

Q: Discuss why French Revolution radicalized.

Illucidating French Revolution

The French Revolution was a period of radical social and political upheaval in France that lasted from 1789 to 1799. It began with the crisis of monarchy. France was not a poor country; in fact France and Great Britain were two great powers in Europe in 1740s but royal pusillanimity, power abuses of aristocracy and clergy led France towards revolution. Moreover, this revolution radicalized when the bourgeoisie of 97% third estate became well-aware of their rights by virtue of enlightenment philosophers.

Factors Radicalizing French Revolution

a. Increased Problems of Affluence

One of the factors that radicalized French revolution was increased discrepancy between the privileged first two estates and disenfranchised masses of the third estate. The first ^{two} estates, only 3% of total population, owned more than 40% of land while the rest 97% owned only debts, taxes and other disadvantages. The aristocracy was

extremely corrupt. Almost 60% of taxes did not reach the government due to their corruption. Almost $\frac{1}{3}^{\text{rd}}$ of the land was not taxed at all.

b. Economic Downturn in France

The ^{poor} financial administration of France led to this economic downturn. Paul Kennedy says "France had no financial policy."

Rules of measurement changed by every area.

Moreover, there was Bad harvest (1788-89) that led towards famine in France. General Consumer Price Index increased upto 65% leading towards fragility of food supply.

c. Ambiguous relations between the king and Nobility of France

keeping in view the fragile situation of France, Charles de Calonne tried to convince King on **across-the-board taxation**. In this taxation, nobility and clergy had to pay taxes.

But this led towards ambiguous relations between the king and french nobility.

Because the king was dependant on clergy.

and nobility to implement his laws. The clergy and nobility rejected this plan and turned against Calonne. In the wake of Calonne's dismissal, king appointed **Jacques Necker** who advised to call for Estates General.

d- Tussle between Nobility and third Estate

The meeting of Estates General was called on May 1789 after 1614. In this meeting, each estate had to cast vote. It was extremely unjust that the 3% population had two votes while 97% population had one vote. The third estate demanded that voting should be by population. This led towards political deadlock in France.

e- Non-Materialization of Jointly Planned ^{new} Game of the Nobility

On June 17, 1789 there was strong defection of clergy and nobility against third estate; but on the same day the third estate declared itself National Assembly of France. Because now they were well-aware of their rights and were demanding for equal political participation. This led towards non-materialization of jointly planned game of nobility and clergy.

f. Tennis Court Oath of June 1789

The king Louis XVI had locked the representative of third estate in the palace but on 20th June, 1789 they gathered in a nearby tennis court, vowing not to disperse until a new constitution would be written. This act laid the foundation of escalation of revolutionary movements in France. David Thomson says, "If nothing else had happened, this was enough to be called a revolution."

g. Bastille Incident of July 1789

In France, there was a great fear - a panic and riot by farmers and peasants amid rumors of "aristocratic conspiracy" planned by king and the privileged to

to suppress the revolution. Moreover, the king concentrated troops in Paris and a Parisian mob seized Bastille on July 14, 1789. Feudalism was abolished from France in August 1789.

h- Tuilleries I Incident of October 1789

There were food shortages in France. So, women marched towards Versailles on 5th October, 1789. This incident took place in response to resistance of monarchs against "Rights of Declaration of Men and of Citizens."³³ Because this declaration was giving rights to people to overthrow the government if it failed to protect rights of people.

i- Civil Constitution of Clergy

In July 1790, civil constitution of clergy was given which reduced the authority of clergy. Bishoprics was reduced to 83. The bishops and priests were to be elected. Their authority to collect taxes was abolished. Moreover, the clergy had to take an oath on this constitution otherwise they would be called as refractory clergy and would not be allowed to perform their duties.

Treason of the king

In this period of intense revolution, the treason of the king invoked insurrection. Because he acted as the fifth column to foreign powers. In June 1791, Varennes incident took place in which Louis XVI and his family attempted to reach Austrian border where they were supposed to meet Austrian army in order to restore monarchy.

K- Intimidation of Austria and Prussia to France

Friedrich William II of Austria and Leopold II of Prussia intimidated France in **Pillnitz**

Declaration of August 1791. The declaration implied that Prussia and Austria would intervene militarily in France if any harm came to the king. On the same side in France, Louis XVI approved constitution given by National Assembly of France in September 1791.

L- Declaration of War by National Legislative Assembly

In October 1791, National Legislative Assembly and Girondins came into power
- by came into being. Girondins were supporters of constitutional monarchy. The

leader of Girondins, Brissot wanted Louis XVI to remain in power but he was threatened by Pillnitz Declaration. So, Brissot rallied legislative Assembly to declare war against Austria on **20th April, 1792.**

m- **Tuileries II incident of June 1792**

^{when} France declared war against Austria, Prussia and Austria anticipating same kind of reaction, moved their troops along French borders. The French army was trounced and fled. In the wake of French defeat, Louis XVI dismissed Brissot and a mob of Girondins marched on Tuileries palace on 20th June 1792 demanding that Brissot be reinstated.

n- **Threat from Duke of Brunswick**

On 25th July, 1792 an army under Duke of Brunswick and mostly composed of Prussians, joined Austrian army and invaded France.

There was hysteria in France. On 9th August 1792, Jacobins insurrection overthrew Paris municipality, proclaiming a new revolutionary commune headed by transitional authorities.

O- Rise of radical groups in France

In France, when Jacobins announced a revolutionary commune on 9th August 1792 then the French revolution was more radicalised.

On the next day, 10th August 1792, Tuileries III incident took place in France. On this day anti-monarch Jacobins rallied together with loyal sans-culottes on Tuileries palace and arrested king for treason. Then in September there were **Paris Massacres**.

P- Dissolution of National legislative Assembly

In the autumn of 1792, the revolutionary government dismissed the idea of constitutional monarchy and established National Convention to oversee the country. During that time, the French army had a major victory in the **Battle of Valmy**. Victory at Valmy on 20th September, 1792 allowed the newly seated deputies of Convention to declare France a **Republic**.

9. Reign of Terror from September 1793 to July 1794

On 28th July 1793, the Committee of Public Safety was taken over by Robespierre and the reign of terror began in France. This reign lasted from 5th September, 1793 to 27th July, 1794. The committee targeted perceived enemies of revolution and in all, there were 17,000 official executions.

Concluding Thoughts

France was a prosperous state in early 1700s but it was corruption, absolute rule and poor governance structure of monarchs that had led France to verge of chaos and compelled the third estate to call for revolution. Later on, the rise of radical elements like Jacobins in France radicalized the process of revolution and Reign of Terror took place in France from September 1793 to July 1794.