

THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

TEXT BOOK QUESTIONS

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

Ans. Many factors led to the onset of revolutionary protest in France. The most important reasons are as follows:

i) Social Causes – The society at that time was fragmented into three estates. The first and the second estates consisted of the clergy and the nobility respectively. They were free from paying taxes. The third estate consisting of the middle and lower classes had to bear the complete burnt of taxation. These people formed the majority in the social fabric but had no social standing or political rights.

ii) Political Causes – The monarch of France at that point in time was the inefficient Louis XVI, who had the reputation of being more interested in leading a luxurious life in his majestic palace at Versailles rather than looking into the administration of his land.

iii) Economic Causes – France had entered the state of bankruptcy and it was in debt. The royal treasury had reached its limit due to France's involvement in constant wars and non-judicious expenses by the king.

iv) Other Causes – The era had witnessed the rise of new thoughts and ideas. Philosophers such as Rousseau, Voltaire and Montesquieu gave the people fresh ideas about freedom and progression.

The lack of funds in the state treasury had compelled the king to call up the Estates-General in order to come up with new tax proposals. The age-old voting method giving one vote to each group was not accepted by members of the third estate and demanded that each member should have individual voting rights. After their demand was rejected by the king, they stopped the proceedings of the meeting by abandoning it. This event marked the beginning of agitations and became the immediate cause for the outbreak of the revolution.

2. Which groups of French society benefitted from the revolution? Which groups were forced to relinquish

power? Which sections of society would have been disappointed with the outcome of the revolution?

Ans. The revolution brought greater rights and representation for the members of the Third Estate consisting of workers, businessmen, merchants, court officials, lawyers, teachers, doctors, etc. These groups were the taxpayers in French society but had negligible say in the workings of the government prior to the revolution.

Members of the first two estates, the clergy and the nobility, were stripped of all their perks and privileges. They had to let go of their centuries-old rights.

The upper echelons of the society were naturally devastated with the outcome of the revolution since all the age-old titles and privileges they had been enjoying for centuries were snatched away from them.

3. Describe the legacy of the French Revolution for the people of the world during the 19th and 20th centuries.

Ans. The Revolution in France heralded a new wave of movements across the lengths and breadths of Europe and also around the world. The social and political

changes that were witnessed in different pockets of the globe had a connection to the revolution.

The ideas of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity inspired many political movements around the world during the 19th and 20th centuries. Liberty, as expressed in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, formed the bedrock of a new social order. National sovereignty had the ideas of liberty and freedom as its foundation. Equality played a major role in ending the stratification of society based on perks and privileges. Fraternity gave impetus to values such as love, unity and cooperation among different groups in a given society.

The idea of nationalism was to a great extent a seminal product of the Revolution. Many parts of the world experienced a surge of 'nationalist' emotions after the Revolution. Countries such as Germany, Italy, Poland, transformed into 'nation-states' due to the long-standing effects of the Revolution. Boundaries in Europe and South America were reshaped once the idea of nationalism became a major component in world politics. The Revolution also made way for future developments in the fields of women's emancipation, anti-slavery, equal rights,



and so on. The far-reaching effects of the Revolution can be felt even in the 21st century.



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