
Chapter 1 History

The French Revolution

Question 1. Describe the circumstances leading to the outbreak of revolutionary protest in France.

Answer : The circumstances that causes outbreak of revolutionary protest in France were:

- **Social Inequality:** French society in eighteenth century was divided into three estates namely The Clergy, The nobility and Third estates which comprises peasants, officials and small business. It was only Third estates pay taxes. Clergy and nobility were exempt from taxes.
- **Privilege based on birth:** People got privileges and position based on their lineage and not on their merit. This led to resentment among common people.
- **Subsistence Crisis:** The population of France also increased from 23 million in 1715 to 28 million in 1789. Food grains were now in great demand. Price of bread shot up. Wages did not keep pace with rising prices. This led to subsistence crisis.
- **Economic Problems:** Long years of war had drained the financial resources of France. To meet its regular expenses, such as the cost of maintaining army, the court, running government offices or universities, the state was forced to increase taxes.
- **Strong Middle Class:** The middle class emerged educated and wealthy during eighteenth century. They believed that no group in society should be given privileges by birth. Ideas of equality and freedom were put forward by philosophers. The ideas of these philosophers were discussed intensively in salons and coffee houses and spread among people.
- **Immediate Causes:** On 5 may, 1789, Louis XVI called together an assembly of Estates General to pass proposals for new taxes. Third estates protested against this proposal but as each estates have one vote the king rejected this appeal. They walked out of assembly.

Question 2. Which groups of French society benefited from the revolution? Which groups were forced to relinquish power? Which sections of society would have been disappointed

with the outcome of the revolution?

Answer : The middle class or the richer members of the Third Estate consisting of merchants, traders, lawyers and rich peasants benefited the most from the French Revolution; feudal obligations were no longer to be honoured by the Third Estate. Tithes, the tax given to the Church, were abolished.

The clergy and the nobility were the groups which were forced to relinquish power, how they were forced to give up their privilege e.g., the how could not collect taxes and its lands were confiscated.

The poorer sections of the third estate and women were disappointed with the outcome of the French Revolution because their aspirations were not properly fulfilled, e.g., women were not given voting rights. Poor men who did not have fulfilled property or who did not pay taxes were not allowed to vote.

Question 3. Describe the legacy of the French Revolution for the peoples of the world during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Answer : The legacy of the French Revolution for the peoples of the world during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was as follows.

Ideas of equality and democratic spread from France to other European countries and feudalism was abolished.

Colonial people reworked the idea of freedom from bondage into their movements to create sovereign nation states.

It was the first movement to adopt the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity.

The declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen gave rights such as right to life, freedom of speech, equality before law, etc.

Women were given many rights. They could not be forced to marry against their will, divorce was made legal, schooling was made compulsory and they could train for jobs.

Question 4. Draw up a list of democratic rights we enjoy today whose origins could be traced to the French Revolution.

Answer : We can trace the origin of the following democratic rights we enjoy today to the French revolution:

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- Right to Equity
 - Right to Freedom
 - Freedom of Speech and expression
 - Right to form associations
 - Right to justice and security
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Question 5. Would you agree with the view that the message of universal rights was beset with contradictions? Explain.

Answer : The message of universal rights was beset with contradictions:

- Many ideals in the "Declaration of Rights of Man and Citizen" were replete with dubious meanings. For example, "the law has the right to forbid only actions injurious to society" had nothing to say about criminal offenses against other individuals.
- The declaration stated that "law is the expression of the general will. All citizens have the right to participate in its formation. All citizens are equal before it", but when France became a constitutional monarchy, almost 3 million citizens including men under the age of 25 and women were not allowed to vote at all.

Hence, by this universal rights poor were suppressed. Constitution is only available for the rich. Women were totally neglected in decision making.

Question 6. How would you explain the rise of Napoleon?

Answer: France was ruled by the Directory, an executive made up of five members.

However, the Directors often clashed with the Legislative Councils, who then sought to dismiss them.

The political instability of the Directory paved the way for the rise of a military dictator, Napoleon Bonaparte.

After crowning himself as Emperor of France in 1804, he went out to conquer the neighboring European countries, dispossess dynasties and creating kingdoms where he placed members of his family.

Initially, he was viewed as a liberator who would bring freedom to the people, but soon the Napoleonic armies came to be viewed everywhere as an invading force.