

The French Revolution

Q1. Describe the circumstances leading to the outbreak of revolutionary protest in France?

Ans. The following circumstances mainly led to the outbreak of revolution protest in France in 1789.

1. In 1789, the monarch of France, Louis XVI needed money for administrative and other expenditure. Need of money forced him to agree to a meeting of the Estates General-the old feudal assembly. He wanted to obtain its consent for new loans and taxes. All three estates were represented in it but each estate held a separate meeting. On 17th June 1789, members of the third estate claiming to represent 96 per cent of the nation's population declared themselves (the real) the National Assembly. King Louis XVI then made preparation to break up the Estate Assembly.
2. On the morning of 14th July 1789, the city of Paris was a state of a doom. Rumour spread that king of France would soon order the army to open fire upon the people.
3. Men and women gathered and formed a people's militia (or army). They broke into a number of government buildings. They stormed the prison (the Bastille) and fortress.
4. The days that followed saw more rioting both in Paris and the countrywide. Most people of France were protesting against the high price of bread. Scholars saw it as the beginning of the chain of events that ultimately led to the execution of the King of France.

Q2. Which groups 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?

Ans. The people (or all groups) of the Third Estate of the French society were benefited from the Revolution of 1789.

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.

1. 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. The class consisted of the educated

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people-writers, doctors, judges, lawyers, teachers, civil servants-and the richer people who were the merchants, bankers and manufacturers.

2. The position of the artisans and city workers also improved later on. Workers, peasants and other non-propertied classes were given equal political rights.
3. 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.

Groups which were forced to Relinquish Power

1. The King was reduced to the position of a nominal head of the state.
2. The church was taken over by the State .Its property was nationalized.
3. The nobility lost their feudal privileges .The landlords and aristocrats also lost their previous positions, status and privileges.

Sections of society which were disappointed

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 workers and artisans- 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.

Q3. Describe the legacy of the French Revolution for the peoples of the world during the nineteenth and twentieth century?

Ans . Some of the impacts are:

- a.)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.
- b.) 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

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which the government derives its authority from the people and is answerable to them only.

- c.) 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.
- d.) Some of the changes that took place in several parts of Europe and the Americas in the early 19th century were the immediate, direct consequences of the Revolution.
- e.) 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.

Q4. Draw up a list of democratic rights we enjoy today whose origin could be traced to the French Revolution?

Ans. 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.

Q5. Would you agree with the view that the message of universal rights was beset with contradictions? Explain.

Ans. 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

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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
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.

Q6. How would you explain the rise of Napoleon?

Ans. 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.
 - 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.