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1. French Society During the Late 18th Century

France's Revolution began with the storming of the fortress prison, The Bastille, on 14 July 1789. The discovery of hoarded ammunition (quantity of bullets and shells) was feared. The Bastille is a prison fortress despised by all because it stood for King's dictatorial force. The castle was broken down.

French Revolution series of events were started by the middle class which shook the upper classes. The people revolted against the cruel regime of monarchy. This revolution put forward the ideas of liberty, fraternity, and equality. French society was divided into three Estates. The First Estate consisted of the clergy, the Second Estate consisted of the nobility and the Third Estate consisted of the common people.

- ✓ The first two estates, i.e., the clergy and the nobility were called the **privileged classes** because they enjoyed certain rights and privileges by birth. They were exempted from paying taxes to the state.
- ✓ Only the Third Estate paid taxes. They also had to render services to the landowners.
- ✓ The Church also collected taxes called **tithes** from the peasants.
- ✓ When Louis XVI ascended the throne he found an empty treasury.
- ✓ Long years of war had drained the financial resources of the country.
- ✓ France helped the thirteen American colonies to gain independence from Britain; this added to the economic problems of France.
- ✓ Louis XVI wanted to raise the taxes to meet the expenses and increase the income of the government.

2. A Growing Middle Class Envisages an End to Privileges

- ✓ In the 18th century, a new social group emerged who were known as the middle class. They had become rich through expansion of overseas trade.
- ✓ In addition to merchants and manufacturers there were lawyers and administrative officials who were educated and believed that no group of society should be privileged by birth but their position should depend on merit. They demanded an end to privileges.
- ✓ Philosophers like Locke, Rousseau and Montesquieu believed in a society based on freedom, equal law and opportunities for all. Rousseau proposed a government based on a social contract between the people and their representatives.

3. The Outbreak of the French Revolution

- ✓ On 5th May, 1789 Louis XVI called together an assembly of the three Estates to pass proposals for new taxes.

- ✓ Each Estate had one vote. The Third Estate demanded one vote for each member of the assembly. They demanded that voting should now be conducted by the assembly as a whole.
- ✓ When the king rejected the proposals of the Third Estate, they walked out of the assembly in protest and held their meeting in the hall of an indoor tennis court and declared themselves the National Assembly.
- ✓ Meanwhile the rest of France was seething with turmoil because a bad harvest led to an increase in bread prices and hoarding. Crowds of angry women stormed the shops.
- ✓ On 14th July, 1789, an agitated crowd stormed and destroyed the Bastille, a prison just outside Paris, freeing all its prisoners.
- ✓ Due to rumours spreading about the nobles trying to destroy crops, the peasants attacked them, booting and destroying records of manorial dues.
- ✓ Finally, the king agreed to a Constitutional Monarchy rule. On 4th August, 1789, the Assembly abolished taxes and tithes and the lands owned by the Church were confiscated.

4. Causes of French Revolution

I. Social Cause

The society was divided into 3 estates.

- ✓ The members of first 2 estates i.e., privileges by birth. They are exempted from paying taxes to the state. Nobles also enjoy feudal privileges which include feudal dues extracted from peasants.
- ✓ The church extracts its share of taxes called Tithes from peasants. A direct tax Taille and a number of indirect taxes are levied on everyday consumption articles like salt and tobacco.

II. Economic Cause (The struggle to survive)

- ✓ The population of France increased from 23 million to 28 million in 1789 which led to an increment in demand for food grains.
- ✓ Most workers were employed as labourers in workshops with fixed wages but the wages did not keep pace with rise in prices of food grains.
- ✓ This led to a subsistence crisis (extreme scarcity of basic means of livelihood) in France due to the old regime.

III. Political Cause

- ✓ In 1774, Louis XVI became the king of France and faced an empty treasury due to long years of war which drained financial resources and discontent within the society was increasing.
- ✓ He helped 13 American colonies to gain their independence from the common enemy, Britain. This war added more than 3 billion lives for which the moneylenders began to charge 10% interest on loans.
- ✓ 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 tax.

5. France Becomes a Constitutional Monarchy

- ✓ The National Assembly completed the draft of the Constitution in 1791. Power was assigned to different institutions, the Legislature, Executive and Judiciary. This made France a Constitutional Monarchy.
- ✓ Only men who paid taxes equal to 3 days wages of a labourer were entitled to vote.
- ✓ The remaining men and all women were classed as passive citizens.

6. Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen

- ✓ The Constitution began with a declaration of the rights of man and citizen. Rights such as right to live, freedom of speech, freedom of opinion and equality before law as established as the 'natural and inalienable' rights.
- ✓ Each right belonged to each human being by birth and could not be taken away.
- ✓ It became the duty of the state to protect each citizen's natural rights.

7. The Jacobins

- ✓ The people who were poor were not given political rights. So, they formed clubs to discuss government policies and plan their actions.
- ✓ The most popular club was that of the Jacobins. This club included small shopkeepers, artisans such as shoemakers, pastry cooks, printers, servants and daily wage workers.
- ✓ Their leader was Maximilian Robespierre.
- ✓ (iv) The Jacobins wore striped trousers to set themselves apart from the fashionable sections of society who wore knee breeches.

8. The Reign of Terror

- ✓ The period from 1793 to 1794 is referred to as the Reign of Terror.
- ✓ Robespierre followed a policy of severe control and punishment.
- ✓ All those whom he saw as being 'enemies' of the republic, ex-nobles and clergy, members of other political parties and even members of his own party who did not agree with his methods were arrested, imprisoned and tried by a revolutionary tribunal.
- ✓ If the court found them guilty they were guillotined.
- ✓ This government placed a maximum ceiling on wages and prices. Meat and bread were rationed. Use of expensive white bread was forbidden.
- ✓ All French men and women were now called citoyen and citoyenne (citizens). Churches were closed.
- ✓ Even the supporters of Robespierre demanded moderation. Finally, he was convicted by a court in July 1794, arrested and on the next day sent to the guillotine.

9. The Directory Rules France

- ✓ The fall of the Jacobins allowed the wealthier middle class to seize power. A new Constitution provided for two councils which elected a Directory made up of five members.
- ✓ The directors often clashed with the Legislative Councils who then sought to dismiss them.
- ✓ The political instability of the directory paved the way for the rise of the military dictator Napoleon Bonaparte.

10. Revolution and Women

- ✓ Most of the women of the Third Estate had to work hard for a living. They worked as seamstresses, sold flowers, fruits and vegetables or worked as domestic servants. They had no access to education or job training.
- ✓ Their wages were lower than men.
- ✓ They started their own newspapers and political clubs.
- ✓ One of their main demands was equal political rights; they demanded the right to vote, to be elected to the Assembly and to hold political office.
- ✓ The revolutionary government did introduce laws that helped to improve the lives of women.
- ✓ Schooling for girls was made compulsory.
- ✓ Their fathers could not force them into marriage against their will. Marriage was made into a contract entered into freely and registered under civil law.
- ✓ Divorce was made legal and could be applied for by both women and men.
- ✓ Women too could now train for jobs, could become artists or run small businesses.
- ✓ It was finally in 1946 that women in France won the right to vote.
- ✓ Olympe de Gouges was one of the most important politically active women in revolutionary France.

11. The Abolition of Slavery

- ✓ One of the most revolutionary reforms of the Jacobin regime was the abolition of slavery in the French colonies in the Caribbean.
- ✓ The slaves were brought from Africa by the European traders and sold in Europe and America to work in the sugar, coffee and indigo plantations.
- ✓ The National Assembly did not pass laws to abolish slavery, as they feared opposition from businessmen whose income depended on slave trade.
- ✓ Finally, the Convention in 1794 made laws to free all slaves in French overseas possessions.
- ✓ After 10 years, Napoleon reintroduced slavery.
- ✓ Slavery was finally abolished in French colonies in 1848.

12. The Revolution and Everyday Life or Effect of Revolution on the People of France

- ✓ The years following 1789 in France saw many changes in the lives of women and children.
- ✓ One important law was the abolition of censorship on books, newspapers, plays, etc.
- ✓ Now the Declaration of Rights of Man and Citizen proclaimed freedom of speech and expression to be a natural right.
- ✓ Newspapers, pamphlets, books and printed pictures flooded the towns of France from where they travelled rapidly to the countryside.
- ✓ Freedom of the Press meant that opposing views of events could be expressed.

13. Legacy of the French Revolution

- ✓ The ideas of liberty, equality, 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 where feudalism was abolished.
- ✓ Colonised people reworked the idea of freedom from bondage into their movements to create a sovereign state.
- ✓ Tipu Sultan and Ram Mohan Roy are two examples of individuals who responded to ideas coming from revolutionary France.

THE END

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