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Second World War

Sep. 1, 1939 — Sep. 2, 1945

Causes : The causes of Second World War as under —

- 1. The Treaty of Versailles (1919) :** The treaty of Versailles had in itself the germs of the Second World War. The Germany was very badly treated. She was forced to sign the treaty at the point of a bayonet, in a spirit of revenge. To tear away the treaty of Versailles, Hitler joined hands with Mussolini of Italy.
- 2. Nationalist Movements of Germany & Italy :** The rise of the national movement in Germany & Italy added fuel to the fire. Although Hitler tried to assure the world that he meant peace, he could not conceal his ambition for long. He embarked on a career of aggression which ultimately led to war. The same was the case with Mussolini who had established his dictatorship in Italy in 1922.
- 3. Conflict of Ideology between Dictatorship & Democracy:** Countries like Germany, Italy & Japan represented the ideology of dictatorship while Great Britain, France & USA represented the ideology of democracy. Mussolini described the conflict between the two ideologies thus : 'The struggle between the two worlds can permit no compromise. Either we or they'.
- 4. Inefficiency of League of Nations :** Unfortunately, when hostility was growing between the two camps there was no effective international organisation which could bring the leaders of the two camps on a common platform and bring about a reconciliation between them. The League of Nations was practically dead.
- 5. Colonial & Commercial Rivalry :** The colonial and commercial rivalry between England and France on one side, and Germany and Italy on the other brought them in conflict with each other.
- 6. Aggressiveness of Berlin-Rome-Tokyo Axis :** Hitler had become very aggressive. He annexed the Saar Valley, occupied Rhineland and Austria, captured Czechoslovakia etc. Mussolini attacked Abyssinia (Ethiopia) Japan attacked China. This aggressive mood of the Fascist Powers got its fullest expression when they formed an Axis providing for mutual aid in the international sphere.

Immediate Cause : The immediate cause of the war was the refusal of Poland to surrender. Germany gave an ultimatum to Poland regarding : (i) surrender the port of Danzig, (ii) the right of establishing a rail link between Germany and East

Prussia through the Polish corridor. These two demands were rejected by Poland. So Germany invaded Poland on Sep. 1, 1939. Britain and France as they were under treaty obligations to aid Poland, declared war against Germany on Sep. 3, 1939.

Course of War : On one side were Germany, Italy and Japan, called the Axis Powers (or Central Powers), and on the other were Great Britain, Francee, USSR, USA, China etc. called the Allied Powers (or Allies).

Germany had to face defeat once again. Hitler, Goebbels & Himmler committed suicide (April 30, 1945) and their successors surrendered unconditionally on May 7, 1945. After the fall of Germany, USA and UK concentrated their focus against Japan. On Aug. 6, 1945, an atom bomb, 'Little Boy', was dropped on the city of Hiroshima. Japan was asked to surrender and when she refused another atom bomb, 'Fat Man', was dropped on Aug. 9, 1945, on the city of Nagasaki. It is estimated that more than one lakh persons were killed and leaving thousands more slowly dying of radiation poisoning. On Aug. 14, 1945, Japan conveyed its acceptance of the Allied demand to surrender but the actual surrender took place on Sep. 2, 1945. With the Japanese surrender, the Second World War came to an end.

Effects of WW II : (i) After about 15 months of preparatory work, the peace treaties were given a final shape by the 21 participating countries and they were signed on Feb. 10, 1947, in Paris by the representatives of the five enemy states and the Allied Powers. As regards Germany she was occupied by the Big Four. After its fall in May, 1945, it was divided into four zones, each of which was administered separated by one of the occupying powers. Berlin came under joint occupation. Ultimately out of one Germany came two countries - West Germany and East Germany. Italy was also deprived of her colonies. As regards Japan, a peace treaty was signed with her at San Francisco in 1951. (ii) The United Nation Organisation (UNO) was established in Oct. 24, 1945. (iii) The USA and USSR emerged as the two most powerful nations in the world. (iv) The emergence of Russia (USSR) gave rise to the desire for freedom in colonies under European control in Asia, (v) The British empire thus rapidly lost its leadership as more and more colonies won independence, (vi) France also lost much of their past glory, (vii) Nearly all the East European countries embraced communism and communist rule was established in the Chinese mainland also.

Important Axis Leaders of WW II : Adolf Hitler (Nazi dictator of Germany), Benito Mussolini (Prime Minister of Italy) and Hirohito (Emperor of Japan) & his Prime Ministers Hidehi Tojo & Fumimaro Konoe.

Important Allied Leaders of WW II : Franklin D. Roosevelt — upto April 12, 1945 & Harry Truman - after April 12, 1945 (Presidents of USA), Winston Churchill (Prime Minister of Britain), Joseph Stalin (Premier of USSR), Paul Reynaud & Charles De Gaulle (Prime Ministers of France) and Chiang Kai-shek.

