

Q: Critically evaluate the phenomenon of Napoleonic regime. whether it was 'military dictatorship' or 'Victory of a state'? Do comment.

Napoleonic Regime

"I saw the crown of France laying on the ground; so I picked it up with my sword." (Napoleon)

Napoleon seized power in France by plotting a coup within another coup. In 1798, France was at a war with UK, Austria, Ottoman Empire and many German and Italian states. Meanwhile, another prominent French-man Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès planned a coup by the help of Napoleon and his loyal army. In this way, Napoleon became able to become the Emperor of France.

Napoleonic Regime - A 'Military Dictatorship' or 'Victory of a State'

After planned military coup of November 9, 1799 Napoleon established his dictatorship in France by effectively ending the French Revolution's democratic phase. But the reforms which he introduced in state drew on Enlightenment Ideas which

showed that Napoleonic Regime was marked by victory of a state.

Napoleonic Regime - A Military Dictatorship

Napoleon imposed censorship on dissenting voices and royalist groups to suppress all threats to his military regime.

→ **Planned Military Coup of Napoleon with Sieyes:**

Napoleon came to power when Sieyes with other conspirators of **Directory System** like Talleyrand, Paul Barras and Roger Duclos decided to seize power from weakened directory on November 9, 1799 through a plan. This propaganda clearly showed that Napoleonic regime was military dictatorship.

→ **Concentration of Powers in hands of Single leader:**

“Napoleonic (reg) rule transformed France to military dictatorship with powers concentrated in the hands of single leader.”

(Steven Englund, Napoleon - A Political life, 2004)

Napoleon first became Consul for 10 years in 1799, then Consul for life in 1802 and then Emperor in 1804.

→ Banishment of Jacobins:

Napoleon banished and imprisoned many Jacobines and Jacobins Club was disbanded, eliminating the focal point of political dissent. This step was absolutely against Enlightenment ideas.

→ Execution of Louis Antoine de Bourbon:

Napoleon executed this royalist in 1804 by sending a message to all opponents that all opposition parties would suffer severe consequences. This showed that his regime was a dictatorship.

→ War against Dissident Groups:

Napoleon waged war against chouans in Vendee region and other royalists. "Napoleonic regime was surely a military dictatorship; the army was an instrument of power for him." (David Andress, *The Terror: Merciless war for freedom in Revolutionary France*, 2005)

Napoleonic Regime - Victory of a State

Although Napoleon came into power through military dictatorship yet he practised many reforms that show his regime was victory of a state.

→ Promotion of Meritocracy:

Napoleon promoted meritocracy in bureaucracy and military. According to George Lefebvre, "Napoleon democratized the government and made careers open to talent." This clearly shows victory of a state.

→ Equality before the law:

Napoleonic regime can be called as victory of a state due to emphasis on equality before the law. Its one of the best examples is of ~~Concordant Agreement~~ **Napoleonic Code** 1804 which ensured equality before the law.

→ Strong Tax Collection system of France:

Napoleon made reforms in tax collection system. According to Robert Holtman, Napoleon's system was remarkable for its administrative efficiencies and centralizations which epitomize the victory of a state.

→ Attempts of National Reconciliation Order:

Napoleonic regime can be marked as victory of a state because of his attempts for National Reconciliation. Its best example is of Concordant Agreement of 1801. It enabled the church to practise in France under control of state and established **Roman Catholicism** in France.

→ Regulation of Business and Commerce practices:

The 'Napoleonic Code de Commerce' instituted in 1807 regulated business and commerce practices. It laid down the rules of business operations like debt recovery and obligations for business owners. This shows that Napoleonic regime can be marked as victory of a state.

→ Restoring Confidence in French Economy:

The establishment of Bank of France in 1800 played a key role in stabilizing French economy. According to **Patrice Gueniffey**, Napoleonic code and Bank of France were important for revitalizing French economy (**Bonaparte: 1769-1802, 2015**). This highlights that this regime was victory of state.

→ Promoting Industrial Expansion:

Napoleonic regime was victory of state due to industrial expansion promoted by him especially in those areas that would enhance military strength of France. "Under Napoleon's rule, France made a concerted effort to bolster its industrial capabilities (**Jean Tulard, Napoleon: The Myth of Savior, 1977**).

Concluding Thoughts

The way through which Napoleon had seized power in France was undemocratic and his concentration of powers in his own hands through suppression of opposition was effectively end of democratic phase in France but the reforms which he had introduced after seizing power reflected Enlightenment ideas.