

### ■ Background:

- The American Revolution stands as one of the most significant landmarks in the history of the modern world. It became a symbol of the world's first anti-colonial movement. Apart from that, it assumed some other dimensions as well.
- In one sense the American Revolution was an extension of the European question as the American middle class revolted against the mercantilist policy that had continuously been criticized by the European middle class. It was not merely a coincidence that in the year 1776 the magnum opus of Adam Smith 'The Wealth of Nations' was published and in the same year American Revolution occurred. Furthermore, this revolution provided the new constitutional model and gave provisions of fundamental rights and federal system. Finally, this revolution resulted into transforming American colonies in economic and political superpower which played a decisive role in world history.

### ■ Structure of North-America :

- Different European powers such as the British, the Dutch and the French established their colonies in different parts of Northern America. For example, French captured Canada while Britain established thirteen settlements in the

eastern part of North America. Whenever we use the term 'American Revolution', we mean the revolt of these thirteen British settlements against the mother state.

### ■ 13 Colonies and their relations with Britain:

- In the early 1600s, Britain started to establish colonies in America. 13 colonies were established by the British in America and at the head in every colony, the institution of governor was established but there was a provision of a colonial legislature as well. These colonies enjoyed self-government for a longer time and simultaneously they grew vastly in economic strength, so upto the second half of 18th century Americans became so autonomous in their work and behavior that any sort of restriction over them by the mother state was quite intolerable for them.



### ■ What was the social composition of American Colonies?

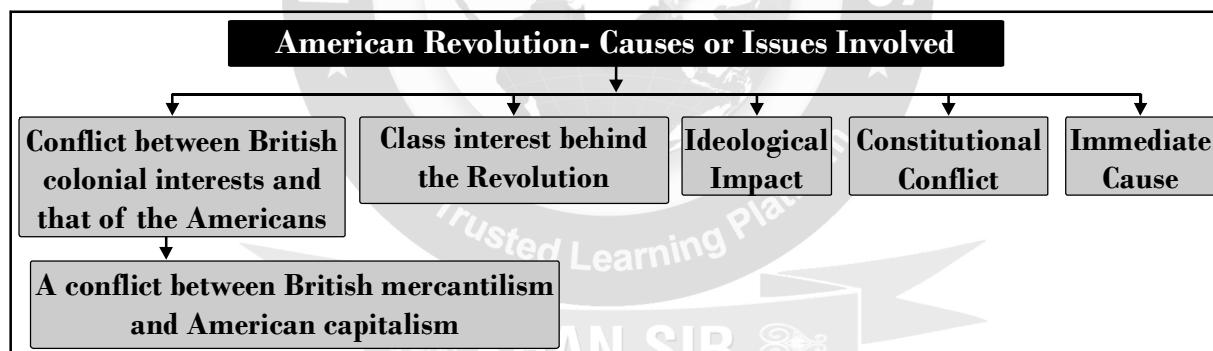
- British-American society was divided in different classes. On the highest ladder of society there were aristocrats and the gentry. Beneath them there were the merchants, entrepreneurs, intellectuals, political leaders, students who could be characterized as middle class. Underneath the middle class there were peasants and

mechanics who belonged to the lower class. At the lowest ladder of the society there were slaves. Besides African and American slaves there were white slaves as well.

### ■ Whether it was a war of independence or a revolution?

- The American Revolution has a greater significance in the history of the world. Firstly, it was the first colony which got independence after fighting against its mother state. However, in comparison to French Revolution it was less radical but to call it as only a war of independence is not appropriate. As it ensured the freedom of American colonies so it was a war of independence. But, as it accentuated change in political, economic & social structure, so it should be characterized as a revolution as well.

- Why is the American Revolution called a middle class revolution?  
In this revolution leadership was provided by the middle class. As it worked as an anti-colonial movement so it is generally believed to be a conflict between the British and Americans but in true sense in this conflict all Americans did not participate. Aristocratic class among Americans supported British side. So, in actual sense it was a fight between British monarchy under James III and the American middle class. Apart from that, it deserved to be called a middle class revolution even on the ground that the changes brought by the revolution conformed to the middle class ideology. For example, American Revolution did not ensure universal adult suffrage. In the same way, it did not ensure right to employment and right to food.



### ■ Issues involved in American Revolution or the causes of the Revolution :

As causes following factors can be highlighted-

- A conflict between British mercantilism and American capitalism :-** A major cause behind the conflict between Britain and America was clash in economic interest. Louis Hacker, an economic historian, has argued that it was a conflict between British mercantilism and American capitalism. British mercantilism was inclined to bring American economy under

strict British colonial control. With this purpose following steps were taken-

- Navigation Acts were introduced in 17th century. It tried to promote the British shipping industry at the cost of American one. For example, there was a provision that all sorts of exports to and imports from American colonies could have been done or carried on only in British ships or in the ships in which at least 75 % of employees should have been of British origin.

- Apart from that under the same mercantilist policy the British tried to bring monetary policy and export-import policy of American colonies under British control. Furthermore, on the purchase of two products, tobacco & maize, from American colonies, there was a complete British monopoly. Not simply that, the British even discouraged industrialisation in American colonies.
- The American economy was a fast-growing economy. In fact, the American shipping industry could not thrive if the British control could not have been relaxed i.e. American colonies could not go for industrialization in British presence. So, when the provisions of the Navigation Act were further tightened up by subsequent legislation than in opposition to this measure American capitalists revolted.

## **2. Class interest behind the Revolution :-**

- American Revolution can be explained in context of class interest as well. Certain classes in American colonies welcomed the revolution-
  - Merchants moved for revolution as they were offended at Navigation Acts.
  - Smugglers were equally offended as the British government tried to enforce the 'Anti-smuggling Act' strictly.
  - Political leaders in American colonies visualized their bright future in independent America. So even they supported the Revolution.
  - Students & intellectuals were inspired by republican ideas. That's why they supported the revolution.
  - Tobacco growers of Virginia were in search of fresh land that's why they were making a westward expansion, but their progress was checked by the British government.

- But certain classes opposed the revolution as well. These were aristocrats, Red Indians as well as the peasants from Middle American regions. Aristocrats were opposed to the revolution as it was in the old order that their traditional privileges were duly recognized, Red Indians of America felt themselves safer under the British rule than under the new order. Likewise, peasants of the Middle American region were very cold about the revolution for the fact they were worried about uncertainties in their future.

## **3. Ideological inspiration :-**

- American Revolution was having some ideological inspiration as well. They were greatly inspired by enlightenment and British thinkers like John Locke, Harrington & Milton. American colonies were rising from the status of a colony and taking the status of a nation. In a conference held by American leaders at Albany, an American leader Benjamin Franklin made an appeal to the British government to treat Americans differently, but the British government did not pay attention to this appeal.

## **4. Constitutional Conflict :-**

- There was a constitutional conflict as well. According to the British, the parliament was an all-powerful institution and all other institutions were just subject to it. But Americans had remained all uncompromising on the issue of natural rights of man. They believed that man, by birth, inherited certain rights and these rights were above all institutions including the British parliament.

## **5. Immediate Cause :-**

- The government of Granville adopted some measures in order to boost up British finance which enhanced discontentment

among Americans. Actually, the Seven Years' War created extra pressure on British treasury. Therefore, the government of Granville introduced other sorts of measures in order to mobilize sufficient finance so that a British army in American colonies could be maintained.

So he took the following measures—

1. To enforce navigation laws strictly.
  2. To activate anti-smuggling laws.
  3. To impose some new taxes like the Stamp Act & Sugar Act.
- The delegates from 9 of the 13 colonies met in New York city and gave a slogan 'No taxation without representation'. In other words, there were no American representatives in the British parliament, so the British parliament was only authorized to impose external tax but could not impose internal tax on colonies. As a result of a series of events, the American colonies became independent by 1783.

■ **Importance of slogan ' No taxation without representation':** The slogan 'No taxation without representation' had a larger significance in the history of the world. It put a question mark on the relationship between colony and the metropolitan state. It rejected the prevailing mercantilist view that colony exists for the betterment of the mother state. Apart from that a colony demanded representation at a time when the larger part of European population was still unrepresented. Furthermore this slogan inspired constitutional movement in other colonies in future including India in twentieth century.

**Question:** - 'American Revolution was a conflict between British mercantilism and American capitalism. Examine. (UPSC-2013)

**Ans:-** Multiplicity of factors including ideological conflict, conflict between constitutional notions etc. played their role in American Revolution but the clash in economic interest between colonies and the metropolitan state definitely played a decisive role.

British mercantilism emphasized that the interest of the colonies is subservient to that of the metropolitan state. It was under this notion that navigation laws were introduced through the act of 1651. It ensured the primacy of British shipping industry at the cost of the shipping of other rivals as well as that of the colonies. It emphasized that all the exports or imports could be carried through ships on which three-fourth employees should have been from British origin. Apart from that industrialization in American colonies was consciously discouraged by British government. Furthermore, American colonists were supposed to sell certain products to British merchants alone. Lastly, British government imposed certain taxes like sugar tax and stamp tax on American colonies. So, it was clear that American capitalism could flourish only after the exit of the Britain from American colonies. Thus the protests which started on the issue of taxation were soon converted into a liberation movement.

It is in this context we can say that American Revolution was primarily a revolt of American capitalism against British mercantilism.

■ **Significance of American Revolution:-**

1. It resulted into the liberation of American colonies. Not simply that, a federal America could emerge as a world power and was likely to play a very significant role in world politics after nearly 150 years.
2. American liberation became a symbol of

'Anti-colonial movement' that influenced the liberation movement even in other parts of the world. The immediate impact was visible in Latin America.

3. After the revolution, American colonies emerged to be the first modern republican government. When Europe was at the stage of enlightened monarchy, British American colonies reached up to the status of a republic. In this way, ideologically American colonies went ahead of contemporary Europe.
4. After liberation, American colonies formed a federal government. In this way, Americans developed a new model of government that was much suited to multi-racial, multi-lingual & multi-cultural countries.
5. Americans sanctified fundamental rights for their people in the new constitution. So, USA became the first nation which had to provide the right to religious freedom and rights to conscience to their people.
6. Being a middle class revolution, it gave an ideological support to French Revolution as well. The American struggle inspired the French people to rise up against ancient regime.

**Question:** - With American Revolution Britain lost one colony but gained another one.

**Ans:** - With American Revolution Britain lost one colony, America while got another one, India.

So far as Britain continued to possess American colonies hardly did it pay proper attention to India. In 17th century Navigation Acts were introduced in context of American colonies so that British monopolies could have been ensured on American exports and imports. In fact

American colonies had remained to be a source of precious metal for Britain.

But, when Britain lost American colonies in 1783 finally, then it concentrated over its Indian possession. Following steps were taken to consolidate British control over India -

**1. Pitts India Act (1784)** – Just after loosing American colonies, British parliament adopted Pitts India Act after a long debate. Its objective was to ensure better control over company's activities in India. On the basis of this Act a Board of Control was constituted and it had to maintain dual control on company's affairs along with Court of Directors.

**2. Reforms by Lord Cornwallis** – Just after that Lord Cornwallis was sent to India as a new Governor General who carried all round reforms in India such as land revenue reforms, police reforms, civil services reforms etc. so that the base of British government in India should have sufficiently been strengthened. Thus, for more than 150 years India remained to be the most precious jewel in British crown.

That's why American Revolution proved a major land mark in the evolution of British colonial policy.

#### ■ Challenge in the framing of the American constitution:

- Thirteen American colonies formed an odd alliance to fight against the British and maintained unity till the liberation movements was going on. But after the exit of the British, internal squabbles started among them about their future constitutional status.
1. **Federalist V/s Democratic debate-** Big merchants, financiers, capitalists & bankers favoured a strong federal government as they believed only a strong federal government could give proper

protection to American economy against European competition. On the other, lower peasants and merchants opposed a federal government on the ground that such a government with the support of a strong army and police system would impose the tax on the people and would collect the tax with iron hand. Then, in 1789 in Philadelphia Congress, the constitution which was adopted was a compromise between the federalist and non-federalist. In this, the provision of the federal government was adopted but in order to satisfy the other sections of society 10 fundamental rights were enforced through constitutional amendment in 1791 and made the supreme court its custodian.

2. Another controversial issue was relations between **big states & small states**. The small state demanded equality in representation of states, while big states pleaded for representation on the basis of population of the states. Therefore, as a compromise between big states and small states, a bicameral legislature was accepted as the American Congress. In the upper chamber i.e. senate, all the states were given equal representation (2 representatives each) but in the lower chamber i.e. the House of representatives representation was given on the basis of population.
3. **Free states V/s Slave states-** There was a difference between capitalist northern American states and plantation aristocracy of southern states which presented and promoted the slavery system. Slave states demanded that while providing them the representation in the House of Representatives even slaves had to be counted. But, Free states opposed this move for the fear of loosing the status

of majority in the lower chamber. So, in order to resolve the difference between Free states and the slave states, the slaves had to be counted in deciding the quantum of representation but the value of a slave had to be 3/5th of a free citizen.

- **Limitations of Revolution :-** In actual sense this constitution was very far from being the reflective of popular will. In this constitution, limited franchise with property criteria was introduced. It was in tune with middle class objectives which emphasized that the government should be for the people but not, exactly by the people. Above all, the declaration of liberty which was enshrined in American constitution was not applicable in case of millions of slaves who were just as chattel without any rights.

**Question- The American Revolution “was a natural and expected event in the history a colonial people who had come of age”.**  
**Comment.**

**Ans:-** The seeds of destruction were inherent in old colonial structure itself. whereas economic exploitation made colonial people grieved and restless association with the institutions established by metropolitan state made them more politically conscious and inspired them to political protest. The same sequence of events occurred in case of American colonies.

1. **Economic exploitation** - British government enforced mercantilist policies in American colonies and through navigation acts made American colonies subservient to British colonial interest. American industry, American shipping industry, American trade all were subjected to the strict British control. It created wider discontent in American middle class.
2. **Growing nationalist consciousness** – In American colonies British government

established the seat of governor and constituted an assembly to give representation to Americans. Naturally, it created political consciousness among American colonists who could organize a protest against unjust taxation and gradually moved towards freedom. As Americans were from British origin so they developed political consciousness a bit more earlier.

In this way American Revolution was a natural and inevitable event in the history of colonialism.

**Question- The American Revolution laid the foundation of the modern world. Comment**

**Question Analysis-** *This question is 'Hypotheticle' in nature. It is needed to agree with the above statement. 'Keywords' are 'modern world' and 'foundation'. By 'modernity' means progressive changes in the political, economic and social fields.*

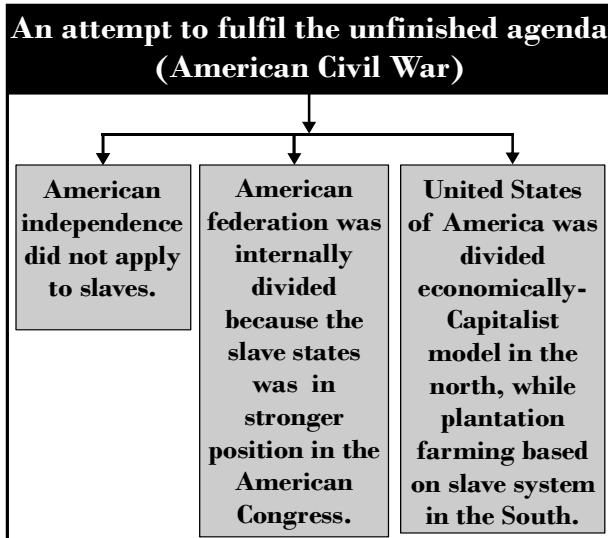
**Answer –** The process of modernity that initiate with the enlightenment was forwarded by the American Revolution. In other words, the American Revolution was an implementation of the ideas of the enlightenment. It was also global in its impact. That is, the changes brought by it impacted not only Europe, but also other continents. It encouraged modernity in following ways-

- **Rejection of mercantilism and colonialism–** It became a symbol of the anti-colonial movement. Its immediate impact was seen on the freedom movement of Latin America.
- **Establishment of Constitutionalism and Representative Government –** An important result of this revolution was the establishment of the first modern, written constitution and elected government.
- **Custodian of the human rights and individual rights–** USA became the first nation to provide fundamental rights to its citizens.
- **The harbinger of republicanism–** European countries were still at the stage of constitutional monarchy, while the American people were enjoying the stage of republic.
- **Federal System–** The American people presented a new model of government for the nations having huge size and pluralistic nature.

Above all, the notion of the American Revolution reached the upto continent of Asia via France, Europe and Latin American countries.

**KHAN SIR**

## American Civil War (1861-65)



### ■ American Civil War and transformation of United States of America :

- Hardly did any destructive event produce such a constructive impact as did the 'American Civil War'. But the most formidable challenge to American democracy was the civil war. However, this event transformed America and developed it as a new modern nation. It proved a very timely surgery to the politico-economic and cultural structure of America.

#### Abolition of slavery :-

- Slavery system is supposed to be a major issue behind the civil war. When we observe minutely we find that the slavery system was having a wider economic,
- With growing tensions between the two, a compromise formula of mediation were failed.

constitutional and political implications. Northern American states vehemently opposed slavery while the southern states did not support it.

- Economic implication** - Northern and central parts of United States of America were economically more advanced and they were carrying industrialization. 'Free wage labour' was the demand for industrialization, but not slavery. On the other hand, slavery was the lifeblood of the economy of southern American states, as they were involved in plantation agriculture.
- Constitutional issue** - USA was making a westward expansion with the slogan of 'Manifest Destiny' as an ideology. But, with the integration of every region, the question arises whether the region should be inducted as a Free State or a Slave State. This question was much important for the fact as it was associated with a constitutional issue. The growing number of slave states could have weakened the position of free states in the lower chamber the 'House of Representatives'.



- **Political issue-** USA fell prey to open attack and bitter criticism by European scholars due to existing slavery system.
- **Moral issue-** North American states declared the system as amoral, on the other hand, southern American states tried to justify it on the moral ground while taking a reference from ‘the Bible’.
- **Immediate cause -** The election of Abraham Lincoln, the candidate of the Republican Party to the post of the president, added further fuel to the fire. Republican Party specified two objectives in the election manifesto- abolition of slavery and protection to North American industries. But southern American states tried to secede from the Union and made a confederation of states. But Lincoln rejected the theory of state sovereignty and clearly stated “America is an indestructible union of indestructible states”. Then, he did not fight civil war in the name of ‘Abolition of Slavery’, rather in the name of protection of the American Union. In 1861 there started an American civil war which continued for four long years. It was during the course of the war itself in 1863 that Abraham Lincoln abolished slavery. Due to better mobilization of resources and more developed economy, the northern states won the civil war in 1865. Finally, the northern and southern states were reunited on the basis of the Louisiana Pact of 1877. So American Union was saved.

### ■ **Significance of American Civil War**

- It did a successful social surgery to USA, as a result of which it emerged to be more powerful & healthy. It proved a capitalist movement due to following factors-
- After abolition of slavery even southern American states moved for industrialization. Therefore, USA

underwent a capitalist transformation as industrialisation became all-pervasive.

- Due to opposition from southern states, the government of USA could not have so far given protection to American industries, but after the civil war USA followed the protectionist policy in favour of its industries, more than half a century. It did so at a time when in the rest part of the world free trade policy was being encouraged. It was due to the success of its unequal policy that USA could emerge as the largest economy after the World Wars. (It is an irony that till the recent year USA criticized India & some other countries for promoting protectionist policy.)
- It is not merely a coincidence that the economy of USA manifested the fastest rate of growth between 1870 and 1970. Here, the abolition of slavery worked as a major trigger.
- **Respectable position of USA among international organizations -** Due to the prevalence of slavery system, America was criticized by European states. However, after the civil war slavery system was abolished through the 13th constitutional amendment. Aftermath, slaves were enshrined with human and political rights. In this way, the position of USA improved among international organisations and later it established as a custodian of human rights.

### ■ **Limitations :**

- The Blacks remained segregated in American society even after the sanctification of constitutional and human rights. But as far as racial discrimination is concerned, it has continued till today and racist attacks and police encounters against black citizens are so common.

### Food for Thought

- Why is American war of independence treated as the Revolution?
- Innumerable number of colonies could get freedom in coming one and half countries but why did freedom of American colonies attract the attention of historians so much so that no other country could rival it.
- After freedom did British American colonies reach at a better level of democratization than Britain had achieved?
- Why should American Revolution be taken as supplementary to the publication of wealth of Nations by Adam Smith?

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