany

The rise of Nazism was the greatest event in the world history.

Nazism, also known as **National Socialism** (German : *National Sozialismus*), refers primarily to the ideology and practices of the *National Socialist German Workers' Party* under **Adolf Hitler**; and the policies adopted by the government of Nazi Germany from 1933 to 1945, a period also known as the *Third Reich*. Among the key elements of Nazism were anti-parliamentarism, Pan-Germanism, welfare state ideology (though only for "fit" Germans), racism, collectivism, anti-semitism, opposition to economic liberalism and political liberalism, anti-communism, along with totalitarianism.



Causes of the Rise of Nazi Dictatorship in Germany :

1. Political Instability in Germany : After her defeat in the First World War, Germany also faced economic crisis, revolts, disorder, lawlessness,

unemployment, rise of prices, etc. **William Kaiser II** was unable to solve these problems. He was forced to abdicate and he fled to Holland on November 10, 1918 to save his life. Elections were held to the new Constituent Assembly on January 19, 1919 which met at Weimar, and adopted the new Constitution, which set up a democratic government called the **Weimar Republic**. But it failed to solve the current problems of the Germans. Under the Weimar Republic, there existed *political instability*. Between 1919-1933 A.D., as many as *21 coalition governments* were formed and fell. Democracy failed to give any relief to the people. The Germans felt only a strong man could restore the past prestige of Germany. **Hitler** promised a **stable** and **strong** government. He won the support of the people. Moreover, Nazi party did not encounter any effective resistance as there was absence of any strong opposition party.

2. Reaction to the humiliating Treaty of Versailles :

The Treaty of Versailles imposed very humiliating terms on Germany, like paying huge war penalties to the victors, ceding chunks of German territory to them including her overseas colonies and disbanding German armies. The Treaty of Versailles was signed by the officers of the **German Democratic Republic** in Paris in 1919 A.D. The people began to look upon the **Weimar Republic** (which accepted the terms and conditions of the humiliating Treaty of Versailles) as a symbol of *national disgrace* and an act of betrayal of the German people.

3. The Economic Disaster : Unemployment, inflation, price-rise, ruin of German trade and industry, coupled with general world depression created an economic disaster of the worst order in Germany. The Government's policy of borrowing failed to solve the economic crisis. To cap it all, Germany was to pay *heavy War reparations* out of her *crippled economy*. Hitler promised relief to the people on the economic front and he won their confidence.

4. Threat of Communism : The Communists in Germany tried to stage a revolution on the pattern of the **Soviet Revolution of 1917 A.D.** Hitler feared that if the Communists succeeded

in their plans in Germany, it will make her a satellite of Soviet Russia. So he exposed the Communists before the people. As a result, they preferred to join the Nazi Party than the Communist Party.



MADMAN OR 'GREAT LEADER' ?

Adolf Hitler (1889–1945 A.D.) became the leader of the German National Socialist (Nazi) Party in 1921 A.D. After Germany's defeat in World War I, he wanted to rebuild a mighty German nation which would control Europe for the next 1000 years. These wild-perhaps mad-ambitions appealed to Germany's wounded pride. Hitler also attracted followers by his extraordinary skills as a public speaker, and by the power and ruthlessness of his personality.

5. Hitler's Dynamic Personality : Hitler had a dynamic personality. He was influential. He was a great organizer, an excellent orator and a tireless



Inflation 1923-24: A woman feeds her tiled stove with money. At that time, burning money was less expensive than buying firewood !

worker. His logic was convincing and his appeals touched the reasons and the emotions of the people.

Hitler's Rise to Power or the Rise of the Nazi Party :

The rise of the Nazi Party and the rise of Hitler to power are interlinked. Adolf Hitler was born in 1889 A.D. in Austria. He fought on the German side in the First World War. He got the "Iron Cross" for his bravery.

In 1919 A.D., Hitler joined a small political group called the **German Workers' Party** in Munich. Soon he became its **Fuhrer** i.e., the leader. He changed the name of the party to **National Socialist Party** which became more famous by the name of the **Nazi Party**.

In 1923 A.D., Hitler had attempted a coup against Weimer Republic. This event is known as Beer Hall Putsch. His attempts failed and was arrested and jailed for five years. In the jail, he wrote his famous autobiography named **Mein Kampf** (My Struggle).



Mein Kampf (English : My Struggle/My Battle) is a book by Adolf Hitler.

The book Contains :

- (i) Land reforms
- (ii) Racial superiority of the Germans.
- (iii) Elimination of Jews
- (iv) Abrogation of the Peace Treaties.
- (v) Social security for workers.
- (vi) Nationalisation of trusts or groups of companies.

After his release from the jail, Hitler re-organized the Nazi Party from 1925-1929 A.D. A past master in the art of propaganda, he defamed the Weimar Republic for the sufferings of the people.

In the election of July 1932, the Nazis polled more than 13 million votes and captured 230 seats in the **Reichstag** but failed to get the majority.

The Nazi Party made the functioning of the coalition government impossible. Ultimately, President Hindenburg of Germany was compelled by these circumstances to appoint **Hitler as the Chancellor** (*i.e.*, the Prime Minister) of the coalition government in January, 1933.

Immediately after coming to power, Hitler got passed the **Enabling Act**, which authorised his Government to take any action without the approval of the Reichstag. Thus, without even having the majority, Hitler became all powerful. The Nazi regime practically became a *one-man show*. President Hindenburg died on August 2, 1934. On that very day, Hitler combined in his own person, the offices of the Chancellor (*i.e.*, Prime Minister) and the President. From then onwards, he assumed the title of the **Fuhrer** *i.e.*, **Leader** and became the **absolute dictator of Germany**.



Hitler after coming to power.

Main Features of Nazism and Aims of Hitler :

Hitler's cult, his creed and philosophy were called **Nazism**. The following were its main principles and Hitler's aims :

1. The people exist for the State, rather than the State for the people. He believed in a **Totalitarian State**.
2. To tolerate no opposition or criticism and to allow no party formation other than his own.
3. To put an end to parliamentary institutions and the democratic government.

4. To have full control on education, press, radio and other means of propaganda.
5. To crush communism and liberalism.
6. To uphold the belief in the superiority of the German race and blood, and to establish that it was their destiny to rule over inferior races of the world.
7. To turn out the Jews from Germany, because they had caused great hardship to the German people due to their greed and conspiracy, during the First World War.
8. To denounce the Treaty of Versailles as disgraceful and to regain the lost or ceded German territories.
9. To make Germany a strong military power and to carry the ***Swastika*** mark all over the world.
10. To inculcate the spirit of nationalism among the German people.

Answer the following questions.

1. Discuss any four reasons for the rise of Nazism.
2. Write any five principles of Fascism.
3. Discuss ~~Hitler's~~ Hitler's rise to power.
4. Write any four impact of ~~the~~ Fascism in Italy.