

Give an estimate of Frederick William the Great Elector as the founder of Prussia's greatness

Ans: The period of Thirty Years war (1618-1648) was auspicious to the Hohenzollerns and unlucky for Habsburgs. The elector of Brandenburg, duke of Cleves and duke of Prussia were the members of the Hohenzollerns family. In the course of thirty years war the Hohenzollerns helped materially to lessen the imperial control and at the close of the struggle they secured for themselves the wealthy bishoprics Halberstadt, Minden, Magdeburg and the eastern half of the Duchy of Pomerania.

The International fame of the Hohenzollerns was increased by Frederick William (1610-88) commonly styled the Great Elector. When he ascended the throne, the Thirty Years war had reduced his scattered dominions to utmost misery. However, with resolution, he set out to reduce the misery to unify his various possessions to make his real a factor in general European Politics.

The Great Elector, not only enabled Brandenburg-Prussia to recover from the devastation of the Thirty Years war, but by diplomacy more than military powers, he obtained in the Peace of Westphalia the title of the above mentioned additions of territories. The great elector increased his country's resources and secured for her an appreciable prosperity. He invited skilled artisans and agriculturists from abroad, opened the country well acquainted with industrial arts, undertook the construction of new roads and canals and did everything possible to improve agriculture, commerce and industry.

In matters of government the Great Elector was, like his contemporary Louis XIV of France, a firm believer in monarchical absolutism. Brandenburg, Cleves and East Prussia were compounded to one. The great elector established an efficient and centralized govt. he stamped out all the traces of particularism and brought the whole region under a uniform system of administration. He made drastic enforcement on the rights of the provincial diet and immunities of the feudal nobility and succeeded in welding the disharmonious provinces of his realm into a fairly compact state.

The great elector laid the foundation of the future greatness of Prussia as a military power. He created the first standing army of Prussia.

The foreign policy of the G E was as successful as his domestic policy. The aim of his foreign policy was twofold viz. a) the liberation of Prussia from the suzerainty of Poland and b) expansion towards the Baltic. He successfully intervened in the Northern war(1655-60) and secured for Prussia the end of Poland's suzerainty. In 1666 he concluded a treaty with Neuburg family and secured thereby districts of Cleves, Ranesberg and Mark. In the Dutch war of Louis XIV(1672-78) GE completely defeated Swedes, who were in alliance with France. He compelled the Swedes to withdraw from upper Pomerania. But by the Treaty which brought the war to an end the elector was obliged to give up upper Pomerania, though on the whole, he had left an abiding impression of the newly acquired military strength of Prussia on contemporary

Europe. Under him the fame of his army was well established and Brandenburg-Prussia took rank as the chief competitor of Sweden for the hegemony of the Baltic.

The great elector secured for Prussia recognition as a leading power among the contemporary states in Europe. Thus the great elector made the foundation of great Prussia.

## 2. Estimate the importance of the reign of Catherine the great in Russian history

Answer: Catherine the great ascended the Russian throne in 1762. She ruled the country for 34 years with firm hand and completed the works of Peter the great.

By birth she was not a Russian. She was a prince from Germany married to Peter III of Russia. But as soon as she was in Russia, she started working to win over the people to her side. She learned the Russian language and outwardly conformed to the Orthodox Church. She earned a reputation for patriotism. So far her influence was that when her husband became the Tsar of Russia the people looked upon her as real ruler.

In her domestic policy Catherine followed the footsteps of her predecessor Peter the great. Hence, her internal policy was directed towards increasing the power of the Tsar. She centralized the administration by dividing Russia into 44 civil govts and districts. Over each of them she placed officers appointed by central authority. She recognized the influence of the Orthodox Church on the lives of the Russian people. So, to the ecclesiastical alterations of Peter, she added the secularization of the Church property.

Being of western birth, she was in favor of western civilization and she opened up her country more thoroughly to western influence. She was a despot and she wanted her contemporaries to regard her as an enlightened despot. She took some personal interest in the literary and scientific progress of the age. She established several schools and academies and encouraged the upper classes in Russia to use French as language of polite society. She sent Russian princes to England to observe the latest experiment in agriculture. She made herself seem enlightened to statesmen and philosopher of her age and her capital came to be known as centre of culture and learning in contemporary Europe. She invited famous French philosopher Diderot to her court. But at heart she was little moved by the desire of reform or by pity for the condition of the peasants. She continued the system of serfdom and under her rule; their condition did not really improve, because she was not sincere in her motives.

The importance of the rule of Catherine lies in the foreign policy of three countries which at the beginning of the eighteenth century blocked the European expansion of Russia-Sweden had been properly dealt with by Peter the great in the Great Northern War and the Treaty of Nystad. Poland and Ottoman Empire remained to be dealt with by Catherine the great, and she dealt with them effectually. She was a wary successor of Peter the great. In maintaining foreign affairs Catherine

showed great efficiency and choose the allies with great care. When the question of Poland absorbed her attention she acted as an alliance with Frederick the great of Prussia. But when the Ottoman Empire was involved she sided with Joseph II of Austria. Catherine cultivated friendship with Frederick and discussed on the matters of Poland partition.

With the death of Augustine III the predominance of Russia was established in Poland. Prussia and Russia entered into an agreement to uphold the anarchical constitution of the unhappy and victimized country. A popular insurrection of Polish people against the melding of foreigners was suppressed by the Russian troops. After that Catherine with the help of Prussia and Austria brought about the three partition of Poland. As a result of which Poland ceased to be an independent country.

The 1<sup>st</sup> partition was made in 1772. By this partition Russia acquired all the country which lay east of the Duna and Denipar rivers. Most of the Ukraine and almost the whole of Lithuania passed into the hands of Tsarina. By the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> partition Russia got the major share of the Polish territory. Thus Poland had disappeared from the map of Europe.

The power of Turkey was also declined.

Peter had tried to extend Russian boundaries to the Baltic Sea, but failed in Turkey. It was Catherine who brought Peter's policy to fulfillment. The enmity between Turkey and Russian was always there. Ultimately a war broke out in 1768 and it lasted till 1774. In that war Turkey received series of defeats. At last the Russian war came to an end by the treaty of Kuchuk-Kainarji in 1774. This treaty was a landmark in extension of Russian empire and decline of the Ottoman Empire. Within a few years Catherine established Russian control over the various places north of the Black Sea. With that war 1) Catherine acquired a natural boundary in Europe and became the chief power on the Black Sea. 2) Henceforth, Russia was looked upon as the friend and supporter of the Orthodox nationalities within the Ottoman Empire. 3) Russia became the protector of certain Churches in Constantinople.

After the treaty of Kuchuk-Kainarji the Ottoman Empire declined with ever-increasing rapidity and Russia became a candidate for the spoils. Catherine brought the policy of Peter the great to its logical conclusion by destroying the independence of Poland and crushing the power of Turkey. She made Russia a great power in Europe. Her reign added two hundred thousand square soils to the Russian territory. Because of the three partitions Poland ceased to exist as an independent country. But her policy towards Poland does not stand moral justification. It was a simple act of political braggadocio. The attitude towards Turkey and the firm foothold on the north of the Black Sea was the definite beginning of the Eastern Question in the international politics in Europe. This proved to be a very thorny problem in European politics. Catherine contributed enormously towards making Russia a great power in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

### 3. Why was Joseph II the least successful of the Enlightened Despots?

Ans: Joseph II had been associated with Maria Theresa since 1765. He became sole ruler of the Austrian empire upon her death 1780 and thenceforth, for ten years, he gave unrestrained pursuit to 'enlightened' despotism. Joseph 2<sup>nd</sup> was thoroughly 'enlightened'. He admired Voltire and Rousseau. He surpassed Frederick the great of Prussia in devotion to reason and reform. He believed in the despotism if not in the divine right, monarchs.

It is a pity that Joseph II cannot be judge simply by his good intensions, for he was quite unfitted to carry out whole some reform. He had derived his ideas from French philosopher rather than from actual life. Regardless of tradition, regardless of opposition, regardless of every consideration of political expediency, he rushed ahead on the path of reforms.

To Joseph 2<sup>nd</sup> it mattered not that masses of his subjects were catholic Christians. In his opinion, Catholicism must be purged of superstition and unreason and must be subordinate to the state. He insisted that no papal bulls should be published in his dominion without his own authorization; he nominated the bishops and confiscated Church lands. The clergy were to be trained in state school.

Some of these measures were no doubt desirable, but by trying to reform everything at once, Joseph only shocked and angered the clergy and such of his people as piously lower their religion.

Joseph II desired to extend his possessions eastward to the Black Sea and Southward along the Adriatic. But this policy proved sterile. His designs on Bavaria were frustrated by Frederick the great.

The administrative policy of Joseph II was also unfortunate. He was against the tradition. He carried the sacred crown of St. Stephen, treasured by all Hungarians to Vienna and abolished the Hungarian diet. Thus, with a stroke of pen he decreed a new system of local government for his empire. He divided it into 13 provinces each under a military commander. Each province was divided into districts and these again into township. The army was henceforth to be on Prussian model and peasants were forced to join army. These all were very fine on paper, but in practice it was a gigantic failure. The Austrian Netherland, Hungary etc revolted against the system.

Finally, Joseph directed that all serfs should become free men, able to marry without the consent of their lords, permitted to sell their holdings and privileged. Nobles and peasants alike were to share the burden of taxation, all paying 13 percent of their land tax. He planned to give everybody a free elementary education to encourage industry and make all his subjects prosperous and happy. But the peasants disliked his compulsory military service policy and misunderstood Joseph efforts for their benefits. The nobles hated him for attempting to deprive them of their feudal rights. The middle classes were irritated by his autocracy. Thus his policies could not satisfied the people for which while he was dying in 1790, Joseph confessed that '*after*

*all my troubles, I have made but few happy and many ungrateful.* He directed that most his reforms should be cancelled and proposed as his epitaph, the gloomy sentence- *'here lies the man who, with his best intentions, never successful in anything'*

Joseph II, Archduke of Austria and Holy Roman Emperor was at once the most enthusiastic and least successful of all the European monarchs of the age of 'enlightened despotism. His ideas were far in advance of his age and so his beneficial reforms were not appreciated by his people. Joseph's reforms were often statesmen like on conception and were the outcome of his liberal and enlightened spirit. But the people regarded these reforms as irritating attacks upon their privileges and customs. His reforms produced discontent and revolts. His attempt at consolidation almost brought dissolution with the best of intension to elevate his people. Hence he has been described as one of the most pathetic figure in history. But although he failed in his plan to centralize the administration, many of his reforms, such as his system of education, religious toleration and abolition of serfs made permanent good of his country.

Joseph tried to emulate Frederick, but he forgot that latter did not face any difficulty in carrying out his reforms, because grounds were already prepared by his predecessors. In Joseph time, the empire was still medieval in character. What Joseph wanted to do could not be achieved in his lifetime. It needed a longer period time.