

9. World : Decolonisation

9.1 Decolonisation : Asia

9.2 Decolonisation : Africa

In this lesson, we are going to review the process of decolonisation in Asia and Africa. We shall do it with examples of the history of a few countries.

9.1 Decolonisation : Asia

In the first half of the twentieth century decolonisation did not take very long, in many of the Asian and African countries. The process of decolonisation was accelerated in short time because of the conflicts among European coloniser countries, occurrence of First and Second World Wars and the anti-colonial movements in the colonies. The European countries could not have reasoned out colonisation



Winston Churchill

For additional information : The process of decolonisation is supposed to have received a momentum mainly because of the document known as the “Atlantic Charter”. This Charter was published together by Winston Churchill, Prime Minister of England and Franklin Roosevelt, President of America. The charter stated that the allied nations including England and America did not intend to grab any kingdom or country, the changes in political system and geographic borders of any country in the post-war period would happen only according to the wish of the citizens of the respective country and it was granted that all people in the world have the right to take their own decisions.

Get to know :

Collect more information regarding the ‘Atlantic Charter’ and organise a class discussion on the topic.

and the exploitation of colonies from intellectual platform. The Indian freedom movement had reached culminating point, under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. Under the situation England had become aware of the reality of their diminishing power. This resulted in gradually introducing the system of internal autonomy in some of the colonies.

Germany and Turkey were defeated in the First World War. To manage the administration of the colonies which were under control of Germany and Turkey, the ‘League of Nations’ introduced the system of trustees. England and France were entrusted with the role of trustees. Later, India, Cyprus and Malta successively gained their independence. In 1971 England withdrew its army from the Gulf of Iran. After that, England released its hold on Singapore. Indo-China, Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria were under French domination. These countries became independent. By the end of twentieth century South Africa also gained independence. Colonialism came to an end and gradually the process of decolonisation was completed. ‘United Nations’ was largely responsible for facilitating this process.

Maldives : Portuguese entered Maldives in 1507. Since then Maldives began paying tribute to Portuguese in Goa. In 1573 the Portuguese rule was ended by Muhammad Thakuruphanu Al Azam from Malabar. After his accession as the Sultan of Maldives, he made a treaty with the Dutch



and gave them the administrative responsibility of Maldives. From thereon, the Sultan of Maldives began to pay tribute to the Dutch in Sri Lanka (Ceylon). Later, Maldives was taken over by the British. They built a naval base and a radio transmission centre in Maldives. They also took Indian labourers to work in the paddy fields in Maldives. Maldives became independent on 26th July 1965, by a treaty signed at Colombo.

Sri Lanka : The British ruled Sri Lanka (Ceylon) from 1798 to 1948. They took over Sri Lanka by defeating the Dutch and the Portuguese. There were uprisings in Sri Lanka against the British rule. The British plantation owners had taken many labourers from Tamil Nadu to work in coffee plantations. In Sri Lanka, the British dominated the production and markets of coffee, tea, rubber and coconut. They developed Colombo as an international port city. They also established colleges and universities in Sri Lanka and encouraged Buddhist Studies. Sri Lanka became independent in 1948.

Myanmar (Brahmadesh) : In 1599, the Portuguese defeated the king of one of the kingdoms in Myanmar. However, in 1611 various dynasties ruling in Myanmar got together, defeated the Portuguese and amalgamated their kingdoms. United Myanmar adopted an expansionist policy and conquered Manipur and Assam. It meant that the British Indian territory was under threat of being invaded, a situation that caused three wars between the British and Myanmar. The first war in 1826 was won by the British and they took over Assam and Manipur. They also defeated Myanmar in the second war. At about the same time the French had taken over the regions of 'Upper Burma'*. In the third war the British won this region too, thereby ruling over entire Myanmar.

**The central and northern region of Myanmar is traditionally known as 'Upper Burma' comprising Mandalay and surrounding region.*

The British administration annexed Myanmar as a province of British India. In 1935, it was again separated from India and was granted autonomy. After 1937 the people in Myanmar created an organisation called 'Burma Independence Army' under the leadership of Aung San. This organisation helped the Japanese during Second World War. It looked like a downslide for the British. However, they strengthened their hold in Myanmar once again with the help of America in 1945. The British learnt their lesson that as administrators, they could not afford to neglect the popular opinion in a country. They appointed Aung San as Vice President. The British granted independence to Myanmar on 4th January 1948.

9.2 Decolonisation : Africa

During the 15 year's period of 1950-1965, people in the European colonies in Africa freed themselves from the foreign rule. The education system imposed by the Europeans was alien to them. Ironically, African leaders were trained in this alien educational system and their education had introduced them to American Independence Struggle, French Revolution and Nationalism. The African people became aware of 'Nationalism' and national pride.

After the Second World War nationalism got a further boost. England and France gradually began to grant more rights to the Africans in their colonies. This strengthened the independence movements in African nations.

Bandung Conference : India called the first conference of Asian countries in 1947. Representatives of 25 Asian countries were present for the conference. In this conference the concept of Asian regionalism



was shaped. The issues like common problems faced by Asian people, the social, economic and cultural problems of the Asian countries and the need of mutual co-operation among Asian countries were discussed in this conference. This conference was followed by the first conference of Asian and African countries held in 1955 at Bandung in Indonesia. This is known as the 'Bandung Conference'. In this conference the problems of Afro-Asian countries were discussed and it was decided to focus on world peace and mutual co-operation.

Concept of African Unity : H.S. Williams was the first person to think of African Unity. He formed an organisation while in London, called 'African Association' (later called as Pan-African Association). He organised its first conference in 1900. W.E.B. Du Bois, an American sociologist of African origin was present in this conference. In 1919 a second conference of African leaders and thinkers was held at Paris, known as 'Pan-African Congress'. Thereafter, W.E.B. Du Bois and his associates called a series of Pan-African congresses at various places. This resulted in the idea of Pan-African unity taking deep roots in Africa. The 5th Pan-African Congress held at Manchester in 1945 by people of African origin living in Manchester.

Decolonisation in the African Continent : The First World War began in 1914. At that time except Liberia and Ethiopia, entire African continent was ruled by European powers. European colonies in Africa, i.e. almost the entire continent, got involuntarily involved in the war. Soon after the onset of the war England and France began to attack the German colonies in Africa. After the defeat of Germany in the war, allied nations began to compete with each other for occupying German colonies in Africa.

The American President, Woodrow Wilson, considering the situation, suggested that the victorious European nations should act as trustees of the erstwhile German colonies and administer them only as protectorates. It was necessary to give the colonies internal autonomy. Hence, the 'League of Nations' decided with mutual understanding that England, France and Belgium should divide the colonies among themselves in 1919. A Committee of 11 members was appointed by the 'League' to supervise the administration of the colonies.



Woodrow Wilson

The four British colonies, namely, Cape Colony, Natal, Orange Free State and Transvaal were amalgamated and the state of South Africa was created in 1920. However, the dominance of the white people continued unchanged. Egypt got its independence before the end of Second World War. Following it Libya, Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria and Ghana became independent one after another.

At about the middle of the twentieth century in all 12 French colonies, such as Ivory Coast, Madagascar, Mali in central Africa became independent. Along with it, Cameroon, Somalia and other colonies under the care of the League of Nations, and also other European colonies became independent, one by one.

Algeria had to give a tough fight to get its freedom. Finally in 1962 it became independent by conducting plebiscite. In 1964, Tanganyika and Zanzibar were amalgamated and the independent state of 'The United Republic of Tanzania' came into existence.

Prior to Second World War, Italy had

taken over Ethiopia and Libya and annexed it to the Italian empire. During the Second World War, Mussolini, the dictator of Italy had used these two regions for launching attacks on Egypt and other British colonies in Africa.

The African battlefield in the Second World War had spread from Morocco and Libya in the north to Ethiopia and Somali Land on the eastern border of Africa. The British empire in Africa was in danger because of the aggressions of Italy and the German General Erwin Rommel. Indian soldiers in the British army who fought with great resilience. With their help, the British could compel the combined armies of Italy and Germany to retreat. Italy and Germany had to lose their colonies in Africa at the end of the Second World War in 1945.

Discuss in the class.

Make a list of the colonies of the British in Asia and Africa with their geographical locations and discuss in the class about their independence struggle and the dates of their independence.

The end of the Second World War created an environment in which the process of decolonisation gained momentum. The Asian and African continents were filled with a heightened spirit of independence movements. The awareness about these movements spread rapidly. Many countries in both continents obtained their freedom. However, developments in these countries were also being watched by America and Russia, the superpowers. Each of them was trying to attract maximum countries on its side. In the next lesson, we are going to study the 'Cold War' and its impact on India.

Exercise

Q.1 (A) Choose the correct alternative and rewrite the statement.

- In the First World War and Turkey were defeated.
(a) America (b) France
(c) England (d) Germany
- In 1935 was separated from India.
(a) Myanmar (b) Sri Lanka
(c) Maldives (d) Iran
- In 1947, first conference of was held.
(a) Unity (b) Asian
(c) Atlantic (d) Manchester

(B) Find the incorrect pair from group 'B', and write the corrected one.

- | Group 'A' | Group 'B' |
|------------|--|
| 1. Bandung | Bandung Conference |
| 2. Paris | The first Pan-African Congress in 1919 |

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| 3. London | The first Conference of 'African Association' in 1900 |
| 4. Manchester | Asian Unity Conference |

Q.2 Choose correct reason from the given options and complete the statement.

During the Second World War the independence movements in Africa were more intensified. -

- The colonies in Africa threw away the dominance of alien European powers.
- African leaders were trained in western education system.
- During the Second World War the British and the French began to give some rights to the people in their colonies.
- European countries were involved in the Second World War.



Q.3 Write short notes.

1. Bandung Conference
2. Concept of African Unity

Q.4 Explain the following statements with reason.

1. There were three wars fought between the British and Myanmar.

2. The end of the Second World War created an environment in which the process of decolonisation gained speed.

Project

Collect information with the help of internet regarding French colonies in Asia and Africa.

