

## RISE OF NATION STATES

In the history of Medieval Europe the Church had a very significant place. Besides the general masses, the king and his regime were also influenced by the Church but later on, the faith of people in the Church began to decline and they began to challenge the power of the Church, but that did not affect the power of the Church as the number of those opposing the Church was quite limited. But in the long run it was found that the Church was hollow from within. The rise of powerful monarchies in place of feudalism also weakened the position of the Church. The mighty rulers of France, England, Spain, Rome, Turkey etc. gathered all powers in their hands and hence the position of the Church became quite vulnerable and its hold on religion and politics began to loosen. The condition of the different states of Europe in the latter half of the fifteenth century was as follows :

**France.** France was engaged in the Hundred Years' War with England which ended in 1453. Luckily, France came out victorious in spite of great difficulties and heavy loss. After the end of this war, France tried to strengthen her position and the people decided to make the king powerful by granting him more and more power. Thus the position of Charles VII (1422-1461) became quite strong and solid. His son, Louis XI succeeded him. He ruled from 1461-1483 and France attained power and prestige during his reign. Charles VII had enhanced his power by establishing his sway over Burgundy and Provence and Louis XI



maintained the prestige of the Crown. These powerful rulers of France freed the feudal lords from the royal duties and took over the strings of the empire in their own hands. During their regime no power of Europe could dare attack France. The parliament of Paris played a very significant role in strengthening the hands of the king. It mostly acted according to the will of the king and in the interest of the king. Louis XI downgraded the nobles and raised the people of the middle class to the highest positions. His actions terminated the Medieval Age in France and gave a modern administrative system to the country.

**England.** A prolonged battle continued between England and France which popularly came to be known as the Hundred Years' War. In this war England lost much of her power and prestige and it was felt that England would not be able to gain her lost power and prestige. As a result of this war, chaos and confusion prevailed everywhere in the country. Henry VI (1422-1461) of England was a weak ruler. His successors Edward IV (1461-1483) and Richard III (1483-1485) also proved to be feeble rulers. Civil war continued during the reign of Edward IV. A great number of nobles were killed in this battle of nobles, popularly known as the War of Roses. Conspiracies went on being hatched even during the reign of Richard III. Ultimately, he was killed by Henry VII in 1485 who belonged to Tudor dynasty. Henry VII was a powerful ruler. He crushed the power of nobles and made England a powerful country once again. The Parliament of England was not powerful during this period as the power of Lords was crippled in the War of Roses and the House of Commons was still in its infancy. Hence Henry VII was not afraid of anyone and became almost a dictator without encountering opposition from any quarter. Gradually, England again attained power and prestige and recovered its lost position.

**Spain.** In the fifteenth century Spain too, became a rich and prosperous nation and achieved perfection in the art of warfare, trade and commerce, navigation, art and literature. Ferdinand became the ruler of Spain in A.D. 1479. He married Isabella and thus the scattered power of Spain was united into one powerful unit. When Ferdinand ascended the throne, the feudal lords were very powerful. He first of all organized his power and then advanced against Moors (Arab Muslims). In 1492 he conquered Grenada and crushed the power of the Moors. Spain also had its control over Italy. As regards power and discipline, no army of any European country could match the army of Spain. The navy and infantry of Spain were also quite powerful. Roman Catholicism was in vogue in Spain and Queen Isabella was a staunch Catholic. As a result of her influence, Protestantism could flourish in Spain.

**Germany.** During fifteenth century Germany was divided into small states. She was not considered a powerful country of Europe during this period for want of unity. Austria and Prussia were the only big states in Germany. In 1493 Maximilian I became the ruler of Germany. He endeavoured to establish a confederation in Germany and made Frankfurt, a famous town, his capital but he failed to achieve great success in his mission as most of the Dukes of Germany still considered themselves to be independent. A famous historian Hayes has remarked



about the condition of Germany, "Germany showed no signs of national unity. The numerous states into which it was divided were practically independent of the control of the Emperor who was weak and powerless." During this period there were seven big and other small states in German confederation which had the right of selection of the German Emperor.

**Italy.** Italy was also divided into small states during the fifteenth century. These states were always at daggers drawn with one another, hence they had become quite feeble. The rulers of France and Spain endeavoured to annex some part of Italy. The nobles used to act in Italy according to their own sweet will and people were fed up with their atrocities and oppression. A prominent historian, A. J. Grant has remarked, "The want of any sense of nationality or patriotism and prevalence of bitter feuds among the petty states, invited foreign attacks and both France and Spain sought to turn the local division of Italy to their personal advantages."

**Turkey.** Constantinople was the capital of Turkey. Earlier, it was the capital of Eastern Roman Empire and at that time it was a Christian state but it was conquered by Muhammad II, the Ottoman Turk. The 29th May, 1453 when the capital fell against the Muslim power, was one of the saddest events in the history of Christianity. After their control over Turkey, the Ottoman Turks began to plan to attain victory over other countries of the Eastern Europe. These Turks began to torture the Christians. As a result of it the Christian scholars were forced to take shelter in Italy and other parts of Europe. These scholars carried with them the Greek literature, culture and art and they spread the same in different countries of Europe, especially in Italy. As a result thereof, Renaissance or the cultural upsurge swept Italy. Owing to the decline of Constantinople the countries of Europe felt it necessary to find out a sea route in the East. It inspired the people to make discoveries at sea and commercial revolution began in Europe.

**Holy Roman Empire.** Holy Roman Empire was a great and mighty empire in the Middle Ages. Almost all the rulers of Europe honoured the rulers of the Holy Roman Empire. The Roman Empire was quite extensive. In the beginning the king of Holy Roman Empire was elected by seven princes of Germany, but with the passage of time, the throne of the king of Holy Roman Empire became hereditary. Now only the people of Hapsburg dynasty were entitled to become the rulers of the Holy Roman Empire. According to the constitution after the name of the German Emperor, the parliament of the country which was known as Reichstag and Diet, ruled over the country. The parliament of the Holy Roman Empire tried to restrict the powers of the kings and did not allow them to turn into despots. Moreover, the internal feuds were a great check on the powers of the kings, hence the Holy Roman Emperors failed to enhance their power.

**New World.** By now the countries of Europe had developed a taste for making discoveries of new lands. In 1494 Columbus discovered America and the king of Spain took possession of a number of small islands. Other countries also followed Spain. Captain Daiz made the round of the Cape of Good Hope in 1486 and in 1497 Vasco da Gama



discovered a new sea route to India. Portugal, England, Holland and France also came ahead with the scheme of imperialism and colonialism. The discovery of the New World brought gold and silver in abundance to Europe. It raised the standard of living of the people of Europe. Thus all these new discoveries injected new hopes into the people of Europe.

Thus we see that in the latter half of the fifteenth century all the countries of Europe referred to above, flourished. The development in trade and commerce brought about a revolutionary change in the economic and social life of the people of Europe.

### CONDITION OF EUROPE IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

The history of every country has its own characteristics but there are certain ages in history that draw a definite dividing line between the two eras. The history of Europe can also be divided into Ancient and Modern eras from the date of fall of the Roman Empire, hence it is a bare fact that every country had her own fundamental unity. In fact, after the invasion of the barbarians some events took place which changed the history of Europe in a new direction.

**Rise of Monarchy.** With the rise of nations, the kings and priests also came into prominence. New dynasties emerged in various countries of Europe. The increasing power of the people and the end of classicism was the main reason of the rise of new dynasties. France was the first nation that experimented and crushed the power of the lords and nobles. England followed the same policy afterwards. Although the means of both the nations were different, the consequences were the same. The War of Roses in England crippled the lords altogether and shattered their power in toto. However, the people failed to keep and concentrate this power in their hands. As a result of it, the power slipped into the hands of Tudor rulers. Gradually in due course of time Spain, Germany and Italy also gathered power for their monarchs.

**Rise of Individualism.** During the Medieval era Emperors, rulers and priests had their own significance whereas the other people had no key place in the European society. Later on, conflict for supremacy began between the Pope and the Emperors. It shattered the power of both the warring parties. As a result thereof the power of individual began to grow in strength. It gave birth to the rise of individualism. The literary persons and the artists raised their voice against the injustice of the traders and the nobles. The rise of individualism also helped the lower classes to progress. So far, the whole Europe was divided into various social classes but emergence of individualism gave birth to significance of the nations. The Hundred Years' War not only gave birth to France but it also brought a political unity in England. In the same way, the marriage of Ferdinand and the Isabella brought together the conflicting groups. The German confederation was loosely knit and so far Italy was the battlefield; so there was classism in both the nations and the pace of individualism was quite slow.

**Social Condition.** The political changes in Europe also affected the society of the contemporary period. Renaissance brought about an awakening among the common masses. The invention of Printing Press



made the books cheap and brought them within the purchasing capacity of the people. Moreover, various books of English, French, German and Spanish languages were translated which enhanced the knowledge and power of discussion among the people. Now they came out of the darkness of the medieval period and began to think of their rights and duties. The Bill of Rights (1680) in England and the Declaration of Human Rights (1789) in France were the results of this awakening. A prominent historian, R. Lodge writes, "The period of transition is also marked by a great social change, viz., the rise of importance of the individual. The change is closely connected with the so-called renaissance which in its essence was the assertion of the rights of individual against the medieval chains which had hitherto bound him down. Literature and Art opened a new career over which the old restriction had no control. The change was completed in the 16th century by the Reformation which broke through the most oppressive trammels of medieval system. Thus, it is evident that with the rise of individual in power, the warriors, nobles and others lost their significance in the European society. It also brought about some fundamental alteration in the style and mode of thinking of the general public.

**Economic Condition.** During the Medieval period there were various guilds pertaining to different small-scale industries. They had full control over production. During the end of the fifteenth century owing to new sea discoveries, trade flourished between the eastern countries of Europe and America. The raw materials for various factories began to pour into Europe and various new industries developed for the manufacture of different articles. As a result, the merchants, small traders and educated persons formed a new middle class which later on became quite prosperous. In due course of time the capitalist class emerged from it. Banks were established for the good of new trade and industries. Thus banking system flourished in Europe.

**Intellectual Awakening.** During the Middle Age the right of education was reserved for the priests only, but with the advent of Modern era renaissance flourished, with the result that Greek education, literature, culture, civilization and arts progressed again. Besides this, ancient Roman literature, art and administrative system also flourished in various countries of Europe. There are ample Greek and Roman examples in the writings of Dante. History began to be written in a scientific way. Machiavelli was a great political thinker. He wrote in his book *Prince*, "A prince or ruler should be brave and courageous like lion and clever like a fox." He stressed impartiality and cheating in politics. In his own words, "A prince in order to maintain the state must often act against faith, against charity, against humanity and against religion. As a result of it the influence of Church diminished and the princes began to act according to their sweet will."