

Causes of French Revolution

Introduction

French revolution is the most important event in the world history which ended prolonged monarchic system of France and gave birth to new political ideas of democracy and equality. However, Occuring of French revolution was not because of any sudden event; rather, it was result of long-standing social, political and economic problems, combined with new intellectual ideas. In this regard, follow causes of French revolution merit attention:-

Political Causes

1. **Absolute monarchy of King Louis XVI and weak leadership :-**
France was ruled by absolute monarchic system of King Louis - XVI. He had final say in every matter and his decisions were completely unchecked. Moreover, King was indecisive and weak unlike the previous rulers making him incapable of providing any effective reforms for betterment of French people. This increased hatred and frustration of French people towards the king who was once known to be a noble personality appointed directly by the divine.

Corruption and inefficiency of Administration :-

French administration was full of corruption. High offices were given on the basis of birth rather than merit. Their inefficiency to sort out the issues of common people and bring any improvement to their lifestyle also played an important role behind the anger of people against their government. People were of the view that high offices should be given on merit and every class of society should be given a share to Administrative offices.

III- Lack of Political Rights :-

Common people of France had no say in the governance of their country. There was no system of accountability or Parliament, where every one can have chance to express their views or interfere in any governance matter.

Social Causes

I. Inequality of Estate System :-

French Society was divided into three rigid estates. The first estate was based on clergy of France and the 2nd estate constituted of nobles. Moreover, the third estate was based on commoners (middle class). This division itself destroyed the unity of people necessary to run any government causing hatred and resentment against each other.

II. Privileges of the 1st & 2nd Estate :-

The 1st and 2nd estate of France were given extraordinary privileges like exemption from taxes, ownership of vast land and control over high administrative offices. They enjoyed immunity and had luxurious life style.

III- Misery and burden of 3rd Estate :-

On the other hand, the third estate in France was paying taxes to run the government. These commoners were forced to pay tithes to church, rents to the land lords and taxes to the state which dragged them into vicious cycle of poverty and resentment.

IV) Rise of middle class

France of 18th century witnessed the rise of middle class (Peasants, Small business owners, workers) - This rising community was also educated and were well informed making them understand the cruelty of Government.

Economic Causes

I. Financial bankruptcy due to wars:-

France fought two wars in late eighteenth century i.e. Seven Years War (1756-1763) along with Austria against the alliance of Prussia and Britain. Additionally, Americas of Independence in which French army fought against Britain in order to help American get their independence. These 2 wars led to financial bankruptcy and drained the treasury without any benefit to the economy.

II. Luxurious life style in Versailles:-

The Palace of Versailles had luxurious lifestyle especially the Queen Antonette, who was infamous for her extravagant spending. This led to thinking that poor French people were paying for better life style of rich.

III. Increase in Poverty, inflation and famine:-

France was also going through famine due to weather condition that led to low agricultural growth. This increased poverty and rise in the price of bread which was the

Primary food for commoners of France - The Price of bread is known to be doubled in 1785 -

IV - Heavy taxation on 3rd Estate :-

Regardless of increase in poverty and inflation, the king imposed more taxes on 3rd estate. Additionally, the new finance minister who made an attempt to impose some taxes on 1st & 2nd estate was removed by the king. This led to extreme poverty in 3rd estate who were now dying due to hunger.

Intellectual and Ideological Causes

I - Age of reason and enlightened French Philosophers :-

In the eighteenth century, France was also undergoing through the age of reason like the other European countries. Moreover, intellectuals like Voltaire, Jean Jacques Rousseau and Montesquieu spreaded their ideas through their open letters, books and pamphlets which gave birth to the new political ideas and hatred towards Monarchy.

II - Ideas of equality, liberty and fraternity :-

The rise of middle class, education and philosophies of French intellectual gave the idea of equality, liberty and fraternity among the French Nationals. This made them believe that equality is their basic right and the king is suppressing their said right through his monarchy.

III - Inspiration from American Revolution :-

Americans also got independence in late eighteenth century which gave hope to the French.

people that if Americans can overthrow tyranny then so could they - This led to motivation amongst the Commons of France to stand against their king and his brutal monarchy.

Immediate Cause

I- Summoning of States-General in 1789:-

King Louis XVI summoned the States general to discuss on financial crisis of France in May, 1789 - However, ~~voting~~ voting rights were given as each state can get one vote - So, the alliance of 1st and 2nd state easily outvoted the third state -

II- Creation of General Assembly by 3rd State :-

Third estate demanded that voting system should be modified as votes should be counted by heads not by estates - However, this demand was rejected by the king leading to creation of general assembly by the third state - The deputies of 3rd estate created the third estate in retaliation to the third estate also known as Tennis Court Oath -

Conclusion

Above in view, it is evident that French revolution was an event that completely changed the course of European history by giving new ideas like democracy and overthrowing absolute monarchy - However, this was result of long list of causes rather than any sudden event - Moreover, crisis of 1789 and deadlock between estates general sparked this event, ending the old feudal order and laid foundation of modern Europe -