

CHAPTER NOTES - THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

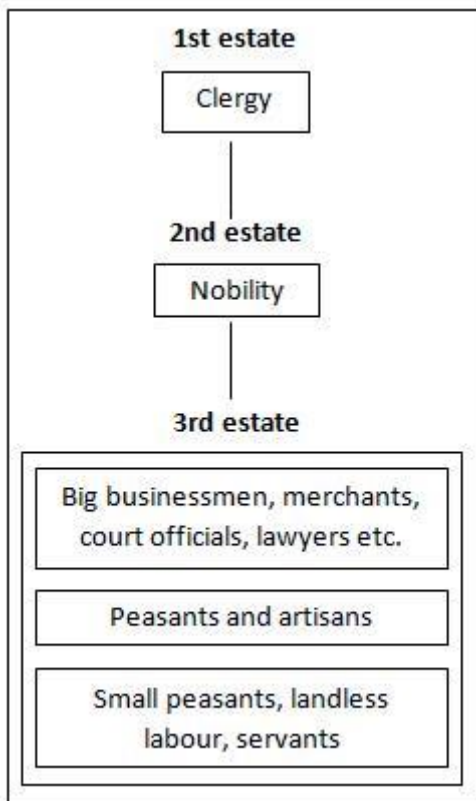
Introduction:

The revolution of France began on 14 July 1789 with the storming of the fortress prison, The Bastille. It was suspected to find hoarded ammunition (quantity of bullets and shells) This revolution put up the ideas of liberty, fraternity and equality.

Causes of French Revolution:

i. Social cause (French society during late 18th century)

The society was divided into 3 estates:



- i. The members of first 2 estates i.e., Clergy and Nobility enjoy certain privileges by birth. They are exempted from paying taxes to the state. Nobles also enjoy feudal privileges which include feudal dues extracted from peasants.
- ii. The church extracts its share of taxes called Tithes from peasants. A direct tax Taille and a no. of indirect taxes are levied on everyday consumption articles like salt and tobacco.

ii. Economic cause (The struggle to survive)

- i. The population of France increase from 23 million to 28 million in 1789 which led to increment in demand for food grains.
- ii. Most workers were employed as labourers in workshops with fixed wages but the wages did not keep pace with rise in prices of food grains.
- iii. This led to Subsistence crisis (extreme scarcity of basic means of livelihood) in France due to old regime.

iii. Political cause:

- iv. In 1774, Louis XVI becomes the king of France and faces empty treasury due to long years of war which drained financial resources and discontent within the society was increasing.

- v. He helped 13 American colonies to gain their independence from the common enemy, Britain. This war added more than 3 billion livres for which the moneylenders began to charge 10% interest on loans.
- vi. To meet its regular expenses, such as the cost of maintaining an army, the court, running government offices or universities, the state was forced to increase taxes.

Role of middle class:

- i. The 18th century witnessed the emergence of social groups termed as middle class who may have means and programmes to carry out full scale measures to bring a change in social and economic order and being educated they believe that no group should be privileged by birth.
- ii. They earned their wealth through an expanding overseas trade, from manufacture of goods like woollen and silk textiles and professions as lawyers and administrated officials.
- iii. They were inspired by the ideas of different philosophers and spread the same through books and newspapers.

Such as:

- i. John lock – In his two treatises of govt, lock sought to refute the doctrine of the divine and absolute right of the monarch.
- ii. Rousseau- Rousseau carried the idea forward, proposing a form of a govt based on a social contract b/w people and their representatives.
- ii. Montesquieu- In the spirit of law, Montesquieu proposed a division of power within the government between the legislative, executive and the judiciary.

Outbreak of French Revolution:

- i. Louis XVI called an assembly of estates general (a political body to which 3rd estate that their representatives to pass proposal for new taxes.
- ii. The first 2 estates sent 300 representatives each, while 3rd one has 600 members who were more prosperous & educated. However, artisans, peasants & women were denied entry to assembly.
- iii. Voting in estate general has been conducted as according to past principle of each state – one vote but members of 3rd estate demanded for each member one vote philosophy.
- iv. Due to rejection, they walked out of assembly in protest after this, they declared themselves a national assembly and drafted a constitution for France to limit powers of monarch, which was led by Mirabeau (a noble) and Abbe Sieye's (a priest).
- v. Due to the power of revolt, law 16 finally recognized the national assembly and accepted the constitution.
- vi. The assembly passed a law abolishing the feudal system of obligation & taxes (tithes) and the members of clergy were forced to give up their privileges.

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 laborer's wage. The remaining men and women do not have right of vote.

iv. The constitution began 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 illiterate 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.
- 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 colors 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 neighboring 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 important from rallying point of view in which most successful club was that of Jacobins. Its leader was Maximilian Robespierre.

v. 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.

vi. The newly elected assembly was called the Convection. In 1792 it abolished the monarchy and declared France a republic.

A Directory rules France:

i. A new constitution was introduced which denied the vote to non-propertied sections of society.

ii. It provided 2 elected legislative councils which later pointed a directory (an executive made of 5 members).

iii. The directors often clashed with the legislative council, who then sought to dismiss them.

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 French society. They hoped that their involvement would pressurize the revolutionary government 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.
- v. During the reign of terror, the new government issued laws ordering closure of women's clubs and banning political activities. In 1792 women in France won right to vote.

KEY CONCEPTS - THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

The French Society during the Late 18th Century

The French Society Comprised :

1st Estate: Clergy

2nd Estate: Nobility

3rd Estate: Big businessmen, merchants, court officials, peasants, artisans, landless laborers, servants, etc.

The Struggle for Survival: Population of France grew and so did the demand for grain. The gap between the rich and poor widened. This led to subsistence crises. Fig: Struggle of people for survival

The Growing Middle Class: This estate was educated and believed that no group in society should be privileged by birth. These ideas were put forward by philosophers such as Locke English philosopher and Rousseau French philosopher. The American constitution and its guarantee of individual rights was an important example of political theories of France. These ideas were discussed intensively in salons and coffee houses and spread among people through books and newspapers. These were even read aloud.

THE OUTBREAK OF THE REVOLUTION

The French Revolution went through various stages.

When *Louis XVI became king of France in 1774*, he inherited a treasury which was empty. There was growing discontent within the society of the Old Regime.

1789 - Convocation of Estates General. The Third Estate forms National Assembly, the Bastille is stormed, peasant revolts in the countryside.

1791- A constitution is framed to limit the powers of the king and to guarantee basic right to all human beings.

1792-93-France becomes a republic. Jacobin Republic overthrown, a Directory rules France.

1795-A new Convention appointed a five-man Directorate to run the state from 26 October, 1795.

1799-The Revolution ends with the rise of Napoleon Bonaparte.

Time Line : The French Revolution

1770's-1780's — Economic decline; French Government in deep debt.

1788-1789 — Bad harvest, high prices, food riots

1789, May 5 — Estates-General convened, demands reforms.

1789, July 14 — National Assembly formed, Bastille stormed on July 14, French Revolution starts.

1789, August 4 — Night of August 4 ends the rights of the aristocracy.

1789, August 26 — Declaration of the Rights of Man

1790 — Civil Constitution of the Clergy nationalizes the Church.

1792 — Constitution of 1791 converts absolute monarchy into a constitutional monarchy with limited powers.

1792 — Austria and Prussia attacked revolutionary France.

1793 — Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette are executed.

1792-1794 — The Reign of Terror starts. Austria, Britain, the Netherlands, Prussia and Spain are at war with France. — Robespierre's Committee of Public Safety repels back foreign invaders. Executes many "*enemies of the people*" in France itself.

1794 — Robespierre is executed, France is governed by a Directory(a committee of five men).

1799 — Napoleon Bonaparte becomes the leader.

WOMEN'S REVOLUTION

From the very beginning, women were active participants in the events which brought about so many changes in the French society. Most women of the third estate had to work for a living. Their wages were lower than those of men. In order to discuss and voice their interests, women started their own political clubs and newspapers. Fig: Women showing their role in revolution. One of their main demands was that women must enjoy the same political rights as men. Some laws were introduced to improve the position of women. Their struggle still continues in several parts of the world. It was finally in 1946 that women in France won the right to vote.

THE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY

There was a triangular slave trade between Europe, Africa and Americas. In the 18th century, there was little criticism of slavery in France. No laws were passed against it. It was in 1794 that the convention freed all slaves. But 10 years later slavery was reintroduced by Napoleon. It was finally in 1848 that slavery was abolished in the French colonies.

NAPOLEON

In 1804, Napoleon crowned himself emperor of France. He set out to conquer neighboring European countries, dispossessing dynasties and creating kingdoms where he placed members of his family. He saw his role as a modernizer of Europe. He was finally defeated at Waterloo in 1815.

GLOSSARY AND IMPORTANT INFORMATION

- 1. First Estate-** French society was divided into classes called Estates. The First Estate consisted of the Clergy which held a vast land, wealth and was exempt from taxation.
- 2. Second Estate-** It consisted of the aristocracy and controlled all the top positions in the government, parliament and in the army and navy. They were also exempt from taxation and led an extravagant life.
- 3. Third Estate-** This comprised everyone who was neither nobility nor clergy and constituted 98% of the population. Town dwellers, the wealthy upper middle class (merchants, bankers, doctors, lawyers), lower middle class, craftsmen, shopkeepers and peasants comprised the Third Estate.

This class lacked political power, social position and was heavily taxed though there were many differences in their wealth and style of living.

4. The Declaration of Rights of Man and Citizen-

In 1789, the French National Assembly adopted a set of basic principles called the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. Proposed by Lafayette and based on the ideas of Locke, Montesquieu and Jefferson, this document stated that “men are born and remain free and equal in rights” and that the “source of power resides in the people”. It guaranteed all Frenchmen the basic rights of liberty, security, equal justice, fair taxes, speech, religion and thought.

5. Physiocrats- The French economists were called physiocrats. They believed that taxes should be imposed only with the consent of those on whom they are levied. Their beliefs undermined the feudal rights and privileges of the upper classes.

6.Livre- Unit of currency used in France till 1794.

7.Clergy- Group of persons invested with special functions in the Church.

8.Tithe- A tax levied by the Church equal to one-tenth of the agricultural produce.

9.Taille- Tax paid directly to the state.

10.Chateau- Castle belonging to a king or nobleman.

11.Manor- An estate consisting of the Lord's lands and his mansion.

12.Sceptre- Symbol of royal power.

13. Negroes- A term used for the indigenous people of Africa, South of the Sahara. A derogatory term not now commonly used.

IMPORTANT DATES:

1774: Louis XVI becomes King of France. Faces empty treasury and growing discontent within society of the Old Regime.

1789: Third Estate forms National Assembly. The Bastille is stormed.

1791: A constitution is framed to limit the powers of the king and to guarantee the basic rights to all the human beings.

1792-93: France becomes a republic. The king is executed. Over throw of the Jacobin Republic, a Directory Rules France.

1804: Napoleon becomes emperor of France.

1815: Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo.

1848: Slavery was abolished in all French colonies.

1946: French women got the right to vote.

Important Personalities:

1. Maximilian Robespierre: Leader of the Jacobin club whose policies led to the Reign of Terror. In 1794, he was convicted and sent to the guillotine.

2. Napoleon Bonaparte: The military dictator of France who conquered many European countries. He was defeated at the Battle of Waterloo.

3. Olympe de Gouges: Fig: Olympe de Gouges One of the most important politically active women revolutionary France. *In 1791, she wrote a Declaration of the Rights of Woman and Citizen.* Critical of the Jacobin government, she was charged with treason and executed.

4. Louis XVI: The King of France when the revolution occurred was a man of average intelligence who disliked any kind of brain work. He staunchly believed in the Divine Right of Kings and was completely unaware of the new ideas that were sweeping across his country and oblivious to the needs and fears of his subjects. He was obsessed with his

beautiful wife and wasted money on festivities. He drove France into useless wars bringing the country to the verge of bankruptcy.

5. Montesquieu: A French thinker and author of the book '*Spirit of Laws*'. He believed that executive, legislative and judicial powers should not be concentrated in one person as it led to tyrannical rule. He stressed on the principle of separation of powers and individual liberty.

6. Jean Jacques Rousseau: His writings played a significant role in bringing about the French Revolution and encouraged people to fight for their rights. He believed that government should be based on the consent of the governed. His most famous work 'The Social Contract' talks of a contract between the ruler and ruled where by the former would guarantee the freedom and happiness of his subjects.
