

HISTORY

B.A. , SEMESTER - II

PAPER - II, HISTORY OF EUROPE

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TOPIC - FRENCH REVOLUTION

- French revolution started in 1789 and was the most turning point in French history
- It is believed that French Revolution started in July 14, 1789
- this date corresponds to the Fall of Bastille
- absolute monarchy prevailed in France
- the zenith of absolute monarchy was witnessed during the reign of Louis-XIV
- France was divided into TWO provinces
- first province was called government
- second province was called generalites
- there were total 40 government
- this set up was formulated for regional administration
- the number of generalites in France was 34
- the generalites were governed by entendants
- Entendants were appointed by the king
- Therefore they were responsible and accountable only to the king

- the duty of intendant was maintaining law order and peace besides internal security

- The French society was too complex
- was divided in 3 classes
- first class belong to the clergyman
- second class belonged to the nobility
- third class was of common man
- Therefore the church of France was termed as ‘state within a state’
- The classes were also termed as estates
- first estate was of Bishops
- second state was of noble man and Aristocrat
- third state was of the common people who possessed no privilege
- the first and second estate belong to the most privileged class
- France was a Catholic Nation
- majority of French were Roman Catholic
- Roman Catholic Church was dominant in all the the political social economic and cultural set up
- Organisation of church was a strong one
- Bishops were exempted from taxes
- enjoyed supreme Power and authority
- worked as state within a state
- Priest were divided into two categories
- first category was of higher clergyman
- it comprised of archbishop and abbots
- Bishop belong to the nobility class
- second category was ordinary clergyman
- they served in local Cathedral
- came from lower section of the society
- possessed no privilege
- Third state comprised of common class which was 94% of the French

population

- completely deprived of any rights and privileges

basically comprised of middle class

- middle class constituted labours artisan farmers
- Farmers were in majority
- constituted 80% of French population
- farmers divided into 2 class
- first independent farmers
- second semi serfs
- Independent farmers possessed land
- Semi serfs did not possess any land
- they worked as serf and labourers on the land
- however both were exploited by the aristocrats nobility and Bishop
- several taxes were paid by the people of France of which two tax were extremely exploiting
- First was the Gabelle tax which was paid on salt
- second tax was called tithe which was paid by the farmers
- it was one tenth of their annual produce
- it was a religious tax
- tithe was to be paid to the church
- In 1778, France joined the American Colonists in their War of Independence against the British.
- With the liberation of the thirteen colonies at the end of the American War of Independence France obtained some revenge of the previous defeats by Great Britain, but her treasury was on the verge of bankruptcy.
- In 1787 Louis XVI summoned the Assembly of Notables to obtain their consent to tax the privileged and unprivileged alike. This did not happen. The Finance Minister Calonne was dismissed.
- The new Finance Minister Archbishop Lomenie de Brienne managed to raise a new loan but the Parlement of Paris refused to register royal decrees for further loans or taxes.
- The Parlement of Paris asserted that subsidies could constitutionally be

granted only by nation's representatives—the Estates General.

- In 1788 Louis XVI restored the popular Necker to the ministry of Finance.
- In the winter of 1788-1789 elections to the Estates General were held throughout France in accordance with medieval usage after 175 years.
- The organization of the Estates General had always been in three separate bodies, representing by election the three traditional estates or “orders” of the realm—the clergy, the nobility, the commoners or “third estate”.
- The electors (or the voters) drafted reports on the condition of their respective localities and recommendations for their representatives and for the government called *cahiers*.
- A study of the *cahiers* reflects that the majority of the French people expected from the Estates General substantial reforms.
- The Estates General assembled at Versailles in May 1789.
- Louis XVI expected the three estates to vote “by order”, that is as three distinct bodies.
- The members of the third estate wanted that the Estates General should organize themselves as single assembly and vote “by head”.
- There was a deadlock on the issue of voting and no work could be accomplished, forcing the Third Estate to declare itself “National Assembly” on June 17, 1789.
- Three days later when the deputies of the third estate gathered to hold their meeting in the hall meant for them at Versailles, they found it closed on the pretext of repairs.
- The members of the third Estate proceeded to the tennis court under the leadership of Mirabeau and Sieyès where they took an oath as the members of the Third Estate---known in history as the Oath of the Tennis Court,--that they would never separate until they had drawn up the constitution for France.
- One week after the Oath of the Tennis Court, Louis XVI directed the three estates to assemble together and vote “by head” as members of the National Constituent Assembly.
- It was noticed that in early July 1789 that royal troops were being gradually transferred from the eastern frontier to the vicinity of Paris and Versailles.

The Assembly requested Louis XVI to remove the troops which he refused and even dismissed the popular Finance minister Necker.

The people of Paris made a common cause with the National Assembly. Incited by a young journalist, Camille Desmoulins, the mob rushed for arms and targeted Bastille.

- Bastille was a fort to the east end of Paris.
- however it was regarded by the people of France as the epitome of despotism
- it was in the Fort of Bastille that all the political prisoners were kept
- the crowd demolished Bastille and hence forth it was popular as the fall of Bastille
- 14th July was declared as the National Day
- old system of Administration was abolished
- new system of Administration called the Paris Commune was established
- on 27 August 1789 constituent assembly formulated Declaration of Human Rights
- Natural right was given priority
- sovereignty was made the basis of France
- both state and Parliament authority reduced
- freedom of religion
- freedom of thought
- freedom of speech
- It was also called charter of liberalism

