

Q Discuss the causes of French Revolution (CSS-2015)

A CAUSES OF FRENCH REVOLUTION

INTRODUCTION

History has witnessed a number of events which shaped the history. French Revolution is one such event, that changed the course of European history. The revolution was not a consequence of a single cause rather a number of factors contributed to French revolution. These factors can be mainly grouped under ideological evolution as a consequence of enlightenment era, economic problems in French society, social structure of French society and political factors. All these factors contributed to French Revolution, the event that proved to be a precursor of modern European history.

CAUSES OF FRENCH REVOLUTION

Following are main causes of French Revolution.

ENLIGHTENMENT IDEAS MADE PEOPLE THINK CRITICALLY

The era of Enlightenment and ideas propagated in that era proved to be instrumental in French Revolution.

These ideas challenged the prevailing political, economic and religious beliefs of that time. The invention of press machine and translation of English literature to French added fuel to the fire.

ENLIGHTENMENT AND CRITIQUE ON RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

The enlightenment philosophers challenged the religious beliefs of French society. Religion provided the legitimacy to monarch through divine right theory.

(i) David Hume

David Hume was against the all sorts of organized religion. Any religion based on miracles was an ultimate rejection as per David Hume. He considered this as a product of fear by primitive human beings.

(ii) Voltaire

"I may disapprove what you say, but I will defend, to my death, your right to say it."
Voltaire

Voltaire also challenged the prevailing religious beliefs. He was against the abductions and political crimes committed by Church-King nexus. He personally convinced Louis XV. to free the prisoners, imprisoned on political grounds.

ENLIGHTENMENT IDEAS CHALLENGED THE POLITICAL SYSTEM - ABSOLUTE MONARCHY

Prevailing political system of France was absolute monarchy, based on theory of divine kingship. This was challenged by following philosophers

(i) Thomas Hobbes and theory of Divine kingship

Thomas Hobbes through his social contract challenged the prevailing political system based on theory of Divine kingship. He advocated absolute monarchy but not on bases of divine kingship but

on bases of social contract
between king and the governed.
He advocated the limitation,
an absolute monarch. to control
the small monsters.

(ii) Role of Ideas propagated
by Thomas Hobbes John Locke
John
Lock gave the concept of
constitutional monarchy. He advocated
the concept of popular
sovereignty - the idea that power
belongs to people. He was first
person to advocate Revolution if
monarch is not able to fulfill
his duties. He also advocated
the idea of life, liberty,
property. This became the bases of
American and then French Revolution.

(iii) Role of Rousseau - The man
behind French Revolution

"man is born free but everywhere
he is in chain"

- opening statement of his
social contract

Finally, the Rousseau became
the person, whose ideas ignited
the French Revolution. He was a

big advocate of Direct democracy
and general will.

ECONOMIC FACTORS AS CAUSE OF FRENCH REVOLUTION

(i) UNJUST TAXES—SALT TAX AND REVOLUTION

One major
cause of French revolution
was unjust taxes. There were
a number of taxes on basic
necessities. For example, salt tax in
France, was one of the taxes
which aggravated the French grievances.

(ii) DISCRIMINATION IN TAXES

Similarly,
there was a discrimination in
context of tax paying.

a - King owned the land but
was exempted from taxes.

b - Nobility owned the land but
were not imposed on nobles.

c - Church didn't pay the tax
rather collected the tax on
name of religion.

d - Third estate paid most
of taxes though no had no
privileges.

3- Social Hierarchy of French Society - provided a foundation for Revolution

French society was divided in 3- Estates as

(i) First E-state - This represented clergy. They were privileged class and didn't pay tax rather imposed religious tax.

(ii) - Second E-state - This represented the nobles. They were people in ~~Royal~~ Royal courts, military and civil bureaucracy. They were also privileged and didn't pay tax.

(iii) Third - E-state - This was a vast class and included the commoners. This class payed the taxes but were unprivileged. They included people ranging from peasants to merchants.

(iv) Political Factors and French Revolution

(i) Discriminated voting rights of three E-states

All the 3- Estates were given only one vote each. There was no vote by

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hered system. This was unjust and discriminatory as the First and second estate were combined 2% while third estate made 98% of population.

First Estate + Second Estate vs Third Estate
(2%) (98%)
2 votes vs 1 vote

ESTATE GENERAL MET SINCE 1614

The estate assembly of general had not met since 1614. This was another factor which shows that political system was run by an absolute monarchy. When meeting of E-State general was called in 1789, it became a cause of French Revolution.

CONCLUSION

So, it can be concluded that multiple factors were responsible to aggravate the situations which lead to French Revolution. These factors ultimately led to French Revolution of 1789, which was a remarkable event as

it shaped European history for
next 300 years.

CAUSES OF FR

Ideas

↓

challenged political
order

challenged Religion
Belief

↓

collapse of Divine
right Theory

Economic
Problems

Indiscriminate
Taxes

salt Tax

No taxation
for clergy
nobility

Political
problems

Discriminate
Voting
rights

Dysfunctional
estate
system

Grievances of
Commoners

Revolution in
France