

THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

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- French revolution started in 1789.
- The series of events started by the middle class shaken the upper classes.
- The people revolted against the cruel regime of monarchy.
- This revolution put forward the ideas of liberty, fraternity, and equality.
- The revolution began on 14th July, 1789 with the storming of the fortress-prison, the Bastille.
- The Bastille, the fortress prison was hated by all, because it stood for the despotic power of the king.
- The fortress was demolished.

French Society During the Late Eighteenth Century :

- Louis XVI, in 1774, ascended the throne of France.
- Financial France was drained because of the war.
- France, Under Louis XVI, helped the thirteen American colonies to gain their independence from Britain.
- Taxes were increased to meet regular expenses, such as the cost of maintaining an army, the court, running government offices or universities.
- The country of France was divided into three estates in the eighteenth century.
- The feudal system was part of the society estates dated back to the

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- middle ages.
 - 90% of the population was dominated by peasants but only a small number of them owned the land they cultivated.
 - 60% was owned by nobles, the Church and other richer members of the third estate.
 - The clergy and the nobility, members of the first two estates enjoyed certain privileges by birth.
 - The population of France rose from about 23 million in 1715 to 28 million in 1789.
 - This led to a rapid increase in the demand for food grains.
 - Production of grains could not keep pace with the demand.
 - So the price of bread which was the

staple diet of the majority rose rapidly.⁴

A Growing Middle Class Envisages an End to Privileges :

A] In the 18th Century, a new social group emerged who were known as the middle class.

- They had become rich through expansion of overseas.

B] In addition to merchants and manufactures there were lawyers and administrative officials who were educated and believed that no group of society should be privileged by birth but their position should depend on merit.

- They demanded an end to privileges.

c) Philosophers like Locke, Rousseau, and Montesquieu believed in a society based on freedom, equal law and opportunities for all. Rousseau proposed a government based on social contract between the people and their representative. 5

The Outbreak of the French Revolution:

- 1] On 15th May, 1789 Louis XVI called together an assembly of the three Estates to pass proposals for new taxes.
- 2] Each Estate had one vote.
- The third Estate demanded one vote for each member of the assembly.
- They demanded that voting should

now be conducted by the assembly as a whole. 6

3] When the king rejected the proposals of the Third Estate, they walked out of the assembly in protest and held their meeting in the hall of an indoor tennis court and declared themselves the National Assembly.

4] On 14th July, 1789, an agitated crowd stormed and destroyed the Bastille, a prison just outside Paris, freeing all its prisoners.

5] Due to rumours spreading about the nobles trying to destroy crops, the peasants attacked them, booting and destroying records of manorial

duces.

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6] finally, the king agreed to a Constitutional Monarchy rule.

— On 4th August, 1789, the Assembly abolished taxes and tithes and the lands owned by the Church were confiscated.

— France becomes a social monarchy :

i] The national assembly completed the draft of constitution in 1791 with its main objective to limit the powers of monarch.

— The powers were separated and assigned to different institutions - the legislature, executive and judiciary.

ii] The constitution of 1791 gave the power to make laws in the national assembly, which was indirectly elected.

iii] Active citizens were only men above

25 years of age who paid taxes equal to at least 3 days of labour's wage.

- The remaining men and women do not have right of vote.

iv] The constitution begin with a right of declaration of the rights man and citizen such as right to life, freedom of speech, freedom of opinion, equality before law etc.

v] Various political symbols used by illeterate people in 18th century are:

- The broken chain : stands for the act of becoming free.

- The bundle of rods and fasces : shows strength lies in unity.

- The eye within a triangle radiating light : the all-seeing eye stands for knowledge.

- Sceptre : symbol of royal power.

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- Snake biting its tail to form a ring: symbol of eternity.
 - Red Phrygian cap: cap worn by a slave upon becoming free.
 - Blue-white-red: the national colours of France.
 - The winged woman: personification of law.
 - The law tablet: the law is same for all and all are equal before it.
 - France abolishes Monarchy and becomes republic :

i) Louis XVI had signed the constitution but also he entered into secret negotiation with the King of Prussia.

ii) Rulers of neighbouring countries were

worried by the developments of France and made plans to put down their events.

— The national assembly voted to declare war against Prussia and Austria.

iii] The patriotic song *Marseillaise* composed by the poet *Roget de L'Isle* as sung for the first time by volunteers as they march into Paris which is national anthem of France.

iv] The revolution wars brought losses and difficulties to the people.

— The constitution of 1791 gave political rights only to the rich people of the society.

— Political clubs became more important from rallying point of view in which

most successful clubs was that of Jacobins.

- Its leader was Maximilian Robespierre.

vi] Members of Jacobin club were from less prosperous sections of society which includes small shopkeepers, artisans, printers, servants etc. they planned a revolt against people of Paris.

- Later, the assembly voted to imprison the royal family and elections were held.

vii] The newly elected assembly was called the Convention.

- In 1792 it abolished the monarchy and declared France a republic.

Reign of Terror :

i] The period from 1793-1794 is referred to as the regime of terror.

- Robespierre followed a policy of severe control and punishment.

i] All those whom he saw as being "enemies" of the republic - ex-noble and clergy, members of other political parties even members of his own party who did not agree with his method - were arrested, imprisoned.

ii] If the court found them guilty, they were guillotined.

- Robespierre's government issued laws placing a maximum ceiling on wages and prices.

iv] Meat and bread were rationed.

- Peasants were forced to transport their grain to the cities and sell it at prices fixed by the government.

- A Directory rules France :

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- i] A new constitution was introduced which denied the vote to non-propertied sections of society.
- ii] It provided 2 elected legislative councils, (who then sought to dismiss them.) point 3
- iii] The directors often clashed with the P legislative council, (which later pointed a point 2 directory (an executive made of 5 members).)
- iv] The political instability of the directory paved the way for the rise of military dictator, Napoleon Bonaparte.

- Revolution of Women :

- i] Women were active participants in the events which brought about changes in

- They hoped that their involvement would pressurize the revolutionary govt. to improve their lives.

ii] Most women of the third estate had to work for their living.

- They worked as seamstresses and laundresses, sold flowers, fruits and vegetables at market.

iii] Working women also had to care for their families and children.

- They were disappointed that the constitution of 1791 reduced them to passive citizens.

iv] The revolutionary government did introduced laws to improve their lives by making schooling compulsory for girls, not marrying against their will, making divorce legal etc.

1) During the reign of terror, the new government issued laws ordering closure of women's clubs and banning political activities.

- In 1946 women in France won right to vote.

Abolition of Slavery:

1) Slave trade began in 17th Century; the colonies in the Caribbean - Martinique, Guadeloupe and San Domingo were important suppliers of commodities like indigo, sugar tobacco and coffee.

- The slaves were brought from local chieftains.

- This was met by triangular slave trade between Europe, Africa and

ii) The slaves were packed tightly into ships for 3 months long voyage across the Atlantic to Caribbean and there to plantation owners.

iii) The national assembly held long debates for the rights of man to be extended to all french subjects.

— But it didn't pass any laws fearing opposition of business men whose income depends upon slave trade.

iv) finally slavery was abolished in french colonies in 1848.

Rise of Napoleon Bonaparte:

i] In 1804, Napoleon Bonaparte crowned himself as emperor of France.

- He conquered neighbouring countries, dispossessing dynasties and created kingdoms, by placing his family members there.

ii] He saw his role as modernizer of Europe.

- He introduced many laws such as protection of private property and uniform system of weight and measure provided by decimal system.

iii] Many saw him as a liberator who would bring freedom for the people but soon his armies came to be viewed as an invading force.

iv] Finally Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo

— Legacy of French Revolution :

- i] The ideas of liberty and democratic rights were the most important legacy of French revolution.
- These spread from France to the rest of Europe during 19th century, where feudal system was abolished.
- ii] Colonized people reworked the idea of freedom from bandage into their movements to create a sovereign nation state.
- iii] Tipu sultan and Raja Ram Mohan Roy are 2 examples of individuals who responded to the ideas coming from revolutionary force.