

**French Society during the Late Eighteenth Century (Part-1)**

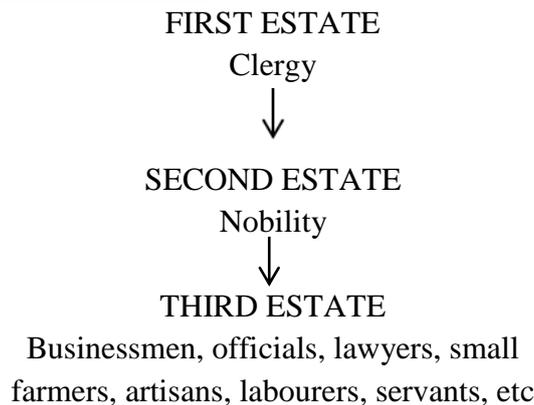
Louis XVI, in 1774, ascended the throne of France.

**Reason for empty treasury**

Long years of war had drained the financial resources of France.

- (ii) High cost of maintenance of immense palace of Versailles and court.
- (iii) Under Louis XVI France helped the thirteen American colonies to gain independence.
- (iv) War added to a debt.
- (v) Lenders began to charge high interest on loans.

**French society during the 18<sup>th</sup> Century**



- The clergy and the nobility, members of the first two estates enjoyed certain privileges by birth.
- These groups of members were exempted from paying taxes and enjoyed feudal privileges
- All members of the third estate had to pay taxes to the state which included a direct tax, called taille, and a number of indirect taxes which were levied on articles of everyday consumption like salt or tobacco.

**The Struggle to Survive**

- Increase in population led to a rapid increase for food grains
- .Production of grains could not keep pace with the demand due to which the price of bread rose rapidly.
- Due to low wages paid to the labourers the gap between the poor and the rich widened.
- Things became worse whenever drought or hail reduced the harvest.

**A Growing Middle Class Envisages an End to Privileges**

- Peasants used to participate in revolts against taxes and food scarcity.
- Group of the third estate had become prosperous and had access to education and new ideas. In the eighteenth century, new social groups emerged, termed the middle class, who earned their wealth through expanding overseas trade and by manufacturing woollen and silk textiles that were either exported or bought by the richer members of society.
- The third estate included professions such as lawyers or administrative officials.

- A person's social position was dependent on their merit.

### **The Three Great Philosophers**

- **Rousseau** carried the idea forward, proposing a form of government based on a social contract between people and their representatives
- In his Two Treatises of Government, **Locke** sought to refute the doctrine of the divine and absolute right of the monarch.
- In The Spirit of the Laws, **Montesquieu** proposed a division of power within the government between the legislative, the executive and the judiciary

### **The outbreak of revolution (part II)**

- In France, the monarch didn't have the power to impose taxes.
- They had to call a meeting of the Estates-General, a political body to which the three estates sent their representatives, to pass proposals for new taxes.
- Louis XVI, on 5 May 1789, called an assembly to pass proposals for new taxes.
- Representatives from the first and second estates were present and the third estate was represented by its prosperous and educated members.
- According to the principle each estate had one vote.
- But, representatives from the third estate demanded each member would have one vote.
- The demand was rejected so members of the third estate walked out to protest.
- They swore not to disperse till a constitution drafted for France that would limit the powers of the monarch.
- They assembled in the hall of an indoor tennis court in the grounds of Versailles.
  - (a) They declared themselves a National Assembly.
  - (b) They took an oath not to disperse till they had drafted a Constitution France limiting the power of the monarchy.
  - (c) They were led by Abbe Sieyes and Mira Beau
- Due to the severe winter, bread price rose and people had to spend hours in long queues.
- Rumours spread that the lords of the manor hired bands of brigands to destroy the ripe crops.
- In fear, peasants started looting hoarded grain and burnt down documents containing records of manorial dues.
- Nobles fled from their homes. Louis XVI accorded recognition to the National Assembly and accepted the principle that his powers would from now on be checked by a constitution.
- The Assembly passed a decree abolishing the feudal system of obligations and taxes on 4 August 1789.
- Tithes were abolished and lands owned by the Church were confiscated.

### **France Becomes a Constitutional Monarchy or Features of the Constitution of 1791(part-III)**

- In 1791, The National Assembly completed the draft of the constitution and its main object was to limit the powers of the monarch.
- These powers were now separated and assigned to different institutions – the legislature, executive and judiciary.

- France became a constitutional monarchy.
- Citizens voted for a group of electors, who in turn chose the Assembly, but unfortunately, not every citizen had the right to vote.
- Men above 25 years of age who paid taxes equal to at least 3 days of a labourer's wage were entitled to vote.
- The Constitution began with a Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen.
- Rights such as the right to life, freedom of speech, freedom of opinion, equality before law, were established as 'natural and inalienable' rights, that is, they belonged to each human being by birth and could not be taken away.

### **Birth of Jacobins club**

- Political clubs were formed and among them, Jacobins became the most successful club.
- Members of the Jacobin club included small shopkeepers, artisans such as shoemakers, pastry cooks, watch-makers, printers, as well as servants and daily-wage workers.
- Jacobin members started wearing long striped trousers similar to those worn by dockworkers.
- These Jacobins were called the sans-culottes, literally meaning 'those without knee breeches'.

### **France Abolishes Monarchy and Becomes a Republic**

- On August 10 1792, Jacobins stormed the Palace of the Tuileries and held the king hostage for several hours.
- Elections were held and all men of 21 years and above got the right to vote.
- Monarchy was abolished on 21 September 1792 and France was declared a republic. Louis XVI was sentenced to death by a court on the charge of treason.

### **The Reign of Terror**

- The period from 1793 to 1794 is referred to as the Reign of Terror.
- People whom Robespierre saw enemies of the republic were arrested, imprisoned and then tried by a revolutionary tribunal. If they were declared guilty by the court then they were guillotined.
- Laws were issued to place a maximum ceiling on wages and prices.
- Meat and bread were rationed. Expensive white flour was forbidden to use.
- Equality was practised through forms of speech and address.
- All French men and women were addressed as Citoyen and Citoyenne (Citizen).
- In July 1794, he was convicted by a court arrested and the next day sent to the guillotine

### **A Directory Rules France**

- Fall of the Jacobin government allowed the wealthier middle classes to seize power. According to the new constitution, non-propertied sections of society denied voting.
- It provided for two elected legislative councils.
- The government appointed a Directory, consisting of executives made up of five members. Political instability paved the way for a military dictator, Napoleon Bonaparte.

## Role of French women in the French revolution (part-IV)

### French women in the old regime (15th century till 1789)

- Most women of the third estate had to work for a living
- They worked as seamstresses or laundresses, sold flowers, fruits and vegetables at the market, or were employed as domestic servants in the houses of prosperous people.
- Most women did not have access to education or job training
- Only daughters of nobles or wealthier members of the third estate could study at a convent.
- Working women had also to care for their families, that is, cook, fetch water, queue up for bread and look after the children
- Their wages were lower than those of men.
- In order to discuss and voice their interests women started their own political clubs and newspapers.
- **The Society of Revolutionary and Republican Women** was the most famous of them.
- One of their main demands was that women enjoy the same political rights as men

### French women in the New regime (after the Constitution of 1791)

- The revolutionary government did introduce laws that helped improve the lives of women
- Together with the creation of state schools, schooling was made compulsory for all girls.
- Their fathers could no longer 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 could now train for jobs, could become artists or run small businesses.
- BUT they had no right to vote or enjoy the same political rights as men .

### The Abolition of Slavery (Part-V)

- Jacobin regime's most revolutionary social reform was the abolition of slavery in the French colonies.
- In the seventeenth century, slavery trade began. Slaves were brought from local chieftains, branded and shackled and were packed tightly into ships for the three-month-long voyage across the Atlantic to the Caribbean.
- Slave labour met the growing demand in European markets for sugar, coffee, and indigo. Throughout the eighteenth century, there was little criticism of slavery in France.
- In 1794, the Convention legislated to free all slaves in the French overseas possessions. Napoleon introduced slavery after ten years.
- In 1848, slavery was abolished in French colonies.

### The Revolution and Everyday Life

- France during 1789 saw changes in the lives of men, women and children.
- Abolition of censorship happened in the summer of 1789.
- Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen proclaimed freedom of speech and expression to be a natural right.
- Freedom of press meant opposing views of events could be expressed.
- Plays, songs and festive processions attracted large numbers of people.