

Q: Note on Nature & Emergence of Nation-State (2011)

Ans:

Introduction

The nation-state is the most dominant political institution of modern times. It represents the fusion of two concepts: the nation, a community united by shared language, culture, history and identity and the State, a political organization possessing sovereignty over a defined territory and population. The nature of the nation-state explains its essential features, while its emergence is the outcome of a long process of historical evolution and philosophical thought.

Historical Overview

The history of the State and the idea of political community goes

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back to ancient times.

Ancient Period

Greek City States (Polis)

First organized political communities

Aristotle called man a political animal, seeing the state as natural

Roman Empire:

The Roman Empire expanded law and citizenship but remained imperial, lacking national identity.

Medieval Period

After Rome's fall, feudalism dominated Europe. Power was divided among kings, nobles, and the church, with no clear sovereignty.

Renaissance Period

Thinkers like Niccolò Machiavelli separated politics from morality, emphasizing the importance of power.

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stability and state interest.

Rise of monarchies and decline of papal authority made the way for centralized/modern state.

Social Contract Theorists

The 17th century further advanced state theory through social contract philosophers. Hobbes justified absolute sovereignty as necessary to escape the chaos of state of nature.

Locke advocated constitutional government, limited power, and protection of rights. While Rousseau highlighted the concept of general will and popular sovereignty.

Treaty of Westphalia

The Treaty established territorial sovereignty and non-interference, marking the birth of modern state system. This settlement ended the religious wars of Europe and recognized the supremacy of

state over the church.

Revolutionary & Modern Age

French Revolution of 1789 introduced nationalism, popular sovereignty and equality before law. Industrial Revolution strengthened national identity through communication and literacy. 20th century saw the decline of Ottoman Empires, WW and decolonization created new nation-states.

Nature of Nation-State

1) Sovereignty

Supreme authority, both internal and external, lies with the state. No higher power within its boundaries, recognized as equal by other states.

Territory

Clearly demarcated geographical boundaries. Authority is exercised within fixed borders.

Nationhood

A sense of collective identity rooted in common language, culture, history, ethnicity and religion.

Legitimacy and Consent

Authority of the state is accepted by the people. It is rooted in democracy, popular sovereignty.

Nationalism

The emotional bond uniting citizens within the state. It provides loyalty, cohesion, and willingness to defend the homeland.

Legal Equality

All nation-states regardless of size or power are equal in international law.

Evolution of Political Organization

1) Stateless Societies

In the earliest stage of human life,

There were no formal states. People lived in small kinship based groups where authority rested with elders and customs. There was no concept of sovereignty.

2) Tribal Systems

With population growth, tribes emerged as larger units. Leadership was based on strength and wisdom.

Tribes lacked centralized authority.

3) City-States & Oriental Empires

The Greeks developed the city-state where citizenship and direct participation in governance were emphasized. Oriental Empires like Persia, Egypt, and China rose, which ruled without national identity.

4) Medieval Europe

After the fall of Rome, power in Europe became fragmented. Feudal lords, monarchs, and the church exercised overlapping authority.

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5) Colonial Empires

From the 15th century onwards, Spain, Portugal, Britain, and France built vast overseas empires. These colonial states spread centralized authority but denied sovereignty and self-rule.

6) Decline of Empires

By the 16th and 17th century, the Renaissance, Reformation, and Enlightenment weakened absolute monarchies and papal authority. New ideas of reason, science laid the foundations for sovereign territorial states.

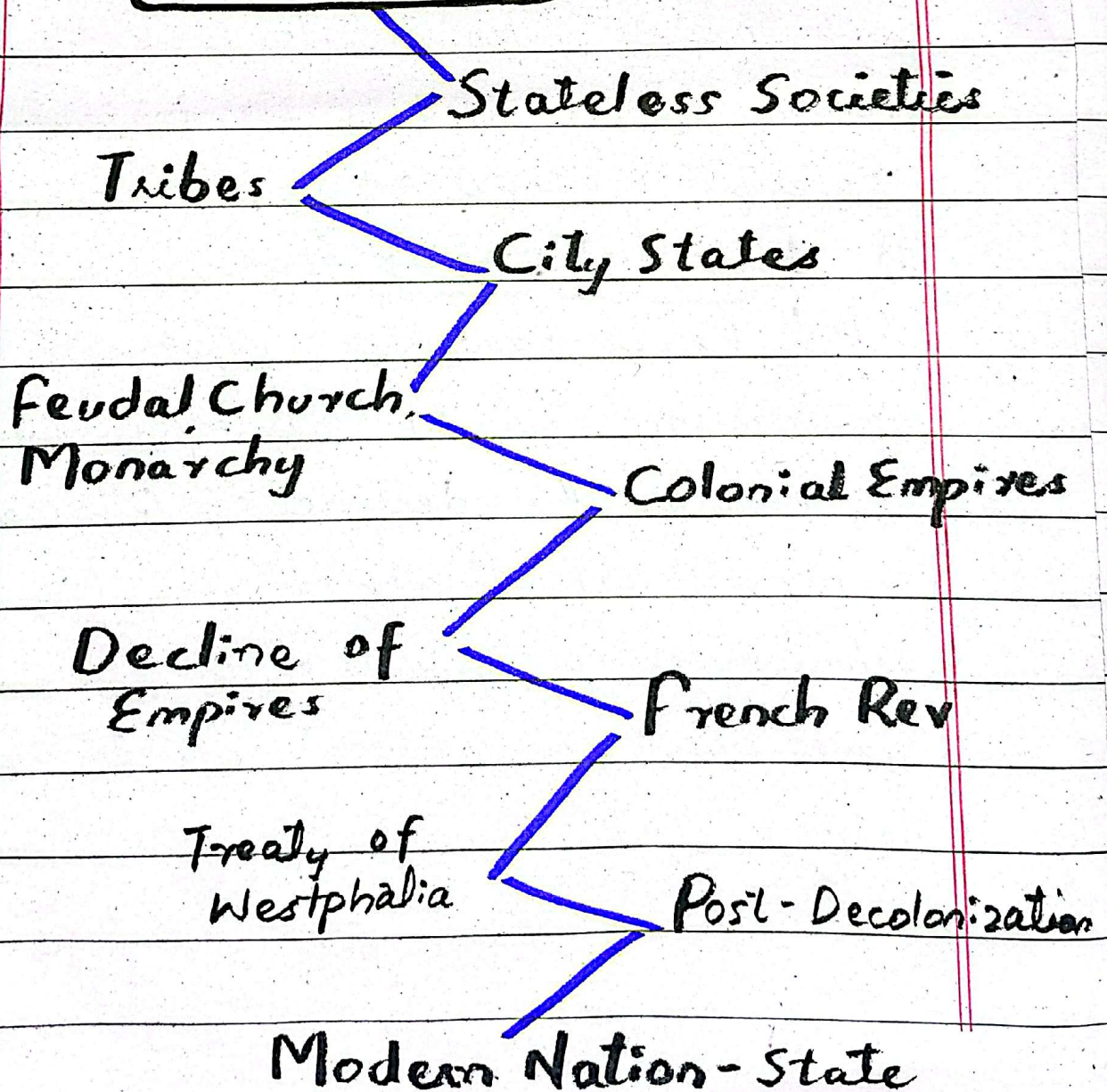
7) Revolutionary Age

The French Revolution popularized nationalism, equality, and sovereignty of people. The decline of Ottoman empires and later World Wars demolished the dynastical rule and gave rise to national self-determination.

8) Post-Decolonization & Nation-State System

In the 20th century, Asia and Africa witnessed large-scale decolonization, with nations achieving independence on the basis of identity and self-determination. The United Nations reinforced sovereignty and equality of states.

Evolution



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Conclusion

In a nutshell, the nature of a nation-state lies in the sovereignty, territory, legitimacy and nationhood, distinguishing it from earlier empires. Its emergence reflects centuries of political evolution: from stateless tribes to revolutions, ending in the modern system reinforced by nationalism and decolonization.