

## Circumstances leading to the outbreak of revolutionary protest in France:

### 1. A society of estates, and the plight of the third estate

French society was divided into three distinct estates: the first estate comprising the clergy, the second estate composed of the nobility, and the third estate made up of tradesmen, merchants, court officials, lawyers, peasants, artisans, landless labour and servants. It was only the third estate that was made to pay taxes. The clergy and the nobility were exempt from this rule. In addition to the taxes that were to be paid to the state, peasants had to pay taxes to the Church and feudal dues to the noble lords. It was an unfair situation which led to the growth of a feeling of discontent among the members of the third estate.

### 2. Subsistence crisis

At this time, there was a greater demand for food grains. Due to greater demand than supply, the price of bread (the staple diet of the majority) rose. Due to rising prices and inadequate wages, most of the population could not even afford the basic means of livelihood. This led to a crisis of subsistence, and an increase in the gap between the rich and the poor.

### 3. A stronger middle class, and popularisation of democratic and social ideals

The middle class emerged educated and wealthy during the eighteenth century. The system of privileges as promoted by the feudal society was against their interests. Being educated, the members of this class had access to the various ideas of equality and freedom proposed by the French and English political and social philosophers. These ideas got popularised amongst the masses as a result of intensive discussions and debates in salons and coffee-houses, and through books and newspapers.

### 4. The assembly of the Estates General, and the proposal to increase taxes

In order to pass proposals for increasing taxes, the French monarch Louis XVI called together an assembly of the Estates General on 5 May, 1789. Each estate was allowed one vote in this assembly. The third estate protested against the unfairness of the proposal. They proposed, instead, that each member should have one vote. The king rejected this appeal, and the representative members of the third estate walked out of the assembly in protest.

### 5. The National Assembly, and the revolting subjects

The representative members, led by Mirabeau and Abbe Sieyes, declared themselves a National Assembly, and took an oath to not disperse until they had drafted a constitution for France that would limit the powers of the monarch and do away with the unjust feudal system of privileges. While this organisation was busy drafting a democratic constitution, there were numerous localised rebellions that sought to displace the feudal lords. Meanwhile, the food crisis worsened and the anger of the masses spilled onto the streets. On 14 July, the King ordered troops to move into Paris. In response, several hundreds of agitated men and women formed their own armed groups. One such people's militia stormed and destroyed the Bastille fortress-prison (representative of the king's despotic power). This is how the French Revolution came about.

**Which group of French society benefited from the revolution? Which groups were forced to relinquish power? Which sections of the society would have been disappointed with the outcome of the revolution?**

The people (or all groups) of the Third Estate of the French society were benefited from the Revolution of 1789. The group of the common people, who were numbered about 95 per cent of the total population, benefited the most.

1. The peasants were the largest section of the Third Estate. A major result of the Revolution was the destruction of feudalism in France. All the laws of the old feudal regime were annulled.
2. The people of the lower middle classes of French society were also benefited from the revolution. There were the artisans, workers and poor people living in towns and cities. Then there was the middle class or the bourgeoisie. The class consisted of the educated people-writers, doctors, judges, lawyers, teachers, civil servants-and the richer people who were the merchants, bankers and manufacturers. Church lands and lands held in common by the community were brought by the middle classes.
3. The position of the artisans and city workers also improved later on. The Revolution had come about with the support and blood of common people- the city poor and the peasants. In 1792, for the first time in history, workers, peasants and other non-propertied classes were given equal political rights.
4. The group of the nobles was adversely affected by the French Revolution. The lands of nobles were confiscated. Their all privileges were finished.
5. A new group of capitalists emerged in France. This new group emerged in the place of the feudal lords. The capitalists became very powerful because the Revolution in France built up a new economic system in place of the feudal system which had been overthrown.
6. Clergy or group of person inversed with special functions in the church was also forced to relinquish power. Feudal lords, nobles, clergy and women would have been disappointed with the outcome of the revolution. Even the common people were not so happy because the right to vote and elect representative did not solve the problems of the common people. The peasants got their lands. But to the workers and artsins- the people who were the back-bone of the revolution movement, the revolution did not bring real equality. To them, real equality could come only with the economic equality, of socialism, gave rise to a new kind of political movement.

**Draw up a list of democratic rights we enjoy today whose origin could be traced to the French Revolution?**

List of Democratic Rights we enjoy today whose origin could be traced to the French Revolution are:

1. Right to Freedom.
2. Right to Equality.
3. Right against exploitation.
4. Right to Freedom of Religion.

5. Cultural and Educational Right.
6. Right to Constitutional Remedies.

**Would you agree with the view that the message of universal rights was beset with contradictions? Explain.**

Yes, I agree with the view that the message of universal rights was beset with several contradictions. We can explain our decision given the following points:

1. Women were not given equal rights as the men were given.
2. The notion of equality and freedom emerged as the central ideas of a new age, but in different countries they were reinterpreted and rethought in many different ways. Most of the imperialist powers did not grant full freedom to the peoples of their colonies.
3. Not all citizens had the right to vote. Only men above 25 years of age who paid taxes equal to at least 3 days of the labourer's wage were given the status of active citizens, that is, they were entitled to vote. To qualify as an elector and then as a member of the Assembly, a man had to belong to the highest bracket of tax payers.
4. The task of representing the people has been given to rich, the lot of the poor and oppressed will never be improved by peaceful means, alone. Here we have absolute proof of how wealthy influence the law

**How would you explain the rise of Napoleon?**

Napoleon Bonaparte was the result of an instable Directory that ruled France. Due to the weak Directory, he found an opportunity to rise to political power. In 1804, he crowned himself Emperor of France.

1. He set out to conquer neighbouring European countries, dispossessing dynasties and creating kingdoms where he placed members of his family.
2. Napoleon saw his role as a modernizer of Europe. He introduced many laws such as the protection of private property and a uniform system of weights and measures provided by the decimal system.
3. Initially, many saw Napoleon as a liberator who would bring freedom for the people.
4. But soon, the Napoleonic army came to be viewed everywhere as an invading force. Due to excessive military campaigns and invasions of Russia and Spain, Napoleon became a major threat for other European Kings. They combined together and defeated him.
5. He was finally defeated at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815.

**What made France a constitutional Monarchy?**

At the time of the assembly of the Estates General, members of the Third Estate had formed themselves into a 'National Assembly'. They had taken the Tennis Court oath to draft a constitution for France.

The King finally recognized the National Assembly.

On August 4, 1789, the National Assembly passed a resolution that provided for the following:

- The feudal system of obligation and taxes was abolished.
- The clergy were forced to give up their privileges
- Titles were abolished.

- Lands owned by the Church were confiscated.

In 1791, the National Assembly completed the draft of the constitution. Its main object was to limit the power of the monarch. The new constitution was adopted by the king. With this, France became a constitutional monarchy.

## Why did the Jacobians change their pattern of dress?

The Jacobians mainly belonged to the less prosperous sections of society. They included small shopkeepers, pastry cooks, watch-makers, printers as well as servants and daily-wage workers. The Jacobians decided to wear long striped trousers to set themselves apart from the fashionable sections of society, particularly nobles, who wore knee breeches. It was a way of proclaiming the end of the power wielded by the wearers of knee breeches.

## France became a republic on 21<sup>st</sup> September 1792. How did it affect the monarchy?

France became a republic in 1792. Elections were held and the Assembly voted to imprison the royal family. All men of 21 years and above, regardless of wealth, got the right to vote. The Assembly abolished the monarchy and declared France a republic.

## Impact of the French Revolution on the people of the world

Some of the impacts are:

1. The French Revolution gave the term Nation its modern meaning. A nation is not the territory that the people belonging to it inhabit but the people themselves.
2. From this followed the idea of sovereignty, that a nation recognizes no law or no authority above its own. And if a nation is sovereign that means the people constituting the nation are the source of all power and authority. There cannot be any rulers above the people, only a republic in which the government derives its authority from the people and is answerable to them only.
3. It inspired revolutionary movements in almost every country of Europe and in South and Central America. For a long time the French Revolution became the classic example of the revolution which people of several nations tried to emulate.
4. Some of the changes that took place in several parts of Europe and the Americas in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century were the immediate, direct consequences of the Revolution.
5. The impact of the Revolution was felt on the far away American continent. Revolutionary France had abolished slavery in her colonies. The former French colony of Haiti became a republic. This was the first republic established by the black people, formerly slaves in the Americas.

## Causes of French Revolution

### I) Political Causes:

1. **An Absolute Monarchy:** France had absolute monarchy. Monarch's absolutism in France was based on the doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings. It meant that the right to rule comes from God and that Kings are answerable to God alone. King Louis XVI regime's was inefficient and unpopular. The Will of the King was the Law of the Land.
2. **Wars Upset the Finances of France.** Under Louis XVI France assisted the American Colonies in their war against Britain. France had provided the Americans with strong naval forces and a large contingent of French soldiers. The treasury became empty after this War.

# The French Revolution

3. **Queen's Interference in State Affairs:** The King was greatly influenced by his Queen Marie Antoinette, an Austrian princess who lived in luxury without knowing the miserable conditions of the common people. The public money was lavishly spent by the Queen. The queen interfered in state appointments in order to promote in state appointments in order to promote her favourites. Her influence over the King proved disastrous to the country.
4. **Cruel and Corrupt Administration:** The administration was corrupt and autocratic. The prisoners were treated with extreme severity. Many of the prisoners died under torture. Many of the nobles were appointed to judicial posts for life. These judges imposed heavy fines. Only a part of it went to the State treasury, the rest was pocketed by the judges. Without legal order the king could confiscate the property of any of his subject.

## II) Social Causes:

1. **The Three Estates:** The two privileged classes were known as the Estate and the Second Estate respectively. The **First Estate** was constituted by the higher clergy like the Archbishops, Bishops, and the Abbots, who governed the Church of France. They enjoyed many privileges under the government and were exempted from paying most of the taxes. They supported absolute monarchy. One-fifth of the cultivated land in France was owned by the Church. The **Second Estate** was constituted by those families in France who belonged to the nobility. They monopolized all important positions in the French administration. They led a life of luxury enjoying all the privileges, such as the income that they raised from the peasants who cultivated their lands and exemption from payment of certain taxes. The **Third Estate** comprised the unprivileged section of the society. It consisted of peasants, artisans, workers and agricultural labourers. The burden of taxation fell chiefly on the Third Estate. The largest section of the Third Estate consisted of the peasants, almost 90 percent of the population. But a great majority of them were landless. They cultivated the land owned by the nobles, the Church and richer sections of the Third Estate, such as the merchants, court officials, teachers, lawyers and doctors.
2. **Misery of the Masses:** The condition of the artisans, peasants and the workmen was miserable in France. The peasants had to work for long hours from early morning till late at night. Sometimes they had to work on the lord's land without any wages. They had to pay separate taxes to the Crown, to the Clergy and to the Landlords. These oppressed sections of the society were waiting for an opportunity to strike at the old order.

## III) The Influence of the Intellectuals:

France produced in that age many great philosophers and writers, such as Voltaire, Montesquieu and Rousseau. They exposed the ills of administration, which caused a sense of hatred against the Crown, the nobles and the clergy. Voltaire awakened the people of France by his critical writings. He exposed the high handedness of the nobles and the clergy. Montesquieu explained that the theory of the Divine Rights of King was baseless and the King was to be chosen by the Will of the People. The greatest philosopher of the period was Rousseau. In his work 'Social Contract', he popularized the idea of direct democracy, which

prevailed in the small city-states of Greece. According to Rousseau, the sovereign power lies in the General Will.

## Results of French Revolution:

The French Revolution is one of the most important events in the history of the world. It marked the beginning of a new era for people of France and those of the world.

1. **The New Ideas of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity:** The Revolution asserted the equality of man. It brought about the downfall of the autocratic regime in France. Other European kings had now realized that the time was approaching when their subjects also would assert their democratic rights. 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity' – these words came as the source of light and warmth to a dead world.
2. **A Death-blow of Feudalism:** The Revolution brought an end to the Feudal system in France. The old social system based on the privileges of the nobles and clergymen ceased to exist. That gave freedom to the bulk of the population – the peasants, the serfs and the agricultural labourers.
3. **Aroused the Nationalist Ideas:** Napoleon started on a career of conquest. He brought under his domination other countries of the world. This aroused the national spirit among the peoples of Europe. It was the growth of nationalism which enabled them to defeat Napoleonic armies and inflict upon Napoleon a crushing defeat. Freedom movement in India and other Afro-Asian countries drew inspiration from the French Revolution.
4. **Idea of Equality Paved the Way for Socialism:** Confiscation of the property by the State weakened the idea of the sanctity of property. The Socialist movement voiced the interests of the working classes.

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