

SOCIAL STUDIES (HISTORY)

CHAPTER 01: THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

(Textbook Q&A)

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

The main causes of revolutionary protests in France are as follows:

- (i) **The war with Britain for an independent America:** This war led to mounting debt on the French monarchy. This resulted in imposition of new taxes on the public (majorly on the third estate).
- (ii) **Birth Privileges:** People got privileges and position based on their ancestry privileges and not on their merit. This led to resentment among common people.
- (iii) **Concentration of power among the privileged:** People belonging to the first and second estate had all the power and money. Community people were at the mercy of this privileged class.
- (iv) **Subsistence Crisis:** Rising population and less grain production resulted in demand supply gap of bread, which was the staple diet. Wages did not keep pace with rising prices. It was becoming difficult for people.
- (v) **Growing Middle Class:** Because of increased overseas trade a new class emerged. This class was wealthy not because of birth but because of its ability to utilize opportunities. People of the middle class started raising their voice for an end to privileges based on lineage.

The above-mentioned causes led to a general sense of resentment among people. Certain philosophers of the period spread awareness through various media like books/ articles. Some from the privileged classes also advocated a switch to democracy. Series of all these events together led to the revolution in France.

2. Which groups of French society benefited from the revolution? Which groups were forced to relinquish power? Which sections of society would have been disappointed with the outcome of the revolution and why?

All the groups of French society which formerly formed a part of the Third Estate were benefitted from the revolution. These groups included the peasants, workers, petty-officers, lawyers, teachers, doctors and traders. Formerly they had to pay all the taxes and they were humiliated both by the Clergy and the Nobles at every point but after the revolution they began to be treated equal with the upper sections of the society.

Clergy and Nobles had to give up their power as a result of French Revolution. Therefore, they would have been disappointed a lot as the new French society was organized on the basis of social equality.

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

The legacy of the French Revolution for the people of the world during the 19th and 20th centuries was as follows:

- Ideas of equality and democratic spread from France to other European countries and feudalism was abolished;

- Colonial people reworked the idea of freedom from bondage into their movements to create sovereign nation states;
- It was the first movement to adopt the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity;
- The declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen gave rights such as right to life, freedom of speech, equality before law, etc.
- Women were given many rights. They could not be forced to marry against their will, divorce was made legal, schooling was made compulsory and they could get trainings for jobs.

4. Draw up a list of democratic rights we enjoy today whose origins could be traced to the French Revolution.

The following fundamental rights, given in the Indian constitution can be traced to the French Revolution:

- The right to equality
- The right to freedom of speech and expression
- The right to freedom from exploitation
- The right to constitutional remedies

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

Yes, I agree because

- (i) The declaration stated that “Law is the expression of the general will and all citizens have the right to participate in its formation, personally or through their representatives”. However, France became a Constitutional Monarchy and still millions of citizens (men under the age of 25 and women) were not allowed to vote at all.
- (ii) The law has the right to forbid only actions injurious to society" did not mention about criminal offences against other individuals like slave trade etc.
- (iii) Women were totally neglected in decision making.

The above-mentioned points contradict the ideals that the revolution advocated.

6. How would you explain the rise of Napoleon?

After Robespierre's rule came to an end, a 5-member executive body i.e. Directory was formed to avoid concentration of power in the hands of one individual. Members of the directory often fought among themselves leading to total chaos and political instability. This created a political vacuum in France. This was a beneficial situation for Napoleon Bonaparte to take over as a military dictator.

After crowning himself as Emperor of France in 1804, he went to conquer the neighbouring European countries, captured dynasties and created kingdoms where he placed members of his family. Initially, he was viewed as a liberator who would bring freedom to the people but soon Napoleonic armies were viewed as invading forces.

He introduced many laws such as the protection of private property and a uniform system of weights and measures provided by the decimal system.