

Rise of Dictatorship

After the First World War, democracy was established in many parts of the world. But gradually, dictatorial governments were established in Russia, Germany, Italy and Spain. These states also aimed at expanding their military might. They also refused to work and cooperate with the League of Nations.

Fascism

The period between the two world wars experienced the rise of Fascism in Italy and Nazism in Germany. The word 'Fascism' has been derived from the word 'fascio' which means union or league. In Fascism, the power of the state is vested in one man only and others have to obey his orders. Fascism, which emerged in Italy, was anti-nationalist, anti-communist and anti-democratic.

Causes for the Rise of Fascism in Italy

- Italy had joined the Allies in the First World War to gain German and Turkish territories. However, she was not able to gain any Turkish and German territories. She could only get southern Tyrol and Trentino and a few coastal regions of Dalmatia. Thus, there was discontent in Italy after the end of the First World War.
- Italy suffered heavy economic losses after the end of the war. Trade, commerce and industries were ruined, and there was large-scale unemployment. Food grains were also in shortage.
- After democracy was established in Italy in 1919, no one single party was able to get a majority in the elections. This created political instability as six coalition governments were formed between 1919 and 1922. There was no mutual consensus among the parties on economic policies. The government was not able to deal with rising unemployment, strikes and frequent riots.
- There was a rise in class conflicts in the interwar period. The common people opposed the control of resources in the hands of aristocracies and rich sections of society.
- Inspired by the Russian Revolution, the communists began to spread revolutionary ideas in Italy. The peasants took away the land from landholders and workers went on strikes. The communists began to conspire overthrowing the government and capturing state power. Landlords and industrialists viewed communism with danger, and they began to support Fascism to counterbalance its effects.
- The League of Nations was a weak organisation which was not able to check the growing influence of Fascism and Nazism in Italy and Germany, respectively.
- Mussolini had an enchanting personality. He was able to win the support of the people by praising the past glories of Italy. Mussolini was often called 'Duce' which means leader.



The Fasces was a bundle of sticks bound to an axe. The Fascists referred to this ancient Roman symbol of power.

Aims of Fascism

Main aims of Fascism:

- Fascists did not believe in democracy; according to fascists, democracy widens the gulf between the rich and the poor.
- Fascists supported one party and one leader as they felt that the country could make progress only under one leader.
- Fascists wanted to control all the sections of society such as capitalists, industrialists, workers, artisans and peasants.
- Fascism laid stress on nationalism and not on individual institutions.

- Fascists favoured aggressive nationalist policies.

Fascism in Italy

- Italy was ruled by King Victor Emmanuel during the First World War. He was a weak ruler and lagged in the Industrial Revolution and in the race for colonial possessions.
- Benito Mussolini was a socialist in the beginning. When he realised that as a socialist he could not get any finances from the industrialists, he became anti-socialist. He formed different groups known as 'Fascios' who organised violence against the socialists and the communists.
- Later, these groups were organised into the Fascist Party. A conference of the members of the Fascist Party was held at Naples in October 1922. Mussolini announced that if his demands are not met, he would attack Rome. His demands were
 - Five members of the Fascist party should be included in the Cabinet.
 - New elections should be announced.
 - The government should act firmly on its foreign policy.
 - Economic reforms should be implemented at the earliest.
- These demands were not accepted by the government. Mussolini marched to Rome with his followers on 28 October 1922. Emperor Victor Emmanuel III invited Mussolini to form a new government.
- After taking over power, Mussolini appointed Fascists as prefects in the Provinces. He also organised the National Army.
- The takeover of the government by Fascists was followed by the reign of terror and within a short span of time, Mussolini became the absolute master of Italy.
- It has been said that the power to Mussolini was handed over to him because the ruling classes of Italy considered democracy and socialism as threats to their power.
- Mussolini believed in the adage, "Italy must expand or perish". He captured several territories. He conquered Abyssinia in 1936. When the League objected, Italy left the League of Nations.
- Fascism in Italy ended after the end of the Second World War. Mussolini was deposed by his own party council in 1943. He was executed in 1945. Thus, fascism came to an end in Italy.



Benito Mussolini

Impact of Fascism

Positive impact of Fascist Rule:

- Mussolini carried out several administrative and economic reforms to strengthen Italy. He also took numerous measures to stop the devaluation of the currency. He expanded agriculture and set up many hydroelectric power plants to overcome the shortage of coal.
- He took several steps to reduce unemployment. Factories and mills were nationalised and syndicates were established to improve relations between the capitalists and the workers. He also improved the transport system in Italy.
- Many new schools, colleges and libraries were set up to eradicate illiteracy.
- Measures were taken to increase the military might of the country. Military training was made compulsory and efforts were taken to improve the naval powers of Italy.
- A pact was signed between Mussolini and the pope. The pope agreed to take a subordinate position and recognise the government formed by Mussolini. The latter recognised Roman Catholicism as the state religion.

Negative impact of Fascist Rule:

- All political freedoms of the people were curbed.

- Italy became a dictatorial state, and all civil and military powers were centred in Mussolini's hands.
- All political parties except the Fascists were banned.
- Press was censored and freedom of speech was denied to the people.
- Mussolini crushed all his opponents.

Nazi Dictatorship in Germany

After the defeat of Germany in the First World War, King Kaiser Wilhelm was forced to abdicate the throne. Free and fair elections were held to the Parliament. The government was formed and a new Constitution was adopted, and Germany became a democratic republic. However, no single party was able to secure majority in the elections. Between 1919 and 1933, 21 ministries headed by 12 Chancellors were formed. The economic condition of the country deteriorated, and there were riots and attempts were made to capture power.

Hitler's Rise to Power and Fall

- Adolf Hitler was an Austrian by birth and had fought for Germany in the First World War. In 1919, he joined a small party—The German Workers Party—which later changed its name to the National Socialist Party or the Nazi party. Hitler became the leader of the party.
- He had planned to capture power by marching through Berlin. He was however arrested and jailed. It was during this period that he wrote *Mein Kampf*.
- After his release, he contested elections in July 1932, but failed to get a majority in the Reichstag (German Parliament). When the government formed under Von Papen could not function for long, President Hindenburg invited Hitler to form the government.
- After the death of Hindenburg, Hitler assumed all powers and adopted the title of 'Führer'. He abolished the Constitution, and Germany became a dictatorial nation.
- In the Second World War, Hitler was defeated by the Allied powers. He committed suicide in 1945.

Causes Leading to the Rise of Nazism

Humiliating Treaty of Versailles

- Germany was defeated in the First World War and was forced to sign the humiliating Treaty of Versailles.
- Several harsh terms were imposed on Germany by the victorious nations. Its overseas colonies were seized by the Allied powers, he had to pay a huge war indemnity of 33 billion dollars, the Rhine area was demilitarised and many of his mineral territories were captured.
- Hitler openly defied the treaty and asked the Germans to support him into building a new powerful Germany.

Growing Fear of Communism

- The communists had organised themselves in Germany, and they had succeeded in capturing many seats in the Reichstag.
- Hitler criticised the growing influence of communism and asked the Germans to vote for him as Nazis could alone check the rising tide of communism.

Economic Crisis

- The economic conditions of Germany deteriorated after her defeat in the First World War. Her industrial and agricultural production declined.
- Many countries raised tariffs on German manufactured goods and the number of unemployed youth increased.

- Hitler promised the people of economic restructuring and reorganisation of German finances after forming the government.

Rise of Militant Nationalism

Hitler assured the people that he would work to regain the lost glory of Germany and make Germany an all powerful nation. People thus began to support him.

Anti-Semitic Propaganda

- Hitler carried on anti-Semitic propaganda. He said that the Jews had conspired with the Allies during the First World War and were responsible for the defeat of Germany.
- Because of his anti-Semitic propaganda, many Germans began to support him.

Charismatic Personality of Hitler

- Hitler had a charismatic personality. He was an excellent orator; through his speeches, he made people believe that only he can work for the upliftment of Germany.
- He was a shrewd politician. He assured the people that their economic woes would come to an end after the formation of the government by the Nazis.
- He devised a new style of politics. Massive rallies and public meetings were held by the Nazis to display the strength of the party. Nazi propaganda also skilfully projected Hitler as a messiah who could deliver people from their distress. He captured the imagination of the Germans.



Hitler's excellent oratory skills won him the support of the people.

Absence of Strong Opposition

There was an absence of a strong opposition party in Germany which could challenge the ideologies and plans of the Nazis. As the Nazis did not encounter any effective resistance, Hitler became extremely popular with the people.

Aims of Nazism

- To acclaim nationalism
- To advocate rule by a great leader from a single party
- Denounce internationalism, peace and democracy
- To use force and brutality
- Wars are necessary to increase the might of the country
- To uphold the racial supremacy of the Germans and ignite hatred for the Jews

Impact of Nazism

Establishment of a Dictatorial State

- Hitler assumed dictatorial powers in Germany. He centred all powers in his hands and suppressed the opposition.
- He made Germany a unitary power from a federal power. All political parties except the Nazi and affiliated parties were declared illegal.
- A secret police known as 'Gestapo' was established which kept a check on the citizens of Germany. A right to freedom of speech was denied to the people.

Economic Reforms

Several reforms were introduced by Hitler to reconstruct the economy of the nation. Some economic reforms which were undertaken by him were

- Industrial and agricultural production was encouraged and factories were set up to provide work to the people.
- A food cooperation was set up to control food production, its pricing and distribution.
- Capitalists were encouraged to increase production and strikes were banned.
- The production of heavy armaments, aeroplanes and naval ships was increased.
- Trade unions were dissolved. All workers were expected to work under the leadership of Hitler.

Militarism and Compulsory Military Training

- The size of the German army, air force and navy was increased.
- Military training was made compulsory for the citizens.

Renounced Peace Treaties

One of the major objectives of the foreign policy of Hitler was to reject the Treaty of Versailles. He considered the treaty as unjust and openly condemned it. He refused to pay war reparation. He also increased the military might of Germany in complete violation of the terms of the treaty.

Acquisition of Territories

- Hitler's main aim was to acquire overseas colonies for Germany. He believed that colonies were necessary to settle expanding population of Germany and to get raw materials for industries.
- Hitler was keen on expanding in Southern and Eastern Europe as the region was rich in minerals and agricultural products.
- Hitler entered into a non-aggression treaty with Poland for a period of ten years in 1934 for safeguarding its eastern frontiers.
- He also recaptured Saar and Rhineland from France.
- He signed a non-aggression pact with Russia.

Racial Supremacy

- Hitler believed in the racial supremacy of the Aryans. According to the theory of racial supremacy, only the Nordic German Aryans were supreme in society. The Jews were placed in the lowest strata of society. The Jews were regarded as the fiercest enemies of the German Aryans.
- After assuming power, the Nazis sought to eliminate the Jews and the physically disabled Germans. Along with them, gypsies and black Germans were also detained in concentration camps.
- The worst sufferers were the Jews. They were forced to live in miserable circumstances in the ghettos. In the early years of Nazi rule, the Jews were forced to leave Germany. In the later years of Hitler's rule, the Jews were rounded up in concentration camps and gas chambers.
- The Polish were forced to leave their properties and home behind for the Germans who came to settle in Poland. Most of the Polish were put into concentration camps. Many of them were murdered in large numbers.

Similarity between the ideologies of Fascism and Nazism

- Both believed in the existence of a totalitarian state
- To oppose democracy and communism
- To uphold the concept of one party and one leader
- To believe in aggressive nationalism and imperialism
- To glorify war

We find that both Fascism in Italy and Nazism in Germany arose because of the deplorable economic conditions of these countries during this time. Both countries were not happy with the terms of the Treaty

of Versailles and feared the possible spread of communism. Failure of the League of Nations and political instability also paved the way for the establishment of dictatorial governments in both countries.