

Chapter 1 - French Revolution

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

Answer:

When King Louis XVI was anointed as the new king, he found an empty treasury. Long years of war had drained the financial resources of France. On top of this, there was the cost of maintaining an extravagant court at the immense palace of Versailles. France had helped the thirteen American colonies gain their independence from the common enemy, Britain. The war added more than a Billion livres to a debt that had already risen to more than 2 billion livres. Lenders who gave credit now began to charge 10 per cent interest on loans. So the French Government had to spend an increasing percentage of its budget on interest payments alone. To meet its regular expenses, such as cost of maintaining an army, the court, running government offices or Universities. Even this measure did not suffice because the French society was divided into 3 estates and only the 3rd estate had to pay taxes. 1st and 2nd estate did not pay any taxes. The population of France grew massively. This led to a rapid increase in demand for food grains. Production of grains could not keep pace with demand. So the price of bread which was the staple diet of the majority rose rapidly. Most workers were employed as labourers in workshops whose owner fixed their wages. But the wages did not keep pace with the rise in prices. So the gap between the rich and the poor widened. All these factors led to the outbreak of the French Revolution.

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:

French society was divided into 3 estates. The third estate benefitted the most. The third estate consisted of Peasants, artisans, Small peasants, landless labour, servants, big businessmen, merchants, court officials, lawyers etc. The groups that were forced to relinquish power came under 1st and 2nd estate. These people had enjoyed certain privileges by birth. With the revolution, these people in 1st and 2nd estate lost their privileges, because inequality was one of the root causes of revolution and the revolution tried to bring equality to society.

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. Colonised people reworked the idea of freedom from bondage into their movements to create a sovereign nation-state. Tipu Sultan and Rammohan Roy are two examples of individuals who responded to the ideas coming from Revolutionary France.

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

Answer:

The list of democratic rights are

1. Freedom of speech
2. Freedom of expression
3. Freedom of press
4. Abolition of censorship
5. Right to vote
6. Abolition of slavery
7. Right to liberty
8. Right to property
9. Right to security
10. Right to education
11. Divorce laws

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

Answer:

Though it says Universal Rights, unfortunately, they left out women from basic rights. They did not have equal rights to men. They did not have the same rights as right to liberty, property, security, and above all resistance to oppression. In the formulation of laws, women did not have any representation. Women were not entitled to all honours and public employment according to their abilities.

6. How would you explain the rise of Napoleon?

Answer:

Napoleon Bonaparte crowned himself Emperor of France. He started conquering neighbouring countries by waging wars against them. He saw himself in the role of a moderniser of Europe. He introduced many laws such as the protection of private property and a uniform system of weights and measures provided by the decimal system. Many of his measures carried the revolutionary ideas of liberty and modern laws to the other parts of Europe, this had a positive impact on people long after he was dethroned as an emperor when he was finally defeated in the Battle of Waterloo.

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