

**CBSE Class 9**

**Social Science**

**History Chapter 1 The French Revolution Class 9 Notes**

**By Net Explanations**

**THINGS TO ANSWER AFTER READING THE CONTEXT**

1. What were the privileges enjoyed by the first and second estate members?
2. What type of taxes were the third estate members had to pay?
3. Why did King Louis XVI have to further impose taxes?
4. Give some examples of philosophers who popularized the ideas of democracy.

**INTRODUCTION:**

City of Paris was in a state of turmoil and anxiety on 14<sup>th</sup> of July, 1789. Its citizens were anxious as there were rumors that the king had ordered troops to kill the citizens.

The anxiety led the citizens to gather at a place and form a militia which then barged into government buildings to find ammunition. The group also attacked the Bastille, a fortress prison. They killed its commander and released the prisoners. This was followed by the demolition of the building, whose remains were then sold in the market.

This is seen as a turning point in the history of France as the events that followed that led to the killing of the king of France.

**FRENCH SOCIETY DURING THE LATE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY**

French society before 1789 followed a system which is referred to as the Old Regime. According to this, the entire society was divided into three estates:

- First one included clergy while the second one was composed of nobility. These two groups enjoyed privileges of birth, which included – most importantly - exemption from the taxes. They also obtained feudal dues from the peasants. The peasants were to render services to the nobility free of cost.
- Third estate was composed of businessmen, courts, merchants, officials, lawyers, peasants, artisans, landless laborers, servants. Peasants covered 90 percent of the population among which many did not own land. Almost 60 percent of the land was occupied by the Church, nobility or the richer peasants of the third estate.

King Louis XVI, when ascended the throne in 1774, France was under huge debt. The debts were mainly due to constant war involvement, especially against Britain. As the king had to clear off the debts and also had to maintain other expenses, such as maintaining an army, court, running government offices and universities; the only way for running things smoothly was to increase the taxes.

As mentioned earlier, the first two estate members were exempted from paying taxes. This left the entire burden of taxes on the third estate members, which mostly consisted of small peasants, landless labor and servants.

Apart from the kingdom's taxes, peasants also had to pay taxes to the Church. Church collected *tithes* from the peasants, *taille* from the entire third estate, along with a number of various other indirect taxes which were extracted on articles of daily use. The entire burden of taxes was borne by the third estate, especially the peasants.

#### THE STRUGGLE TO SURVIVE

The population of France rose rapidly from 23 million in 1715 to 28 million in 1789. This rapid increase in population did not accompany the increase in food grains. This led to increase in demand for food, which caused its prices to rise.

Many were employed in workshops where they were given fixed wages, which also did not increase with time. This led to increase in gaps between the rich and the poor. Shortage of food supply got worsened when a drought or hail led to decrease in harvest. This situation leads to a subsistence crisis. It was a common occurrence during the Old Regime in France.

#### A GROWING MIDDLE CLASS ENVISAGES AN END TO PRIVILEGES

Due to increase in taxes and shortage in food supply, there were many revolts held by the peasants. But they were not capable enough to carry out the revolt on a large scale.

Middle class members gained momentum during the eighteenth century. These members gained wealth by their involvement in the overseas trade and manufacturing of goods such as silk and woolen textiles. Along with the merchants, the middle class society also included lawyers, administrative officials.

The education that they gained made them believe that in a society, privileges should be imparted based on a person's merit, rather than by birth. A society should be based on laws that treat its every member equally and fairly. Such ideas were put forward by philosophers such as John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau.

- John Locke, in his work *Two Treatises of Government*, opposed strongly against the doctrine of divine and absolute power to the monarch.
- Jean Jacques Rousseau proposed a form of government where there is a social contract between the people and the government.
- Montesquieu, in his book *The Spirit of the Laws*, proposed a form of government where the entire power is divided into three sections – legislative, executive and judiciary.

These ideas were discussed by people at various public places by common people. Many accepted them and wanted them to be implemented. They were also read out to illiterate people so that the ideas can be conveyed to a large number of people.

### **THINGS TO ANSWER AFTER READING THE CONTEXT**

1. Explain the procedure of passing of taxes in the Old Regime of France.
2. Who were the leaders of the National Assembly?
3. Why did the common people and peasants of France revolt in the summer of 1789?
4. What was the eligibility criteria to vote in the Constitutional Monarchy?

### **THE OUTBREAK OF THE REVOLUTION**

King Louis XVI had to increase taxes. But he alone did not have the power to do so. For imposing new taxes, the law should pass through Estates General, a political body composed of representatives from all the three estates. But only a monarch can call for a meeting for the Estates General.

On 5<sup>th</sup> May, 1789, King Louis XVI called for the assembling of Estates General to pass the new tax proposals. The representatives, 300 each from first and second estates and 600 from the third estates were made to assemble at a hall in Versailles. While the representatives of the first and second estates sat in the front rows, the representatives of the third estates stood at the back. Though women, peasants and artisans were not elected as representatives, their grievances were noted down in 40,000 letters.

King Louis XVI wanted to follow the old way of voting, where each estate was entitled to one vote. But the third estate representatives wanted each representative to have its own vote, an idea put forward by Rousseau in his book *The Social Contract*. But the king rejected the proposal, and the third state representatives marched out of the hall in protest.

The representatives then met in a tennis court hall in Versailles and formed themselves into a National Assembly with an aim to draft a constitution which would restrict the powers of the monarch and the privileges of the nobility. The leaders of the National Assembly were Mirabeau, a noble family member who believed in equality for all; and Abbe Sieyes, a priest, who wrote a very influential pamphlet "What is Third Estate?"

Around the same time, France was facing a severe crisis in food supply. A bad harvest worsened the situation, leading to increase in prices of bread. After spending long queues, women barged into the shops snatching anything they had their hands upon. Also, there were rumors that the king had ordered troops to destroy the ripe crops. Frightened by such news, many peasants attacked chateaux and burnt down official documents. They also looted grains. On 14<sup>th</sup> July, a frightened and anxious crowd attacked the Bastille.

Seeing such uprising and revolts, King Louis XVI finally gave recognition to the National Assembly. He accepted that his rights and powers will be checked by a constitution. Also, privileges enjoyed by the clergy and nobility were removed. On the night of 4<sup>th</sup> of August 1789, a decree was passed by the National Assembly abolishing the feudal system of taxes and obligations. Lands under the church were confiscated and tithes were abolished.

### **FRANCE BECOMES A CONSTITUTIONAL MONARCHY**

The draft of the National Assembly completed in 1791, where the powers from the monarch were restricted. Instead, division of powers was formulated, the divisions being – legislative, executive and judiciary. Thus, France became a constitutional monarchy.

Members of the National assembly had the right to make laws. The members were indirectly elected by the citizens. Citizens elected a group of members called electors who then elected the members of the National Assembly. But not all members were given the right to vote. People aged above 25 years and paying taxes equivalent to a three days of laborer's wage were eligible to vote. They were considered as active citizens. Other males and all females were considered as passive citizens.

Though not bestowed with the right to vote to all citizens, the draft of the constitution gave rights such as right to life, freedom of opinion, freedom of speech, equality before law as 'natural and inalienable' rights under Rights of Man and Citizen. This meant that the laws were applicable to all the citizens by birth and it was the duty of the government to implement and protect the rights of its citizens.

#### **THINGS TO ANSWER AFTER READING THE CONTEXT**

1. Who is the poet of the National Anthem of France? Where did the National Anthem derive its name from?
2. Write a short note on Jacobins club. How did the members of this club distinguish itself from the nobility?
3. What were the eligibility criteria to vote in government formed by the Convention?
4. Write a short note on the Reign of Terror.

#### **FRANCE ABOLISHES MONARCHY AND BECOMES A REPUBLIC**

King Louis XVI accepted and gave recognition to the National Assembly after seeing the uprising and revolts being held at a very massive scale. But secretly, he sought help from the king of Prussia. As the neighbouring countries were also worried with the events taking place, they agreed to help.

But before such could happen, the National Assembly voted and declared a war against Prussia and Austria in April 1792. Many people came forward to join in the war, as it was seen as a fight of common man against the kings and aristocracies. People sang many patriotic songs. Marseillaise was sung for the first time by volunteers when they marched out from Marseilles (hence the name). It is now the national anthem of France. Its poet is Roget de L'Isle.

The wars caused huge losses to the public. Men went to the wars and women in the family were left with the duties of the household. But many refused to stop the war. They wanted it to continue as the constitution of 1791 gave voting rights only to richer sections of the society.

Many political clubs were also formed. People who were interested in discussing political ideas and planning their own course of actions joined these clubs. One such club was Jacobins club, deriving its name from the former convent of St Jacob in Paris. Members of this club mainly belonged from the less prosperous sections of the society, such as pastry cooks, watch makers, servants, daily wage workers. The leader of the Jacobins club was Maximilian Robespierre.

The members of the club decided to wear long striped trousers, similar to those worn by dock workers. This they decided to do so to distinguish them from the nobility, who wore knee breeches. The club members also started wearing red caps which symbolized liberty. Gradually the members came to be known as sans-culottes, which literally meant 'those without knee breeches'.

Summer of 1792, sans-culottes planned an attack on Parisians due to short supplies and high prices of food. On August 10, Palace of Tuileries was attacked; its guards were killed and the king was held hostage. Later the entire royal family was imprisoned.

Fresh elections were held where all citizens above the age of 21 years were given the right to vote. The newly elected members' assembly was called the Convention. This new convention abolished monarchy and established France as a Republic.

Louis XVI was tried for treason and sentenced to death. He was executed publicly at the Place de la Concorde on 21 January 1793. Marie Antoinette, the queen, same given the same treatment after him.

#### THE REIGN OF TERROR

- The period from 1793 to 1794 is seen as a Reign of Terror in France.
- Robespierre followed a system of strict control. Anyone he seemed as 'enemy' of the republic form of government, be it ex-nobles, clergymen, members from different political parties, even its own party members who were against some of his methods, were arrested and imprisoned. If the court found them 'guilty' they were guillotined.
- Maximum value on wages and prices were fixed. Peasants were forced to sell their grains in the cities at prices fixed by the government. Meat and bread were rationed. Breads made of expensive white flour were banned and all the citizens were made to eat the *pain d'egalite* (equality bread).
- Churches were banned and were converted into barracks and offices.
- Citizens were also being asked to be referred as Citoyen and Citoyenne (citizens), instead of Monsieur (Sir) and Madame (Madam).

Frustrated and angered by the measures and policies adopted by Robespierre, its members fought a case against him. In July 1794, Robespierre himself was found guilty in court, and then the next day he was guillotined.

#### A DIRECTORY RULES FRANCE

The Demolition of the Jacobin government paved the way for the middle class people to gain power. These made a government where two legislative councils were elected and then these elected a five member Directory. But often clashes between the Directory and the legislative councils led to unstable governments. Later, Napoleon Bonaparte, a military dictator, took over France.

Though many unstable governments were formed, the idea of freedom and equality before law were ideals that kept inspiring people to fight for their rights.

#### THINGS TO ANSWER AFTER READING THE CONTEXT

1. Write a short note on the struggle of women for its fight for equality, both politically and professionally.

#### **DID WOMEN HAVE A REVOLUTION?**

Women's fight for equality was a constant struggle in France. Women of the third estate had to work for a living. They worked as seamstresses, sold flowers, fruits, vegetables, worked as domestic servants and many other works. And together with these, they also took care of their families by cooking food, washing and cleaning. Despite all these efforts, women's wages were less than that of men. Women were also deprived from the right to education, except the daughters of the nobles. These daughters were then married off after a certain age.

Women were active participants in the revolts and uprisings carried out against the monarchy and the aristocracy. They wanted equal rights as that of men. They wanted political positions and powers in the National Assembly. They believed that getting elected in the Assembly will help them raise their concerns and make the lives of women in the country better. But they were highly disappointed when the National Assembly of 1791 categorized them as passive citizens and no right to vote were given to them.

Women formed their own political clubs to discuss ideas and plan their own course of action. The Society of Revolutionary and Republican Women were some famous political clubs. Together with the revolutionary government, schools for girls were opened and girl education was made compulsory. Forced marriage was stopped by creating it as a contract where free willing people could register under civil laws. Divorce was also made legal, and could be applied by both men and women. Women were also allowed to be trained for jobs, could start their own small business and pursue different fields.

The Robespierre government banned the political clubs for women and deemed them illegal. Many prominent women were arrested and executed. But the fight of women for equal political rights continued. Finally in 1946, women in France won the right to vote.

#### THINGS TO ANSWER AFTER READING THE CONTEXT

1. How did slavery end in France?
2. Explain about the triangular slave trade practiced in the French colonies.

#### **ABOLITION OF SLAVERY**

- French colonies of Caribbean – Martinique, Guadeloupe and San Domingo – were prominent exporters of tobacco, indigo, sugar and coffee. But due to harsh working conditions, European people did not go there to work. To meet the need of labour, slave trade was introduced between Africa, Europe and America.
- French merchants from Nantes or Bordeaux sailed to African coast, where slaves were bought from locals. These were then shackled and packed tightly in a ship for a voyage of three months.

From Atlantic to Caribbean they were brought and then sold to plantation workers. Many gained prosperity through the slavery as the much growing demands were met.

- There was not much demand against the slavery system initially. The members of the National Assembly were reluctant to raise concerns against the atrocities faced by the slaves as many of their members were rich businessmen who would be severely affected by the abolition.
- The Convention formed under Robespierre abolished slavery under the ideal that all the subjects under French government should be treated with equal rights. But this freedom was short lived. Napoleon Bonaparte re-established slavery ten years later.
- Slavery was abolished permanently from the French colonies in the year of 1848.

#### THINGS TO ANSWER AFTER READING THE CONTEXT

1. How did abolition of slavery affect the everyday lives of the French people?

#### **REVOLUTION AND EVERYDAY LIFE**

The French government took the responsibility of promoting the ideas of a democratic country to its public. It passed and implemented such laws that would define and set examples to its public about the ideas such as liberty and equality and how that would affect the everyday lives of the people.

One such change was abolition of censorship. Under the Old Regime, everything that was printed or displayed to the public first had to have approval from the censors of the king. But under freedom of speech and expression, ideas and opinions could now be freely expressed and discussed. Prints bloomed and so the ideas of different sections of people reached to the vast public. Newspapers, pamphlets, books and even plays portraying ideas became common. Even if people opposed some methods of government, they could freely raise their concerns and voice their opinions without the fear of being silenced. These ideas of liberty and equality gained ground in the French society.

#### CONCLUSION

Napoleon Bonaparte crowned himself the Emperor of France in 1804. He conquered many neighbouring territories, installing one of its family members in each territory. He saw himself a modernizer of the European society, introducing laws such as right to private property, introduction of a uniform system of weights and measures.

Initially people saw Napoleon as a liberator who would free them from atrocities of the monarchs. But the armies of the emperor proved otherwise. Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo in 1815.

Though many governments rose and fell, the idea of equality, justice for all and liberty were the inspiring ideals of all. Such ideas introduced in France travelled to different parts of Europe, where people began to understand their rights and began to fight for the same. These ideals were the legacy of the French Revolution.

In India, the ideas of French Revolution were popularized by freedom fighters Tipu Sultan and Raja Rammohan Roy.

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