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# Distance Learning Programme

UPSC Mains

## World History & Post Independence India







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# **WORLD HISTORY & POST INDEPENDENCE INDIA**

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# Decolonization & New Imperialism

## 5

### Chapter

Decolonization is a process which is the reverse of colonization i.e. to say that it denotes the withdrawal of the colonial powers from their colonies. This withdrawal is not partial or sublime, but real territorial withdrawal so that control of political and economic power is shifted from the colonial powers to the locals.

## Decolonization

Historically speaking, decolonization occurred in three major phases. The first phase was in the late eighteenth century and early 19<sup>th</sup> century, starting with the creation of the United States and ending with the freedom of Spanish and Portuguese colonies in the American continent. The second wave occurred in the aftermath of World War I, made possible by the collapse of the Russian, German, Habsburg, and Ottoman Empires. The third phase, which was also the most massive one, occurred after the end of World War-II and the rise of US and USSR as the only two superpowers.

## Causes of Decolonization (First Phase)

There were several factors that encouraged the first phase of decolonization. Some of the important ones are the American Revolution, the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars.

### *The American Revolution*

The rebellion by the Thirteen Colonies of North America against the Great Britain and their eventual victory in the form of establishing USA inspired a wave of revolutions in other parts of the continent. The American war of independence demonstrated that the people of the colony had every right to be free from the mother country and the same can be achieved by a united effort.

### *The French Revolution (1789-1799)*

The French Revolution ushered an era of radical change in French as well as European society. Driven by the Enlightenment principles of democracy, citizenship, and inalienable rights of people, common people fought for freedom and equality. These ideals spread to the Spanish and Portuguese colonies, giving a strong ideological impetus to the revolutionary movements emerging there. The Enlightenment spurred the desire for social and economic reform to spread throughout Latin America and the Iberian Peninsula. The political reforms that were implemented and the many constitutions that were written both in Spain and throughout the Spanish world, during the wars of independence, were influenced by these factors.



## ***The Napoleonic Wars***

These were a series of wars fought between Napoleon's army and alliances involving Britain, Prussia, Spain, Portugal, Russia and Austria at different times, from 1799 to 1815. Wherever and whenever Napoleon emerged victorious, he fundamentally altered the political dynamics of the defeated territory. In the context of Spain, Napoleon forced Carlos IV and King Fernando VII (in May 1808) to give up the claim for the throne, and installed his own brother, Joseph Bonaparte as the Spanish king. This disrupted the political stability of both Spain and its colonies. Cities throughout Spain and its colonies in America, each formed governing bodies, primarily consisting of local elites called juntas. The prime motive of these juntas in taking power over their communities was that "in absence of the king, Fernando VII, their sovereignty devolved temporarily back to the community". All colonies established their own juntas and though swore loyalty to the captive Fernando VII, each ruled different and diverse parts of the colony. However, after Fernando VII was restored to the Spanish crown in 1814, his policy of restoring absolute power antagonized both the juntas and his subjects. The violence used by the royalist forces and the prospect of being ruled by Fernando finally shifted the majority of the colonist population in favour of separation from Spain.

## **Decolonization in the New World**

### ***Haitian Revolution***

The Haitian revolution was a successful anti-slavery and anti-colonial insurrection that took place in the French colony from 1791 to 1804 resulting in the establishment of the sovereign state of Haiti. It had a huge impact on the institution of slavery throughout the Americas. The Haitian revolution is the only instance in the history wherein a slave revolution led to the founding of a free state, ruled by non-whites and former captives. Most historians agree that the revolution was a watershed moment in the freedom struggle of the Atlantic World. The most important aspect of the Haitian Revolution was that it challenged long-held beliefs about black inferiority and of the enslaved person's capacity to achieve and maintain freedom. The ability of slaves to organize and mobilize their efforts and withstand the full might of a European power became a source of inspiration throughout the continent.

### ***Freedom of Other Latin American Countries***

The aforesaid phenomenon of Napoleonic war was the reason for several revolutions which swept across Latin America and resulted in the independence of several Spanish colonies during the first quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Argentina became independent following the May revolution in 1816. Bolivia became independent after a 16 year long military struggle in 1825. Chile broke out from Spain in 1810. After a 12 year long armed struggle against the Spanish rule, Ecuador became independent in 1822. Mexico after a tortuous struggle from 1808 to 1821, became free from Spanish control. Uruguay became independent following the Treaty of Montevideo in 1828. Peru proclaimed its independence on July 28, 1821, following long military campaigns led by Simon Bolivar. Venezuela became independent from Spanish rule in 1819-20 again following the efforts of Simon Bolivar.

Brazil, a Portuguese colony, achieved its independence in a relatively peaceful transfer of power wherein Dom Pedro I (also Pedro IV of Portugal), son of the Portuguese king Dom João VI, proclaimed the country's independence in 1822 and became Brazil's first Emperor.

This was generally peacefully accepted by the crown in Portugal, although some guerrilla wars were fought between Portuguese troops and civilians. Portugal recognized Brazil's independence 3 years later upon compensation.

### ***Pattern of Decolonization in Latin America***

Decolonization in Latin American countries, particularly in Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay was marked by a common pattern of an armed struggle which was waged against the forces loyal to the Spanish monarch by the revolutionaries who were members of the local elite who largely took advantage of the weakness of the Spanish colonial government in these countries after the defeat of Spain in the Peninsular War and subsequent removal of King Ferdinand VII. Absence of a rightful king in the Spanish throne reduced the legitimacy of office of the Viceroy and as a result the right of Viceroys to govern came under scrutiny. The local elites, troubled by the Spanish trade restrictions and taxes, utilized the opportunity and mobilized the masses to wage an armed struggle against the establishment. These local elites promised the political and economic concessions to the masses, which were restricted or denied by the Spanish colonial government, to seek support from them. They were supported by foreign powers who were adversarial to Spain and taking advantage of the weakness of the colonial power, were somehow able to wrest freedom from them.

In other countries such as Mexico wherein the struggle for freedom was prolonged, was mainly because of the differences cropping among the revolutionaries themselves on account of various changes in circumstances which threw different propositions for consideration. Therefore, the history of decolonization of Latin America is basically an account of military campaigns where the role of interests largely preceded ideology and strategic power dominated diplomacy. The struggle threw up some extra-ordinary military leaders like Simon Bolivar, who are remembered for their daring and tactics till date.

## **New Imperialism**

The term 'new imperialism' is used to refer to a new wave of imperialism that happened in the late 1800s and early 1900s which is characterized by the colonial expansion by European powers, the United States, and Japan.

### **Causes of New Imperialism**

#### ***Economic Reasons***

At the heart of imperialism were the economic benefits emanating from the industrial revolutions that could only be maintained and enhanced if the mother country had three advantages. One, it should have an uninterrupted supply of cheap industrial raw materials. Secondly, it should have unrestricted access to markets for selling their industrial products and thirdly, it should have access to cheap labour. All these three aspects were addressed by the access to colonies. Once the colonies were subjugated politically, they could be forced to sign one sided treaties granting the colonial powers unrestricted or duty free access to their markets. Now, these products were prepared out of factories which were run by cheap labourers again sourced from the colonies, most of the time they were sourced out of the huge slave trade racket which was being run across the world by these colonial powers.

With the development of means of transportation in the form of roads, railways and steamboats, the colonizers had access to the hitherto unexplored hinterlands of these



colonies, which they utilized in brutally exploiting the natural resources of the colonies. Now, since the industrial revolution had not reached to countries of Asia and Africa, these countries became prime targets of Imperialism. All these factors cumulatively contributed to make their products cheaper so that they can compete with those of the other European players who were in the market employing the same strategy. This cutting edge competition between these powers could be trumped if a particular player had duty free access to a country's market while others had to pay an arbitrary amount of duties, specifically calibrated to drive these players out of the market.

Therefore, in the context of such an economic environment wherein the domestic market was very small and very much already saturated, the only way to get rich was by politically subjugating other countries so as to increase one's wealth over and above others. This generated wealth was further utilized in improving the military capabilities which was thereafter employed in satisfying even more imperialistic ambitions thereby creating a self sustaining cycle of growth and expansion, all of which was driven by the engine of imperialism. Therefore, the more imperialistic a country is, the bigger empire it builds for itself and greater military power it becomes, which in-turn helps it to become even more imperialistic and so on.

### ***Extreme Nationalism: Pride and Power***

The later part of the nineteenth century was a period of intense nationalism. Germany and Italy had just succeeded in becoming unified nations. Nationalism in the late nineteenth century came to be associated with chauvinism. Many nations developed myths of their superiority over other people. Each one felt that it too must have colonies to add to its prestige and power. Imperialism became the fashion of the age. Writers and speakers in England, France and Germany opened institutions to promote the idea of imperialism, and took great pride in calling their territories as empires.

Imperialist countries took over some places in Asia and Africa because of their military or strategic importance. For example, England needed Port Said, Aden, Hong Kong, Singapore and Cyprus – not to protect England, but to protect her conquered lands and trade route to India from rival nations. At these places she established naval bases and coaling stations to strengthen her overseas power. Rival nations got similar bases elsewhere. Acquiring a colony also had a chain reaction, i.e. if a country acquired a colony, it needed another to protect it and so on.

### ***The 'Civilizing Mission': Men and Ideas***

In the minds of many Europeans, imperialist expansion was very noble. They considered it a way of bringing civilization to the 'backward' peoples of the world. The famous English writer, Rudyard Kipling asked his countrymen to shoulder what he called 'the white man's burden'. Jules Ferry, in France, said, 'Superior races have the duty of civilizing the inferior races'.

Christian missionaries, dedicated to spreading Christianity, also played their part in promoting the idea of imperialism. Usually they went alone into unknown areas in a spirit of duty. Very often they were followed by profiteering traders and soldiers. Wars often took place to protect the missionaries. All this seemed quite natural to most Western people who considered it their nation's destiny to civilize and Christianize the peoples of Asia and Africa. President McKinley of the United States summed up the reasons for annexing the Philippines in these words- "There was nothing left to do but to take them all, and to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them as our fellow men for whom Christ also died".



### ***Role of Explorers and Adventurers***

They also helped in spreading imperialism. They went into unknown or little known territories and brought back reports that often indicated opportunities for trade and development. On the basis of such reports, a trading post would first be set up; next, gradually the explorer's home government would arrange to take over 'protection' of the entire area around the trading post. Then this government would proceed to claim the entire territory. The work of explorers and adventurers was particularly important in Europe's taking over of Africa.

### ***Backwardness of Asia and Africa***

The most important condition favouring the imperialist conquest of Asia and Africa was that the Industrial Revolution had not come to this part of the world. The craftsmen produced goods of fine quality that Westerners admired and desired. But they relied entirely on hand tools which meant production on a small scale. In comparison with the production of Western countries in the nineteenth century, Asian and African methods were backward. Also, because of the lack of knowledge that the Industrial Revolution had brought to the West, the two continents were militarily unable to stand up to the armed might and power of Europe.

The governments of the countries of Asia and Africa were very weak in the nineteenth century, though in ancient and medieval times powerful empires had existed there. In the nineteenth century, the old ways of governing were still followed, even though they had outlived their usefulness. Strong nation-states in the modern sense had not developed. The people's loyalties were still to local princes as in feudal times, or to tribal chieftains. These rulers cared little for the welfare of the people. These conditions helped to explain how small bands of Westerners succeeded in gaining power and finally with the backing of their governments, in conquering entire countries.

### ***Scramble for Africa***

#### ***Africa Before Imperialism***

In the mid 1800s, before the European domination of Africa, African people were divided into hundreds of ethnic and linguistic groups. Most continued to follow traditional beliefs, while others converted to Islam or Christianity. These groups spoke more than 1,000 different languages. Politically, they ranged from large empires that united many ethnic groups to independent villages. The largest empire in West Africa at its peak had a population of about 10 million people. Although Europeans had established contacts with Africans as early as the 1450s, they actually controlled very little land. The main reasons appear for the same are:

- European travel into the interior on a large-scale basis was virtually impossible. Europeans could not navigate African rivers that had so many rapids and cataracts and drastically changing flows. Until the introduction of steam-powered riverboats, Europeans would not be able to conduct major expeditions into the interior of Africa.
- Large networks of Africans conducted trade. These trade networks kept Europeans away from controlling the sources of trade items such as gold and ivory. These trade networks were specialized. The Chokwe, for example, devoted themselves to collecting ivory and beeswax in the Angola highlands. Others, such as the Yao carried their goods to merchants on the coast.





- Powerful African armies were able to keep the Europeans out of most of Africa for 400 years. As late as 1880, Europeans controlled only 10% of the continent's land, mainly on the coast.

### **Slave Trade**

The European penetration of Africa from the late fifteenth century onwards was confined for a long time mainly to certain coastal areas. However, even these limited contacts led to the most tragic and disastrous consequences for the people of Africa. One of the first results of these contacts was the purchase and sale of people – the slave trade. The Spanish rule in the Americas had resulted in the large-scale extermination of the original inhabitants of the Americas. The Portuguese had established a slave market in Lisbon and the Spaniards bought slaves from there and took them to their colonies in the Americas to work there. African villages were raided by slave traders and people were captured and handed over to the European traders.

Earlier, the Arabs had dominated the slave trade. Subsequently, some African chiefs also took part in the slave trade by trading slaves in exchange for firearms which the European traders sold to them. The Europeans themselves also raided the villages and enslaved the people, who were then transported. When the demand for slaves in America increased, they were sent directly from Africa by the traders.

Up to about the middle of the nineteenth century, this trade continued. Millions of Africans were uprooted from their homes and many were killed while resisting the raids on their villages by the traders. They were taken in ships as inanimate objects and in such unhygienic conditions that the sailors on the ships often revolted. Lakhs of them died during the long journey. It is estimated that not even half of the slaves captured reached America alive. The inhuman conditions under which they were forced to work on the plantations cannot even be imagined today. Extreme brutalities were inflicted on those who tried to escape. The person who killed a runaway slave was given a reward by the government. Slavery had become an integral part of the colonial system established by European countries during this period.

By the early nineteenth century, trade in slaves lost its importance in the system of colonial exploitation. Slavery was also a hindrance if the interior of Africa was to be opened to colonial exploitation. In fact, some colonial powers used the pretext of abolishing slave trade to go to war against African chiefs and kings to expand their territorial possessions. In the meantime, exploration of the interior of Africa had begun and preparations made by the European powers to impose another kind of slavery on the continent of Africa – for the direct conquest of almost entire Africa.

### **Weakness of Africa**

The interior of Africa was almost unknown to the Europeans up to about the middle of the nineteenth century. However, once they were done with the reputation of being slave traders, the speed with which the European powers conquered Africa is without a parallel. It is necessary to understand the reasons for this. They are briefly listed as follows:

- The imperialist countries were far more powerful than the African states. The economic might of the imperialist powers was much greater than the economic resources of the African States. The latter did not have the resources to fight a long war in terms of military strength.
- The Africans had outdated firearms which had been sold to them by the Europeans. They were no match for the new rifles and guns which the Europeans used.

- Politically, like Indian states in the eighteenth century, the African states were not united. There were conflicts between states and within states, and the rulers and chiefs often sought the support of the Europeans against their rivals. As a result of these conflicts, the boundaries of the African states were often changing. As against this, the imperialist countries participating in the scramble for Africa were united.

### ***Paper Partition***

The scramble had created serious rivalries among the imperialist nations. In fact, the scramble to grab the maximum of African territory in the shortest possible time was the result of these rivalries. Many a times during the scramble, war between these countries became imminent, but in almost every case, war was avoided and agreements were reached between them as to who will get which part of Africa. For example, the Anglo-German rivalries in East Africa were resolved in 1890 when Germany agreed to concede Uganda to Britain in exchange for Britain giving away to Germany.

In 1884-85, there was a Congress in Berlin, where a group of European states met and discussed how to share out Africa among themselves. No African state was represented at this Congress. Treaties were signed between European powers to settle disputes over claims to African territories among themselves.

Treaties were also signed between African rulers and chiefs, and the representatives of European governments, European companies or individuals, which were later ratified by their respective governments. These treaties were often fraudulent and bogus and in the cases where these were genuine, they were misrepresented in negotiations with other European countries and the wrong interpretations put on them were recognized by other European powers. For example, if an African ruler signed a treaty with a European country to seek the latter's support against a rival, that European country in seeking approval of other European countries interpreted it to mean that the African ruler had agreed to make his state a 'protectorate' of that European country. This interpretation was then accepted by other European powers and the process of occupation began without any hindrance from them. In this way, the partition of Africa was nearly completed by the end of the nineteenth century. This position is generally referred to as 'paper partition'. However, the actual partition took much longer and was accomplished by the use of the superior military might of the European powers to suppress the resistance by the Africans.

A look at the map of Africa after partition will show how the continent of Africa was partitioned on paper in conference rooms in Europe. About thirty percent of all boundaries in Africa are in straight lines. There were many squabbles among the European powers for territory and trading rights in Africa. For example, French and British interests collided in Egypt and Sudan. Belgium opposed an agreement in 1884 signed by Britain and Portugal, demarcating their areas of influence, as it would have resulted in denial of sea access to Congo. However, almost every-time, the overlapping claims of European colonists were resolved through negotiations in different conferences and any significant conflict was averted.

### ***African Resistance***

Across Africa, European attempts to colonize the lands were met with resistance. The contest between African states and European powers was never equal due to the Europeans' superior arms. Sometimes African societies tried to form alliances with the Europeans. They hoped the agreement would allow them to remain independent. In some cases, the Europeans did help defeat the rivals, but they then turned on their African allies. Other times, Africans resisted the Europeans with whatever forces they could raise. With the single exception of Ethiopia, all these attempts of resistance ultimately failed.





Ethiopia was the only African nation to successfully resist the Europeans. Its victory was due to one man—Menelik II. He became emperor of Ethiopia in 1889. He successfully played Italians, French, and British against each other, all of whom were striving to bring Ethiopia into their spheres of influence. In the meantime he built up a large arsenal of modern weapons purchased from France and Russia. About to sign a treaty with Italy, Menelik discovered differences between the wording of the treaty in Amharic—the Ethiopian language – and in Italian. Menelik believed he was giving up a tiny portion of Ethiopia. However, the Italians claimed all of Ethiopia as a protectorate. Meanwhile, Italian forces were advancing into northern Ethiopia. Menelik declared war and in 1896, in one of the greatest battles in the history of Africa—the Battle of Adowa—Ethiopian forces successfully defeated the Italians and maintained their nation’s independence.

### ***Impact of Colonial Rule on Africa***

European colonial rule forever altered Africans’ lives. For the most part, the effects were negative, but in some cases the Europeans brought benefits. The important points could be summarized as follows:

- Africans lost control of their land and their independence.
- Famines resulted from the change to cash crops in place of subsistence agriculture.
- Africans also suffered from a breakdown of their traditional cultures. Traditional authority figures were replaced. Homes and property were transferred with little regard to their importance to the people. Contempt for the traditional culture and admiration of European life undermined stable societies and caused identity problems for Africans.
- Slavery was perhaps one of the most gruesome and ghastly crimes which the Africans suffered. It will forever remain a blot on the face of human civilization. Millions lost their lives, millions were uprooted from their families and kinship ties were broken. These slaves suffered some of the most inhuman and humiliating treatment ever rendered by a man to another man.
- The most troublesome political legacy of the colonial period was the division of the African continent. Long-term rival chiefdoms were sometimes united, while at other times, kinship groups were split between colonies. The artificial boundaries that combined or unnaturally divided groups created problems that plagued African colonies during European occupation. These boundaries continue to create problems for the nations that evolved from the former colonies.
- On the positive side, colonialism reduced local warfare. Now, under the control of the European military, raids between rival tribes were reduced. Humanitarian efforts in some colonies improved sanitation and led to the establishment of hospitals and schools. As a result, life spans increased and literacy rates improved.
- One of the positive impacts was the economic expansion. African products came to be valued on the international market. To aid the economic growth, African colonies gained railroads, dams, and telephone and telegraph lines. But for the most part, these only benefited European business interests, not Africans’ lives.

### ***Conquest of South & Southeast Asia***

South and Southeast Asia includes Nepal, Burma, Sri Lanka, Malaya, Indonesia, Indo-China, Thailand and the Philippines. Even before the rise of the new imperialism, many of these countries were already dominated by the Europeans. Sri Lanka was first occupied by the Portuguese, then by the Dutch and finally by the British, who transformed it into