

The French Revolution



Louis XVI

- In 1774, Louis XVI of the Bourbon family of kings ascended the throne of France.
- He was 20 years old and married to the Austrian princess Marie Antoinette.
- Upon his accession the new king found an empty treasury. Long years of war had drained the financial resources of France.
- Added to this was the cost of maintaining an extravagant court at the immense palace of Versailles.

French Society During the Late Eighteenth Century

- Under Louis XVI, France helped the thirteen American colonies to gain their independence from the common enemy, Britain.
- The war added more than a billion livres to a debt.
- Lenders who gave the state credit, now began to charge 10 per cent interest on loans.
- So the French government was obliged to spend an increasing percentage of its budget on interest payments alone.
- 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.
- French society in the eighteenth century was divided into three estates, and only members of the third estate paid taxes.

A Society of Estates.

- 1st estate : Clergy
- 2nd estate: Nobility
- 3rd estate: Big businessmen, merchants, court officials, lawyers etc.
- : Peasants, artisans
- : Small peasants, landless labours, servants.



Nobility

Commoners
Peasants

Clergy

Taxes

- The Church too extracted its share of taxes called **tithes** from the peasants, and finally, all members of the third estate had to pay taxes to the state.
- These included a direct tax, called **taille**, and a number of indirect taxes which were levied on articles of everyday consumption like salt or tobacco.
- The burden of financing activities of the state through taxes was borne by the third estate alone.

The Struggle to Survive

- The population of France rose from about 23 million in 1715 to 28 million in 1789. This led to a rapid increase in the demand for foodgrains.
- Production of grains could not keep pace with the demand. So the price of bread which was the staple diet of the majority rose rapidly.
- Most workers were employed as labourers in workshops whose owner fixed their wages. But wages did not keep pace with the rise in prices.
- So the gap between the poor and the rich widened.
- Things became worse whenever drought or hail reduced the harvest.
- This led to a subsistence crisis, something that occurred frequently in France during the Old Regime.

*(Subsistence crisis – An extreme situation where the basic means of livelihood are endangered)

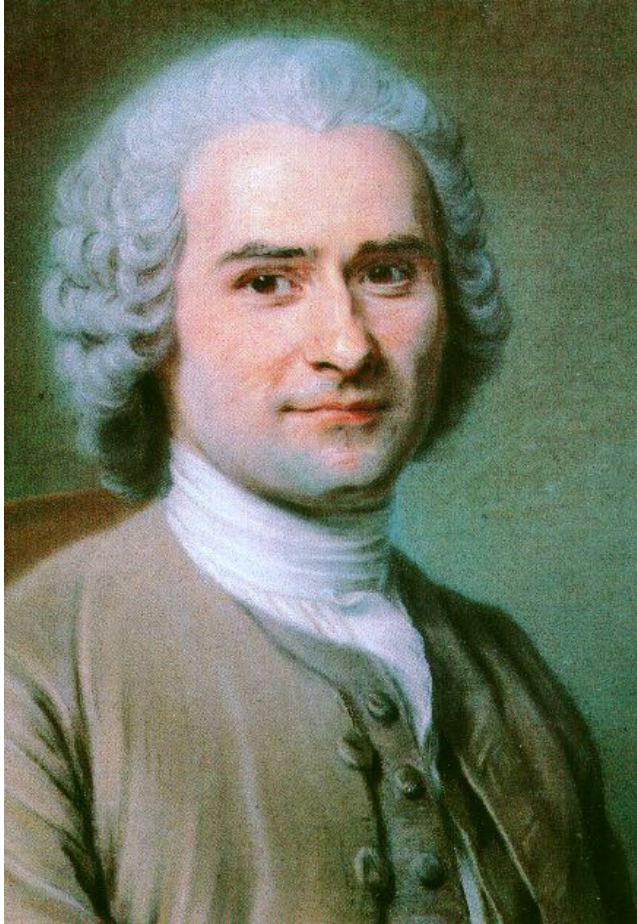
A Growing Middle Class Envisages an End to Privileges

- The eighteenth century witnessed the emergence of social groups, termed the middle class.
- In addition to merchants and manufacturers, the third estate included professions such as lawyers or administrative officials. All of these were educated and believed that no group in society should be privileged by birth.
- Rather, a person's social position must depend on his merit. These ideas envisaging a society based on freedom and equal laws and opportunities for all



John Locke

- In his *Two Treatises of Government*,
- Locke sought to refute the doctrine of the divine and absolute right of the monarch.



Jean-Jacques Rousseau

- Rousseau carried the idea forward, proposing a form of government based on a social contract between people and their representatives.

Montesquieu

- In *The Spirit of the Laws*, Montesquieu proposed a division of power within the government between the legislative, the executive and the judiciary.

Mirabeau and Abbé Sieyès

- **Mirabeau** was born in a noble family but was convinced of the need to do away with a society of feudal privilege.
- He brought out a journal and delivered powerful speeches to the crowds assembled at Versailles.
- **Abbé Sieyès**, originally a priest, wrote an influential pamphlet called
- ‘What is the Third Estate’?

Ideas of these philosophers

- The ideas of these philosophers were discussed intensively in salons and coffee-houses and spread among people through books and newspapers.
- These were frequently read aloud in groups for the benefit of those who could not read and write.
- The news that Louis XVI planned to impose further taxes to be able to meet the expenses of the state generated anger and protest against the system of privileges.

The Outbreak of the Revolution

- On 5 May 1789, Louis XVI called together an assembly of the Estates General to pass proposals for new taxes.
- The first and second estates sent 300 representatives each, who were seated in rows facing each other on two sides, while the 600 members of the third estate had to stand at the back.
- The third estate was represented by its more prosperous and educated members. Peasants, artisans and women were denied entry to the assembly.
- However, their grievances and demands were listed in some 40,000 letters. On 20 June they assembled in the hall of an indoor tennis court in the grounds of Versailles.
- They declared themselves a National Assembly and swore not to disperse till they
- had drafted a constitution for France that would limit the powers of the monarch.

The Outbreak of the Revolution Cont.....

- Louis XVI finally accorded recognition to the National Assembly and accepted the principle that his powers would from now on be checked by a constitution.
- On the night of 4 August 1789, the Assembly passed a decree abolishing the feudal system of obligations and taxes.
- Members of the clergy too were forced to give up their privileges.
- Tithes were abolished and lands owned by the Church were confiscated.
- As a result, the government acquired assets worth at least 2 billion livres.

France Becomes a Constitutional Monarchy

- The National Assembly completed the draft of the constitution in 1791.
- Its main object was to limit the powers of the monarch.
- These powers instead of being concentrated in the hands of one person, were now separated and assigned to different institutions – the legislature, executive and judiciary.
- This made France a constitutional monarchy.

The Constitution of 1791

- The Constitution of 1791 vested the power to make laws in the National Assembly, which was indirectly elected.
- That is, citizens voted for a group of electors, who in turn chose the Assembly.
- Not all citizens, however, had the right to vote.
- Only men above 25 years of age who paid taxes equal to at least 3 days of a labourer's wage were given the status of active citizens, that is, they were entitled to vote.
- The remaining men and all women were classed as passive citizens.
- To qualify as an elector and then as a member of the Assembly, a man had to belong to the highest bracket of taxpayers.

The Declaration of Rights of Man and

1. Men are born and remain free and equal in rights.
2. The aim of every political association is the preservation of the natural and inalienable rights of man; these are liberty, property, security and resistance to oppression.
3. The source of all sovereignty resides in the nation; no group or individual may exercise authority that does not come from the people.
4. Liberty consists of the power to do whatever is not injurious to others.
5. The law has the right to forbid only actions that are injurious to society.



The Declaration of Rights of Man and Citizen

6. Law is the expression of the general will. All citizens have the right to participate in its formation, personally or through their representatives. All citizens are equal before it.

7. No man may be accused, arrested or detained, except in cases determined by the law.

11. Every citizen may speak, write and print freely; he must take responsibility for the abuse of such liberty in cases determined by the law.

12. For the maintenance of the public force and for the expenses of administration a common tax is indispensable; it must be assessed equally on all citizens in proportion to their means.

17. Since property is a sacred and inviolable right, no one may be deprived of it, unless a legally established public necessity requires it. In that case a just compensation must be given in advance.

France Abolishes Monarchy and Becomes a Republic

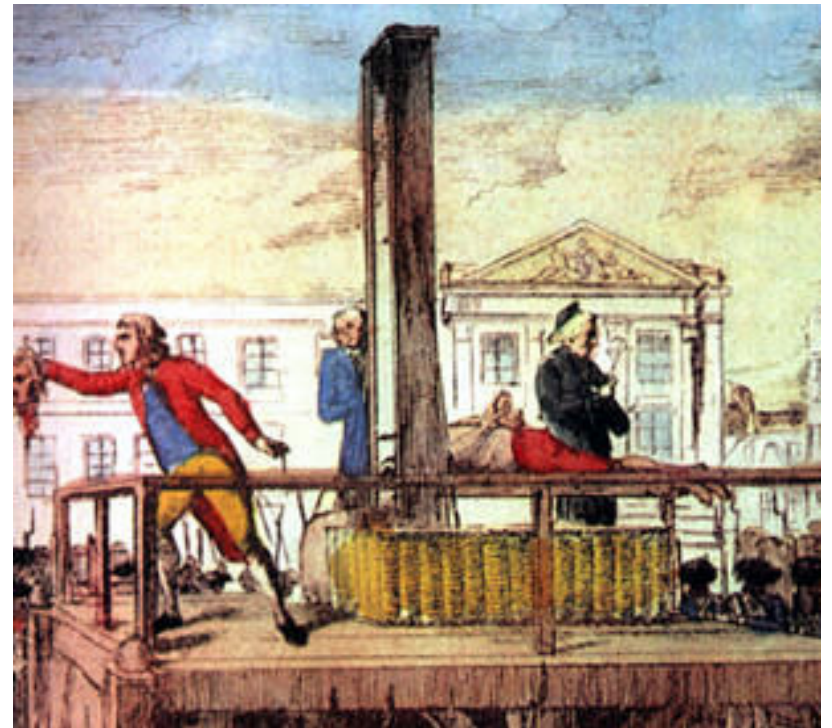
- The situation in France continued to be tense during the following years.
- Although Louis XVI had signed the Constitution, he entered into secret negotiations with the King of Prussia.
- Rulers of other neighbouring countries too were worried by the developments in France and made plans to send troops to put down the events that had been taking place there since the summer of 1789.
- Before this could happen, the National Assembly voted in April 1792 to declare war against Prussia and Austria.

France Abolishes Monarchy and Becomes a Republic Cont..

- The newly elected assembly was called the Convention.
- On 21 September 1792 it abolished the monarchy and declared France a republic.
- As you know, a republic is a form of government where the people elect the government including the head of the government.
- There is no hereditary monarchy.

Execution of the King

- Louis XVI was sentenced to death by a court on the charge of treason.
- On 21 January 1793 he was executed publicly at the Place de la Concorde.
- The queen Marie Antoinette met with the same fate shortly after.



Louis XVI



Marie Antionette



The Reign of Terror

- The period from 1793 to 1794 is referred to as the Reign of Terror. Robespierre followed a policy of severe control and punishment.
- All those whom he saw as being ‘enemies’ of the republic – ex-nobles and clergy, members of other political parties, even members of his own party who did not agree with his methods – were arrested, imprisoned and then tried by a revolutionary tribunal.
- If the court found them ‘guilty’ they were guillotined.

The Guillotine

- The guillotine is a device consisting of two poles and a blade with which a person is beheaded.
- It was named after
Dr Guillotin
who invented it.



A Directory Rules France

- The fall of the Jacobin government allowed the wealthier middle classes to seize power.
- A new constitution was introduced which denied the vote to non-propertied sections of society.
- It provided for two elected legislative councils.
- These then appointed a Directory, an executive made up of five members. This was meant as a safeguard against the concentration of power in a one-man executive as under the Jacobins.
- The political instability of the Directory paved the way for the rise of a military dictator, Napoleon Bonaparte.



The Directory

Napoleon Bonaparte

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



Did Women have a Revolution?

- Women hoped that their involvement would pressurise the revolutionary government to introduce measures to improve their lives.
- Most women of the third estate had to work for a living.
- They worked as seamstresses or laundresses, sold flowers, fruits and vegetables at the market, or were employed as domestic servants in the houses of prosperous people.
- Most women did not have access to education or job training. Only daughters of nobles or wealthier members of the third estate could study at a convent, after which their families arranged a marriage for them.

Did Women have a Revolution? Cont...

- In order to discuss and voice their interests women started their own political clubs and newspapers. About sixty women's clubs came up in different French cities.
- The Society of Revolutionary and Republican Women was the most famous of them. One of their main demands was that women enjoy the same political rights as men.
- Women were disappointed that the Constitution of 1791 reduced them to passive citizens.
- They demanded the right to vote, to be elected to the Assembly and to hold political office.
- Only then, they felt, would their interests be represented in the new government.

Women's Rights

- In the early years, the revolutionary government did introduce laws that helped improve the lives of women.
- Women's struggle for equal political rights, however, continued. During the Reign of Terror, the new government issued laws ordering closure of women's clubs and banning their political activities.
- Many prominent women were arrested and a number of them executed.
- Women's movements for voting rights and equal wages continued through the next two hundred years in many countries of the world.
- The fight for the vote was carried out through an international suffrage movement during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
- It was finally in 1946 that women in France won the right to vote.

The Abolition of Slavery

- One of the most revolutionary social reforms of the Jacobin regime
- was the abolition of slavery in the French colonies.
- The slave trade began in the seventeenth century.
- French merchants sailed from the ports of Bordeaux or Nantes to the African coast, where they bought slaves from local chieftains.
- Branded and shackled, the slaves were packed tightly into ships for the three-month long voyage across the Atlantic to the Caribbean.

The Abolition of Slavery Cont...

- There they were sold to plantation owners. The exploitation of slave labour made it possible to meet the growing demand in European markets for sugar, coffee, and indigo.
- Port cities like Bordeaux and Nantes owed their economic prosperity to the flourishing slave trade.
- It was finally the Convention which in 1794 legislated to free all slaves
- in the French overseas possessions.
- This, however, turned out to be a short-term measure: ten years later, Napoleon reintroduced slavery.

The Revolution and Everyday Life

- Abolition of censorship
- the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen proclaimed freedom of speech and expression to be a natural right.
- Plays, songs and festive processions attracted large numbers of people.
- This was one way they could grasp and identify with ideas such as liberty or justice that political philosophers wrote about at length in texts which only a handful of educated people could read.

Conclusion

- In 1804, Napoleon Bonaparte crowned himself Emperor of France.
- He introduced many laws such as the protection of private property and a uniform system of weights and measures provided by the decimal system. Initially, many saw Napoleon as a liberator who would bring freedom for the people.
- But soon the Napoleonic armies came to be viewed everywhere as an invading force.
- He was finally defeated at Waterloo in 1815.
- Many of his measures that carried the revolutionary ideas of liberty and modern laws to other parts of Europe had an impact on people long after Napoleon had left.
- The ideas of liberty and democratic rights were the most important legacy of the French Revolution.
- These spread from France to the rest of Europe during the nineteenth century, where feudal systems

The French Revolution of 1789

- 1.Rule of kings until 1789**
- 2. Estates general called in 1789**
- 3.Fall of Bastille July 1789**
- 4.New Constitution 1789-1791**
- 5.Republic 1792**
- 6.Extremists in power 1793**
- 7.Reign of Terror 1793-1794**
- 8.The Directory 1795**
- 9.Napoleon First Consul 1799**