

Ques-Napoleon was the unconscious instigator of German Unification. Elaborate. (200 words)

Answer: Apart from the deep cultural roots of German nationalism, Napoleon Bonaparte also proved to be an unconscious instigator for German Unification. His role was like a typical occupation force that compels the defeated nation to ask itself how it could preclude such humiliations in the future. The politico-administrative changes he made to the German region turned out to be unintended instigators for a future vision of Germany.

→ The sense of German identity predates the rise of the German nation-state. The richness of the German language and culture can be gauged from the fact that Martin Luther had written those famed 95 theses in the German language.

→ After his victory in the war of the third coalition, Napoleon created the Confederation of the Rhine, which effectively nullified the role of the Holy Roman Empire. Subsequently, Joseph II resigned from this office and only retained the title of Emperor of Austria.

→ The institution of the Holy Roman Emperor was a major obstacle to German unification because certain German principalities owed allegiance to him. This gave him a right to meddle in the affairs of the German region.

→ He reorganized the 300 German states – small, big, lay, ecclesiastical- and free cities into 16 bigger states and created the confederation of the Rhine consisting of these 16 states.

→ Even when the Congress of Vienna revoked many of the changes brought by Napoleon, understood the futility of the old hodgepodge of the German region. The German Confederation that they set up was far more rationalized than what existed before Napoleonic reforms.

→ He improved the internal administration of these states by, inter alia, introducing the Napoleonic code. He abolished feudalism and curtailed the power of the church in these states. He secularized the ecclesiastical states.

→ Whenever Napoleon went he was welcomed as a liberator and a harbinger of liberty, equality, and fraternity. But, the initial enthusiasm soon turned into hostility, as it became clear that the new administrative arrangements did not go hand in hand with political freedom.

→ Increased taxation, censorship, forced conscription into the French armies required to conquer the rest of Europe, all seemed to outweigh the advantages of the administrative changes.

→ German states together participated in the wars against Napoleon; the close cooperation between the armies of these states increased the sense of fellow feeling between Germans. Fighting a common enemy was a significant unconscious instigator of German nationalism.

→ The fight against an oppressive power fired up the imagination of thinkers of Romanticism. Their art and literature were a major fuel for German nationalism.

→ Napoleon used to humiliate his vanquished enemies. In the treaty of Tilsit, he took almost half of the Prussian territories. Such actions tended to sow deep-seated . The war indemnity that he imposed on Prussia necessitated reforms in administration and economy. The consequent Prussian Reform Movement under the rubric of Stein-Hardenberg reforms brought Prussia into the vanguard of the German Question.

Therefore, Napoleonic unconsciously reminded the German society across the political divide that they must unite to protect their nation. It can be compared with the freedom movement of India where different regions realized their oneness because they were under the dint of a common oppressor.

