

Ch 1 The French Revolution

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Questions

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

Answer

The circumstances that causes outbreak of revolutionary protest in France were:

→ Social Inequality: French society in eighteenth century was divided into three estates namely The Clergy, The nobility and third estates which compares peasants, officials and small business. It was only third estates only pay taxes. Clergy and nobility were exempt from taxes.

→ Subsistence Crisis: The population of France also increased from 23 million in 1715 to 28 million in 1789. Food grains were now in great demand. Price of bread shot up. Wages did not keep pace with rising prices. This led to subsistence crisis.

→ Economic Problems: Long years of war had drained the financial resources of France. 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.

→ Strong Middle Class: The middle class emerged educated and wealthy during eighteenth century. They believed that no group in society should be given privileges by birth. Ideas of equality and freedom were put forward by philosophers. The ideas of these philosophers were discussed intensively in salons and coffee houses and spread among people. → Immediate Causes: On 5 may, 1789, Louis XVI called together an assembly os Estates General to pass proposals for new taxes. Third estates protested against this proposal but as each estates have one vote the king rejected this appeal. They walked out of assembly.

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?

Answer

The richer members of the third estate (the middle class) benefitted the most from the French Revolution. The clergy and the nobility were forced to relinquish power. The poorer sections of society and women would have been disappointed with the outcome of the revolution as the promise of equality was not fulfilled in full measure at the end of the revolution.

3. Describe the legacy of the French Revolution for the peoples of the world during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Answer

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 were abolished. It inspired the Germans, Italians, and Austrians to overthrow their oppressive regimes. The French Revolution inspired the struggling nations of Asia and Africa who were groaning under the oppression of European colonialism. Tipu Sultan and Rajaram Mohan Roy are two examples of individuals who responded to ideas coming from French revolution.

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

Answer

We can trace the origin of the following democratic rights we enjoy today to the French Revolution:

- Right to Equity
- Right to Freedom
- Freedom of Speech and expression
- Right to form associations

→ Right to justice and security

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

Answer

The message of universal rights was beset with contradictions: → Many ideals in the "Declaration of Rights of Man and Citizen" were replete with dubious meanings. For example, "the law has the right to forbid only actions injurious to society" had nothing to say about criminal offences against other individuals.

→ The declaration stated that "law is the expression of the general will. All citizens have the right to participate in its formation...All citizens are equal before it", but when France became a constitutional monarchy, almost 3 million citizens including men under the age of 25 and women were not allowed to vote at all.

Hence, by this universal rights poor were suppressed. Constitution is only available for the rich. Women were totally neglected in decision making.

6. How would you explain the rise of Napoleon?

Answer

After France became a republic in 1792, the then ruler, Robespierre, gave more privileges to the wealthier section of society. Further, he was a sort of autocrat himself. This led to reign of terror for the following many years. After Robespierre's rule came to an end a directory was formed to avoid concentration of power in 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 conducive situation and Napoleon Bonaparte took the reign of power as a military dictator.