
UNIT 11 EUROPEAN STATE SYSTEM

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11.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you should be able to understand:

- how state systems developed in the early modern west;
- how the development of the state systems was marked by rise of absolute monarchies;
- how these absolute monarchies reflected the quest for by wars and expansion;
- how in the eastern and western Europe there were different forms of these absolute monarchies; and
- how as compared to the eastern Europe the western Europe was marked by the development of the bourgeoisie which made for a different balance of power as compared to the East where the bourgeoisie was absent.

11.1 INTRODUCTION

Absolutism refers to absolute monarchies created after the breakdown of the medieval monarchies in early modern Europe. The new monarchies were strong nation-states and depended on strong individual leaders. To strengthen both, it was necessary to curtail the restraints on centralized government that had been exercised by the church, feudal lords, and medieval customary law. By claiming the absolute authority of the states against such former restraints, the new monarchs claimed his own absolute authority. The most common defence of monarchical absolutism asserted that kings derived their authority from God. The new national monarchs asserted their authority in all matters and tended to become heads of church as well as of state.

The metamorphoses of European monarchies to new levels of power, efficiency and development during the late fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries were needed to escape from the crises of feudal monarchies and the ravages of war, plague and economic hardships. Before 1453 European states were more feudal than sovereign in nature, after 1559 they were more sovereign than feudal. In a feudal state the prerogatives of the State namely, the authority to wage war, to tax, to administer and enforce the law were privately owned as legal and hereditary rights by members of a military landed aristocracy. The division of power between monarch and magnate, royal lord and great vassal was the central characteristic of medieval monarchies. This kind of monarchy was an intermediate political model standing between decentralised feudal government on the one hand and the sovereign state on the other. The feudal monarch was linked to the people by a network of personal loyalties and obligations created by the feudal bond between lord and vassal.

But in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries Europe witnessed the emergence of a different genre of monarchies which were absolutist and sovereign in nature known as Absolutist Monarchies. This transition was largely the royal response to a massive general crisis which swept Europe in the fourteenth century brought about by the inefficiencies and internal conflicts in the feudal mode of production that prevailed in the Middle Ages, long destructive wars and the devastating outbreaks of bubonic plague or Black Death.

The feudal lord's growing demand for revenue for military purposes and increasingly extravagant lifestyles imposed additional stress on the feudal mode of production. This feudal crisis of the fourteenth century was a watershed dividing the destinies of Europe.

The horrors of incessant wars devastated the fortunes of many European states. The Christian princes were engaged in driving out the Moors from the Spanish peninsula. Germany witnessed sporadic civil wars. Central Europe was busy warding off the Turkish advances and quelling the heresy of Bohemian subjects. France and England were engaged in the devastating Hundred Years War.

11.2 EMERGENCE OF NEW ABSOLUTE MONARCHIES

The New monarchies that emerged from this crisis were different from the preceding feudal monarchies. Absolutism vested complete and unrestricted

powers in the government. As the political theorist **Jean Bodin** said, “the distinguishing mark of the sovereign is that he cannot in any way be subject to the commands of another, for it is he who makes law for the subject, abrogates laws already made and amends obsolete law.”

Karl Marx defined Absolutism as a system of centralised state power with a standing army, police, bureaucracy, clergy, judiciary, national taxation, codified laws and the beginnings of a unified market serving the nascent middle order of society in its struggle against feudalism.

Friedrich Engels said that Absolutism was the product of a class equilibrium between the old feudal nobility and the new urban bourgeoisie as the nobility's domination had come to an end. But this does not hold true for eastern Europe where the bourgeois class was suppressed.

In the words of **Perry Anderson**, Absolutism was a redeployed and recharged apparatus of feudal domination designed to clamp the peasant masses back into their traditional social position despite widespread commutation of dues into money rent. The Absolutist state was never an arbiter between the aristocracy and the bureaucracy, and still less an instrument of the nascent bourgeoisie against the aristocracy.

Christopher Hill was of the view that Absolute monarchy was a different form of feudal monarchy and that the ruling class remained the same. The new form of state power of the nobility was determined by the spread of commodity production and exchange.

The new monarchs were outspoken about their pursuit of power, unadorned with medieval trappings. They tried to augment their power by exploiting the national feelings that were developing in their subjects. And they developed better instruments of governance, better soldiers and bureaucrats. This was an epoch of reconciliation between the monarchy and the nobility throughout Europe.

But there were marked differences in the Absolutist monarchies in Western and Eastern Europe. The reasons for the differences were differences in the social formations in which Absolutism evolved. And the social formations in western and eastern Europe differed crucially in respect of serfdom and the bourgeoisie. Serfdom had disappeared in western Europe with the commutation of dues into money rent, whereas serfdom was re-strengthened in eastern Europe. The new bourgeoisie emerged in western Europe but was suppressed in eastern Europe.

And it needs to be noted that not all new monarchs tried to build model nation-states. Some German princes and some Italian states were trying to establish proto nation-states on a regional basis, like what the monarchies along the Atlantic sea-board were achieving.

11.3 FEATURES OF WESTERN ABSOLUTISM

The centralised monarchies of France, England and Spain were different from the earlier feudal social formations. There has been a continuing debate about the nature of these absolutist states.

The class power of the feudal lords was weakened by the gradual disappearance of serfdom, gradual decline of the system of vassalage, the ending of obligation

of paying feudal taxes to the overlords, and the emergence of the mercantile bourgeoisie which had developed in the medieval towns.

The system of politico-legal coercion was displaced upwards to a centralised militarised Absolutist State. New and extraordinary powers were conferred on the new monarch. This reinforced the apparatus of royal power which served to repress the peasant masses that stood at the end of social hierarchy.

From the extreme chaos and turmoil of the Wars of the Roses, the Hundred Years War and the second Castilian civil war, the first new monarchies emerged almost simultaneously during the reigns of Louis XI in France, Ferdinand and Isabella in Spain, Henry VII in England and Maximilian in Austria.

These new Absolutist States were machines built for war. They pioneered the professional army, which was a mixed contingent of national recruits and foreign mercenaries who played a crucial role.

The feudal nobility was integrated into the Absolutist States by selling to them offices in the bureaucracy. The growth of the sale of offices was a by-product of (a) the increased monetarization of early modern economies and (b) the relative rise of mercantile and manufacturing bourgeoisie within them. This provided additional revenue to the State.

By 1560, giant steps had been taken by the monarchies of Western Europe in the sphere of territorial unification, administrative centralisation and expansion of royal power which led to their transformation from feudal monarchies into sovereign territorial states. They were known as the New Monarchies because of their novel methods of governance. On the foundations of these novel administrative institutions the great sovereign monarchies of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries built their greatness.

The “new monarchs” of France, Spain and England exercised sovereign rule with innovations in the bureaucracy, army, taxation, trade and diplomacy.

11.3.1 The King's Bureaucracy

At the top of the governmental hierarchy the king was supreme both in theory and practice. He ruled through his council and officers of the state. By the middle of the sixteenth century the council became an instrument of absolute government dependent on him alone. Its composition was determined by the king himself. The function of the council was simply to carry out the wishes and policies of the king.

At the local level, though the King was supreme, it was the officer of local government or *corregidor* as in Castile who exercised real authority. In England local government rested in the hands of the justices of peace who served the Tudor kings efficiently. These officers functioned remarkably well under Henry-VIII and Queen Elizabeth which helped them establish a tradition of public service and political activity among the economically powerful.

In France the main officers of local government were the *baillis* who were recruited from the higher ranks of nobility. But most of the time they were absent from their administrative duties and the real task of local administration was

done by a subordinate officer, the lieutenant who was either a graduate in law or a bourgeois. But the lieutenant was very often appointed by the bailli himself or was chosen on the advice of the notables.

The sale of royal offices during this period was the most important administrative innovation of the period. Kings sacrificed some of their royal powers and control over the appointment of financial and judicial officers in return for money. In the early sixteenth century the venality (corruption) of royal offices became very common in France and Spain. But the practice of venality of offices created obstacles to the effective exercise of royal power.

But the significant fact is that for the first time effective political power was largely concentrated in the hands of the king and his officers instead of being divided among a multitude of spiritual and temporal lords.

11.3.2 The Army

Another notable feature of the new monarchies was the maintenance of a permanent mercenary army. Under feudalism the standing army was maintained and privately owned by the magnates or the feudal lords. But once the monarchy became the sovereign power the ownership and maintenance of the army vested in him. Between 1460 and 1560 the rapidly growing wealth of Europe and the various technological innovations associated with gunpowder, new European states began to build new armies.

The new French army was formed during the reign of Francis I. But it was during the last years of the Hundred Years' War that Charles VII took the first steps in creating an army comprising of heavy cavalry supported by mounted archers. These men were paid volunteers from the nobility rank in the regular and permanent service of the crown. In 1448 Charles VII ordered each parish to train and furnish one archer for the royal army. By the time Francis I became King (1515-1547) the infantry had become a professional mercenary force. Captains appointed or hired by the French King organised foot soldiers equipped with pikes and muskets. But the recruitment was royal but not national in the sense that some infantrymen were French, royal bodyguards were Scots and pikemen were Swiss.

In France and Spain armies of this type provided strength behind royal efforts to build centralised sovereign states. But these armies were imperfect mechanisms of royal control. When they were left unpaid, they became pillaging mobs, mercilessly sacking cities and countryside. Even when paid they did not give their loyalty to the Crown exclusively. Most towns retained their own militias. The greatest nobles of France and England however remained the centres of complex webs of patronage, family ties and relationship ties with lesser nobles. Sixteenth century monarchs commanded military machines far more effectively than those of their medieval predecessors.

11.3.3 Trade

Mercantilism advocated the intervention of the political state in the workings of the economy in the joint interests of the prosperity of the economy and the power of the state. Mercantilism demanded the suppression of barriers to trade within

the national realm and strove to create a unified domestic market for commodity production. The export of goods was encouraged while the export of bullion was banned to increase the power of the state relative to all other states.

As **Duc de Choiseul** said: Upon the navy depend the colonies, upon the colonies depend commerce and upon commerce depends the capacity of the state to maintain numerous armies, increase its population and make possible the most glorious and useful enterprises.

11.3.4 Diplomacy

Diplomacy was another external activity of the western Absolutist State — a great institutional invention of the epoch, a birthmark of the Renaissance States. It was inaugurated in Italy in the 15th century and it was adopted in Spain, France, England, Germany and throughout Europe in the 16th century.

11.3.5 Finance and Taxation

Renaissance princes were desperate for money on many fronts. The major problem of every Renaissance ruler was that their expenses were more than their incomes. They had to finance their recurrent war expenses. Major campaigns were launched by important powers between 1494 and the end of the sixteenth century. The average sizes of the French and Spanish armies were approximately 20,000 and 25,000 men respectively. International diplomacy required steep state expenditures (France paid huge sums to secure the friendship of the Swiss, the German princes and Henry VIII of England). Finance was also required for salaries of royal officers, expenses of the royal households, maintenance of magnificent courts and building palaces.

The rulers obtained their revenues from a variety of sources:

- a) The royal domain yielded rents and dues to the chief of the feudal hierarchy.
- b) Custom duties and sales taxes were levied on various commodities. Almost everywhere the burden of taxation fell on the poor (the “taille” or “gabelle” in France and “servitor” in Spain). **Boris Porshnev** called these new taxes “centralised feudal rent” imposed in place of the earlier “local feudal rent”.
- c) Borrowing (Some loans were forced and the bourgeoisie of the larger cities were largely the victims). When the kings could no longer survive on royal credit, they started selling government bonds and floating public loans.
- d) Selling offices in the Bureaucracy to the nobility and the emerging bourgeoisie.
- e) Direct taxation. This contravened the traditional view that a king should live off the revenues from the royal domain and from indirect taxation and no taxation could be imposed by the king without the consent of the subject. However, the kings of France and Spain refused to accept the principle of public consent and thus weakened the representative institutions in their State. Throughout the sixteenth century the royal ministers negotiated with these representative institutions for direct taxes. It was largely due to the power of the Crown and the efficiency of the financial bureaucracy that made the population submit to the policies of direct taxation.

English kings had no overwhelming military motive to tax regularly without consent because England was protected by the Channel and after the middle of the fifteenth century was hardly engaged in wars. England had no permanent army and hired few mercenaries. The soldiers were recruited and trained by local notables not by professionals. More over everyone paid taxes, nobles as well as commons.

But in the seventeenth century there was a transition towards limited monarchy in England and growth of absolutism in France. The French kings bought the cooperation of the ruling class by tax exemption and the English kings showed willingness to tailor their policies according to the wishes of the Parliament in return for supply of money and mobilise public opinion and support during the political crisis of his great struggle with Pope Clement VII.

11.4 FEATURES OF EASTERN ABSOLUTISM

The Eastern Absolutism was marked by the absence of bourgeoisie in its social structures. This was to have important consequences in the way it shaped up.

11.4.1 Feudal Nobility

Eastern Absolutism emerged to defend the class position of the feudal nobility against both, its rivals abroad and its peasants at home. Eastern Absolutism was hyper centralised because the feudal class was absorbed into the state structure by recruitment into a service nobility required for military purposes. Either people with land were to serve the state or only those serving the state could own land. The service nobility was like the fief system that existed in the west earlier. It had not taken serious hold in the east earlier. When the fief system was disappearing in the west because of Absolutism, it emerged in the east because of Absolutism. The nobility drew its wealth and power from a stable possession of land, not from temporary sojourn in the state. The great bulk of agrarian property remained hereditary within the noble class.

11.4.2 Consolidation of Serfdom

The Absolutist State in the East was also a device for the consolidation of serfdom, and the elimination of autonomous urban life or resistance. Perry Anderson wrote that “it was the repressive machine of a feudal class that had just erased the traditional communal freedom of the poor.” Wars and civil disorders had caused acute labour crisis. Demographic losses had created or aggravated a constant shortage of rural labour for demesne cultivation. The landlord class sought to arrest the mobility of the peasants. And the class struggle of the peasants was the collective desertion of feudal lands. Seigneurial laws tying the peasantry to the soil could not be implemented perfectly.

In Russia the installation of serfdom and the erection of Absolutism were closely coordinated. In 1648 serfdom for the rural population was codified and universalised; state control over towns and inhabitants was instituted; the formal liability of noble lands for military service was confirmed and clinched. The social pact between the Russian monarchy and nobility was sealed, establishing Absolutism in exchange for finalising serfdom.

In Poland, the classical land of the 'second serfdom' no Absolutist state ever emerged. In Hungary the enslavement of the peasantry was accomplished after the Austria-Turkish war at the turn of the seventeenth century.

11.4.3 International Pressures

Eastern Absolutism was determined by the international political system into which the whole region was integrated. This was essentially the pressure of Western Absolutism which believed that the primary form of expansion was conquest, not commerce. The eastern region was obliged to match the state structures of the west before a comparable transition to capitalism. It was the price of their survival in a civilisation of unremitting territorial warfare.

11.4.4 Role of Wars

The influence of war was more preponderant in eastern Europe than in the west. In Prussia the state apparatus was a by-product of the military machine of the ruling class, and the bureaucracy was an offshoot of the army. In Austria the machinery of war was the constant escort of Absolutism, but not as much as Prussia. The construction of Prussian Absolutism by the Great Elector from the 1650's onwards was in large measure a direct response to the impending Swedish menace. The standing army which was to be the corner-stone of Hohenzollern autocracy and its tax system was accepted by the Junkers in 1653 to deal with an imminent war situation in the Baltic areas. In Russia too, the really decisive phases of the transition towards Absolutism occurred during successive phases of Swedish expansion. Sweden was thus a serious trigger for Eastern Absolutism.

11.4.5 Absence of Bourgeoisie

There was no bourgeoisie in the east. And there was no sale of bureaucratic offices. The feudal lords had taken up trade and commerce themselves

In the 18th century, eastern Absolutism surpassed western Absolutism.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Discuss the features of western absolutism.

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- 2) Discuss the features of eastern absolutism.

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11.5 EUROPEAN ABSOLUTISM – SOME CASE STUDIES

To understand Absolutism, we need to study the ways in which Monarchs tried to establish their power over restraints exercised by the church, feudal lords, and medieval customary laws internally, and rival countries abroad. From an efficient and effective bureaucracy and administration for domestic control to war and diplomacy for ascendancy abroad and trade, taxation and socio-legal reforms to finance it all, the Absolutist Monarchies empowered themselves in different ways that suited them. This would be noticeable in the complex ways in which the kings, princes, cities and estates exercised, shared or competed for political authority better. It will help to study the making of the modern state-system in Spain, France, England and Sweden in Western Europe and Russia, Prussia and Austria in Eastern Europe.

11.5.1 Western Absolutism

1) Spain

Spain suffered the most political upheavals in Europe prior to the sixteenth century because of seven centuries of conquests by the Moors and conflicts between Christian kingdoms. Some rulers like Ferdinand the Great of Castile, Alfonso the Warrior of Aragon, and brave military commanders like Rodrigo Diaz were determined to drive the Moors out of the Peninsula by *Reconquista* (reconquest). The conflicts between Christian kingdoms of Aragon, Castile, Navarre and Portugal were reduced when **Isabella, Queen of Castile**, married **Ferdinand, King of Aragon** in 1469 and ruled their respective kingdoms on the basis of a shared heritage, culture and religion.

The main achievement of the reigns of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella was the extension of royal authority at the expense of the nobility which had amassed considerable powers including military orders capable of fighting as independent units because of constant warfare with the Moors. The consolidation of royal authority was gradually achieved by:

- a) reducing the power of the legislatures of both Aragon and Castile
- b) giving the two Royal Councils of Aragon and Castile the responsibility of supervising all internal affairs and justice;
- c) more effective control over the nobility;
- d) replacing leading members of the nobility with royal servants with legal training in the *Curia Regis* or Great Councils of Aragon and Castile to advise the monarchs and in other Councils set up to govern Spain;
- e) forfeiting the nobility's right to vote;
- f) elevating the lower nobility and bourgeoisie as rewards for loyal service for curbing the powers of the great feudal lords; and
- g) the appointment of royal officials in local government.

New royal officials known as *Corregidores* were appointed to assume joint responsibility for judicial and administrative duties in Castile which had been granted semi-independence in the Middle Ages with their own assemblies and

officials called *regidores*. Banditry, a by-product of the violent period of *Reconquista* was reduced by the end of the fifteenth century with the revival of the *Santa Hermandad* (Holy Brotherhood) which was given the powers of arrest, detention and summary justice.

The monarchies gradually reduced dependence on the *Cortes* (legislatures) by building up financial reserves through the resumption of previously alienated lands and property and a more intense application of a tax known as the *alcabala*. In the twenty-eight years between 1475 and 1503 the legislature of Castile was called only nine times. And it was not convened at all in the sixteen years between 1482 and 1498.

Charles I was the king of Spain from 1516-1556 and Holy Roman Emperor as Charles V from 1519 to 1558. As the Holy Roman Emperor his political ambitions increased and he considered himself the secular leader of Christendom whose role was to establish a universal empire and overcome heresy.

His territorial responsibilities were enormous because it included Spain, the Holy Roman Empire extending from Germany to northern Italy including Austria and Burgundy (which he ruled as Charles V), and the southern Italian possessions of Naples, Sicily and Sardinia. He could not create a single system of government for his entire empire. The result was that each dominion developed its own constitutional arrangements, the guiding principle of which was usually to maintain an administration which could function in Charles's absence.

The system of councils as developed by Ferdinand and Isabella was used to increase the power of the Crown. To the advisory and departmental councils were added the Council of War, the Council of State, the Council of Finance, and the Council of the Indies for its American territories. No doubt the system of Councils became complex, but it worked well because of the exceptional ability of the administrators to whom Charles I dedicated his authority during his absences. While the bureaucracy grew the legislature continued to decline, reducing its scope for opposition to royal policy. All Spanish institutions were subordinated to the principle of providing resources for an ambitious foreign policy which affected most of Europe.

Charles spent the better part of his reign, engaged in military conflicts with the Ottomans, the French and the Protestants in the Holy Roman Empire and in maintaining a balance of power in Europe.

Under the Hapsburg dynasty (1516-1700), Spain became the first global super-power. The first majority of the Spanish empire was built in a frenetic burst of activity from 1492 to 1540. During this time Spain explored, conquered and settled the Caribbean, conquered and annexed the territories of the Incas of Peru and the Aztecs of Mexico and established itself as the dominant power in Italy. In Europe, Spain also controlled the Low Countries.

In 1556 Charles I renounced his claim to the Netherlands and Spain in favour of his son, Philip and to the imperial Crown in favour of his brother, Ferdinand. His legacy was left in ruins: Germany was bitterly divided over religion, Spain was near bankruptcy and the Netherlands were in revolt.

Charles's son Philip became the king of Spain as **Philip II** upon the abdication of his father in 1556 and ruled until his own death in 1598. During the reign of

Philip II, the Spanish Empire witnessed its greatest power and influence and covered its largest extent. The Spanish Conquistadores had been conquering new territories in the Americas since Columbus's encounter with the New World in 1492. By the time Philip ascended the throne, Spain controlled the Caribbean, parts of North America and all of Central and South America except for Portuguese controlled Brazil. Philip II also established a colony in Philippine Islands in the Pacific Ocean and Portugal was annexed to the empire in 1580.

While the Spanish empire was at its height during Philip II's reign, the seeds of decline were also sown through damage to the Spanish economy. Philip II inherited an empire with significant debts. The various wars that Catholic Spain fought against the Protestant nations cost the empire a great deal of money as did the efforts to suppress rebellions in the Netherlands. Spain had become dependent upon the gold and silver wealth that was brought in from the American mines to maintain the government. In fact, Spain declared bankruptcy in 1557, 1560, 1575 and 1596. This overextension of the Spanish economy was a major factor in the decline of the empire in next century.

Philip II believed in close personal involvement in administration and that his main duties were to ensure impartial dispensation of justice, to protect the Church and the Inquisition, and to uproot heresy. His inability to delegate responsibility and focus on formulating policy slowed the administration down. The system of Councils continued to expand on territorial bases with Council of Portugal and the Council of Flanders. The Councils of Italy and Portugal were successful but the Council of Flanders could not stem the revolt of the Netherlands against Spanish rule.

At the time of the accession of **Philip III** who ruled from 1598-1621 Spain had an enormous national debt and unresolved conflicts. The year 1610 saw the peak of silver imports from South America. But this resulted in a massive inflation leading to an economic slowdown.

The Spanish nobility or *Grandeess* whose powers had been severely curtailed by Philip II soon became stronger as Philip III handed over his powers to them. The decadence of the royal court was reflected in the general weakness of the state. The financial exhaustion of the realm was accompanied by war fatigue which eventually led to a truce with Netherland, England and France.

Charles II (1665-1700) was the last king of the Spanish Hapsburg dynasty and Sovereign of the overseas Spanish Empire, from Mexico up to the Philippines. Due to his mental and physical incapacities, the reign of Charles II were years of agony for Spain and his mother acted as the Regent Queen for most of his reign. Upon his death in 1700 the Spanish branch of the house of Hapsburgs became extinct. His death triggered off the Spanish War of Succession in 1701.

2) France

The King of the Franks, **Charlemagne** (c.768-814) united the majority of western and central Europe for the first time since the classical era of the Roman Empire. But after the death of Charlemagne, the vast Carolingian Empire broke up and the title of emperor was passed to German rulers in the eastern part of Europe. At the end of the tenth century, **Hugh Capet (c.987– 996)** founded the **Capetian dynasty** of French kings that ruled the country for the next eight hundred years.

France was divided into numerous fiefs (called duchies) that were ruled by dukes. The Capetians were a family who controlled the region centred on Paris and the land adjacent and extending to Orleans. At first the Capetians' control over the other duchies of France was in name only because many were semi-independent kingdoms. Gradually, the kings established a strong monarchy that ruled all duchies in France. The partnership with the Church greatly strengthened the early Capetian kings. Within the royal domain itself the Capetians increased their control over the *Curia-Regis* or the king's court.

The most important single factor in the development of Capetian France, was the relationship of the kings with their most powerful vassals, the Dukes of Normandy. By the mid-eleventh century the Dukes had centralised the administration of their own duchy, compelling their vassals to render military service. Even after Duke William of Normandy (also known as William the Conqueror) conquered England in 1066, he and his successors still remained vassals of the Capetians. Gradually the Normans became so much more powerful than their Capetian overlords that they never hesitated to conduct regular warfare against them.

Philip II or Philip Augustus (1180- 1223) quadrupled the size of the French Empire. His predecessors had been known as kings of Franks but from 1190 onwards Philip became the first ruler to style himself King of France. In the Anglo-French wars (1202-1214) Philip not only succeeded in destroying the powerful Angevin Empire under the English Crown; he also defeated a coalition of three powers comprising of the English, Germans and the Flemish forces at the battle of Bouvines in 1214.

New advances in royal power came with **Louis IX (1226-1270)** perhaps the greatest of all medieval kings. He did not let his personal devotion to the Church prevent him from defending his royal prerogatives against the infringement being made by the bishops or the Pope. Louis IX declared that church property in France was for the requirements of the King and his realm and was not to be despoiled by Rome. The extension of royal justice to the towns was secured by bringing into the *parlements'* deliberations the representatives of the middle classes or the king's bourgeois.

During the reign of Louis's grandson, **Philip IV (1285-1314)** also known as Philip the Fair old conventions began to be followed. He extended royal power ruthlessly and consolidated his royal hold over towns, nobles and the Church. The King's men used propaganda, lies and trickery to undermine all authority except that of the king. The system of royal justice swallowed up the system of feudal justice. The royal courts or the *Cura Regis* became the secret council comprising of his close advisers. The larger group of advisers consisting of other lords and high clerics was called the full council.

War with England kept Philip pressed for cash during much of his reign. Forced loans, debasement of coinage, additional custom dues and royal levies on commercial transactions added to the royal income. In 1296 Pope Boniface VIII forbade kings and princes to tax the clergy of their countries without papal consent. In response, Philip imposed an embargo on exports from France of precious metals, jewellery and currency. This embargo threatened the financial system of the Papacy and the Pope had to withdraw his order. But further quarrels with the Pope led Philip to elect a French Pope who never went to Rome at all which

began the period of Babylonian Captivity of the Papacy at Avignon (1305- 1378). He also stripped the Jews and agents of Italian bankers of their money and property. By the time of Philip IV's death in 1314, the Capetian monarchy of France had established a new model state manned by efficient and loyal bureaucrats. Soon France became embroiled in an interminable contest with England (Hundred Years' War) that crippled the monarchy for a century.

After 1328 the Crown passed to **Philip of Valois, Philip VI (1328- 1350)**, a nephew of Philip IV. The **Valois dynasty** thereby succeeded the Capetian dynasty, but the succession had to be made legal since Edward III, King of England was the son of Isabella, who was the daughter of Philip IV.

Edward's claim to the French throne was not the only reason for the outbreak of war in 1378. England's continued possession of Aquitaine and the port of Bordeaux was an anomaly in a unified France. The Kings of France also encroached upon the feudal rights of the Kings of England.

The French king **Louis XI (1461-1483)** laid the foundations for a strong monarchy by his consolidation of territorial unity and competent central administration. He forced his subjects to pay higher taxes, granted favours and administrative posts to the middle-class men. He restricted Papal control over the Gallican Church. But the greatest threat which Louis XI had to confront was the threat from the Duchy of Burgundy. The power of the dukes of Burgundy spread to parts of Eastern France and encompassed a large portion of the Low Countries. The decisive trial of strength between France and Burgundy took place under Charles the Bold, the duke of Burgundy. Subsidized by Louis XI, the Swiss forces defeated Charles three times in 1476 and 1477 and later he was slain. The duchy of Burgundy and other parts of eastern France were assimilated in the French kingdom. The only major region which remained outside the control of the Crown was the Duchy of Brittany and this region was brought under royal control by his son **Charles VIII (1483-1498)**.

French Absolutism was a gradual progression towards a centralised monarchical State, interrupted by lapses into provincial disintegration and anarchy until finally a stable political structure was established. The three great political events which disrupted the state formation were the Hundred Years War, the religious wars of the sixteenth century and the Fronde revolts of the seventeenth century. But by the reign of **Louis XIV, Sun King (1643-1715)** a cult of royal authority was created. His words, "I am the State" expresses the spirit of absolute monarchy by which the king held all political authority. He viewed himself as the direct representative of God. He began his reign with administrative and fiscal reforms. He chose Jean Baptiste Colbert as his Controller General of finance, who soon implemented reforms that sharply reduced the deficit and fostered the growth of industry. Colbert believed in the mercantilist doctrine that the expansion of commerce and a favourable balance of trade was the key to State wealth. His war minister Louvois expanded and reorganised the French army. The Hundred Years War succeeded in freeing the monarchy from fiscal and military limits of medieval polity. The war was won only by abandoning the seigneurial ban system of knightly service and creating a regular paid army whose artillery proved to be a decisive weapon. With the consent of the French aristocracy the *taille-royale* of 1439 was collected. The nobility, the clergy and certain towns were exempted from this payment. Between the reigns of **Charles VII (1422-1461)** and the death of Louis XII (1498- 1515), new *Parlements* were founded in Toulouse.

Bordeaux, Dijon and Rouen. The position of the aristocratic oligarchy in the *Parlements* was reinforced at the expense of the guilds.

After the Hundred Years' War, with the revival of the monarchy the Estates-General found a new lease of life. But with the political devolution of monarchical power the consolidation of the Estates General as a permanent national institution was thwarted. The result was that the French kings were unable to get the financial contributions they wanted from the national Estates. The deep rootedness of local seigneurial power hampered the growth of a national Parliament in Renaissance France.

In the first half of the sixteenth century, **Francis I (1515- 1547)** and **Henry II (1547-1559)** presided over a prosperous country and foreign policies tended to become an exclusive royal prerogative. Legal officials extended the judicial rights of the monarchy and special sessions of *Parlement* of Paris or *lits de justice* were conducted in the presence of the king. But the national bureaucracy was still in a rudimentary stage.

In 1589 **Henry of Navarre or Henry IV (1589-1610)** ascended the throne as the first king of the **Bourbon dynasty**. By the late sixteenth century the Protestants were strongest in south-central and south-west France. The French nobility took up the cause of Protestantism as the local feudal independence among the nobles encouraged resistance to the centralised Catholic monarchy. The French Wars of Religion broke in 1562 and the Catholic nobles organised a powerful league led by the Guise family and both sides took to negotiating with foreigners for help, the Catholics with Spain and the Protestants with England. But Henry IV laid siege to Paris and by the Edict of Nantes in 1598 the French religious wars were ended. The Edict of Nantes was a major symbol of religious toleration which established Catholicism as the official religion of France, but also granted rights and freedoms to the Protestants. In 1598, the Treaty of Vervins with Spain put an end to Spanish intervention and restored to the French Crown all Spanish conquests in France. This marked the emergence of France as a major power in early modern Europe.

After the assassination of Henry IV, the Queen mother Marie de Medicis ruled on behalf of her son **Louis-XIII (1610-1617)**. But the security of the country was threatened as factions disputed around the throne. But the Bourbon dynasty was rescued by its greatest minister Cardinal Richelieu. His first objective was to crush a number of revolts staged by the nobles. In the course of strengthening royal absolutism, Richelieu came into conflict with the Huguenots who were defeated in due course of time. To promote economic self-sufficiency, Richelieu encouraged the manufacture of tapestry, glass, silk, linen and woollen cloth. To protect the trading and colonial interests of France, he created a navy which by 1642 had 63 ships.

Richelieu's foreign policy was not only ambitious but extremely expensive. Annual government expenditure tripled from 1620 to 1640, two-thirds of the money going to the military. The drastic increase in taxes needed to pay for the wars sparked a series of provincial rebellions in the 1630s. The population's resentment of the monarchy's rising demands was exacerbated by the fact that these years marked the end of a long cycle of prosperity, encompassing most of the 16th century and the beginning of a period of economic difficulties that would

extend through the reign of Louis XIV. Crop failures, great fluctuations in prices, and outbreaks of famine further accentuated the misery.

Although these revolts were unwelcome distractions from the minister's efforts to project French power abroad, they did not pose a revolutionary threat. Dispersed and uncoordinated, they were put down by a combination of temporary concessions, such as the suspension of efforts to collect unpopular taxes, and the exemplary execution of a few ringleaders.

Richelieu was no innovator, he devised neither new administrative procedures nor novel methods of taxation to secure the king's authority. Indeed, the power of the great financier grew with the government's need for additional war revenue, posing a different threat to royal absolutism.

3) England

England had first emerged as a major power after the Norman conquest in 1066. The Anglo-Saxon forces were defeated by the Norman forces led by **William the Conqueror**. This marked an important stage in the process of Norman expansion which spanned the tenth and eleventh centuries and reached from the British Isles to the south of Italy. By the time of William's death in 1087, the English monarchy was stronger than the French was to be for more than two hundred years.

Between the death of the strong and successful **Edward I** in 1307 and the end of the Wars of the Roses (1455-1485) royal authority was weakened by political dissensions caused by the Hundred Years' War and mediocre rulers who surrendered their authority to the nobility or the Parliament, which gained control of monetary and domestic affairs. The War of Roses between rival factions of the royal family (House of Lancaster symbolised by a Red Rose and the House of York symbolised by a white rose) plunged England into a bitter Civil War for thirty years.

But with the end of the War of Roses at the close of the fifteenth century England emerged as a national monarchy when Henry VII of the Tudor dynasty asserted his royal power.

Henry VII (1485-1509) was confronted with many problems when he ascended the English throne. Henry formally healed the breach between the Houses of Lancaster and York by marrying the Yorkist heiress, Elizabeth, the daughter of Edward IV. Henry dealt firmly with the factional strife led by an imposter Perkin Warbeck who claimed to be Elizabeth's brother. He deprived the nobles of their private armies by forbidding their liveries (lords' uniforms) and maintenance. He also took steps to ban the nobles' habits of interfering in the royal courts. At the local level he utilised the Justices of Peace and at the centre he worked through an administrative court known as the Star Chamber, a special committee of the King's Council, charged with the task of seeing that the apparatus of law was not misused to back up local abuses and privileges. To make justice swift the customary procedures of the common law including trial by jury was bypassed. Henry VII left a well-filled treasury and a prosperous country. He re-established law and order in England after a long period of civil rebellion. His policies set the stage for the most dramatic reigns of his illustrious successors Henry VIII and Elizabeth I.

Tudor England under **Henry VIII (1509-1547)** enjoyed both, solvent government finances and a prosperous society. This national wealth was not unduly expended in foreign wars. Henry's six wives and his lavish court did not beggar England as the wars of Charles V and Philip II did beggar Spain. Henry VIII never really risked his army on the Continent and played a cautious game of balance of power. He made use of the opportunities afforded by the English Reformation to add to the royal revenues by confiscation of monastic property and by rewarding his loyal followers with these confiscated lands. A new class of nobles loyal to the Crown was thus created. Henry VIII continued the administrative policies of his father, strengthened his central administration and maintained adequate supervision over the justices of peace who were the keystone of English local government.

Henry VIII was succeeded by his son Edward VI and then by his elder daughter Mary. In 1558, the English throne passed to **Elizabeth I (1558-1603)** youngest daughter of Henry VIII. Elizabeth was brought up as a Protestant and the Anglican Church was firmly established. The Prayer Book and Thirty- Nine Articles of 1563 issued under Elizabeth have remained to this day the essential documents of the Anglican faith. Royal authority was greatly enhanced as the personal popularity of the queen rose to new heights. Institutionally, the Privy Council was stabilised in the first part of her reign. The espionage and police networks were mainly concerned with suppression of Catholic activity. Factional rivalries within the higher nobility now mainly took the form of corridor intrigues for honours and offices at Court. Parliament started to show independent criticism of government policies. Over the century, the House of Commons grew greatly in size from 300 to 460 members, of whom the numbers of country gentlemen steadily grew. The last years of Tudor rule were marked by an unruly and restive Parliament whose fiscal obstruction led Elizabeth to further sales of royal lands to minimize her reliance on the Parliament. Elizabethan England did not produce a permanent or professional army. The militia contingents were combined with mercenary soldiers, Scots or Germans. The military inferiority of English Absolutism prevented any expansionist goals on the mainland.

Elizabeth never married and in the early years of her reign she played off foreign and domestic suitors one against the other with excellent results for her foreign policy. The dramatic crisis of her reign was the war with Spain which was resolved in the defeat of the great Spanish Armada in 1588.

The Elizabethan Age was an age of wars, rebellions, personal and party strife and intense competition. There was a solid foundation under the state and society that produced the literature, music, architecture, science and wealth and victories of the Elizabethan Age. The age of Elizabeth I was a flowering of English culture symbolized by the writings of Shakespeare, Francis Bacon, Spenser and many others.

The succession of the Tudor dynasty by the Stuarts in 1603 created a new political situation for the monarchy. With the accession of **James I (1603-1625)**, Scotland was united with England. The Scottish impact on the pattern of English development was to prove critical for the fortunes of English Absolutism. The Parliament now represented the central locus of noble power. Divine right doctrines of monarchy were matched by High Church ritualism in religion. Prerogative justice was used against common law, sale of monopolies and offices against parliamentary refusal of taxation. Agrarian and mercantile capitalism

had registered more rapid advances than in any other nation except the Netherlands.

Charles I (1625-1649) undertook the task of building a more advanced Absolutism. English failure to intervene in the Thirty Years' War was compounded by an unsuccessful war with France. Parliament was dissolved indefinitely as it had denounced Lord Buckingham and England's failure in the conduct of war. The monarchy drew closer to the higher nobility by reinvigorating the hierarchy of birth and rank within the aristocracy by granting privileges to the peers. But the bulk of the gentry and newer mercantile interests were excluded from such royal grants. Charles I resorted to every possible feudal and other sources of revenue in order to sustain his growing war expenses and an enlarged State machinery without seeking Parliament's help. The struggle to control the English army in order to suppress the Irish insurrection, drove Parliament and King to the Civil War (1642-1651) and led to a successful bourgeois revolution. The conflicts between the Stuart Kings and Parliament were primarily over the issues of the Crown's prerogatives and the Parliamentary privileges. These disagreements were aggravated by religious animosities and financial disputes. The Monarchy tried to enhance its authority by attempting to impose extra-legal taxes without the consent of the Parliament. The English gentry whose status and influence came from the ownership of land and the powerful bourgeois class who were in majority in the Parliament emerged from the Civil War with their Parliamentary prerogatives secured.

James II (1685-1688)'s pro-French and pro-Catholic policies and his own ambitious designs of becoming an Absolute Monarch, and the birth of a Catholic heir led to the escalation of tensions between the King and the Parliament resulting in the Glorious Revolution of 1688. His three-year reign was a struggle for supremacy between the Crown and the Parliament, resulting in his deposition. It led to the passage of the Bill of Rights which severely curtailed the prerogative powers of the King. After 1689, the Monarchy became a Parliamentary Monarchy.

4) Sweden

The emergence of Absolutism in Sweden was rapid compared to other countries in western Europe. It was not caused by the crisis of serfdom or the internal contradictions of feudalism or the emergence of the mercantile capital and urban economy. It was triggered by the Danish invasion which defeated and executed the ruling Sture oligarchy and imposed its authority over Sweden.

Swedish Absolutism was unique. While western Absolutism was created around an un-servile peasantry and ascendant towns, and eastern Absolutism was created around servile peasantry and subjugated towns, Swedish Absolutism was created around un-servile peasantry and insignificant towns and was driven by foreign subjugation.

The social structure was stable because the aristocracy was inadequate to make any assault on the peasantry and there were no wealthy bourgeoisie in the insignificant towns to challenge the political power of the aristocracy.

In politics there were oscillations in the power of the monarch and his relationship with aristocrats. When the monarch was in minority the aristocrats curbed his powers through charters. When the monarch regained support, he also regained lost powers. Divisions and conflicts within the nobility were important causes

for these oscillations. But the aristocrats adjusted easily to the swings from royal state to representative state. There were no upheavals as in Spain, France or England.

Only foreign pressure could and did destabilize Sweden. Swedish Absolutism functioned most smoothly during aggressive expansion abroad. The harmony between monarchy and nobility was greatest during reigns of royal generals like **Gustavus Adolphus** (1611-1632), **Charles X** and **Charles XII** (1697-1718).

The secret of Swedish Absolutism's economic and military strength were mineral resources. Sweden was rich in iron and copper. They can be compared to Spanish gold and silver in their impact on local absolutism.

Gustavus Vasa, a noble, overthrew the Danish and established his rule over Sweden with the support of aristocrats, independent peasants and Lubeck, an enemy of Denmark from the Hanseatic region comprising of regions of European countries touching the Baltic and North Sea.

Gustavus Vasa took the following steps to establish a stable monarchy in Sweden: took over church estates and two-thirds of the tithe (ten per cent tax) levied by bishops on the people; exploited silver mines; promoted bar-iron exports; minutely supervised state revenue; the administrative apparatus was expanded by trebling the number of bailiffs and the bureaucracy was centralised; the nobility's fiefs were increasingly replaced by an allocation of specific royal revenues for specific administrative assignments (this did not antagonize the nobility because Vasa succeeded in defeating peasant rebellions and Lubeck); the traditional house of magnates was preserved for advice in matters of political importance, but excluded from day-to-day administration; the Estates Assembly (*Riksdag*) was regularly summoned to legitimise royal policies with stamp of popular approval (the Estates Assembly even approved the change from elective monarchy to hereditary monarchy).

Gustavus was able to accumulate a vast surplus without much increase in taxes. And he created a vigorous state that maintained cordial relation with the aristocracy.

His sons and cousin who succeeded him could not match his legacy. At one point, a conflict with the aristocracy was brewing because benefices (rewards for services rendered) were increasingly conferred on people of humble origin until the nobility had only one-third of all benefices.

When Gustavus Vasa's nephew, **Gustavus Adolphus** became monarch of Sweden the aristocrats reclaimed their pre-eminence with a Charter of 1612 which guaranteed noble primacy in appointments to the bureaucracy. There was reconciliation and integration of monarchy and aristocracy. They became part of the modern and powerful administration and army in Europe. The executive system was re-organised into five central colleges staffed by noble bureaucrats. A Privy Council regularly deliberated public policy. The aristocracy was divided into three grades. Sweden was divided into twenty-four provincial units with noble as lord-lieutenant. Adolphus built the basis of the finest army in Europe by introducing a modified form of conscription in 1620 and by ensuring that his troupes used advanced weapons, notably shorter pikes, and lighter firearms, both of which enhanced the manoeuvrability of Swedish columns in battle. With the

advanced degree of discipline instilled into his troupes, Adolphus was able to achieve notable victories in the Thirty Years War. The education system was modernised. The Gothic ethnicity of the Swedish ruling class was eulogised. Heavy tolls were levied on copper mines. A royal export company was organised to corner copper supplies and fix price levels. Large Dutch loans were taken against iron and copper resources for his wars. Prussian tolls, German booty and French subsidies completed its war budget for the Thirty Years War and enabled the hiring of vast numbers of mercenaries into its army. There was six-fold increase in expenditure on the navy and the native army quadrupled. Copper and iron were not just sources of revenue for the Absolutist state, they were also indispensable for its arms industry. This provided the platform for military expansion abroad.

Gustavus Adolphus started with a costly treaty with Denmark to end an unsuccessful war started by his father. Ingria and Karelia were acquired by the Treaty of Stolbovo in 1617, giving Sweden total control of the Gulf of Finland. Riga was seized from Poland in 1621 and Livonia was conquered in 1625-26. In 1629 Sweden attacked Poland, and in 1630 it landed in Pomerania, which was spread across Poland and Germany on the southern Baltic sea shore. Then it intervened in the struggle for Germany in the Thirty Years' War. The Treaty of Westphalia gave Sweden the stature of a co-victor with France of the long war in Germany.

In 1644, **Christina** acceded to the throne and increased the ranks to the nobility and gave away lands and taxes on an enormous scale to the nobles. State incomes decreased equally. The peasantry became dependent on the nobles and reacted vigorously. The hostility of the lower gentry who did not benefit from the profligacy of the queen ensured that old property patterns would be restored.

Charles X who replaced Christina after her abdication in 1654 returned Sweden to aggressive expansionism. They took Poznan, Warsaw and Cracow in Poland. East Prussia became a Swedish fief and Lithuania joined to Sweden. But retaliations and a Danish assault on Sweden undid these conquests.

Charles XI used the *Riksdag* to compromise the privileges of the magnates and reclaimed alienated lands and revenues of the dynasty. Eighty per cent of alienated lands were recovered without compensation. The creation of new tax-exempt properties was forbidden. Territorial counties and baronies were liquidated. These recoveries were more thorough in overseas possessions. Higher tax was imposed on the peasantry. The *Riksdag* (Estates Assembly) submissively approved his increased powers. Payments to troops at home were reduced by allotting them special lands. The army and navy were scaled up. The *Riksdag* ended by approving the divine right of the king to absolute sovereignty over his realm.

Charles XII, the last Vasa warrior-king, surpassed his father in autocratic power. He was able to spend eighteen years abroad (nine years in Turkish captivity) without any disruption of his administration. But Sweden had expanded beyond manageable proportions. Its demographic and economic base was too small to sustain its spread against the combined enmity of its neighbours and rivals.

The imperious autocracy of Charles XII disappeared with him. The nobility deftly engineered a constitutional system which left the Estates politically supreme and the monarchy temporarily a cipher.

The accession of **Gustavus III** restored the Absolutist state and the power of the monarch. When the nobility resisted the king promised the lower estate socially egalitarian reliefs such as access to civil service and judiciary and the right to purchase noble lands.

The last hours of Swedish Absolutism were lived in the anomalous atmosphere of a 'career open to talents' and curbs on the privileges of the nobility.

11.5.2 Eastern Absolutism

Russia, Prussia and Austria in eastern Europe manifested social formations different from western Europe within the feudal mode of production. So, the Absolutism that evolved in eastern Europe was different from the west.

1) Prussia

Prussia, which was to become a byword for German militarism and authoritarianism, began its history outside Germany. The people called Preussen in German, who inhabited the land on the south-eastern coast of the Baltic, were Slavs, related to the Lithuanians and Latvians. They were conquered and forcibly Christianised in the thirteenth century by the Teutonic Knights, diverted from the Holy Land. German peasants were brought in to farm the land and by around 1350 the majority of the population was German. The Poles annexed part of Prussia in the following century, leaving the Knights with East Prussia. Meanwhile Germans had conquered the Brandenburg area to the west and the margraves, or marcher lords, of Brandenburg became Electors of the Holy Roman Empire. Both Brandenburg and East Prussia fell under control of the Hohenzollern family, which mastered the Brandenburg hereditary nobility, the Junkers, and began the long march to power in Europe which was to end with the First World War and the abdication of the Kaiser in 1918.

The story of Brandenburg-Prussia has exemplified the triumph of political skill and audacity over unfavourable conditions. Sparsely populated and deficient in resources, Brandenburg in 1648 held sovereignty over a patchwork of scattered territories. Its ruler, **Frederick William (1640–88)** faced the problem of integrating and defending widely separated possessions, which included the duchy of Prussia, inherited in 1619 but remaining under Polish suzerainty and geographically separated from the electorate of Brandenburg; the counties of Cleves, Mark, and Ravensberg in the Rhineland and Westphalia regions, gained in 1614, also distant from Brandenburg and not contiguous with each other; and eastern Pomerania and various small lands acquired in the Treaty of 1648. Through diplomatic manoeuvring such as changing sides several times between Sweden and Poland and between France and the emperor, he augmented and solidified his realm and his authority within it; moreover, he won direct rule over Prussia as its duke and acquired the important bishops' territory of Magdeburg.

Frederick William's instrument in the attainment of these and subsequent prizes was the army, a permanent force of 30,000 disciplined professionals, the adequate financial support of which dictated every aspect of his government. Large revenues from taxes required a flourishing economy, the stimulation and direction of which by mercantilist principles was a main undertaking. Economic growth was further accelerated late in the Great Elector's reign by the influx of nearly 20,000 skilled Huguenot refugees. A territory wide system of state administration began this

economic and fiscal effort and resulted in the creation of a professional bureaucracy that permitted the Great Elector to govern essentially without estate participation. The landowning nobility supported their prince in exchange for the freedom to exploit their peasants as they saw fit. In these ways Frederick William laid the foundation for what was to become an autocratically ruled state, enabled by its strong economy, tightly run administration, efficient fiscal organization, and powerful army to play a prominent role in the empire's and Europe's affairs.

The Great Elector's efforts were rewarded in 1701 when his successor, **Frederick III (1688–1713)**, obtained from the emperor (who needed the Brandenburg army for the impending War of the Spanish Succession) the right to style himself Frederick I, King of Prussia (Prussian rulers renumbered themselves upon bestowal of the royal title). The title of king, recognized internationally upon the conclusion of the war in 1713, was of considerable importance to Brandenburg in its competition with Saxony, whose ruler had become king of Poland in 1697, for pre-eminence in northern Germany.

The formidable Frederick William of Brandenburg, known as the Great Elector, made Brandenburg-Prussia the strongest of the northern German states, created an efficient army and fortified Berlin. His son, the Elector Frederick III (1657–1713), was not a chip off the old block, he was besotted with all things French and looked for a crown as a reward for aiding the Emperor Leopold I. There could not be a king of Brandenburg, which was part of the Empire, and there could not be a king of Prussia, because part of it was in Poland. By an ingenious formula, however, Frederick was permitted to call himself king in Poland. He put the crown on his head with great ceremony at Königsberg as Frederick I and so created the Prussian kingdom, with its capital at Berlin. Brandenburg from then on, though still theoretically part of Germany owing allegiance to the Emperor, was treated in practice as part of the Prussian kingdom.

Frederick and his second wife, Sophia Charlotte of Hanover, sister of George I of England, turned their court at Berlin into a miniature Versailles where French was the first language and French etiquette was followed.

It was Frederick's son and successor, **Frederick William I (1713–1740)** one of history's sergeant-majors, who transformed his realm into the military autocracy that gave Prussia its lasting reputation. He ruled until 1740 and his son in turn, **Frederick the Great (1740–1786)** used his army to turn Prussia into a major European power later in the eighteenth century. He perfected the combination of state-structure, productive energy, military power and ethical drive that came to be identified with modern Prussia. Known as the "soldier-king," Frederick William built his standing army into a force of more than 80,000 men. Although Prussia was only the 13th most populous country in Europe, it had the continent's fourth largest army (after those of France, Russia and Austria), a superbly drilled and equipped force that served mainly defensive purposes. Only peasants and journeymen served in the ranks, while the middle classes were safe from the draft but obliged to quarter soldiers in their homes. A huge war chest obviated foreign subsidies, and reliable revenues, more than 70 per cent of which went to the army, provided ample support.

For the state to continue to draw high taxes without ruining land and people, the country's level of wealth had to be raised. Frederick William therefore pursued

an aggressive policy (known as cameralism) of stimulating agriculture and manufacturing while reducing unnecessary expenditures; even his court was stripped of many of its royal trappings. Export bans preserved raw materials, and sumptuary laws limited indulgence in luxuries. Town governments were subordinated to royal commissioners, whose powers included supervision of urban production. A work ethos suffused society from the top.

1740 was an ideal year for king Frederick William. Charles VI (Archduke of Austria and Holy Roman Emperor) had just died without leaving a male heir. He had spent the last years of his life trying to persuade the European powers to sign the Pragmatic Sanction, which would guarantee his daughter Maria Theresa as ruler of the Habsburg dominions. On becoming Archduchess of Austria, Queen of Bohemia and Queen of Hungary, Maria Theresa found herself challenged by the Elector of Bavaria, who advanced his candidature for the Habsburg dominions. Frederick seized the opportunity and stated that he would give Prussia's guarantee that Austria's territory would not be violated; in exchange he wanted part of Silesia. He sent Prussian troops across the border and occupied Silesia. Frederick immediately provided justification for his action, 'By our geographical position we are neighbours of the greatest Princess of Europe; all these neighbours alike are jealous of us and secret enemies of our power.' Of these Austria was the most dangerous and Silesia acted as a springboard from which could be launched an invasion into the heart of Prussia. In Prussian hands, Silesia would be a definite military advantage since it would greatly increase the distance which Austrian armies would have to march in hostile territory before threatening Berlin. Strategically, it would separate Saxony from Poland, both of which were under the same ruler and friendly towards Austria. Silesia was also desirable for commercial reasons, since it contained the main trade routes down the Oder River valley to the Baltic and was the pivot of east-west trade in north Central Europe. By the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle (1748) Prussia received recognition of her claim to Silesia. But Frederick was to pay dearly for his success. Maria Theresa would not let the matter rest and conceived a strong personal animosity towards Frederick.

Prussia may have been poor, but the monarchs had a great deal of control over peasants and nobility alike. Like many other German states of the late 17th and 18th centuries, Prussia had been damaged by domestic and foreign armies. Depopulation was the major problem. The total wealth of society and its productive capacity had dropped drastically. Every prince had to be very concerned with creating wealth, and needed an up-to-date, well-disciplined, well-supplied army. Frederick William was able to lay claim to 30% of land in the kingdom, thanks to his strong army, and thus cutting down the independence of the nobility and gaining for himself an independent power base and income.

This wealth was used to implement an impressive bureaucratic government. Compared to France, where offices had been sold for generation, in Prussia offices had seldom been sold, and were not sold at all after 1740. Frederick William I and Frederick II were able to do this because they were solvent and so powerful that they could keep discipline among nobles and officers alike.

The greatest accomplishment of these wealthy, puritanical kings was perhaps the new ruling class that they created. Both Frederick William and his more cultured son thought of themselves as protectors and patrons of the old landed nobility, the Junkers, whom they depended upon to command the army on which

their power was ultimately based. But at the same time they knew that they needed educated men to plan and oversee the technical aspects of government including industrial and trade policy. Prussia, as usual, was most successful in creating such a class, drawn from both nobility and middle class.

These Prussian bureaucrats were both more business-like than any merchants of the eighteenth century and also were the original socialist technocrats. Prussia was successful in building not just an army, but a core of skilled industrial workers, and became the fourth manufacturing country in eighteenth century Europe.

But Prussian absolutist system had some limitations. Prussia, though economically progressive, was entirely authoritarian in its attitudes. In particular, the welfare that the Prussian welfare state sought to create was the welfare of the state. The individual meant nothing, except in so far as his or her existence benefited the corporate body and the interests of the ruler. The peasants as a class was protected, but any peasant family could be expropriated if replaced by another one. Nobles were also regulated very strictly in their private lives. For instance, they were not even allowed to leave the country without permission, which was almost never granted.

The success of the system is consistently exaggerated by the neglect of significant factors:

For instance, the role of plunder: success largely financed by confiscations of Frederick William I (used to build an army), the use of that army, by Frederick II to conquer Silesia (increase in size of state by 25%). Even this plunder did not guarantee success. Frederick II's savings (four years' state revenue) ran out long before the end of the Seven Years' War. War had to be financed by savage taxation of conquered Saxony, and later partition of Poland. Much of Prussian economy was theft on a grand scale.

Some facts which are often overlooked in discussions on the nature of Prussian welfare state is that almost 1/9 of Prussian population died in Seven Years' War. Fighting such wars was not an unfortunate necessity for Frederick. The Prussian system was not immune from the normal problems of a monarchical, centralized regime. The chief danger was that the rulers got comfortable and spent their loot in totally unproductive ways, on patronage and palaces, rather than on production or even armies.

Frederick William II, Frederick the Great's son, spent his father's savings of 52 million thalers and ran up a debt of 40 million thalers. Fortunately, he died before he could completely wreck the state. New reforms (after humiliating defeats by Napoleon) gave Prussia a new lease on life. The nineteenth century success of Prussia is partly due to the fact that in this crisis, the absolutist government took the daring step of eliminating mercantilist restrictions on trade, dysfunctional privileges, and most features of the society of orders.

2) Austria

The Habsburgs were the last to emerge of a series of royal houses that vied for possession of the thrones governing the medieval states of Central-Eastern and North Eastern Europe during the 14th through early 16th centuries. The family started out within the Holy Roman Empire as obscure minor German aristocrats holding lands in the eastern regions of Switzerland. The Habsburg rise from

obscurity began in 1273 when **Count Rudolf of Habsburg was chosen Holy Roman Emperor (1273–91)** by the German Electors of the empire precisely because of his very obscurity and perceived weakness as a prince. During Rudolf's reign, the Grand Principality of Austria was established as the new heartland of Habsburg possessions. The family thereafter continued to enlarge its lands and to maintain claims on the imperial throne in Germany primarily through a deft political policy of marriage alliances that transformed the Habsburgs into the wealthiest and most politically powerful ruling house in all of Europe by the sixteenth century.

The Habsburgs became known as the House of Austria after the Swiss peasantry ousted them from their original family seat in Habichtsburg in the Swiss canton of Aargau in 1386. The name Austria subsequently became an informal way to refer to all the lands possessed by the House of Austria.

Because the elector-princes of the Holy Roman Empire generally preferred a weak, dependent emperor, the powerful Habsburg Dynasty only occasionally held the imperial title in the 150 years after Rudolf's death in 1291. After the election of Frederick III in 1452 (r. 1452-93), however, the dynasty came to enjoy such a dominant position among the German nobility that only one non-Habsburg was elected emperor in the remaining 354 years history of the Holy Roman Empire.

The Habsburg Empire was a super national collection of territories united only through the accident of common rule by the Habsburgs, and many of the territories were not part of the Holy Roman Empire. In contrast, the Holy Roman Empire was a defined political and territorial entity that became identified with the German nation as the nation-state assumed greater importance in European politics.

Although the succession of Holy Roman Emperors from the Habsburg line gave the House of Austria great prestige in Germany and Europe, the family's real power base was the lands in its possession, that is, the Habsburg Empire. This was because the Holy Roman Empire was a loosely organized feudal state in which the power of the emperor was counterbalanced by the rights and privileges of the empire's other princes, lords, and institutions, both secular and ecclesiastical.

The Habsburg power was significantly enhanced in 1453, when Emperor Frederick III confirmed a set of rights and privileges, dubiously claimed by the Habsburgs, that paralleled those of the elector-princes, in whose ranks the family did not yet sit. In addition, the lands the Habsburgs' possessed in 1453 were made inheritable which strengthened the Habsburgs. The lands they held in 1453 became known collectively as the Hereditary Lands, and, with the exception of territories possessed by the archbishops of Salzburg and Brixen, encompassed most of modern Austria and portions of Germany, France, Italy, Croatia and Slovenia.

While it is certain that to strengthen the authority of the monarchy remained the Habsburgs' ideal, an absolute monarchy can be seen only as a distant goal, given the peculiar structure of the Austrian monarchy, composed of a number of kingdoms forming a free alliance in which the various estates (*Stände*) remained powerful. Eager to play their part as heads of state, the Habsburgs had always been concerned to strengthen the monarchy's power, but they had been obliged

to content themselves with the Bohemian model. The power of the estates in turn reflected that of the aristocracy (*Herrenstand*), which held absolute supremacy, for the person who owned the landed property controlled not only the production of primary foodstuffs, but also a major part of the economic activities and authority over his subjects which the state had more or less devolved upon him. In Hungary or in Austria, even if the peasant was not legally bound to the landlord, he never considered leaving the village over which the vicar and the landlord held control. By means of the right of patronage, the landlord had succeeded in making the minister of the Church into a subordinate.

The Hapsburg emperor **Leopold I (1658-1705)** a lifelong rival of Louis XIV, successfully contained France's bid for dominance in European affairs, thus maintaining the balance of power. His reign too was marked by warfare. Positioned between the French in the West and the Turks in the East, Leopold often had to fight both at the same time. In 1683, Turkish forces under the leadership of the Ottoman Grand Vizier, Kara Mustafa besieged Vienna. Leopold tried to rally support from Christian princes and finally a united force which had the Pope's blessings defeated the Turks. By 1687, Leopold was once again the master of his kingdom and the principality of Transylvania. In 1690 the Turks attempted to retake Hungary only to be defeated again.

Turkish occupation and the war of reconquest had devastated the Hungarian countryside and vast stretches of farmland lay unoccupied. To restore agriculture and also to neutralise possible Hungarian rebellions, Leopold encouraged Serb, Bohemian and German peasants to resettle the lands, promising them limited freedom from royal taxes and the obligations of serfdom. This resettlement complicated the religious situation in Hungary, where for a century, Hungarians had been split over religion, along with Catholics, there were Calvinists, Lutherans, Eastern Orthodox and Muslims.

The Hapsburgs ruled over lands that were far more socially polarized than Louis XIV's France. At the top were the Magnates who were fabulously rich. The Magnate families were few in number, but their cooperation with the Hapsburgs was essential for the smooth functioning of the government and they dominated Hapsburg administration at the central and local levels. The vast majority of people tied to the land as serfs lived in the countryside. Serfdom had expanded in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as East European landlords, had successfully bound peasants to the soil as a labour force producing grain and timber for the western European market. During the dislocations of the Thirty Years' War, they also bound them to the soil to prevent them from fleeing to more peaceful areas.

Landlords used their serfs to work their estates without compensation. Leopold tried to reduce uncompensated work to three days a week, but his success was limited because direct control of serfs lay with the landlord class, not the Hapsburgs. Leopold's policies thus had to accommodate the self-interest of nobles before it could be effective.

Since Leopold's direct rule over the mass of his subjects was very limited, he never established the kind of centralized and intrusive state that Louis XIV and Louis XV created in France. The Hapsburg state was also characterised by a high degree of ethnic and religious diversity, particularly in Hungary. The

Hapsburgs manipulated these groups for their own purposes, with the result of enhancing the sense of difference between communities.

3) Russia

The impact of the Tartar invasion of Russia between the mid thirteenth to late fifteenth centuries has been the focus of a debate among historians. One school has argued that the experience of the invasions was somehow beneficial because it enabled the centralizing influence of the princes of Moscow to prevail. On the other side, there are scholars who argue that despite the military efficiency of the Tartars, they were the bearers of an inferior culture as compared to the Russians. It was during this period of political chaos that the princes of Moscow asserted themselves and assumed leadership.

Moscow had a favourable geographical position, near the great watershed from which the Russian rivers flow north into the Baltic or south into Black Sea. Once the Tartars ended their attacks, trade reopened through these routes. Moscow was also blessed with a line of remarkable and shrewd princes and administrators who were anxious to increase and consolidate their authority within their territories. They married into powerful families, acquired land by purchase, by foreclosing mortgages and by inheritance. Later these princes claimed victories over the Tartars and became the champions of liberation in Russia. The princes also secured the support of the Russian Church.

Ivan-III (1462-1505) put his candidature forward as the heir to the princes of Kiev and declared that he intended to regain the ancient Russian lands that had been lost to the Tartars and Poles. In 1492, the Prince of Lithuania was forced to recognise Ivan III as sovereign of all the Russians. This national appeal was fortified by a religious appeal also, for in addition to being sovereign Ivan, he was also the champion of Orthodoxy against the Catholic Poles and the Moslem Tartars. Ivan adopted the Byzantine title of *autocrat* (after the death of his father-in-law Constantine XI) and even used the Byzantine double eagle as his seal. Ivan III laid the foundation of Russian Absolutism during this overall resurgence with his *pomest'e* system, which expropriated large tracts of land from Russia's landowning class (princes and aristocrats, many of Tartar and Oriental origin) and settled a new gentry (military service class) on them. The *pomest'e* required seasonal campaigns in the Tsar's armies. Most *pomest'e* lands were allocated in the central and southern Russia, close to its permanent battlefield with the Tartars (central Asian forces, including Mongols and Turks). The *pomest'e* lands were small with 5 to 6 peasant households in each compared to the lands of aristocrats and princes with an average of 520 peasant households. Productivity was low because of small size and government control over the exploitation of these lands. The first step to legal enserfment of Russian peasantry was Ivan III's Sudebnik decree which restricted the mobility of serfs to two weeks per annum.

His successor **Tsar Ivan IV, the Terrible (1534-1584)** even discontinued the practice of consulting his nobles, he freely bestowed favours on his slaves and inflicted punishment on them as he chose. He extended and radicalised the administration by taking over lands of hostile landowners and creating a terrorist guard corps (*oprichniki*) who were granted confiscated lands for their services. He introduced the widespread use of heavy artillery in the army, and an infantry of musketeers, both critical for foreign expansion. He annexed the Khanate of Astrakhan, breaking Tartar power in the east. The *pomest'e* system (land tenure

system) was escalated to shift the balance of power between the *boyars* (aristocrats) and the tsar in favour of the tsar. *Votchina* estates, whose ownership could be inherited, and whose owners had administrative and legal rights, were made liable for service. The growth of monastic estates was checked. The role of the Boyar Duma or the Assembly was diminished. The first *Zemski Sobor* (land assembly) a consultative body consisting of nobles, clerics and representatives from the towns to assist the Tsar in matters of war and peace was set up. In which smaller gentry were represented prominently was called. The military service class settled in *pomest'e* lands were given the right to determine the rent to be extracted from the peasantry on their lands. The administrative and tax system was modernised. Salaries in kind for provincial officials was abolished. A central treasury was created for fiscal receipts. The service gentry manned local self-administration and got further integrated into the governmental apparatus of the monarchy. All these measures enhanced the political power of the Tsarist State.

Russia lived in a constant state of war or preparation for war. A prolonged national emergency over centuries led to the creation of an autocratic state-system. More significantly, in Moscow, feudalism had not developed a united class of self-conscious nobles who would fight against the rising monarchy for their privileges. Rather the Muscovite nobility produced various factions with which the monarch could deal individually. In the West, the Church was part of a feudal society and overzealous of its prerogatives. But in Russia, the Church became an ally of the monarchy. With the fall of Constantinople, the Churchmen elaborated a famous theory that made Moscow the successor to the two former world capitals: Rome and Constantinople. The Church also claimed that the Russian Tsars had inherited certain insignia and regalia from the Byzantines and even Babylonians.

Between the accession of Ivan III in 1462 and the accession of Peter the Great in 1689, the autocracy succeeded in overcoming the opposition of the old nobility. A new class of military-service gentry was created who owed everything to the Tsar. Their estates (*pomestie*) initially granted for life in exchange for service, eventually became hereditary. The estates (*votchina*) of the old nobility which had always been hereditary but for which they had owed no service, became service-estates.

In 1613, the *Zemski Sobor* elected **Michael Romanov** as the next Tsar. The Romanov dynasty thus continued in power from 1613 to the Russian Revolution of 1917. However after 1623, the *Zemski Sobor* was summoned only to help declare war or make peace, to approve new taxation and to sanction important new legislation. All lands, *votchina* and *pomest'e*, were made hereditary and liable to military service. Poor merchants and artisans were made state serfs. Under the *Ulozhenie* code, all slaves and free peasants were consolidated as new class of unchangeable hereditary serfs, which served as one of the foundations of Russian Absolutism. The other foundation of Absolutism was the understanding and unity between monarchy and nobility by which the nobility owed loyalty to the king and the king granted the nobility serfdom as part of the estate that could be inherited from father or ancestor. The Romanov dynasty abolished the *Guba* or the self-administration mechanism of provincial squires and replaced with governorships appointed from Moscow.

Under **Peter the Great (1682-1725)** service to the state became universal. A central bureau in Moscow kept a census of the service men and of their obligations, in time of war. Together with the absolute autocracy, the institution of serfdom

was the most characteristic feature of Russian society. In a period of bitter agrarian and political crisis such as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it became advisable for the government to help the service gentry to keep their farmers fixed to the soil. The Russian serfs were not emancipated until 1861.

He created a new ranking system which aligned nobles and squires in a similar way into the political framework. A sophisticated hierarchy was introduced in the aristocracy with new titles like Count and Baron borrowed from Denmark and Sweden. Independent magnate power was ruthlessly suppressed. The Boyar Duma was replaced by an appointed senate. The gentry were reincorporated as the core of a modernised army and administration. Serfs were bound to their lords instead of the land they tilled and thus could be sold.

The Church was subordinated to the State. The Patriarchate, i.e. the offices of those who exercised autocratic authority over an extended Christian family, was abolished.

The Tsar started an industrialization effort that was slow but largely successful. Russia's main exports were based on the mining and lumber industries.

A new, westernised capital was built in St. Petersburg. The administrative system was divided into gubernias, provinces and districts. The bureaucracy was doubled. There were nine centralised government colleges, or departments, run by collective boards. The budget was quadrupled largely by increasing peasant taxes five-fold between 1700 and 1708. Around three-fourths of the budget was used to build a modern and professional army and navy. But the tradition of corruption and embezzlement implied that perhaps only one-third of the taxes reached the state.

Catherine II (1762-1796) became Tsarina in 1762. She wanted to be reputed for political Enlightenment. So, she introduced a new education system, secularised Church lands and promoted mercantilism to develop the Russian economy. The currency was stabilised, the iron industry expanded and foreign trade increased.

Organised serf agriculture was extended to Ukraine after pushing back the Turks and Tartar Khanate of Crimea. Free and semi-free inhabitants were reduced to the status of central peasantry and money rents paid by serfs increased manifold. State serfs were handed over to nobles for private exploitation. This led to a great rebellion of all groups in the lower classes against the ruling class. But the revolt was crushed.

The Charter of Nobility of 1785 guaranteed nobles all privileges, ended their compulsory duties, gave them control over rural labour and transferred provincial administration to the gentry. There was harmony between the Monarchy and nobility.

Catherine faced more than a dozen uprisings during her reign.

Of the various uprisings that threatened Catherine's rule, the most dangerous came in 1773, when a group of armed Cossacks and peasants led by Emelyan Pugachev rebelled against the harsh socioeconomic conditions of Russia's lowest class, the serfs.

International successes corroborated the strength of Russian Absolutism. Russia became the main initiator and beneficiary of the partition of Poland. It was the

only country in the ancient regime which could withstand the French attack during the Napoleonic Wars. For the first time Russian armies were dispatched deep into western countries (Italy, Switzerland and Holland) to suppress the bourgeois revolution still fanned by the Consulate.

The structure of the Tsarist state which emerged from the Vienna Settlement (1815) had no parallel anywhere in Europe. The State was officially proclaimed as an Autocracy. A feudal hierarchy was cemented into the State system itself. Aristocratic titles and privileges continued to be related by the political system to different administrative functions down to 1917

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Compare and contrast the cases of the French and Swedish monarchies.

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- 2) Compare and contrast the cases of the Russian and Austrian monarchies.

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11.6 LET US SUM UP

After reading this unit, you have been able to:

- Understand the different features of Absolutism in the Western Europe and Eastern Europe;
- Understand how the absence of bourgeoisie in the Eastern Europe led to shaping up of absolutism there in a different way from western Europe;
- Understand through different case studies how the shaping up of absolutism in the Western and Eastern Europe specifically took place.

11.7 KEYWORDS

Corregidore	:	Chief Officer of Magistrate of a town in Spain
Baillis	:	High officers having judicial, financial and military powers
Taille	:	Direct Land Tax in France
Gabelle	:	Salt Tax in France

Servitor	:	Serving the social superiors
Cortes	:	Legislature in Spain
Seigneurial	:	Feudal Lord
Curia Regis	:	Royal Council or King's Court
Parlement	:	French Provincial Appellate Courts
Lits de Justice	:	Sessions of Parlement of Paris headed by the King
Gallican	:	Ancient Church of France
Bailiffs	:	Law Officers who have power to seize a person's property or possessions if they failed to pay their debts
Privy Council	:	A body of Councillors or Advisors appointed by the King
Herrenstand	:	Higher nobility or aristocrats of Austria
Stande	:	Different social status groups
Pomest'e	:	Feudal landed property granted to the gentry class in exchange for military service
Oprichniki	:	Terrorist Guards Corps in Russia
Zemsky Sobor	:	Assembly of representatives of different social classes
Votchina	:	Heritable landed estates in Russia
Riksdag	:	Estates Assembly in Sweden.

11.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See Section.11.3 especially Sub-Section.s 11.3.1 to 11.3.5
- 2) See Section.11.4 especially Sub-Section.s 11.4.1 to 11.4.5

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See Sub-Section. 11.5.1 and especially France and Sweden
- 2) See Sub-Section. 11.5.2 especially Russia and Austria.

11.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

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