

Q The connection between the ideas of French philosophers and the revolution was indirect and remote. The philosophers did not preach the revolution rather they undermined the faith of people in the older order. Discuss

Ans 1) Introduction:

The French philosophers played a crucial role in an ~~even~~ empowering the mindset of French population. Though, they did not directly preach the revolution. However, their ideas influenced the revolutionary thought. They exposed the loopholes of French monarchy. The Enlightenment philosophers such as Voltaire, Rousseau, and Montesquieu contributed to revolutionary fervor among the deprived populace. Therefore, French philosophers, with their philosophical and literary prowess, undermined the faith of people in the older order, leading to widespread discontent and inspiring people to take revolutionary path and dismantle the Ancien regime.

2) The French Philosophers and Revolution:
Different philosophers played their role indirectly, contributing to the outbreak of revolution.

9) The Role of Voltaire-

Voltaire was a towering figure of Enlightenment era, whose influence reverberated far beyond his lifetime. Born in 1694, he was a writer and philosopher. Through his plays, letters, and satires, he attacked the French institutions such as the Catholic Church. Additionally, he denounced French laws aimed at oppressing poor classes. He advocated religious tolerance and freedom of speech inspired from English liberties. He argued that necessary reforms would bring about social and political change and quell the prevalent discrimination. Hence, Voltaire influenced profoundly the people before the revolution. He inculcated in them such ideas, which later inspired them to contribute to revolutionary fervor.

i) Voltaire was essentially a destroyer who condemned French laws through his literary prowess:-

Voltaire denounced the existing societal norms and laws at that time. He criticized the orthodox. Initially, before the revolution, there were some harsh laws of tax collection which were detrimental for masses. Voltaire, through his satires which was his most powerful weapon, denounced these laws. Additionally,

he influenced educated bourgeoisie for which he was courted by nobles. Although, he had not no love, nor faith in, for common man. Yet he endured pain for the oppressed individuals whom French law immensely harmed.

(ii) Voltaire's critique of Catholic Church fostered religious tolerance:-

Voltaire's main target was Catholic Church. He viewed it as privileged nuisance, a monument of bigotry, and a den of superstitions and ignorance. He argued that Church had put man in perpetual bondage. Moreover, he denounced the public worship of only Catholic God. He exposed its inherent selfishness, deprived of inclusivity. Voltaire was a staunch proponent of religious tolerance. He once said that since we are all steeped in errors and follies, we should forgive our follies. Thus, Voltaire imparted a feeling of religious inclusivity among the people which was elusive in French monarchy ancien regime.

(iii) Voltaire was impressed by English liberties, which he later propagated in France:-

Voltaire, during his visit to England, was profoundly impressed by English liberties. He published letters on English

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from which his later ideas are developed. He was exposed to the absence of privileged nobilities in England. Furthermore, he witnessed freedom of press and trial by jury. He exaggerated English liberties to criticize deplorable state of things in France. Hence, Voltaire propagated those English liberties and freedom of speech which were absent in ancient regime. He once said:

"I do not agree with a word you say; but I shall defend to death your right to say it"

iv) Voltaire was not republican, but he argued that necessary reforms were possible within French monarchy.

Voltaire was not republican. However, he advocated reforms within existing system. He argued that educated few should exert their influence and follow him. Hence, Voltaire was not supporter of democracy. He did not urge the people to revolutionize. However, his ideas enlightened people, enabling them to challenge aristocracy and seek change.

b) The Role of Montesquieu.

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Montesquieu, a profound ~~antigh~~ enlightenment philosopher, influenced the ~~antigh~~ revolutionary thought more than Voltaire in a strictly political sense. He was an advocate, studied history and law. He exposed the privilege enjoyed by the French Aristocracy, and corruption rampant in Royal Court. He championed the absolute power of the king. Additionally, he championed the principle of separation of powers which later became core principle of modern democracies. His magnum opus, "The Spirit of Laws," notably impacted the people, instilling in them core values of equality, liberty, and constitutionalism. Therefore, Montesquieu with his intellectual ideas brought about a shift in mindset of people who later sought to challenge the existing order.

i) Montesquieu vehemently opposed the absolute power of the king:-

Montesquieu was against the absolute power of the king. He possessed a view that various groups should engage in debate, ensuring that laws underwent scrutiny and amendment before enactment. He argued that such system of checks and balances would restrain absolute

power of the King, preventing any means of despotism. Most people championed Montesquieu's ideas who intended to sustain monarchy, albeit with the system of checks and balances.

- ii) Montesquieu supported the principle of separation of power - a prerequisite for liberty

Montesquieu called for separation of power within governmental organs. He asserted that the powers of executive, legislative, and judiciary are put in different organs, then alone * could there be liberty for the people. On the other hand, the merger of two or all three in one organ would bound to result in tyranny. Furthermore, he analyzed the laws exposing their inherent flaws. Hence, he supported the doctrine separation of power which, ~~would~~ according to Montesquieu, would brought about liberty for the French people.

- iv) Montesquieu's 'The Spirit of Laws' exerted profound influence on revolutionary thought:-

Montesquieu's "The Spirit of Laws" played crucial role in imparting necessary values among the French populace. According to Professor

Salemi, It awakened in cultivated persons a inspiration for political and judicial studies, brought the social sciences in the field of literature, and helped no more than any other book to assist eighteenth century revolutionary theories to prosper. Hence, the Spirit of Laws brought about intellectual ferment. It uplifted those deprived people who started analyzing French aristocracy in different manner.

a) The Role of Rousseau.

Rousseau was actually the key precursor of the revolution. His ideas of general will, popular sovereignty, and natural education sparked a shift in national thought of French populace. Many revolutionary leaders considered his writings as gospel. Therefore, Rousseau introduced such effective ideas which ignited a fire of challenging the aristocracy. His influence loomed large, shaping discourse and ideals which perpetuated the events of French Revolution.

i) For Rousseau, the General Will should be the ruling force of society.

Rousseau called for general will as the only ruling force of society. He found the traces of origin of the state. He adopted Lockes main proposition of State of nature, the idea of social contract, and the sovereignty of the people. He asserted that the government, law, and the state are the outcome of the contract with the people. The king or state is directed to safeguard the rights of people. If the king failed to perform his duty, the people would depose him. Thus, Rousseau was essentially introducing democratic ideas when monarch would rule.

ii) Rousseau presented dual voices of idealism and pragmatism.

Rousseau, at first place, presented the idea of idealism. He believed in natural goodness of man. He supported the rule of man. On the flip side, he feared sudden change. He advocated necessary reforms within monarchy if the educated middle class play their role. Thus, it is clear from this point of view, that Rousseau

did not ever supported sudden change or revolution. However, he presented dual voice idealism and pragmatism. But the revolutionaries such as Robespierre listened to his first principle, they ignored the second one.

- iii) Rousseau's influence can be gauged from the fact that his writings were considered gospel by almost all revolutionary leaders.

The writings of Rousseau were considered gospel by all revolutionary leaders. According to Madame De Staël, an 8 female writer, Napoleon ascribed revolution more to Rousseau than any great thinker. His famous dictum "Man is born free but everywhere is in chains;" echoed in Declaration of rights of Man and Citizen, stating that all political association is the preservation and of inalienable human right. All sovereignty belongs to the nation. No individual can exercise authority, which is not granted from permitted by nation. Thus, Rousseau's ideas helped developed an intellectual mindset of previously deprived people who started opposing the existing structural framework.

d) The Role of Encyclopedists: Denis Diderot and D'Alembert

The encyclopedists must be certainly numbered among those who spreaded rational ideas before the revolution. Led by Denis Diderot and D'Alembert, the Encyclopedie served as a repository for the Enlightenment thought. It published articles in which great thinkers criticized the government's inefficiency. Hence, the encyclopedists contributed to instill rational values, propagating the message of philosophers among the masses.

3) Conclusion:-

In conclusion, the French Revolution occurred due to the social and moral upliftment of French populace. The upliftment was precipitated by the great thinkers of enlightenment era. Philosophers such as Voltaire, Rousseau, and Montesquieu highlighted the commondrum of French aristocracy, which kept half of population in deplorable state. These philosophers imparted such values among the minds of deprived populace which enable them to question the aristocracy. As the saying goes:

"The French Revolution sprang from the combination of intellectual ferment and material grievances. And it was the intellectual ferment which made the material grievances more fiercely resented".

—Château de Boissac

The philosophers brought about intellectual ferment. They never advocated sudden change or revolution. However, they advocated reforms under existing system. But the revolutionary fever was sparked among the populace, urging them to dismantle the discriminated aristocratic system. In sum, the philosophers did not preach the revolution! However, they brought about rationality and logic, which later led to the revolution.