

Q- What were the causes of the downfall of Napoleon Bonaparte !

Or

Spain and Russia destroyed Napoleon, Explain ! Or “Spanish ulcer ruined me” (Napoleon). Explain !

The Spanish ulcer and Russian adventure ruined Napoleon.

At Tilsit (1807), Napoleon was at the height of his power. But from 1808 to 1814 his power was continuously on the decline. His fall was as rapid as his rise. The causes were as follows.

1. Napoleon's character:- Napoleon was no doubt an able man but as his power increased, he became very proud and made many mistakes. He did not listen to the advice of his able ministers like Talleyrand and Fouché. They advised him not to attack Spain or Russia. But Napoleon did not listen.
2. Defects of his military system:- Napoleon's empire depended on military powers. Slowly his military power began to weaken. At first his army was inspired by revolutionary ideas of Equality and Liberty. But after he became an emperor, the army was only fighting for Napoleon and his brothers. Secondly to increase his army, Napoleon recruited men of other nationalities like, Germans, Italians and Poles. Only half of his army consisted of Frenchmen. In this way the feeling of national unity in the army was finished.
3. The rise of Nationalism in European Countries: - Napoleon had insulted many European countries. Especially, the people of Spain and Prussia rose in national revolts against Napoleon. Napoleon could not suppress these national revolts. Before this he had fought with king's armies, but he failed before the people's movement.
4. Continental System of Napoleon:- To defeat England, Napoleon imposed his Continental System in 1806. He asked all European countries to boycott all trades with England. He thought that England was a nation of shoppers and if her trade was boycotted, she will be defeated. But as a result of the Continental System, Napoleon had to attack many countries, which did not boycott England's trade.
 - a. Attack on Portugal : 1807 :- Portugal's king was a friend of England. He did not follow the Continental System. Napoleon attacked and captured Portugal in 1807.
 - b. Attack on Pope : 1809 :- Pope also did not follow the Continental System. Napoleon attacked and captured Portugal in 1807.
5. Attack on Spain : 1808-1814 :- Spain was Napoleon's friend. Spanish king allowed Napoleon to take his army to Portugal through Spain. Once Napoleon's army reached Spain, dishonesty came in his mind. He removed the Spanish king and declared his brother Joseph as the king of Spain

This was a betrayal of the Spanish people. Every man, woman and child of Spain became Napoleon's enemy. The Roman Catholic priests also asked the people to revolt. Napoleon tried to suppress this national revolt for six years. But he was unsuccessful. England also sent her armies to Portugal and Spain to support the rebels.

In 1812, Napoleon had to call back some of his armies from Spain to attack Russia. The English general, Duke of Wellington drove out the French armies from Spain in 1812-13. Napoleon himself said “the Spanish ulcer ruined me.”

6. Attack on Russia : 1812 :- In Tilsit (1807), Russian Czar and Napoleon had become friends. Russia had also boycotted England's trade. But the Continental System caused much hardship to the people of Russia. Russia imported Coffee, Sugar and tea from foreign countries. So there was a famine of these things in Russia. In Dec, 1810, Russia decided to break the Continental System and started preparation to attack Russia.

There was one more reason of Napoleon's anger with Russia. Napoleon wanted to marry Czar's sister, but the Czar refused.

In 1812, Napoleon attacked Russia with a large army of 6lakhs of men. The Russian retreated without fighting. Napoleon occupied Moscow. But he could not stay there due to winter and cold. On 22nd October, 1812 Napoleon and his army began to retreat from Moscow. The return from Moscow was horrible. Due to cold and hunger Napoleon's large army was destroyed. Only 20000 were able to return to France. 5,80,000 men died in snow or were killed by the Russians. Thus attack on Russia was the greatest cause of his downfall.

7. Coalition against against Napoleon 1813-14 :- After the destruction of Napoleon army, England, Austria, Prussia and Russia formed a IV Coalition against Napoleon. Napoleon recruited a new army and won some victories, but in Oct 1813, he was defeated in the battle of Lipzig. He was arrested in April 1813 and sent to Elba.

In 1815, Napoleon returned from Elba and ruled France for hundred days.

In June 1815, he was finally defeated in the battle of Waterloo and sent as a prisoner to St. Helena. Napoleon died in St. Helena in 1821.