

French Revolution

BOSS
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French revolution started in 1789. The people revolted against the cruel regime of monarchy. This revolution put forward the ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity.

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 (Louis XVI).

Causes of the French Revolution

Social Cause

The French society was divided into three estates

1st estate: Group of persons involved in church matters (clergy).

2nd estate: Nobility persons who have high rank in state administration.

3rd estate: Rest population of France (Big businessman, merchants, lawyers, court officials, peasants and artisans, landless labourers, servants)

First two classes were exempted from paying taxes. They enjoyed privileges by birth. Nobility classes also enjoyed feudal privileges.

Only the members of the 3rd estate had to pay taxes to the state.

Direct tax called taille and also a number of indirect taxes which were charged on articles of everyday consumption like salt or tobacco.

A tax called ~~Tithe~~ Tithe was also collected by the church from the peasants.

Clergy and Nobility were 10% of the population but possessed 60% of lands.

Third estate was 90% of the population but possessed 40% of the lands.

* Old Regime: - It is used to describe the society and institutions of France before 1789.

Economic cause:

The population of France rose from about 23 million in 1715 to 28 million in 1789. This increased the demand for the foodgrains. However, production could not keep pace with the demand which ultimately increased the prices of the foodgrains.

Most workers worked as labourers in the workshops and they didn't see increase in their wages.

Situation became worse whenever

drought or hail reduced the harvest. This led to the scarcity of foodgrains or subsistence crises which started occurring frequently during old regime.

Political Cause :

Louis XVI came into the power in 1774 and found empty treasury. Long years of war had drained the financial resources of France. Under Louis XVI France helped the thirteen American colonies to gain their independence from the common enemy, Britain which added more than a billion livres to a debt that had already risen to more than 2 billion livres.

An extravagant court at the immense palace of Versailles also cost a lot.

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.

Growing Middle Class

The eighteenth century witnessed the emergence of social groups termed the middle class who earned their wealth through overseas trade, from manufacturing of goods and professions. This class was educated and believed that no group of society should be privileged by birth. They were inspired by the ideas put forward by the various philosophers and became a matter of talk intensively for these classes in salons and coffee-houses and spread among people through books and newspapers.

The American constitution and its guarantee of individual rights was an important example for political thinkers in France.

Philosophers and their contribution

John Locke wrote a book named "Two Treatises of Government" in which he criticized the doctrine of the divine and absolute right of the monarch.

Jean Jacques Rousseau wrote a book named 'Social Contract' in which he proposed a form of government based on a social contract between people and their ^{-tatives} representatives.

Montesquieu wrote a book named "The Spirit of the Laws" in which he proposed a division of power within the government between the legislative, the executive and the judiciary.