

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

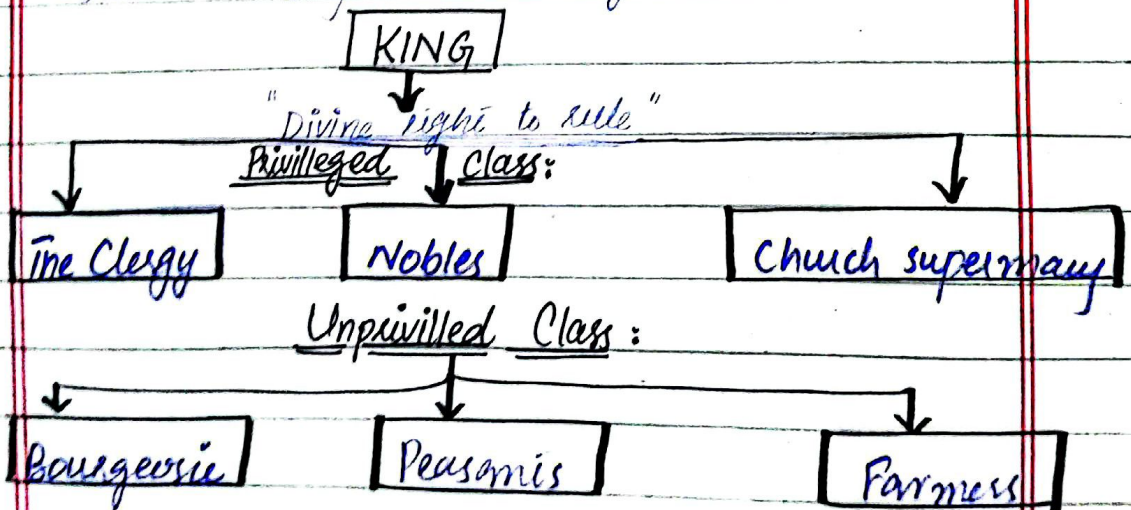
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Introduction:

The French Revolution 1789 was a landmark in the history which uprooted the centuries old institutions of monarchy, feudalism and clerical dominance. These were various causes of French revolution, the socio-economic are on the top of the list. There were intellectuals present during that era and they created grounds for enlightenment of people by publishing pamphlets, and other literature. They did not directly incite people for revolution because they were not democrats and promoting the present system but with reforms. Through their literature, middle class or Bourgeoisie enlightened and started demanding their due rights. So, the role of philosophers like Montesquieu, Voltaire, Rousseau and Encyclopedists was pivotal in awakening the people, which later became one of the reasons for French revolution.

Connection between French Revolution and Philosophers:

The role of Philosophers in French Revolution cannot be denied but it was not the direct link between these two. They did not openly advocated for rebellions rather they criticized the unjust monarch system, church dominance, privileged aristocracy and religious dogma. Through their literature they tried to envision the people about reforms that were needed according to their philosophies. As a result, the educated middle class got enlightened and started rejecting the old regime where the specific seats were privileged and the commoners were brutally abused by the elite.



Remote and Indirect role of Philosophers:

The philosophers were not against monarchy but they were against the inequality and concentration of power. All people should be equally privileged and this was they portrayed in their philosophies as well.

Montesquieu: (1689-1755)

His philosophy revolves around the concept of "Separation of Power". According to him power should be decentralised in different institutions to improve the distribution of assets to people on equal basis. He was inspired of the system of England where there was distribution of power between different institutions like "legislature, judicature and executive". These institutions worked separately in their jurisdiction. He worried that power should not be amalgamated to the King only rather he believed

in separation of power.

Montesquieu's book:

He wrote and published his book "The Spirit of Laws" in which he discussed or compare the different system of government of different states.

According to Prof. Selverini:

"The Spirit of Laws awakened in cultivated persons taste for judicial and political studies, brought literature of social sciences into the field of literature, and helped more than any other work to create that atmosphere for the sociological and philosophic dilettentism, which enabled eighteenth century revolutionary theories to prosper."

Voltaire: (1694-1778)

Voltaire was mercilessly critiqued the unjust monarch system from his verse to poems, drama, history, romance. In his every literature he openly condemned the inequality in France. He was imprisoned by the French government but stayed with his rational ideas. Interestingly, he was not republican and not against

Satire on religion

benevolent despotism. He was compared with Luther and Erasmus due to his work. He preferred to be ruled by one lion rather than hundred of rats. So, he did not like Democracy.

The words of "Duc de Choiseul" about Voltaire:

"Why do you not stop where Voltaire did? Him we can comprehend!"

Amidst all his satire, Voltaire respected authority."

Voltaire's book:

He wrote "Letters on the English" in 1734 where he showed respect for the English people due to their religious tolerance and absence of privileged nobility in England like in France. He said:

"Since we all are steeped in error and folly, we must forgive for our follies."

"Worship God and be a good man"

(Voltaire)

Jean Jacques Rousseau : (1712-1778)

J.J Rousseau was known as the Father of French Revolution. He was a democrat and believed in "General Will" of people. According to him men

should go back to old age when there was knowledge and people were not exploited. Due to the artificial societies all the issues are arising. According to him people should decide who will rule them because this is a contract between king and people. If the ruler fails to deliver the people can use their will to dismiss their ruler for not fulfilling his duties.

"Sweep away, therefore, all the false fabric of society, the world of ugly want and insolent of riches mis-called civilization, the oppression mis-called order, error mis-called knowledge. Level its inequality, repudiate its learning, break its function and shatter its chains"

(J.J. Rousseau)

Rousseau's Book:

His famous writing is "Social Contract" in which he explained that it is a contract between ruler and people and people can choose and in case of not discharging his duties properly people are authorized to dismiss their ruler. He was in a favour of free will because

Encyclopédie

The two great intellects behind the 'Encyclopédie' were Diderot and D'Alembert. They summarise all the existing knowledge of the finest thinkers in irregular intervals of twenty years. (1751-1772). The writers of Encyclopédie were imprisoned ^{and banned it} because the stance of government was that it had everything against the France. Yet the work was so fascinating that some of the court nobility at Versailles pleaded with the king for lifting up the ban. At a time when it went for publishing, the printers alarmed for their own safety and changed that specific section against government. Diderot detected it later and started work again on it.

he said "men were created free but everywhere they are in chains"

Impact of literature on French Revolution

Discredited the old norms:

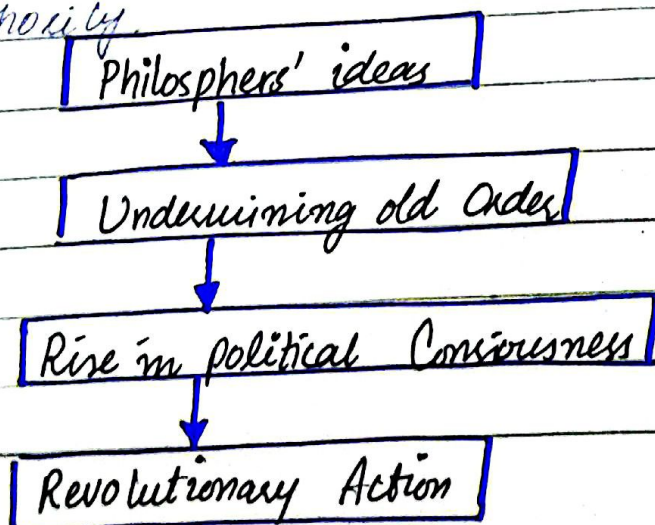
The philosophers discredited the monarch system, dominance of church and aristocratic privileges.

Philosophers were reformers, not Revolutionaries:

The philosophers were reformers, so they brought gradual change through literature by changing the perception of people on hierarchy and divine right to rule. It was nothing but an unjust system.

New political consciousness:

Through philosophies, educated bourgeoisie got enlightened and turned against all the unjust rules imposed by a centralized authority.



Conclusion:

However, French philosophers were not directly involved in inciting the rebellious feelings against the existing system but laid the foundation to bring a change against unjust system. This led to the revolution, along with the minor contribution of philosophers there were major socio-economic issues which became the reason of revolution. The people who became enlightened started demanding "Liberty equality for everyone". Thus, the role was indirect and remote but transformational.
