
UNIT-1: SOCIO, RELIGIOUS, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CONDITIONS



Structure

- 1.0 Learning Objective
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Social Condition
 - 1.2.1 The First Estate
 - 1.2.2 The Second Estate:
 - 1.2.3 The Third Estate
- 1.3 Religious Condition
- 1.4 Economic Condition
 - 1.4.1 Bankruptcy of the French Government
 - 1.4.2 Heavy Taxes
 - 1.4.3 Failure of Economic Reforms
 - 1.4.4 Famines
 - 1.4.5 Taxes By Edicts
- 1.5 Political Condition
 - 1.5.1 Royal Absolutism
 - 1.5.2 The Bourbon Dynasty
 - 1.5.3 Corrupt Administrative System
- 1.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.7 Key Words
- 1.8 Check Your Progress
- 1.9 Suggested Reading

1.0. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to understand the Socio, Religious, Economic, and Political Conditions of France on the eve of French revolution 1789.

1.1. INTRODUCTION

The French Revolution of 1789 was a major event in the history of Europe as well as in the history of World. This revolution not only changed the history of Europe but also to change the History of World. However, it's considered as the first event in



European history to completely deny the old regime. In the second half of the 18th century, the very roots of the long-established social, political, and economic foundations of the French society based on privileges, hierarchy, and traditions were questioned by the common people. The French people strove hard to build a new society based on the principles of freedom, equality and fraternity. However, 'Robert Palmer' has pointed out that the French revolution was the French phase of a general European revolution. This revolution influenced the world of thoughts, political ideas, Social organization, and economy. It was the France which tasted and felt the impacts of this change. French revolution was the most well-prepared event of the modern world history.

In the 18th century, like many other parts of Europe, France was ruled by an autocratic ruling dynasty that had faith in autocratic rule and the successors of this dynast claimed the throne by divine right. The name of this dynasty was the Bourbon dynasty. The power of the ruling family was not checked by any constitutional body. Besides, the State-General which was the only national assembly of France had ceased to meet from 1614. The absolute power of the French monarchy reached its highest watermark during the reign of Louis XIV. The ministers like 'Richelileau' and 'Mazzarine' and monarchs like Louis XIV made it absolute. One can imagine the thoughts of Louis XIV from his famous remark, "The State, it is myself". During the reign of Louis XV, the situation of French society further deteriorated and he was a Butterfly king averse to hard work. Comparatively the next ruler Louis XVI was much better than his ancestors. He was good and well-meaning in nature. But he was manipulated and checked by his self-willed wife Maria Antionette and the real royal power to a great extent was enjoyed by the nobility and the bureaucracy.

Later on, due to the progress of modern scientific thoughts, the French administrative set up even the entire social structure faced increasing pressure for change. It made the crisis possible, but not unavoidable; it was not evident that France was on the brink of a revolution. The fluctuating economic activities in the 1770s and 1780s had made most of the peasants poorer and had not prevented the bourgeoisie from increasing its wealth. The need for change was caused mainly by the financial difficulties faced by the government of King Louis XVI due to its involvement in foreign wars. The French government did not make any effort to manage the financial matters of the state and the kings' attempt at reforming the financial structure of the state by heavy taxes on the common people, further led to the political crisis. Finally, the different sections of the French society demanded a permanent constitutional setup to regulate and coordinate the relationship between those governing and those being governed. The demand of the common people was not accepted and it was resisted by the monarchy and the nobility. Finally, in 1789, the common people revolted against the French monarch.

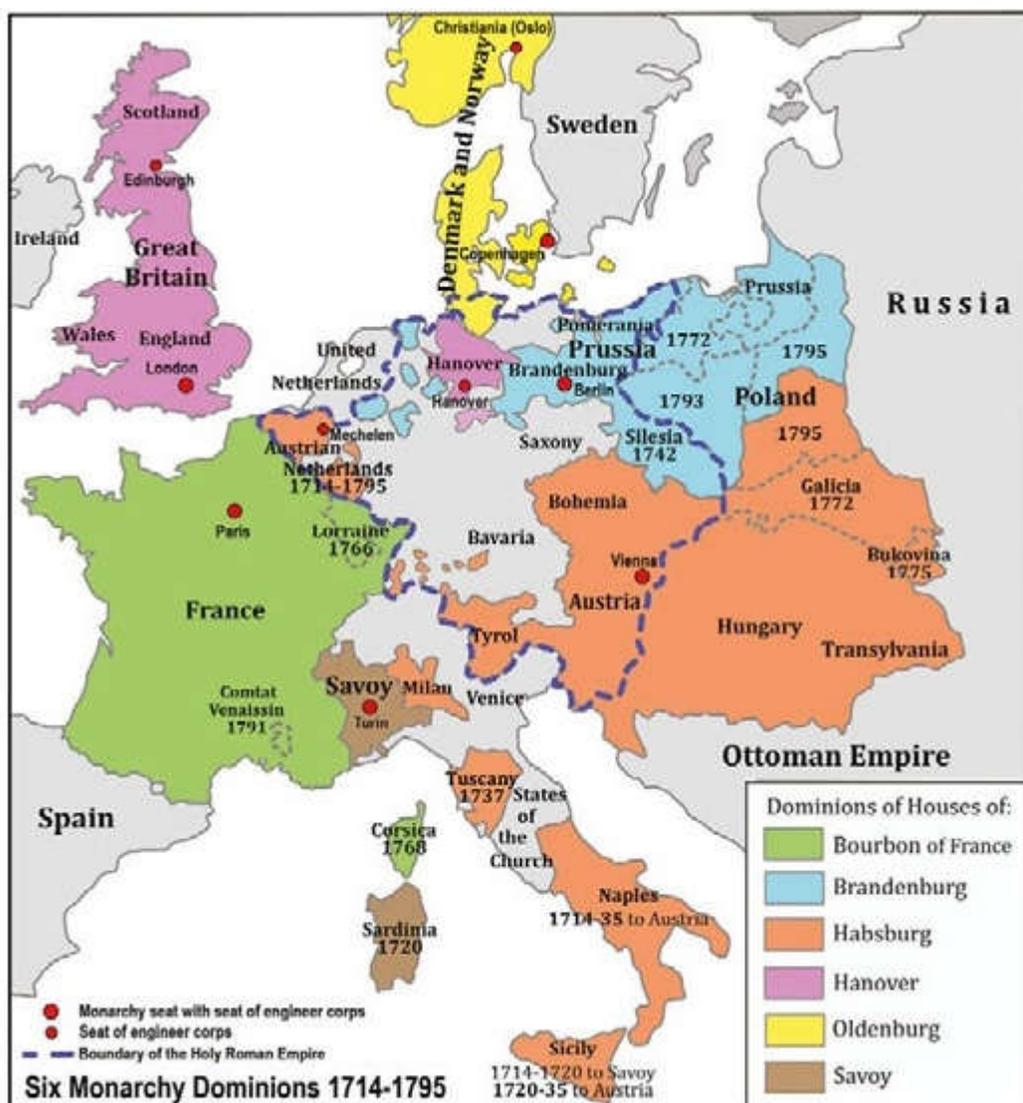


Figure- 1: Six Monarchy Dominos of Europe
(Source- Beata Medyńska-Gulij and Tadeusz J. Żuchowski- 2018)

1.2. SOCIAL CONDITIONS

Eighteenth-century Europe continued the legacies of medieval European society. The social condition in France on the eve of the French Revolution of 1789 was not at all good. It was antiquated, irrational, and oppressive. The French Society comprising 25 million people was divided into three estates namely the clergy belonging to the first estates, the noble belonging to the second estate, and the common people comprising the middle class and peasants belonging to the third estate.

1.2.1 The First Estate

The clergy and the Aristocracy comprised one percent of the whole populace of France on the eve of the French Revolution. These two estates enjoyed all the

facilities and power, of and were known as the privileged section of the society: (1) They owned maximum of the land in France; (2) They Collected feudal and church dues from the third estates; (3) they were exempted from the taxes; (4) The members of the First estates had a very close relationship with minister of the King. (5) Besides, they have been granted special favors at the same time as administering the law.

The higher clergy was comprised of archbishops, bishops, and abbots. They lived luxuriously in their palaces and monasteries. The Church owned nearly 1/5th of the land in France. The Church's land yielded massive revenue. In addition, the clergy accumulated tithes (One-10th of the full produce) on agricultural products.

Besides, a larger portion of the Church's revenue went to the higher clergy and they numbered around five to six thousand. Most of the higher clergy resided at the Royal Court. But on the other side, the large number of the lower clergy, who did the real and actual work, were deprived of many facilities those enjoyed by the higher clergy. While the higher clergy belonged to the nobility, the lower clergy usually belonged to the third estate.

1.2.2 The Second Estate

The nobility of France occupied a special position in French society. They just claimed their position by birth and enjoyed certain numbers of privileges. They were known as the grand Nobles'. About a thousand of them lived at Versailles as courtiers. The country nobles lived on their estates, in the provinces. The new nobles were not the same as actual nobles by birth but were the men from the middle class who had grown rich and purchased the privileges of the nobility of the birth. They were known as the 'nobility of the robe'.

Gradually the nobles had lost much of their political power and either they had entered the army or the church. Besides, that a few official posts had been reserved for them in various public offices like ambassadors. Maximum numbers of nobles had no lands and derived their income from their old feudal rights. In addition, the nobles were not only exempted from certain numbers of taxes but also enjoyed special privileges which were serious and unhealthy for the peasants. The exclusive right of hunting was the chief pastime of the nobles, and this game destroyed the crops, of the peasants. On the other hand, the peasants had no right to disturb this game and due to the pleasure of the nobles, the peasants suffered a lot.

1.2.3 The Third Estate

During the 18th century, France was an agricultural country and Peasants played an important role in agricultural productions. Out of the 25 million French populations, 93% belonged to the Third Estate. The third estate or the commoners formed a heterogeneous class and it was further subdivided into the bourgeoisie (middle class),



the artisans, and the peasants. However, the bourgeoisie formed the topmost group of the Third Estate. The bourgeoisie was a heterogeneous class, and many of them were highly rich, intelligent, energetic, educated, the professionals, lawyers, physicians, teachers, merchants, bankers, etc. belonged to the bourgeoisie class. The only common characteristic among them was that they had no right of high birth and had no entry into the privileges of the nobility. All of them were victims of social inequality and formed an unprivileged class.

The artisans were settled in towns and cities. Comparatively the artisans were a smaller class as compared to the others. They had mostly engaged themselves in industrial sectors. However, the industrial life in France was not yet highly developed and the artisans were usually organized in guilds.

The peasants formed the majority of the third estate. The peasants' community was comprised of middle Peasants, small Peasants, leaseholders, and sharecroppers called Metayers. The upper-class people believed that the peasants were born to suffer and produce food for the upper classes. The peasants, as a whole, owned 30-40% of the French soil. One-third of the arable land of France belonged to them. Two third of the peasants were Métayer or sharecroppers who could only enjoy 20% of the produce of the land they cultivated after meeting all the demands of the landlords. Besides, some rentiers were temporary farmers of lord's acre and had no right on the land. Another group of peasants was called cottagers and they were landless peasants who served as agricultural laborers. However, the maximum numbers of peasants were serfs and they were situated on the bottom of the peasantry class. Out of every 20 peasants one was a serf. The serfs had no personal liberty and they were bound to offer physical labor to the landlords. They spent two to three days per week without taking any wage or food. The forced labor was named '*Corvee*'. The rest were free men who were dissatisfied and against the existing system and social organization.

The entire revenue of the state was raised from the third estate. The peasants paid nearly 55% in taxes of what they produced or earned. The peasants paid different types of taxes to the state, tithes to the Church, and feudal dues to the nobles. Besides, that the peasants were bound to pay tolls to the nobles for the use of the roads and bridges in their estates. The peasants were forced to use the flour mill, oven, and winepress of the nobles and paid for the service. "In France, there was a common maxim which said, "The noble fight, the clergy pray; and the people pay. In France, nearly 9/10th of the population died of hunger and 1/10th of indigestion.

The peasants were also bound to pay indirect taxes like the gabelle (salt tax). The salt-tax collectors were called 'gabellous'. Due to their harsh attitude, they were the most hated by the French people. In France, every family was following certain rules and they were bound by law to buy annually a specific amount of salt for consumption and other household purposes. On the other side, the price of the salt was very high in

the northern and central provinces of France and less in other parts of the country. It resulted in smuggling of the salt. The people were forced to collect salt from the provinces where the rate of the salt was very cheaper. Under these circumstances, the 'gabellous' used to make a house to house searches and harass the common people for hoarding of the salt. Besides, the salt tax, the common masses had to pay the excise duty, taille (property tax), customs duties, etc. The feudal dues include 'corvee' (forced labor) of two or three days and contribution in kind.

However, the French peasants, suppressed, oppressed, and depressed as they have opted for a change in their existing condition. Thus, the third estate desired a change in the government, society, and economic conditions. The large and growing middle class and some of the nobility and the working class had absorbed the ideology of equality and freedom of the individual.

1.3. RELIGIOUS CONDITION

The clergies of France were included in upper-class people and nearly there were one and a half lac clergies and the number of religious centers was five thousand. Besides, there were 25 thousand members including both men and women each in all religious centers. Immorality was among them. The religious institution was very powerful and strong and it had a great impact on the administration. They had a strong chain from Priest of the village to Pope of Rome. Their officials included the Pope, Cardin cardinals, Archbishops, Archdikan, Bishop, Bikan, Abbot, etc.

The Gallican Church (Ancient Roman Catholic Church) of France was a powerful corporate body. By the 'Contract of Poisey', 1561 the French Clergy could not be taxed by the Government, without the consent of the church. They were immune from direct taxation of the king and enjoyed the right of self taxation. This seems to be odious when it is found that the French bishops enjoyed vast tax-free estates equal to 1/3th of the total land of the country.

The Roman Catholic had their monopoly in France. Reformist Protestants were minor in value in France. The massacre of Protestants was done at night on the day of the memory of Saint Bartholo in Paris. The clergies were rich, selfish, and luxurious. In the name of God and religion, all the worst things were going on very smoothly. There were two groups, within the clergies, the upper and lower clergies. However, within the two groups, the lower class was neglected by the uppers class. So there was huge turbulence among them.

To conduct spiritual and religious activities, the clergies had the responsibility to keep and maintain social morality. So they were given rights, concessions, possession of land, and the religious institutions had been very wealthy like feudal organizations. Even the consent of spiritual authority became essential to the king at the time of the coronation. Many evil traditions were continuing in France, all regulated by the

clergies and the common people were exploited in every stage of their life. The unrest in this way was growing among the people against the religious centers and clergies. Finally, they started a revolution to change the existing government.



1.4. ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

The financial crisis of France was an important cause for the outbreak of the French Revolution. France was a vast museum of economic errors and the economic policy implemented by the French government was faulty. However, to understand the economic condition of the French people, we must look towards the economic condition of Europe as well as France during the 18th century. Several factors were responsible for the economic crisis of France, but the most important was the existing tax system which placed the heavy tax burden over the third estate and virtually ignored the first two estates of their responsibilities.

1.4.1 Bankruptcy of the French Monarch

During the eighteenth century, the French government spent beyond its limits on various profitless war fronts. Besides, the government involved itself and spent in various projects that create economic instability in France. To maintain financial stability and recover from the economic crisis the French Government followed a policy of meeting the deficit by raising public loans at a higher interest. Further, the French monarchs borrowed money, and sometimes they used to sell titles of the noble and other privileges to overcome the crisis. But it did not help because the nobles and titleholders were exempted from the taxes. The total government expenditure in 1788 amounted to 630,000,000 livres and the interest on the public debt alone stood 318,000,000 livres apart from the principal amount of loan payable to the creditors. In 1788 roughly three-fourth of state expenditure was spent to maintain the Arm Forces and interest on the debt.

The excessive expenditure of Louis XIV on various luxuries projects such as the construction and maintenance of the magnificent palace at Versailles, the involvement of the royal household in an extravaganza for banquets and festivity during the reign of Louis XIV, Louis XV, and Louis XVI, besides, the personal expenditure of Marie Antoinette, queen of Louis XVI were additional factors to the financial crisis. In addition, the involvement of France in the Seven Years War(1756-63) and in the American War of Independence (1776-83) had crippled the economic backbone of France. The French monarch had no regular budget nor proper planning to control the debt. Rather they wasted money and the national debt went on increasing. The empty national treasury was the spark that set fire to the French Revolution.

1.4.2 Heavy Taxes

The French government collected a variety of heavy taxes from the third estate and

exempted first and second estates, although the first and second estates held 40% of the total national wealth. Three direct taxes were collected from the common people. These taxes were the 'taille' or land tax, 'capitation' or production tax, victims or income tax. But according to the 'Contract of the Possey', the clergy paid only voluntary tax. They were hardly faced with any hardship. Further, the royal and feudal (signorial) taxes were collected in the form of compulsory labour(*corvee*). Further, *gabelle* (salt tax), was unpopular among the people due to its implementation and collection procedure because those taxes were contracted to private collectors and they used to collect far more than the actual government demand. The heavy taxation of the French government created economic chaos among the third estates and created an unhealthy environment against the government, which led to revolution.

1.4.3 Failure of Economic Reforms

Turgot:

During the regimes of Louis XV (1715-74) and Louis XVI (1774-93) many finance ministers were appointed and they implemented the various policy to improve the financial condition of France. The most notable among them was Turgot (1774-76). Turgot was a bourgeois intellectual, and he recommended an economic structure to cure financial ill of France. In his letter to the King, Turgot strongly emphasized, "No bankruptcy, no new taxes, and no loans". Turgot suggested the King to cut down and reduce the financial expenses of royal household and expenses made by the Queen. He strongly advised to impose tax on the Noble and clergy. After the proposal of Turgot, the higher class started opposing his policy and they were searching for a chance to expel Turgot from his post. However, in order to improve the economic conditions of the state, Turgot issued the First Reform Edict in 1774, which was concerned with the grain trade. This edict abolished all authority's rules associated with the acquisition and sale of grain and allowed complete freedom in the inter-provincial grain trade. But due to the famine and shortage of food grain, it resulted in the grain price hike suddenly and created a widespread disturbance which is known as the 'Grain War'. Further, he presented several other reforms before the Parliament of Paris and the two most important reforms was the abolition of 'corvee' and the disbandment of most of the guild corporations. He also proposed to do introduce the principle of tax equality. In this proposal, he suggested that the privileged classes should also pay tax in order to generate additional revenue for the state. But the parliaments of Paris strongly opposed the policy of Turgot and pressurize the King to dismiss him from his post. The weak-kneed Louis XVI had to dismiss Turgot. He remarked, "No one except me and Turgot loves the country". This was the first sign of aristocratic revolt against the King.



Necker:

After the Turgot dismissal, Necker (1776-81) was appointed as the finance minister. He was a famous and well-experienced Genevan banker and the Director-General of Finance. To improve the financial conditions of France, Necker, made some new loans and administrative reforms. However, the involvement of France in the American War of Independence had proved to be a costly affair. It's resulted from the national treasury of France gradually becoming empty and financial debt went increasing by more than one and a half billion livres.

The administrative reforms of Necker were very sound, but it was hardly sufficient to solve the problem and work as a remedy. Further, Necker suggested reform and reduction of many unnecessary offices and introduced procedures, which modified and simplified the accounting system. Again he suggested reforming the revenue policy of France, which was affecting the farmers on his farmers. Further, he allowed and granted loan during the years of the war but he faced serious problems during the time of repayment because the amount of loan consisted several millions of livres. Further, the interest on loans had gradually been increased. Finally, Necker suggested collecting taxes from the privileged classes. But after this suggestion, Necker faced the same situation and problem as that of Turgot and was finally dismissed.

Calonne:

After the Necker, to manage the situation, control, and solve the financial crisis in France Louis XVI appointed many other ministers between 1781 and 1783. However, finally, Louis XVI appointed Calonne (1783-87). Calonne was a highly intelligent and resourceful person and had the support of the Queen, Marie Antoinette.

Callone tried to restore the confidence of the people over the government and to manage the situation of France; he went heavily on borrowing credit from the capitalists and spent a small part of that money to silence the opposition i.e. new agencies and the members of Parliament of Paris. He also spent money to gain support from the royal family. The greater part of this fund went to meet the outstanding indebtedness and to promote artificial public works. His program included increased production and employment as well. The income of the public also increased. Besides, during the time of war with England which ended with the treaty of Paris (1783), France had witnessed some good agricultural seasons and developed commercial activities but it could not work as a remedy for the economic crisis.

The annual deficit of France rose to more than one hundred million livres and France had reached a state of virtual bankruptcy. No one was ready to provide extra funds to the King to manage this situation. However, the loans amounted to one thousand six hundred and forty-six million and there was an annual deficit of a hundred and forty million livres. To manage the situation Callone prepared and presented a secret plan

of reformation to Louis XVI. Finally, to get the approval of the parliament Calonne appeared before the Assembly on February 22, 1787. Callonne addressed the Parliament of Paris which consisted of 144 representatives, but they did not approve this plan.

In these proposals Calonne had suggested for: (1) the abolition of *corvee*; (2) abolition of internal customs; (3) permission for free grain trade within France; (4) extension of the system of provincial assemblies throughout France; (5) decreasing the burden of *taille*(property tax) and *gabelle*(salt tax); (6)transformation of the Bank of Discount into a State Bank; and (7) proposal to maintain uniformity of land tax payable by all the section of France i.e. the clergy, nobility, and the commoners.

The members of the Assembly could not agree with the proposal of Calonne. Rather the huge fiscal deficit allowed the Assembly to force Louis XVI to dismiss Callone from his post. After this action taken by Louis XVI, Calonne fled to England.

1.4.4: Famines:

The Crop failure in the 1780s further caused the shortages, of food grain and the food scarcity led to a steep increase in the price of the bread. The bread crisis in France was one of the most important causes that led the common mass of Paris to action and the addition of rural population increased the possibility to initiate Revolution in 1789.

1.4.5 Taxes By Edicts

Louis XVI imposed additional taxes to manage the financial crisis of France by issuing Royal Edicts, and it was strongly opposed by a different section of France. Finally, to control the situation the King was advised to summon the defunct Estates General which had been suspended since 1614 to find out a solution and to manage the economic crisis. Further, Louis XVI, had hoped to get support from the Estates-General, but the Estates general which met on 5th May 1789, strongly opposed the new form of taxation and subsequent events led to the outbreak of the Revolution in 1789.

1.5. POLITICAL CONDITION

During the 18th century, most of the European monarchs had continued to adopt an aristocratic form of government, which was generally known as the Ancient regime or Old Order in the French language. In English, the term refers primarily to the political and social system that was established in France under the Valois and Bourbon dynasties. However, these rulers followed the policy of Divine rights and which vested all the power of the state and some religious authorities sometimes controlled by the church with Kingship. However, like the Bourbons of France in the other parts of the Europe's we find the similar origins of *Ancient Regimes*. They were

the Hapsburgs of Austria, Hohenzollerns of Prussia, the Hanoverians of England and the Romanovs of Russia. Gradually few of them had become constitutional monarchies, while few others were torn down by wars and revolutions. Power in the *Ancient Regime* rested on three main pillars: i.e. the monarchy, the clergy and the aristocracy. The European Society was divided into three classes known as estates: the clergy, the nobility, and the commoners.

The kings covered their despotism with the cloak of enlightenment. Though in 18th century the concept of autocratic monarchy was tempered by benevolency, the kings were intelligent enough to cover their selfishness by enlightened doctrines. Enlightened despotism was, however, a clever attempt to perpetuate despotism. Even if other European monarchs advocated enlightened reforms, the Bourbon monarchy of France was uninfluenced by the currents of enlightenment Ideas. The French kings strictly claimed Divine right to rule the subjects.

1.5.1 Royal Absolutism

The socio-political system which existed in France throughout the rule of the Bourbon dynasties was halfway between feudalism and modernity. One can say that France was running through a transitional phase. However, France was ruled by a powerful absolute monarch who believed in Divine Rights of the Kings, and they had succeeded to gain the support of the powerful established Church. When the renaissance began in Italy, had its impact on French society and during the reign of Francis I (1515-1547) the process of the renaissance had begun in France. Gradually France became the capital of Europe. In addition, during the reign of Louis XIV (1643-1715) France had touched the zenith of glory. Later on due to the foreign policy adopted by subsequent rulers and financial difficulties France lost its glory.

The king always claimed to rule by the will of God and not by the consent of the people. Further, the kings directly claimed to be responsible to no one but God. They were vested with all power as the chief legislators, executive, and dispensers of justice. They could impose taxes at any time without informing anyone and spent money as they pleased. They believed in the centralization of power and denied certain basic rights to their subjects. Besides that, they had imposed many rules and regulations against the Freedom of speech and press. Arbitrary arrest, imprisonment, exile, or even execution was the hallmarks of royal absolutism in France.

1.5.2 The Bourbon Dynasty

The Bourbon dynasty continued to rule France from 1589 to 1792. During the reign of Louis XIV France had touched its height of glory. Under Louis XIV, the French monarchy became absolute and bureaucratic. Under him the power and prestige of the crown reached such a height that he could claim, “The State, it is myself” and he was known as the ‘Grand Monarch’ and ‘Sun King’. He used to say that sovereign authority is vested within my person and the legislative powers exist in myself alone.

He blindly believed in the divine concept of absolutism, which leads the nation into various dangerous and expansive positions viz., wars with neighbors, and involved various project. The most important project was the construction of the Palace of Versailles. The court of Versailles was comprised of 18,000 people and out of these 16,000 were appointed for personal service of the king and his family, besides 2,000 courtiers, to favored guests and nobles. Further, the royal stables include 1900 horses and more than 200 carriages. In 1789, the total cost of the Versailles extravaganza was \$ 20,000,000. However, these expensive wars and lavish style of living crippled France both financially as well as politically.

Louis XIV, left a legacy of financial bankruptcy for his successors. At the last time on his death bed, he advised successor his grandson Louis XV, not to initiate any war against your neighbors, which I have incurred and maintain peace and cooperation with them. Louis XV, was a butterfly king who was always under the evil influence of his chief queen 'Madame de Pompadour' in comparison to Louis XIV, the 'sun king'. Louis XV, was virtual "the gravedigger" of the Bourbon monarchy. He prepared the path of its ruins by his extravagance, indolence, lack of reforming zeal, and foreign wars resulting in defeats. Louis XV fought two wars from 1740-63 and in each of them, France got nothing but defeat. Due to the wrongly concentrated continental war of Europe, France lost two potential colonies in India and Canada. Again due to his silly foreign policy gradually France lost its colony in a different part of the world. In this way, Britain gained what France deliberately lost.

However, the reign of Louis XV ended with his death in 1774. He left a heritage of military defeat, financial bankruptcy, the parliamentary opposition, and intellectual resistance to the existing political and social regime to his successor. He was so unpopular that when he died of smallpox in 1774, nobody mourned his death.

After the death of Louis XV, Louis XVI (1774-93) came to the throne and became the ruler of France at the age of twenty. Louis XVI tried to reform the entire structure of the administrative affairs, but many times he avoided difficulties and was incapable to enforce his own judgment. Subsequently, he became blind followers of his advisors, particularly his Queen Marie Antoinette. She was the daughter of Maria Theresa, Empress of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Queen Marie Antoinette was beautiful and gracious. She had a strong willpower but she lacked in wisdom and breadth of judgment. However, she was never willing to understand the temperament of common people, and neither she gave any wise advice to the king for the betterment of the state nor the welfare of the subjects.. Most of the times Louis XVI's desire for reform was manipulated by Queen Marie Antoinette as a result he could never accept the true sense of reformation and rejected all the advice made by the finance ministers.

1.5.3 Corrupt Administrative System

During the reign of Louis XV and Louis XVI, the administrative system in France was highly corrupt. All the power of the state vested within the King and he believed in centralization of power. He had the sole appointing authority, and appointed all the ministers and officers, but the Minister and officers were got their appointment not on the merit of their experience or qualification, rather they were appointed on the basis of their birth. Further, there was neither constituent assembly nor any written constitution. The Kings monopolized the rules and regulations according to their whims and caprices. France was divided into 34 Intendancies, and these Intendancies were placed under intendants who possessed great authority. They controlled most of the departments of the local government and monopolized various other departments. They received their authority directly from the Councils. As per the theory of absolutism, all the justice in France came from the monarch but unfortunately, there was no legal system or uniformity in the judicial system and the law, which differed from time to time and section to section.

Since 1614 without summoning the legislature known as the Estates-General the French Kings continued to rule in France. Even the King had the power to abolish the parliament of Paris which had been proved in various times and situations. The French parliaments had the power to review and check the judgments and give final judgment to the lower courts. At the end of the eighteenth century, there were as many as thirteen parliaments in France all of which were hereditarily and continued with rich magistrates. They had monopolized and enjoyed exercising certain political powers. They had the right to issue and register the royal edicts and ordinances. Sometimes they indirectly controlled the King. In 1771, Louis XV abolished these parliaments. But they were revived by Louis XVI in 1774.

1.6. LET SUM UP:

Various causes were responsible for the outbreak of the French revolution such as the social disparity, monopoly attitude of the Church, failure of economic policy and the failure of administration was the main cause for the revolution. The French monarch never tried to understand the sentiments of the common people and followed the policy of absolutism. They were inspired by the ideal of enlightened despotism. Although, Louis XVI initiated some reformative measures but due to the interference of Queen Marie Antoinette, he could not make anything and sacrificed his great ministers under the pressure of court, palace, and nobility.

The French Revolution was a total revolution. It was not merely directed against the privileges of the nobility. However, the enlightened process in France changed the mindset of common people, and they prepared their mindset towards revolution which finally flared up in 1789.



1.7. KEYWORDS:

- Corvee: Feudal privilege the French landlords asserted in the form of forced labour from the common masses
- Intendants: A title given to a high-ranking official or administrator, especially in France, Spain, Portugal, or one of their colonies
- Taille: A direct land tax imposed on each household and based on how much land it held.
- Métayer*: one that cultivates the land for a share of its yield usually receiving stock, tools, and seed from the landlord
- Gabellous: Collector of Salt tax

1.8. CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Briefly discuss the Social stratification of France on the eve of the French revolution?

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2. Write a note on Finance Minister of Louis XVI?

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3. Write a note on religious condition of France on the eve of French revolution?

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1.9. SUGGESTED READING

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UNIT-2: INTELLECTUAL CURRENTS



Structures

- 2.1. Learning Objective
- 2.2. Introduction
- 2.3. Montesquieu (1689-1755)
- 2.4. Voltaire
- 2.5. Rousseau (1712-1778)
- 2.6. Denis Diderot (1713-1784)
- 2.7. The Physiocrats
- 2.8. Let Us Sum Up
- 2.9. Key Words
- 2.10. Check Your Progress
- 2.11. Suggested Reading

2.1. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In the previous chapter, we have already discussed the socio, economic, and political condition of France on the eve of the French revolution and many other factors that were responsible for the French revolution. The present section gives information about how the intellectual currents played a significant role in the French revolution.

After the reading of this chapter, you will be understand

- The intellectual background of the French Revolution.
- The philosophical views of various French philosophers, especially related to the state and society.
- To review the contribution of the Encyclopedists and Physiocrats

2.2. INTRODUCTION

The French word '*philosophe*' literally means "philosopher", but in the context of the Enlightenment, it refers to intellectuals, authors, and philosophers who critically examined institutions, laws, and society, and frequently raised their voice against the orthodox practices. The approach of '*philosophes*' was empirical that is, based on truth, facts, and experience. However, eighteenth-century Europe is known as "The Age of Reason" and "the age of Nationalism and Criticism". The French philosophers

took the leading part and played an important role against the existing institutions. The French philosophers started questioning and exposing the humiliating customs and practices of the orthodox institutions. However, they were aware of the problems of the common people. Through their writing and speeches, they tried to an intellectual environment. The atmosphere created by the French philosophers helped the common masses to raise their voices against the 'ancient regime' and to find out the actual truth. The socio-political situation of France affected the thoughts of the philosophers. The French Philosophers raised their voice for equality and fraternity which later on became the fundamental principle of the French revolution.



Figure-2.1. The Philosophers were instrumental in shaping revolutionaries ideas
(Courtesy- WWW. alphahistory.com)

Paying due regards to the Intellectuals D.M Ketelbey has rightly observed: Writers of all kinds prepared the French revolution. The writing and propaganda of the philosophers made an excellent gun powder for destroying the monarchy in France, and never before was a revolution so armed with words and phrases.

C.D. Hazen also referred to the intellectual awakening in France in these words:

“In a land of no parliament (France) the men of letters had come to be the politician”

The French intellectuals encouraged and shaped the values and beliefs of the revolutionaries who were to lead the transformation of France after 1789. Although,

there were many intellectuals, who enlightened the common masses through their writing, yet the most prominent and influential among the French philosophes were Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Besides, there are other groups of people that participated in this revolution such as the Physiocrats.



2.3. MONTESQUIEU: (1689-1755)

Montesquieu was born in 1689 at Bordeaux and his original name was ‘Charles Louis de Secondat’. He belonged to an aristocratic family and his father was a well-known Judge by profession, his father died in 1713, and his uncle “Baron de Montesquieu” took care of ‘Secondat’. The Baron died in 1716 and left ‘De Secondat’ his fortune. Later on, he became a student of Law but took interest in natural science. Besides, that he had become a member of the Bordeaux and French Academies of Science and studied the laws and customs, and governments of the countries of Europe. After receiving his education, in France, he traveled to many countries of Europe. He was greatly influenced by the constitutional monarchy of England and completely rejected the Theory of ‘Divine rights’. He started a campaign to establish a constitutional government in France.

For the first time, he gained fame in 1721 with his famous “*Persian Letters*”, which criticized the lifestyle and liberties of the wealthy French as well as the church. His great work, the product of twenty years of labor, was his ‘*Sprit of Laws*’ and it was published in the year 1748. Twenty-two editions of this book were issued from the press in the eighteenth month. The book has primarily focused on political philosophy, an analysis of various forms of government; their merits, and demerits. As the foremost champion of the theory of separatism of power, he emphasized upon the necessity of separation the three agencies of government i.e. Legislative, Executive, and Judiciary

Prof. C.D. Hazen has paid a glowing tribute to Montesquieu in the following words:

“Propounded by a studious Judge, in language that was both graver and elegant, Montesquieu (the Spirit of the laws) was a storehouse of the wisdom destined to the provoking of much thought, discussion, and action both in France and elsewhere”.

In the opinion of Montesquieu, all power was centralized and vested with the French Monarch, who followed the policy of Divine rights of Kingship and continued his monopoly rights over the administration. In this way, Montesquieu strongly argued in favor of the separation of power and check and continued to have a better check and balance. He was a supporter of constitutional monarchy and gave the example of the British form of government. However, according to him, the English government was on the whole the best, since it guaranteed personal liberty to all citizens. In addition,

he is quoted to have said that it was a monarchy that was limited in power and controlled by an assembly that represented the people of England.



2.4. VOLTAIRE (1694-1778)

Voltaire was one of the masters of minds of European history and most influential among the French intellectuals. He was born on 21 November 1694 A.D. in a middle-class family in Paris. His real name was Francois Marie Arouet. At the beginning of his early career he took keen interest in learning poetry and used to write satirical articles against the evils and defects of the government. Voltaire proved himself an accomplished poet, historian, dramatist, and scientist. He was famous at the age of twenty-three and died at the age of eighty-four. His significance to his times is shown in the title ‘King-Volttaire’, given to him by the people.

Voltaire was a great supporter of Individual freedom, and through his writings, he exposed the evils of the Catholic Church and orthodox political institutions. In his words, the Church was a “privileged nuisance” a monument of bigotry and a den of superstition. Through his writings, he appealed to the people to destroy it. Due to his writing, he was sent to the Bastille in 1717 for 11 months. However, during his imprisonment, he wrote "Oedipe" which was to become his first theatrical success, and adopted his pen name "Voltaire." He also undertook the writing of an epic poem Henry-IV, under the title “Henriade”. It was at this time that he began to call himself Voltaire. “Oedipe” won him fame and a pension from the regent.

He visited several countries of Europe but he was mostly influenced by England. Voltaire met the English literary men John Locke and was attracted to his philosophy. Further, he also met mathematician and scientist, Sir Isaac Newton. In England he studied Constitutional Monarchy and religious tolerance, further, he wrote his first Historical works “A History of Charles XII of Sweden”. He was impressed by the freedom of thought in England. He describes the enlightened thoughts, philosophy, and scientific development of England in his “*Letters Concerning the English Nation*” which was published in 1773. Further, Voltaire described England as a country where opinion was free and government constitutional; where religious persecution was unknown and everyone permitted to go to heaven in his own way; where the middle class was as respectable as the nobility; where civil liberties were guaranteed and men of letters and sciences honored.

After his return from England, he continued his work in France and produced several literary works and letters to his friends. His work includes “Brutus” in 1730, “Zaniel” in 1732 some of his outstanding works are Philosophical Dictionary (1764), Essay on manners and spirit of Nations (1756) and Treatise on Tolerance. He met with Madam Emile du Châtelet and they lived together at “Cirey” in Lorraine. In 1746, Voltaire was voted into the "Academie Francaise." After the death of ‘Emile’ in 1749, he went

to Prussia and met Frederick the Great. Voltaire moved to Potsdam, near Berlin in Germany. In 1753, Voltaire left Potsdam to return back to France.

In 1759, near the French-Swiss border Voltaire Purchased an estate called “Ferney” and lived there till his death in 1778, and later on “Ferney”, became the Intellectual capital of Europe.

A prominent historian A.J. Grant has also remarked:

“Voltaire was of all of them the best known and the widest read thinker. His thoughts never went deep and he had made no original contributions, but he was very powerful in popularising ideas, Europe has never known. His wit and satire the clearness of his language and the humanity of his appeal pervade the 18th century and French revolution.

One of the renowned historians C.D. Hazen describes Voltaire in the following words “He was a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night for all who enlisted for the liberation of mankind”.

Primarily Voltaire was not a political thinker but he raised his voice for the rights of every individual though he was not a democrat. He was not an atheist, he believed in God, but he did not believe in the Christian or in the Hebrew God and hated the Roman Catholic Church. Through his philosophical writings, Voltaire became the torchbearer of the French Revolution of 1789.

2.5. ROUSSEAU (1712-1778)

Jean Jacque Rousseau was born on 28 June 1712 in Geneva, Switzerland but he inhabited France. He was born in a middle-Class family and his father Isaac Rousseau was a watchmaker. His mother died nine days after his birth. Rousseau did not receive any regular education from any school, at the age of sixteen he left the city and got influenced by Roman Catholics at Turin. In 1742 he went to Paris and came in contact with the circle of Denis Diderot, who was the editor of the Encyclopaedia. In 1745 he met with ‘Therese Levassear’ who later on becomes his wife. During his early career, he adopted many professions, like that of a private secretary, the lac seller, and a Musician, etc, but could never get any success and he faced a severe economic crisis in his life. His autobiographical account ‘*Les Confessions*’ (The Confessions) published in 1783, provide information about his turbulent life.

However, due to his writing, he gradually succeeded to influence contemporary French as well as European society. Rousseau emphasized equality, and work for the future generation. He believed that man should enjoy equal rights. Further, he used to say “Human beings are good by nature but are rendered corrupt by society”, again he said, “This earth has not been made for one man but God has made it for all”.

In his book “Discourse on the Origins of Inequality” he has analyzed and focused on inequality, fraud, and exploitation of modern civilization. In his opinion, the natural man was far better than the modern one and his famous Slogan was “Go back to nature”.

The famous book of Rousseau “Social contract”, published in 1761 A.D, was based on the philosophy of John Locke. The book was one of the most influential books ever written. Opening with the starting statement of the book “*Man Was Born Free and Is Everywhere in Chain*”. He proceeded to outline a purely ideal state, which was in complete contrast to the one in which he lived. He discussed the fundamental rights of mankind. According to Rousseau, King should not consider him as the absolute monarch rather a servant of humanity and society. But if the King violates the agreement or misuses his power then it is subjected to the people who have the right to dethrone the King. The ideas and thoughts of Rousseau revolutionized the thinking of the French people and his book ‘Social contract’ came to be known as the ‘Bible of revolution’. In addition, Rousseau contributed many other works such as ‘Discourse on Political Economy (1755), ‘The New Heloise’ (1761), "Emile”(1762), ‘Constitutional Program for Corsica’ (1765), and ‘Considerations on the Government of Poland(1772)’.

Rousseau criticized the economic inequality that prevailed in French society; according to him “No citizen should reach enough to be able to buy another, and none poor enough to be forced to sell himself”. Although, many times the authorities take action against Rousseau to suppress his writings, always failed and his writings greatly influenced the French people for revolution. Rousseau breathed his last in 1792 but his thoughts continued to enlighten and spark the French people, which created the strong ground for the French revolution.

Medelian Observed that:

“Rousseau of all contemporary writers was the most discussed philosophers who created the most opposite sentiments of love and hate.

Further Prof. C.D. Hazen remarks on Rousseau that:

“In France thousand of enlightened townfolk were very shortly to participate in a political, social, and religious revolution- of which the chief motives were to be Rousseau liberty, equality, fraternity, popular sovereignty democracy.....”

2.6. DENIS DIDEROT (1713-1784) AND ENCYCLOPAEDIA

Besides, Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Rousseau there were many other peoples whose writing enlightened the French society and ‘Denis Diderot’ was one of the most prominent among them. In 1732 Diderot received the Master of Arts degree from the



University of Paris. His father expected him to study medicine or law, but Diderot spent his time with books. To maintain his economic conditions he worked for an Attorney, Clement de Ris, as a tutor and a freelance writer. For the first time in the 1740s, Diderot gained first notice as an English translator. Diderot wrote an article 'Letter on the Blind' and in this article he questioned the existence of God. For his opinion he was imprisoned for three months. In 1745 Diderot became the editor of the Encyclopaedia.

However, Diderot was strongly against the existing orthodox institutions. He edited a great Encyclopaedia which consisted of twelve volumes and it was done with the help of other scholars who continued their fighting against the French monarch. According to him all laws of the universe aim at doing good to man, whatever is not good for man and society is not rational". Further, he said the autocratic rulers and the priest had responsibility for all bitterness of the world.

In his works Diderot highlighted the Monopoly attitude of the French monarch, how they exploited the lower section of people and gave privileges to the upper section such as Clergies and Nobles, Besides, he highlighted the economic exploitation of French monarchs.

'Encyclopaedia' of Diderot, was highly popular among the people and it was published seventeen times from 1751 to 1772. The work of Voltaire, Montesquieu, Rousseau and Quency got special attention. They wrote an article on History and Economics. Besides, Diderot highlighted the corrupt administrative system, Economic exploitation, defective taxation, and blind beliefs of the French people.

However, the work of Denis Diderot played an important role to create a revolutionary attitude among the common people of France, and later on, it has contributed much to the outbreak of the French revolution.

2.7. PHYSIOCRATS

The Physiocrats were eighteenth-century economists and social philosophers. French economist Francois Quesnay (1694–1774), founded the school of Physiocrats. He was born on June 1694 at Méré near Versailles. Quesnay belonged to a middle-class family. In 1744 he graduated as a doctor of medicine and was appointed as a royal Physician of the King's court. Although he was not opposing the autocratic form of government, he was against the existing economic policy of the French government and suggested implementing the free trade policy, new agricultural policy, and new taxation system.

In 1758 he published "Tableau économique" (Economic Table). Further, he published two other articles, on "Fermiers" (Farmers) and on "Grains". He was supported by Turgot, the finance minister of Louis XVI. According to the Physiocrats, the French



society was divided into three categories based on their productivity. In this section farmers stand in the first category because they were fully productive, the landowners stand in the second category and are considered as partially productive because they cooperated with the farmers in the use and improvement of land. The rest of the people belong to the third category because they were associated with trade and industry, and are considered entirely unproductive. However, the Physiocrats emphasized the economic development of the peoples and abolition of all indirect taxes and the imposition of a single tax on the net income from land.

2.8. LET US SUM UP

Opinions and Views of Historians differ, and some historians question the role of Philosophers on the French revolution, rather they believed that the socio-economic and political conditions of France were responsible for the outbreak of the French revolution. However, Jules Michelet has pointed out that poverty and hunger was responsible for the French revolution. Further, Prof. Thomson remarked that there is no relation between the French philosophers and French Revolution. Prof. C.D Hazen too has pointed out that revolution was not caused by philosophers but by the conditions and evils of that the philosopher's national life. Further, he said did not cause the revolution, but they exposed the causes brilliantly, focused attention, compelled discussion, and aroused passion. Historians believe that the writings of philosophers gave influenced the educated and bourgeoisie a small group of the population but not the common people of French society, the common people. Besides, the philosophers had died before the French revolution and they never encouraged the people for open revolution or violence. Rather their writings awakened the common masses for reformation and developed new hopes for changes.

Although, the Intellectuals did not directly call for any open revolutions, but their writings and speeches created awareness among the people, who later on raised their voice against the corrupt system. Montesquieu rejected the "Divine Rights" of Kingship. Voltaire enlightened the people through his satirical writings against the clergies and nobles. Rousseau gave the ideas of democracy through his book "Social Contract". Besides, the 'Physiocrats' and Encyclopedists played an important role and they continuously exposed the economic policy of the government, which led to revolution.

2.9. KEYWORDS

Philosophe: Philosopher

Physiocrat: A school of economists founded in 18th-century France

Encyclopedist: A Person who writes, edits, or contributes to an encyclopedia



2.10. EXERCISE

1. Write a Note on Voltaire's?

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2. Who were the Physiocrats?

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3. How French Philosophers were responsible for the outbreak of revolution?

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4. Write a note on Rousseau?

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5. Who was Montesquieu?

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2.11. SUGGESTED READING

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UNIT-3: ROLE OF THE MIDDLE CLASS IN THE FRENCH REVOLUTION



Structures

- 3.0 Learning Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Background of the emergence of the middle class
- 3.3 Composition of the middle bourgeoisie class in French society
 - 3.3.1 Nature and characteristics of Middle Class
- 3.4 Role of the middle class in the French revolution
- 3.5 French revolution as bourgeoisie revolution: a Marxist analysis
 - 3.5.1 Marx's prophecy on the Future of Middle class/Bourgeoisie
- 3.6 Let Sum Up
- 3.7 Exercise
- 3.8 Suggested Readings

3.0. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In previous chapters, we have discussed the socio, economic and political conditions of France on the eve of the French revolution. The second chapter gives information about how French intellectuals enlightened the French society and prepared ground for the French revolution. However, after reading the present units you will know about:

- The middle-class society in Europe and France
- The factor responsible for the emergence of the middle class in France
- Composition of the Bourgeoisie
- Marxist views on French Middle Class.

3.1. INTRODUCTION

The middle class as a distinct class emerged in Europe as a result of changing economy and society that developed in the wake of the decline in the power of the feudal aristocracy and clergy. The middle class consisted of numerous occupational groups which became economically powerful and politically vociferous in Europe from the 18th century onwards. They were called middle class because this class stood in between the ruling feudal and clergy classes on the top and peasant and artisan at the bottom. According to Lenore O' Boyle, the author of the article *The Middle Class*



in Western Europe, 1815-1848 published in American Historical Review (1966) “middle class included all "the middling ranks of society . . . intermediate between the laboring class and the aristocratic landowners. (826)” Middle class in the context of the French revolution was also called Bourgeoisie comprising wealthy shopkeepers, artisans, lawyers, bureaucrats, merchants and university professors. The world bourgeoisie is derived from the term burghs, which means towns. People who inhabited towns were called burghers or bourgeoisie.

3.2. BACKGROUND OF THE EMERGENCE OF THE MIDDLE CLASS

The growth of towns and cities i.e urban centers in the 14th century onwards represented the beginning of a shift in European society and economy. The decline of feudalism was accompanied by the rise of a new urban landscape and a new urban class. This urban space was inhabited by new social classes such as new landed gentry, businessmen, merchants, lawyers, university-educated people, etc. New social groups of urban centers became economically rich and politically vociferous. Urban centers provided job opportunities for the ordinary people who moved out of the stranglehold of feudal society and economy to find freedom in cities. Renaissance and reformation brought about a change in the mindset. Middle Class or bourgeoisie questioned the idea of divine kingship, absolutism, and a society based on privileges and hereditary status. The closed feudal society, polity, and economy were questioned by urban people who sniffed the air of freedom.

The bourgeois needed greater freedom to expand their trade operations and expansion of economic activities. They stood against the feudal authorities and became more progressive. For a segment of this class, wealth came by employing labor (industrial capital), for others, it came through trade (merchant capital), for some from banking and finance (finance capital) or using land in a capitalist manner (landed capital). Mostly the industrial capitalists, who employed a large number of the laborer to create capital, became the leading sector of the bourgeoisie, whose economic activities ultimately changed the society. By employing workers industrial capital created the surplus value that could take on various forms such as profit, rent, and interest. The industrial capitalist mostly became dominant politically and ideologically by the mid-nineteenth century in Britain.

However, in Western Europe, the second half of the nineteenth century can be characterized as the age of the bourgeoisie. Although, in Eastern part, the bourgeoisie which attained its own identity and wealth, was yet to exert its hegemony, in general, throughout Western Europe, the most influential sections of the bourgeoisie were bankers, factory owners, and mine owners i.e. capitalists, who emerged especially after the 1850s. With the rise of bourgeoisie culture, there too emerged a new trend of capital accumulation through different means. The industrial bourgeoisie not only remained confined to the manufacture of industrial products, but were integrated with

finance and banking sectors for more income generation. Because of the emergence of the bourgeoisie, industrial wealth became the index of social advance. The bourgeoisie had a great dominance over political activities which was marked in different European countries. Even many European countries made laws that best suited the economic interest of the bourgeoisie.

The bourgeoisie also included the professional classes who were a salaried personels that grew with the growth of bureaucracy, health and medicine sectors, law and order, education, publication, etc., as an industry with a new system of patronage linked to mass production. A democratic idea prevailed among these classes that contributed to their expansion and inequality that created the hegemony of the bourgeoisie as a class through them. The higher and the more influential positions were held by numbers of the wealthy strata among the bourgeoisie. The entire bourgeoisie preferred to maintain distance from the landed aristocracy and the monarchy as they grew in strength and significance. Mostly they were regarded as elite class people everywhere and played dominant role both in politics and the economy. The bourgeoisie across Europe had different religious affiliations like Catholic, Protestant, etc. In general, almost all the bourgeoisie of Europe had an influential position in socio-economic and political affairs.

The French Revolution 1789 represented a revolutionary attempt to change the ancient regime which represented the world of feudalism to a new world that represented the shifting economy, society, and demography of Europe operating since the 15th century.

3.3. COMPOSITION OF THE MIDDLE CLASS IN FRENCH SOCIETY

Out of the 25 million French populations, 93% population belonged to the third estate. The middle class was divided into upper bourgeois and middle bourgeois. The Upper Bourgeoisie was wealthy. They were capitalists, and bank proprietors. They provided huge loans to the government. They invested a huge amount of wealth for the reconstruction of Paris and drew vast profits from such investment. However, they had no access to political power as enjoyed by the aristocracy. This kind of injustice and deprevatron very much injured the variety of the upper bourgeoisie, many of whom were influenced by the ideas of philosophers. The middle bourgeois were merchants. They nourished a strong grievance against the government for the restrictions imposed on their trade and movement of goods. The bourgeois as a class resented the special privileges and the closed status of the aristocracy. "Since the doors were everywhere closed, the only course was to break them down". The bourgeois claimed equality of rights with a view to break the special privileges of the aristocracy. The lower Middle Class or The petty bourgeoisie included the professionals like lawyers; teachers and job holders, and doctors. They were mostly exposed to the ideas of philosophies and drank deeply from the cup of philosophy. They were most determined to wreck the

unjust privileges of the nobility and wreck royal autocracy. They wanted reforms to open the door for their entry into the aristocratic class.

According to O'Boyle, the French middle class in the early nineteenth century was divided into three components i.e. businessmen, members of free professions, and state officials (p. 828). It also consisted bankers, officials, merchants, landowners, and other professionals. The picture of the French bourgeoisie was then of a small business group, a substantial contingent of professional men and state officials, and a large group of landowners. These new landowners, called gentry were different from old feudal aristocratic landowners in the sense that they owned lands by virtue of purchase than inheritance.

3.3.1 Nature and characteristics of Middle Class

From translations of Aristotle's *Politics* that were circulating at the time of the French Revolution, the nature of the middle class can be discerned. Aristotle considers in his book *Polity* that "communities are composed of three classes of men: men encumbered by wealth, men oppressed by poverty, and men enjoying a happy medium of fortune" If the middle class, or the class of "modest comfort," is wiser, this is because it "can comply more readily than any other with the counsels of reason, which are so hard to attend to when one enjoys some extraordinary advantage, of beauty, strength, birth, or wealth, or when one suffers from some excessive inferiority, through poverty, weakness, or obscurity." In this sense, "the power of the middle class is a rampart against tyranny, which is the offspring of the natural tendency toward oligarchy among the rich, or toward demagoguery among the poor." *"The best commonwealth is one in which middling men most abound and prove to be, if not more powerful than both, at least superior to either of the extremes. . . . Wherever extreme wealth is found beside extreme indigence, these two excesses lead either to absolute demagoguery or pure oligarchy."*

According to Aristotle, a numerous middle class guarantees the State, a level of equality capable of ensuring peace by silencing the insatiable cupidity of one side and the envy of the other. *"What the polity requires above all is equal and similar men, qualities most often found in middling positions."* Having emphasized that the middle class dislikes revolutions and instability, Aristotle notes that they have a final advantage, namely a sense of the general interest.

Therefore, the middle class wanted to change but not a violent change; it wanted position and power but not at the cost of peace. They were driven by rationality rather than a demagogue. They had achieved wealth by the investment of money or through their education. Moreover, they were a bulwark against tyranny.

Lefevre has pointed out that the doctrine of equality was a handy weapon for the bourgeoisie of 1789 to attain power and equal status with the aristocracy. The French

bourgeoisie was an undemocratic class who wanted to enjoy equality with the aristocracy. But they were unwilling to share same equality with the men living at the bottom. "The perfect type of bourgeois of 1789 combined hatred of nobles with destruct of the mob." Napoleon remarked, "What made the Revolution? Vanity. Liberty was only the excuse." The vanity of the bourgeoisie injured by the haughtiness of the aristocracy hardened their determination to wreak the privileges of the nobles. According to Thampson, "All branches of upper-middle-class were inclined to criticize the aristocracy and aspired for noble status."

3.4. ROLE OF THE MIDDLE CLASS IN THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

The immediate background of the french revolution was the convening of the estate General, a legislative body of different groups in the face of mounting debt of the French state. The king Louis XVI wanted economic reform in the looming prospect of debt default by the sovereign French state. But the Estate Generals consisted of block voting of three separate estates. The first estate of Clergy consisting of 0.5 % of the total population owned 10 percent of the land and enjoyed tax exemption. So also the Second Estate of Nobles. Both the Nobles of Sword and Nobles of Robes, consisting of 35, 0000 population controlled about 20 % of the land and occupied all military, bureaucratic, and church positions. They also enjoyed tax exemption. The third estate comprised the rest of the population, including peasants, artisans, and bourgeoisie, and all the legal and extralegal tax burden fell on this Estate. When Louis XVI proposed tax reforms in the Estates-General, the first two estates came together to block royal proposals for tax reforms. As mentioned earlier, the voting in the Estate General was not based on the numerical majority but based on block votes. Therefore the Third estate comprising 98 % of the total population had one block vote whereas clergy consisting of 0.5 % also enjoyed one vote. This prompted the 'Third Estate' to move out of the Estate General. They moved out of the Estate General and formed a National Assembly and took an oath in a tennis court. It is at this moment that Abbe Seyes, a member of the Third Estate, wrote a pamphlet titled 'What is Third Estate'. In this pamphlet, Abbe Seyes, himself a bourgeoisie claimed that 'It represents the nation'. 'The Third estate is everything and nothing. This means that it represents the French nation without having any voice in the affairs of governance. When the Third Estate declared itself a National Assembly, it was merely underscoring the point that it represented the French nation. As Abbe Siyes wrote: 1. What is the Third Estate? – Everything. 2. What has it been so far in the political order? – Nothing. 3. What does it ask to be? - Something. In this summing up of the nature and history of the third estate, the middle-class bourgeoisie was articulating the aspiration and demands of this new class. This articulation underlines the fact that the Third Estate has not had any true representatives in the Estates-General. Thus its political rights have been non-existent. [What is the third estate? 2: 'What has the Third Estate been until now?

Nothing'] The Third Estate thus contains everything proper to the nation, and those who do not belong to the Third Estate cannot be seen as part of the nation. What is the Third Estate? Everything. [What is the third estate? 1: 'The Third Estate is the complete nation']. Therefore, in this articulation, the French middle class demanded a greater say of the middle class in the governance of the French state. Further, it arrogated unto itself as representing the voice of the nation. Thirdly, it demanded that the number of its deputies be equal to that of the two privileged orders. The third demand was that the Estates-General should vote, not by orders, but by heads. In one sense the middle class was articulating for representative government; wider suffrage and inalienable rights of individuals and citizens. It articulated the notion of citizenship.

The Middle class wanted not a violent revolution but a greater say of the middle class and ushering of constitutional monarchy. The fact that revolutionary France turned a more radical turn was because of a series of circumstances and events that unfolded from 1791 onwards.

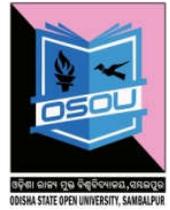
3.5. FRENCH REVOLUTIONS AS BOURGEOISE REVOLUTION: A MARXIST ANALYSIS

Bourgeoisie was also those who lived from their invested income or property, thus "living nobly" and constituting a distinct social category that had its representation in municipal politics. In addition, the bourgeoisie often enjoyed certain privileges that were called the "rights of the city." In the nineteenth century, most notably in the work of Karl Marx and other socialist writers, the French Revolution was described as a bourgeois revolution in which a mercantile –capitalist bourgeoisie overthrew the feudal aristocracy to remake society according to capitalist interests and values, thereby paving the way for the Industrial Revolution.

3.5.1 Marx's prophecy on the Future of Middle class/Bourgeoisie

Marx prophesied the disappearance of the middle class in the high noon of capitalism. According to him, the process of economic modernization would lead to the vanishing of the "petty bourgeoisie" (a term he preferred to "the middle class"). Squeezed between the proletariat and the capitalist class and which he identifies as the self-employed petty bourgeoisie working in the trade, crafts, and professions, these intermediate categories would necessarily fall on one side or the other, and for the most part into the proletariat. The demise of the middle class was programmed by the very logic of the development of capitalism. The middle class would not survive the concentration of large-scale industry, mechanization, the rise of department stores, and financial coalitions. However, capitalism led to a differentiated working class with some, aligned to capitalists than with the world of proletariat. As Raymond Aron

wrote so lucidly in 1939, “The heterogeneity of the middle class cannot easily support more than a partial, abstract unity.”



3.6. LET US SUM UP

The views and opinion may differ on the role of middle-class people in the French revolution but we cannot forget they were the highest in numbers, and they were the highest taxpayers of the nation. They provide financial support to the King, and they controlled the trade and commerce of France, but never enjoyed any privilege like Nobles and clergy. Out of the 1214 seats of the Estate General the third Estate got 621 seats and the other two states got 593 seats together. Further the third estate was strengthened by the addition of 149 declassed clergy and 47 declassed nobles. So the total strength of the Third Estate was $621+149+47=817$, and they had a clear majority if the vote was taken per head. Among the third estate, there were 20% lawyers, 5% service holders, 13% merchants, and industrialists, and merchants and 7.9% peasant’s leaders, who belonged to the gentry’s class. The members of the third estate formed the patriotic party; and the outstanding leaders were Lafayette, Lameth, Abbe Siyas, and Mirabeau. These leaders were much superior to the leaders of the nobility. The middle class was educated, united, and equipped themselves for revolution. The middle-class had people were not only influenced by the ideas of the philosophers but they strictly followed the ideas of philosophers. The 'Social Contract' of Rousseau was highly popularized among the middle class.

Several times they demanded and stood for equality, such as the abolition of feudal taxes, equal status for all. Especially the bourgeoisie was the claim, for abolition of the privilege arising out of birth in high families was demanded. The bourgeoisie also protested against the pollution of culture by cabaret dancing which spoiled the youth. They too raised demand for compensation for the failure of the potato crop but they never got any success. Louis XVI, failed to manage the situation and never took any decision in favor of middle-class people. However, the bourgeoisie succeeded in creating an atmosphere against the ancient regime and class supremacy of nobles, which prevailed in France since medieval times and finally they prepared ground and declared revolution against the French monarch.

3.7. EXERCISE

1. Write a note on the Role of the Middle Class in the French Revolution?

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2. Composition of French Middle Class

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3. Write a note on the background of the emergence of the middle class in Europe?

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3.8 SUGGESTED READING

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