

The French Revolution

After analysis of the previous 3 years' examination papers, it is concluded that the following topics are the most important concepts from this chapter and should be focussed upon.

- The outbreak of the French Revolution
- Changes after Revolution
- Classes of French Societies
- Facts about Napoleon, the former emperor of France.

The French Society during the Late 18th Century-

The French Society comprised :

1st Estate: Clergy

2nd Estate: Nobility

3rd Estate: Big businessmen, merchants, court officials, peasants, artisans, landless laborers, servants, etc.

Some within the Third Estate were rich and some were poor.

The burden of financing activities of the state through taxes was borne by the Third Estate alone.

The Struggle for Survival: Population of France grew and so did the demand for grains. The gap between the rich and poor widened. This led to subsistence crises.

The Growing Middle Class: This estate was educated and believed that no group in society should be privileged by birth. These ideas were put forward by philosophers such as Locke the English philosopher and Rousseau the French philosopher. The American Constitution and its guarantee of individual rights was an important example of political theories of France. These ideas were discussed intensively in salons and coffee houses and spread among people through books and newspapers. These were even read aloud.

The Outbreak of the Revolution

The French Revolution went through various stages. When Louis XVI became the king of France in 1774, he inherited a treasury which was empty. There was growing discontent within the society of the Old Regime.

1789: Convocation of Estates General. The Third Estate forms National Assembly, Tennis Court Oath the Bastille is stormed, peasant revolts in the countryside, Assembly issues Declaration of the Rights of Man.

1791: A constitution is framed to limit the powers of the king and to guarantee the basic right to all human beings.

1792-93: Convention abolishes Monarchy; France becomes a republic. The Jacobin Republic overthrown, a Directory rules France.

1795: New Constitution is adopted. A new Convention appointed a five-man Directorate to run the state from 26th October 1795. Churches reopened.

1799: The Revolution ends with the rise of Napoleon Bonaparte, Napoleon's coup abolishes Directory and establishes Consulate.

Time Line: The French Revolution

1770s-1780s: Economic decline: French Government in deep debt. In 1774, Louis XVI ascends to the throne.

1788-1789: Bad harvest, high prices, food riots.

1789, May 5: Estates-General convened, demands reforms.

1789, July 14: National Assembly formed. Bastille stormed on July 14. French Revolution starts.

1789, August 4: Night of August 4 ends the rights of the aristocracy, the surrender of feudal rights.

1789, August 26: Declaration of the Rights of Man

1790: Civil Constitution of the Clergy nationalizes the Church.

1791: Dissolution of the National Constituent Assembly.

1792: Constitution of 1791 converts absolute monarchy into a constitutional monarchy with limited powers.

1792: Austria and Prussia attack revolutionary France, Robespierre, elected the first Deputy for Paris to the National convention.

1793: Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette were executed.

1792-1794: In 1793, the Reign of Terror starts. Austria, Britain, the Netherlands, Prussia, and Spain are at war with France.

Robespierre's Committee of Public Safety repels back foreign invaders.

Executes many 'enemies of the people' in France itself.

1794: Robespierre is executed. France is governed by a Directory, a committee of five men. The Reign of Terror ends.

1795: National convention dissolved.

1799: Napoleon Bonaparte becomes the leader of the French Revolution ends.

Women's Revolution

- From the very beginning, women were active participants in the events which brought about so many changes in French society.
- Most of the women of the third estate had to work for a living.
- Their wages were lower than those of men.
- They demanded equal pay for equal work.
- In order to discuss and voice their interests, women started their own political clubs and newspapers.
- One of their main demands was that women must enjoy the same political rights as men.
- Some laws were introduced to improve the position of women.
- Their struggle still continues in several parts of the world.
- It was finally in 1946 that women in France won the right to vote.

The Abolition of Slavery

- There was a triangular slave trade among Europe, Africa, and America.
- In the 18th century, there was little criticism of slavery in France.
- No laws were passed against it.

- It was in 1794 that the convention made free to all slaves.
- But 10 years later slavery was reintroduced by Napoleon.
- It was finally in 1848 that slavery was abolished in the French colonies.

The Revolution and Everyday Life

- The years following 1789 in France saw many changes in the lives of men, women, and children.
- The revolutionary governments took it upon themselves to pass laws that would translate the ideals of liberty and equality into everyday practice.
- One important law that came into effect was the abolition of censorship.
- 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 19th century.

Napoleon

- In 1804, Napoleon crowned himself emperor of France.
- He set out to conquer neighboring European countries, dispossessing dynasties and creating kingdoms where he placed members of his family.
- He saw his role as a modernizer of Europe.
- He was finally, defeated at Waterloo in 1815.