

Causes of French Revolution of 1789

✓ Reasons -

1. Social
2. Political
3. Economic
4. Intellectual

1. Social –

The social conditions in France in the late 18th century were extremely unequal and exploitative. The clergy and the nobility formed the first two Estates and were the most privileged classes in French society. They were exempt from payment of taxes to the State. On the other hand, the Third Estate which consisted of peasants and workers formed the majority of the population. They were burdened with excessive taxes with no political and social rights. As a result, they were extremely discontent.

2. Political –

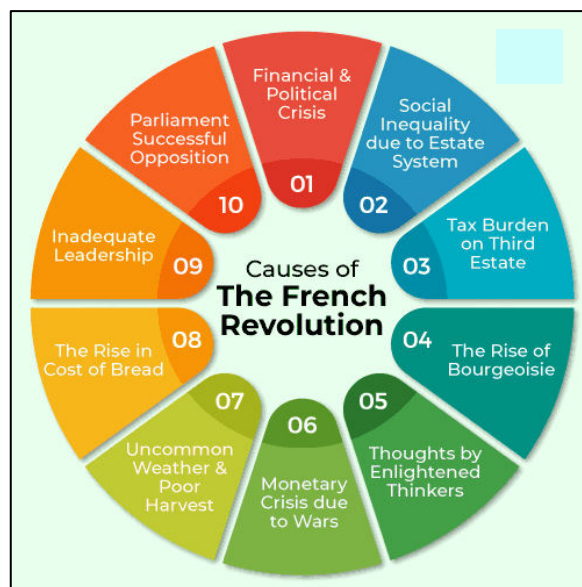
The Bourbon king of France, Louis XVI was an extremely autocratic and weak-willed king who led a life of obscene luxury. This led to a lot of disenchantment among the masses who then were leading life of extreme poverty and widespread hunger.

3. Economic –

As a result of numerous wars waged by Louis XVI the State coffers were empty. The situation was made even more complex by France's involvement in the American War of Independence and the faulty system of taxation. While the privileged classes were excused from paying taxes the Third Estate was more and more burdened with them.

4. Intellectual –

The 18th century was marked by a conscious refusal by French thinkers of the 'Divine Rights Theory'. Philosophers like Rousseau rejected the paradigm of absolute monarchy and promulgated the doctrine of equality of man and sovereignty of people. They played a pivotal role in exposing the fault lines of the old political system, i.e. the ancient regime, and articulating the popular discontent.



Stages of French Revolution

A. <u>The meeting of the Estates-General</u>
B. <u>The French Revolution Begins</u>
C. <u>Declaration of Rights of Man</u>
D. <u>Reign of Terror</u>
E. <u>End of the French Revolution</u>

A. Stage I – The meeting of the Estates-General

- ⊙ Despite the non-aristocratic members outnumbering the aristocrats in terms of population.
- ⊙ Before the meeting of the Estates-General on May 5, members of the Third Estate began to mobilise the support of equal voting rights which would be based on head and not by status.
- ⊙ While the middle class believed that fiscal and judicial reform was the need of the hour, the nobles were against the idea of giving up the privileges they had enjoyed under the traditional system.
- ⊙ When the meeting was convened, the question over the voting process turned to open hostility between the three orders, thus the original purpose of the meeting and the authority of the king who called for it being neglected.

- ⊙ Then the **Third Estate** met alone and formally adopted the title of **National Assembly** on **June 17, 1789**. They gathered in a nearby indoor tennis court and took the oath of office.
- ⊙ This oath was known as the **Tennis Court Oath**.
- ⊙ The members of this new assembly vowed not to disperse until reforms had been initiated.
- ⊙ Seeing no other option **Louis XVI** had the absorb the three assemblies into the new order.

B. **Stage II – The French Revolution Begins**

- ⊙ The National Assembly continued to meet at **Versailles**.
- ⊙ Speculations went around regarding an imminent military coup.
- ⊙ This led to an insurgency which resulted in the taking of **Bastille fortress** on July 14, 1789 (this event marked the beginning of the French Revolution).
- ⊙ A wave of revolutionary fervour spread throughout the countryside, which led to a peasant revolt that saw many homes of tax collectors and burnt as well as those of the aristocrats themselves.
- ⊙ The rebellions caused the nobles of the country to flee.
- ⊙ This period is known as the **Great Fear** when the National Assembly finally dealt a fatal blow to feudalism on **August 4, 1789**.

C. **Stage III – Declaration of Rights of Man**

- ⊙ The National Assembly adopted the **Rights of Man and of the Citizen on August 4, 1789**.
- ⊙ The charter was grounded on democratic principles, drawing from the philosophical as well as political ideas of Enlightenment thinkers like **Jena-Jacques Rousseau**.
- ⊙ The **declaration** was published on **August 26, 1789**
- ⊙ The **Constitution** was adopted on **September 3, 1791**.
- ⊙ It symbolised a new French society where the king would have limited powers with a moderate assembly wielding the most power.
- ⊙ This, however, was not enough for the radical elements of the assembly like **Goerges Danton** and **Maximilien de Robespierre**, who demanded a trial of the king and a more republican form of government.
- ⊙ The French constitution was adopted on **September 3, 1791**.
- ⊙ Although it was moderate in its stance by limiting the powers of the king, it was not enough for the more radical members of the assembly like Maximilien **de Robespierre** who wanted Loise XVI to stand trial.

D. **Stage IV – Reign of Terror**

- ⊙ The revolution took a more radical turn when a group of insurgents attacked the royal residence in Paris and arrested Louis XVI on **August 10, 1792**
- ⊙ The following month many who were accused of being the **'enemies of the revolution'** were massacred in Paris.
- ⊙ The Legislative Assembly was replaced by the National Convention which proclaimed the establishment of the Republic of France and the abolition of the Monarchy.
- ⊙ **King Louis XVI** was condemned to death on **January 21, 1793**, and executed for treason.
- ⊙ His wife, **Marie Antoinette** would follow him nine months later.
- ⊙ The **execution of the king** marked the beginning of the most violent and turbulent phase of the French Revolution.
- ⊙ The National Convention was under the control of an extremist faction led by Robespierre.
- ⊙ The **Reign of Terror ended with Robespierre's execution on July 28, 1794**.
- ⊙ Robespierre's death began a moderate phase during which the people of France revolted against the excesses committed during the Reign of Terror.
- ⊙ This was known as the **Thermidorian Reaction**.

E. **Stage V – End of the French Revolution**

- ⊙ On **August 22, 1795**, the National Convention, now composed of moderates who had survived the excesses of the Reign of Terror approved the creation of a new constitution that created France's bicameral legislature.

- ⊙ The power would be in the hands of the Directory, a five-member group appointed by the parliament.
- ⊙ Any opposition to this group was removed through the efforts of the army, now led by an upcoming and successful general, Napoleon Bonaparte.
- ⊙ The Directory's rule was marked by financial crises and corruption.
- ⊙ Finally, resentment against the Directory reached a fever pitch and a coup d'état was staged by Napoleon himself, toppling them from power.
- ⊙ Napoleon appointed himself "first consul".
- ⊙ The French Revolution was over and the Napoleonic era was about to begin during which time French domination of continental Europe would become the norm.

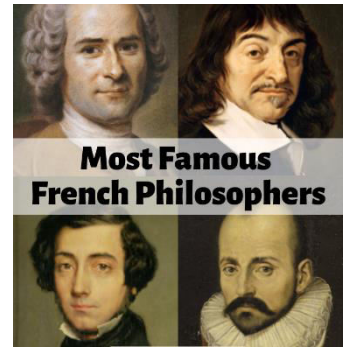
Significance of the French Revolution

The French Revolution is highly regarded as the turning point in modern history as the rise of new ideas steeped in liberalism, enlightenment and democracy. These ideals were carried throughout Europe by French armies that fought many wars to preserve the Republic's existence. French Revolution was inspired the common folk in Europe to rise against their own Monarchs in a wave of revolutionary fervour. Although most were harshly put down, the revolutions would continue into the early years of the 19th century which saw the fall of many absolute Monarchy all over Europe.

Explain the Role of Philosophers in French Revolution

The Role of Philosophers in the French Revolution was to inspire people with their revolutionary ideas. Since it was one of the first major revolutions in the world, the philosophers gave the citizens the intellectual legs to stand up and fight against the injustice of the French monarchy.

Some of the most famous and influential French philosophers were Voltaire, Rousseau, Montesquieu, and Diderot. Their revolutionary ideas not only encouraged the common people of France to fight for their rights in the French Revolution but also inspired the rest of the world.



MIND MAP –

- ✂ *Role of Philosophers in the French Revolution*
- ✂ *The Impact of Philosophical Ideas on the Estates-General*
- ✂ *The Role of Philosophers in Revolutionary Clubs*
- ✂ *Writing and Publishing Revolutionary Literature*
- ✂ *Forming Alliances and Networks*
- ✂ *Providing Moral and Ethical Perspectives*
- ✂ *The Reign of Terror and Philosophical Justification*
- ✂ *The End of the Revolution and Philosophical Legacy*
- ✂ *Conclusion*

Role of Philosophers in the French Revolution

Philosophers played an important role during the French Revolution. With their revolutionary ideas, they inspired the common people of France and prepared them to fight against injustice. They gave the revolution the intellectual discourse needed to overthrow the monarchy for the first time.

- i. **Montesquieu**, in his work 'In the Spirit of Laws', proposed a division of power within the government. He divides it into three sections- legislative, executive, and judiciary. This is an idea that we see many countries have adopted, even India.
- ii. **Rousseau**, another brilliant mind of the time, came up with the idea of a form of government based on a social contract between the people and their representatives.
- iii. **Voltaire**: Advocacy for Freedom of Speech and Religious Tolerance Voltaire, known for his advocacy of freedom of speech and religious tolerance, influenced the revolutionaries with his writings. His criticism of the monarchy, aristocracy, and religious institutions encouraged the French people to question the existing social and political order. Voltaire's ideas played a significant role in shaping the revolutionary discourse.
- iv. **Denis Diderot**: Encyclopaedist and Dissemination of Knowledge Denis Diderot, as the editor of the "Encyclopedia," played a vital role in disseminating knowledge and promoting Enlightenment ideals. The Encyclopedia was a comprehensive compilation of knowledge, including articles on science, arts, philosophy, and social issues. It provided a platform for intellectuals to exchange ideas and contributed to the spread of revolutionary thought.

The Impact of Philosophical Ideas on the Estates-General

The Estates-General, a representative assembly of the three estates in France, was convened in 1789 to address the financial crisis and other grievances. Philosophical ideas played a significant role in shaping the debates and discussions within the Estates-General. The revolutionaries drew upon Enlightenment principles to challenge the privileges of the nobility and clergy, advocating for a more egalitarian society.

The Role of Philosophers in Revolutionary Clubs

Revolutionary clubs played a significant role in the French Revolution, serving as hubs of political activity, intellectual exchange, and mobilization. Philosophers, deeply influenced by the Enlightenment ideals, actively participated in these clubs, contributing their ideas, shaping the direction of the revolution, and

fostering a sense of unity among the revolutionaries. Here, we delve into the specific roles and contributions of philosophers in revolutionary clubs through detailed subheadings and bullet points:

Writing and Publishing Revolutionary Literature

Philosophers in revolutionary clubs wrote and published revolutionary literature, including pamphlets, newspapers, and political tracts. Their writings disseminated revolutionary ideas, criticized the monarchy and the old regime, and called for action and unity among the revolutionaries.

Forming Alliances and Networks

Philosophers played a crucial role in forming alliances and networks within and outside the revolutionary clubs.

They connected with like-minded individuals, shared ideas and information, and collaborated on strategic initiatives to advance the revolution.

Providing Moral and Ethical Perspectives

Philosophers brought moral and ethical perspectives to the discussions within revolutionary clubs.

They raised questions of justice, human rights, and the ethical implications of revolutionary actions, contributing to the moral framework of the revolution.

The Reign of Terror and Philosophical Justification

The Reign of Terror, a period of intense violence and political repression during the French Revolution, raised questions about the ethical implications of revolutionary actions. Some philosophers, like Robespierre, justified the use of violence as a means to achieve revolutionary ideals. They argued that the ends justified the means in the pursuit of liberty, equality, and justice.

In spite of these the philosophers were rational and enlightened. They did not follow the religious rules of the time that believed in the doctrine of God, which established the absolute authority of the emperor and placed him on par with God on earth. The ideas of these philosophers became important as they advised the public with rational ideas and also gave them alternatives to their present situations. These works were widely discussed in salons and coffee houses, which were common grounds for socializing in France at the time. These ideas were disseminated among the people through newspapers and books. For illiterate people, these thoughts were accompanied by speech and reading. Thus, philosophers contributed a lot to bring about the French Revolution.

The End of the Revolution and Philosophical Legacy

- The French Revolution came to an end with the rise of Napoleon Bonaparte and the establishment of the Napoleonic Empire. Despite the political changes, the philosophical legacy of the revolution continued to inspire future generations. The ideas of the Enlightenment and the role of philosophers in the revolution left a lasting impact on the development of modern political thought.
- The philosophical ideals propagated by Enlightenment thinkers and embraced by the revolutionaries had a profound and lasting impact on society. The French Revolution marked a significant shift in political power, leading to the rise of democracy and the decline of absolute monarchy in Europe. The concepts of liberty, equality, and popular sovereignty continue to shape modern democratic societies.

Conclusion

In conclusion, philosophers played a pivotal role in the French Revolution by shaping revolutionary ideology, disseminating knowledge, and inspiring the masses. Their ideas, centered around the principles of the Enlightenment, guided the revolutionaries in their quest for social and political transformation. The contributions of philosophers during the French Revolution laid the foundation for modern democratic ideals and left a lasting legacy in the annals of history.