

Q: French Revolution is evitable or inevitable.
Discuss.

Expounding French Revolution

"To conquer, we must dare, and dare again, and go on daring!" (Georges Danton)

French revolution was a period of radical social upheaval in France that lasted from 1789 to 1799. In 1740s, France and Great Britain were two great powers in Europe. But royal pusillanimity, poor financial administration, enlightenment ideas and rise of radical groups in France radicalized French revolution.

Illucidating French Revolution as an Evitable or Inevitable Situation

French revolution was **inevitable** due to problems faced by the majority of France at the hands of the privileged i.e. the king, clergy and aristocracy. According to **Robespierrie**, "the king must die so that the country can live." Moreover, there are various factors that radicalized French revolution and

brought revolution in France.

Factors Showing 'Inevitability' of French Revolution

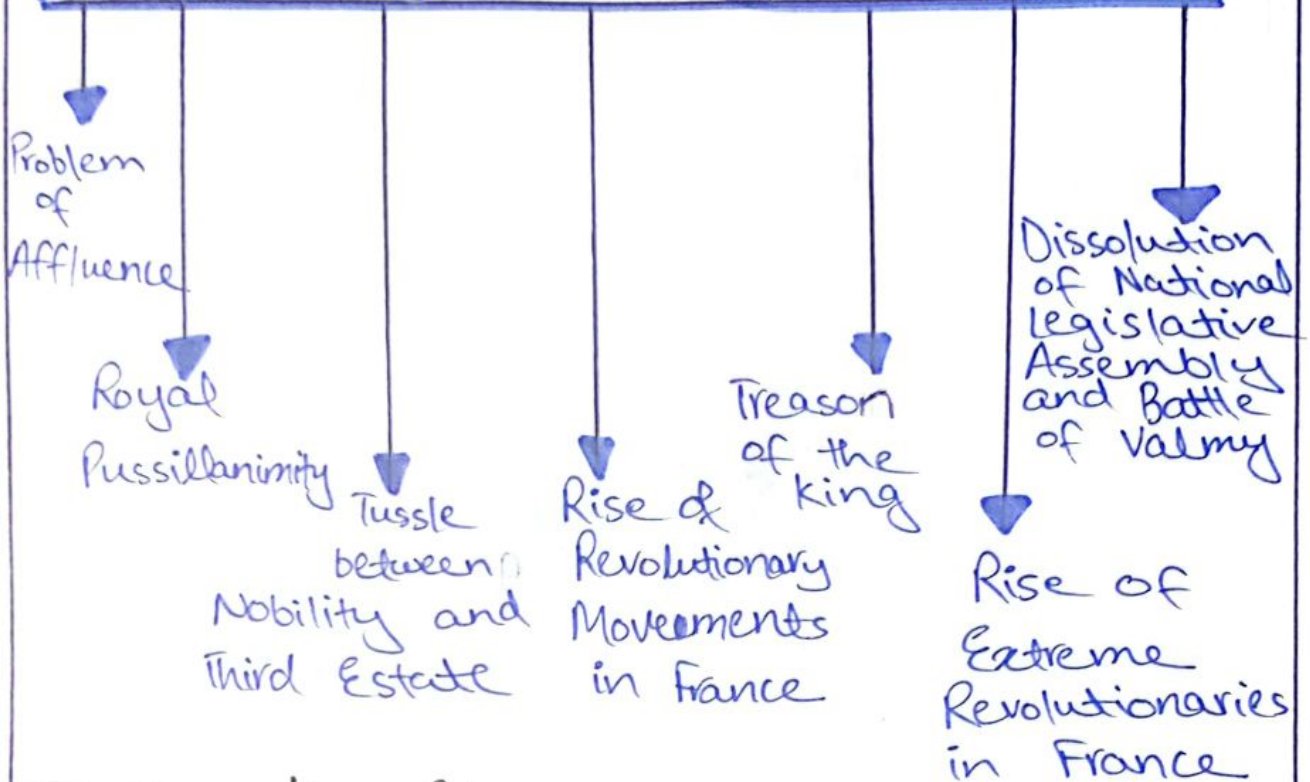


Figure: Key Elements Contributing to French Revolution

Factors Showing Inevitability of French Revolution

a. Problem of Affluence

French revolution was inevitable due to problem of affluence in France. There was unequal distribution of wealth among three estates of France. The first two estates were only 3% of total population but they

owned more than 40% of land. While the third estate was 97% of population but owned only debts, food shortages and other disadvantages. This clearly shows French revolution was inevitable.

b- Economic downturn

Paul Kennedy says, 'France had no financial policy.' This poor financial administration led France to famine. There was bad harvest in France from 1788 to 1789. The general consumer price index increased to 65% followed by fragility of food supply in France. This economic ruin clearly shows that French revolution was inevitable.

c- Royal Pusillanimity

Louis XVI and his wife Marie Antoinette were extremely extravagant. Moreover, his administration was very poor. He needed clergy and aristocracy to bring his decrees into effect. His pusillanimity was clear from the unimplementation of suggestion of Charles de Calonne of 'across-the-board taxation'.

In fact, due to his wrong decisions there was tussle between nobility and third estate that called for revolution.

d- Tussle between nobility and third estate

Now, the third estate was well-aware of their political rights. When king called for meeting of Estates General in May 1789, it was extremely unjust that 3% population (first two estates) had two votes while the 97% population (third estate) had only one vote. This forced third estate to demand equal voting rights and resulting in political deadlock in France which shows inevitability of revolution.

- Demand of Equal Political Rights by Third Estate

The third estate was very fond of John Locke who gave the idea that "it is people who are actual source of powers". They were demanding for written constitution through Tennis Court Oath of 20th June, 1789. Even they decided not to disperse until a ^{new} constitution of France would be written. This shows that French revolution was inevitable.

f- Rise of Revolutionary Movements in France

The tennis court oath laid the foundation of revolutionary movements in France. According to David Thomson "if nothing else had happened, this was enough to be called a revolution."

Moreover, in France a Parisian mob seized Bastille on 14th July, 1789 and feudalism was abolished in France in August 1789. There were series of revolutionary movements in France amid rumors of "aristocratic conspiracy" which show inevitability of French revolution.

g- Food Shortages in France

French revolution was inevitable due to chronic food shortages in France that caused Tuileries-^I incident of October, 1789 in which women marched towards Tuileries palace in response to resistance against 'Rights of Declaration of Men and of Citizens' and food shortages. The monarchs were showing resistance to 'Declaration of Rights of Men' as it drew ideas of Enlightenment philosophers due to which riots were going violent.

i- Treason of the king and France at ^{verge of} war with Austria and Prussia

In June 1791, when King Louis XVI and his family tried to reach Austrian border, "Varennes Incident" took place. Then, Austria and Prussia intimidated France ^{in Pillnitz Declaration} to restore monarchy which instigated the situation. The King Louis XVI had to approve constitution given by National Assembly of France in September 1791 and National Legislative Assembly came into being in October 1791 which declared war against Austria and Prussia on **20th April, 1792**. This shows that French revolution became inevitable.

j- Rise of Extreme Revolutionaries in France

French revolution was also inevitable when Jacobins insurrection overthrew Paris municipality, proclaiming a new revolutionary commune ^{headed by transitional authorities} in France on **9th August, 1792**.

French revolution radicalized and became inevitable when **Tuilleries III** incident took place on **10th August, 1792** when these anti-monarchs marched on Tuilleries palace and arrested the king. Moreover, French revolution also became inevitable when there were

Parris Massacres in September 1792.

Dissolution of National Legislative Assembly and Battle of Valmy

In the autumn of 1792, the revolutionary government dismissed 'constitutional monarchy' and established **National Convention**. During the same time, the victory of France in battle of **Valmy** (in) helped the newly seated deputies of Convention to declare France a **Republic** on 20th September, 1792. This clearly shows that French revolution was inevitable.

Concluding Thoughts

France ^{was} a rich and great power of Europe in early 1700s but royal pusillanimity and abusive ^{use of} power by aristocracy and clergy led France towards economic ruin and tussle between third estate and aristocracy. Moreover, treason of king led France towards verge of war that brought food shortages in France. All these situations compelled France towards revolution. This analysis shows **French revolution was inevitable.**