
CHAPTER – 3

French Revolution

The French revolution of 1789 was a landmark in the history of Europe, ending an era and heralding another one. The revolution having abolished monarchy in France installed new thoughts of 'Liberty', 'equity' and 'fraternity and new principle of human right that - 'man is born free' and thus gave challenge to the old traditions of Europe. Outbreak of such type of independence of thought was the result of renaissance in Europe, that gave birth to many nationalist revolutions in the Europe. These revolutions were against feudalist and autocratic system of government as well as the social system responsible for exploitation. In this course, the freedom struggle of America started in 1776 and in 1783 independence of its colonies overthrew the old regime of France and paved way for establishment of a society with independent thoughts. As France had to support America in this war, against Britain so the wave of independence reached France after America and the armies supported the public in France.

To know why and how the French revolution took place, we shall have to study the politics and society of that time. Though France was a powerful country in the eighteenth century and occupied a vast area in the North America, Western archipelago and on the island of Madagascar in Africa, yet the foundation of power was not strong. Lack of economic resources due to protected war and extravagance of the rulers put great pressure of taxes on the people of France and the oppression of social inequalities brought them on the brink of revolution. Hence, explanation of the reasons responsible for revolution can be done in the following ways :

3.1 Political cause:

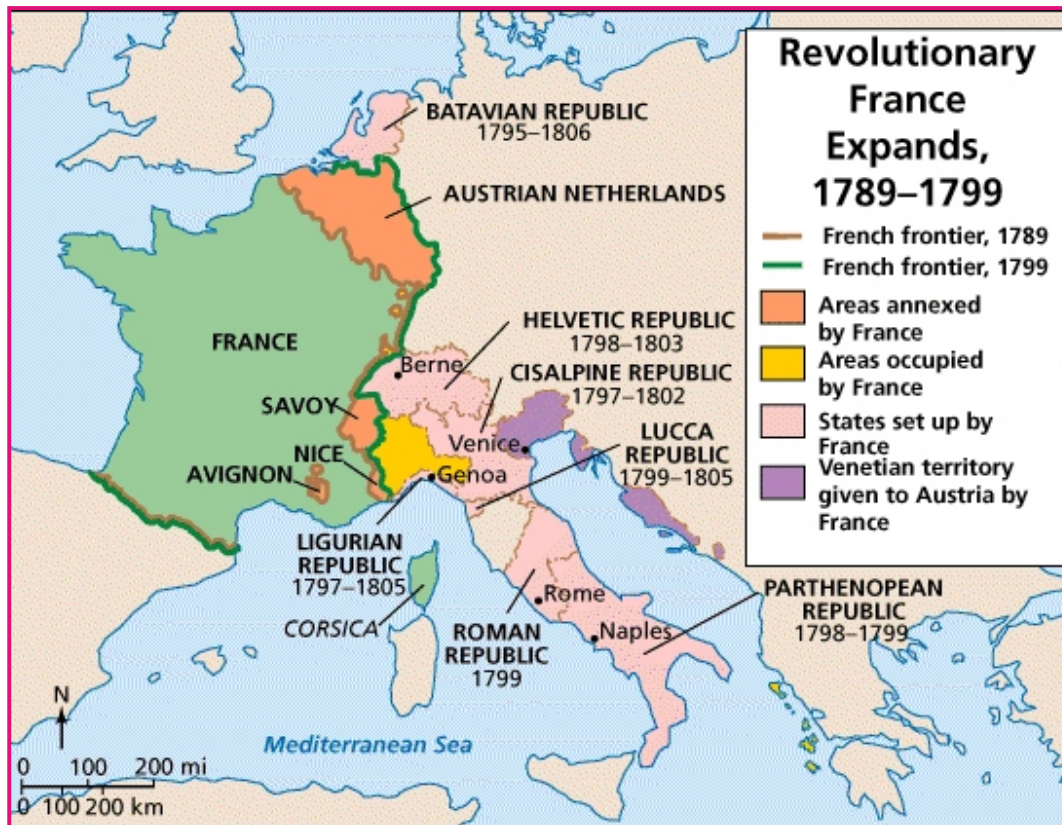
It was monarchical system of government in France. The reputation and honour of the empire in the reign of Louis XIV of Bourbon dynasty was on the top but his successors proved incompetent. Louis XVI was enthroned in 1774, who was great despotic, extravagant and incompetent. He was married to the princess of Austria Marie Antoinette who used to destroy money on festivities and interfere in the state affairs for appointment of her own men on the higher posts. Fifteen thousand employees in the Versailles Palace of King had no work but got heavy amount as salaries. Nine percent of revenue spent on them. In the reign of Louis XVI, France got additional burden of Loan of 10 billion livre (the then French currency) in getting thirteen colonies of America free from Britain. The continued lack of economic resources compelled the king to raise the taxes on public for meeting his regular expenses.

Political reasons:

- Despotic and incompetent
- The cabinet did not meet till 175 years.
- The policy of highly centralisation.
- Lack of autonomous government.
- Influence of Marie Antoinette

There was lack of control on the despotic kingship. Though the States General was the parliamentary institution, yet it was a big example of the autocracy of the King after 1614 till 175 years. There was no meeting of the cabinet. It vindicated the autocracy of Louis XIV, who said "I am the state", but since he was a competent and able ruler, he suppressed the revolts successfully. Thus, he was having the sole power of the state, but his successors lacked such qualities.

To have a check on the autocracy and arbitrariness of the King, there was an institution in France, named Parlma, established in the forum of court. It was 17 in number. The post of judges were reserved for nobility and aristocratic class and the posts were hereditary. As per need, the King compelled them to agree his will on the basis of money. Thus, practically and virtually the King had its control over it.



Political map during French Revolution

The tendency of centralisation was the biggest defect of French revolution. Always, there was lack of autonomous government, while in the neighbouring England, the autonomous institutions ran such type of government. In France, everywhere, there was dominance of Versailles palace. In addition to the King, Marie Antoinette misused the power. That made the people totally against the concepts of monarchy. By 1789 the people became impetuous for participating in government. That time there was no institution in France to control their violent attitude.

Social cause :

In the eighteenth century, the French society was divided in three Estates or classes. The first Estate comprised clergy with about 1 lakh 30 thousand population (1,30,000), the second Estate was the group of Nobility, having about 80,000 families or 40 lakhs people. These two groups were exempted from taxes. That time the population of France was about 2.5 crores. They had 40 percent of total land in France.

90 percent people belonged to the third Estate and having no special power. They were bound to provide services to their masters, to work in the houses and fields of their masters, provide military services or indulge in read construction works. They had to pay all types of taxes. Doctors, lawyers, judges, lecturers, businessmen, teachers, writers, artisans and labourers were included in this group, and lived in the urban areas.

These middle class people were called Bourgeois, who played very important role in the French revolution.

The middle class was extremely discontented, the most important reason of it was that being capable and prosperity they did not avail of the social status like that of nobility. In spite of prosperity and progress they were deprived of all types of political rights. All high posts of the states were reserved for the aristocrats. They were of the view that the basis of social status should be heredity rather than ability. The behaviour of the nobility towards bourgeois was very rude.



Naturally, they felt very humiliating. For this reason, the most important slogan of the French revolution was 'Equity', started by bourgeois class.

The condition of the peasants, in the French society, was miserably sad. They had to pay many types of taxes. It is said that before the revolution in France, the nobility fight, they clergy pray and the people pay.

Economic cause

The external wars and squandering of money had weakened the economic condition of France. Every year the expenditure exceeded the income so imposition of taxes was in vogue. The tax system was based on the principle of inequality and partiality. The way of fixation and realisation of taxes was also not equal. At every five or six years the French government gave contract to the capitalists for realisation of taxes. These capitalists were known as 'tax-farmer'. They realised more and more taxes from the ryots and paid a fixed amount to the government and the rest amount they kept themselves. Thus the poor farmers had been facing great economic difficulties.

Economic dis-contentment among people of France brought the country to the brink of revolution. Various types of taxes were imposed upon them to meet the burden on state exchequer. Peasants had to pay the taxes on land. In addition to that they had to pay the religious tax to the Church. Many types of indirect taxes were paid even on the commodities of daily use such as salt and tobacco. In addition to this they had to pay many gifts, tall taxes, tributes etc. as feudalist tax. Thus the economic condition of the French people was becoming pitiable day by day.

Social Causes

- Unequal taxation system
- Awakening among bourgeois class of political rights.
- Discontentment to social inequalities.
- Miserable condition of the farmers

Economic Causes

- Unequal taxation system
- Burden of land tax, religious tax and other feudalist taxes.
- Problem of unemployment
- Restriction of guild, provincial income tax, discontentment among the traders due to feudalist income tax

In addition to the economic burden of taxes the problem of unemployment prevalent in the society played a very important role in making the economic condition of France pitiful and miserable. In those days industrial revolution had taken place and the use of machine had begun in the country. As a consequence manual workers, artisans and cottage industries suffered badly and became unemployed. During revolution they supported revolutionaries against the king.

Besides, unorganised government system had made the mercantile life of France handicapped. The French faced many types of trouble in exchange of trade due to lack of uniformity in their life. Various types of restrictions such as band and guilds, trade related rules in towns, provincial income tax, feudalist tax etc. were imposed on traders. Development of trade had almost stopped under the circumstances. The traders wanted to get trade free from all restraints.

Thus, in a situation of dissatisfaction and injustice the economic growth of the country had blocked and government extravagance made by Louis XVI and Mari Antoinette for their pleasure extremely affected the state exchequer. In these circumstances, the government instead of being economical, focused on taking loan and imposing taxes.

Military cause

There was immense dissatisfaction among the armies of France. The farmers were appointed in military. They were indignant for lower salary, strict administration and substandard diet. They were appointed on lower posts only, the higher offices were reserved for nobility.

Military Cause

- Disparity in appointment
- Fixation of low salary
- Arrangement of substandard food diet.

Personal and religious cause

There was absence of all types of freedom in France, there was no freedom of speech, writing, expression of thoughts and religious liberty.

Catholic religion was state's religion and the followers of Protestant were severely punished. Not only that, there was also lack of personal freedom. The king or any of his men could arrest any person. Warrant of arrest was issued in absence of accusation and charge; it was called letters-de-cachet.

In France, there was lack of uniformity in law' there were 400 laws in force. Nobody knew that under which law the judgement of his case would be given.

Personal and Religious Cause

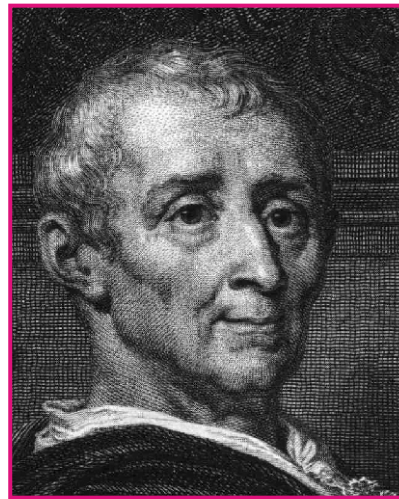
- Lack of freedom of speech, writing and expression of thoughts
- Absence of religious freedom
- Arresting of people without accusation
- Lack of uniformity in law

Intellectual cause

In respect of French revolution, it is said that it was a bourgeoisie revolution, in which the educated class revealed the then political, social, economic and religious faults. The French intellectuals initiated the intellectual movement. Montesquieu, Voltaire and Rousseau were the prominent figure among them.



Voltaire



Montesquieu

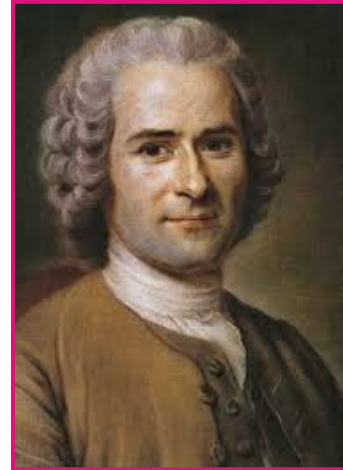
Montesquieu in his book, 'The Spirit of Laws', gave the theory of

separation of power for keeping the three wings of government Executive, Legislature and Judiciary separate from one another.

Voltaire revealed the weaknesses of Church, society and monarchy. Though he

was not pro-democracy yet he was a strong supporter monarchy in favour of people. Montesquieu and Voltaire wanted reforms but Rousseau wanted a drastic change. He, in his famous book, 'Social Contract', accepted state as an institution formed by people and General will as sovereign. So he was a supporter of democracy.

The essays of Diderot's encyclopedia spread the revolutionary ideas in France. The famous economist like Quesnay and Turgot, in France, criticized economic exploitation and economic control in the society and supported policy of Laissez-faire.



Ruso

Impact of Foreign incidents

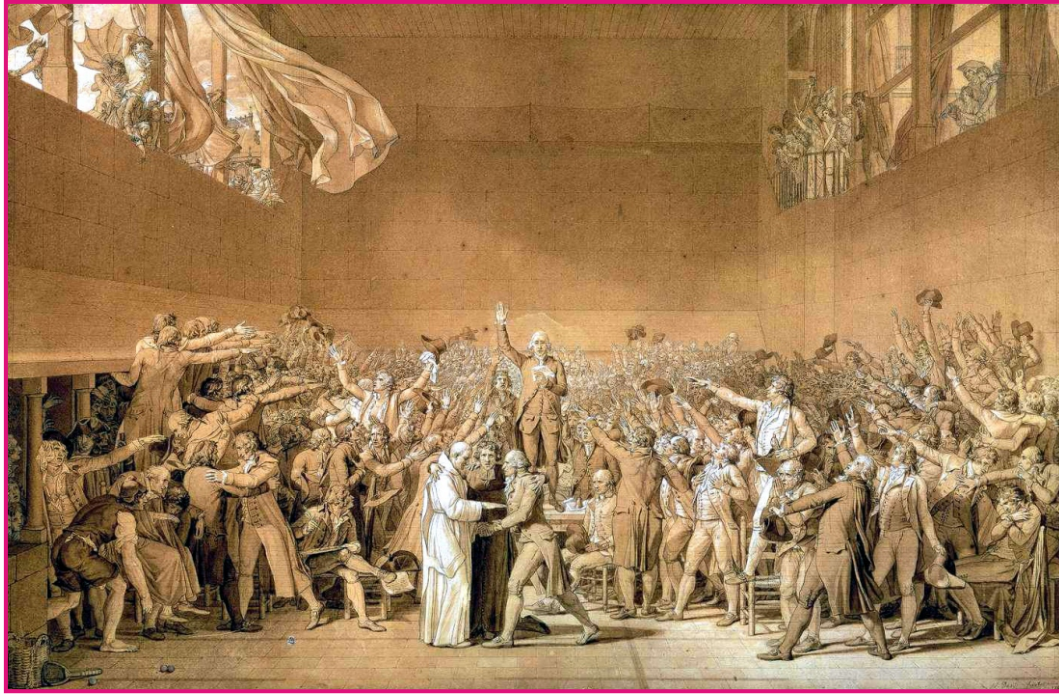
The glorious revolution in England. The glorious revolution in England in 1688, and formation of constitutional government paved way for political change in France.

Impact of foreign independence:

- Glorious revolution in England.
- American struggle for freedom

America's Freedom Struggle

During America's freedom struggle, the French Army took part against England under the leadership of Lafayette, democratic government was formed in America. It was a source of inspiration for the French people and the revolution got further strength. The economic condition of France became so weak that the country was unable to control it and finally it became immediate cause of the revolution.



Oath of Tennis Court

3.2 The episode of revolution

In 1789, Louis XVI was in need of money, so he called a meeting of States General on 5th May, 1789. 300 representatives of the first state and the second state and 600 representatives of the third states ensured their participation. The third states demanded right to vote for all representatives. On the basis of democratic principle. The demand was turned down by the King. So all representatives of the third states came out raising voice against the decision. On June 20, when they assembled to organise a conference they saw that the hall, venue of their conference was full of the royal guards. So all the representatives of third state gathered in Tennis Court. They declared their meeting National Assembly and took oath that the assembly would not be dissolved until the constitution for minimising the power of King was ready.

Rumours regarding dissolving the assembly by king and arresting of its members spread. Hearing this people gathered there in a huge number, leaders like Mirabeau and Obesio were leading them. Though Mirabeau belonged to feudal family still he was in favour of rumouring the special powers of feudal.



Fall of Bastille

On 14 July 1789, the revolutionaries besieged the state prison of Bastille in Paris. The fort of Bastille was a symbol of despotism of monarchy. After a four hour siege, they succeeded in breaking the gate of the prison and making the prisoners free. The end of Bastille prison signified the downfall of despotic power. That is why 14th July is celebrated as the Independence Day in France.

After 14 July 1789, Louis XVI was a king only in name and the National Assembly began to prepare Act for the country. The Assembly passed the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen on 27 August 1789. Through this declaration all the people got the right of expression of thought and follow

religion of their choice. Together with individual freedom, they got freedom of speech. The press were also awarded freedom. Now the State was not allowed to arrest anyone without filing a case and could not acquire their land without paying compensation. The most important decision for the middle class people was that the taxes were equally imposed on all classes and they were permitted to have personal property. The revolutionary decision was extremely important not only for France but for the entire Europe.

The National Assembly in 1791 prepared the draft of constitution in which the theory of separation was adopted. Thus constitutional assembly came into force in France.



Rights of Man and Citizen

Although Louis XVI accepted the new constitution, violent revolt started after the death of Miravio. The nobility opposed the constitution even in the foreign countries. In April 1792, the National Assembly of Austria declared war against Porsche and Sewaai. Till that time all the citizens had not got right to franchise. Election to the National Assembly had to be conducted indirectly. The issues discussed above had become a matter of criticism. Among the critics the prominent were the members of the Jacobin Club comprising the shopkeepers, artisans, watch makers, labourers, day labourers etc. The Jacobin Club was named after the former Convent of Saint Jacob with Maximilian Robes pierre as its head.

3.3. Reign of Terror

Robespierre was supporter of the leftist. So being disgusted with dearness and shortage of food items he started violent revolution and established reign of terror. Around seventeen thousand people were prosecuted and hanged in fourteen months. Robespierre was foster of direct democracy. Election was conducted by guaranteeing right to vote to all persons above the age of 21 whether they possessed property or not. On 17 September 1792, the newly elected Assembly was christened as 'Convention' and the power of the king was withdrawn. Louis XVI was prosecuted in the charge of treason and hanged on 21 January 1793. Mary Antoinette was also hanged later on.

Till October 1793, the reign of terror established by Robespierre was at its zenith. The Convention declared French as the only national language. Rules were compiled; the tradition of sending slaves to colonies and the tradition of primogeniture (system in which the eldest son receives all the property when his father dies) were abolished. New National Calendar (22 September, 1792) came into force. All these were established by Robespierre as a token of dignity and excellence of absolute power. But all these proved just temporary. Due to his terrorist activities a special court awarded him death punishment on July 1794. After that a new constitution was framed in 1795 through which republican government came into force. Later on Napoleon Bonaparte declared himself as chief of the republic and imposed his own code of law. His reform measures helped immensely in progress of the then France.

3.4 Consequences of the revolution

End of Ancient Regime: By ending the ancient regime the French Revolution gave birth to modern era by which 'Liberty ', 'Equity 'and 'Fraternity' got impetus.

Secular State: The revolution established a secular State by separating religion from State. Intellectualism emerged in the religious sphere and religious freedom was awarded to the people.

Establishment of Democracy:

The French revolution ended the doctrine of Divine Right and established democracy.

Dignity of Individual: For the first time the National Assembly emphasised on the greatness of individuals; and the fundamental rights and duties for the citizen were declared.

Beginning of Socialism: The French Revolution provided strength to the socialist attitudes too. The Jacobins safeguarded the rights of common people and favoured the poor against the rich. Their political rights were declared.

Growth in Trade and Commerce: As a consequence of the

revolution the guild system, provincial income tax and other economic sanctions were lifted from the merchants that led to the development of trade and commerce. It was the reason that during the 19th century France was next to England in the field of trade and commerce.

Abolition of Slavery: The revolution abolished slavery. In 1794 the Convention passed the 'Slave Emancipation Law'; though later on it was abolished by Napoleon. In 1884 slavery was eradicated finally from the French colonies.

Responsibility of education upon the government: Till date education was confined to churches. Now this accountability was shifted to the government. As a consequence of this, Paris University and many educational institutions and research centres were opened in France.

National Calendar: A new National Calendar was implemented in France. The calendar was divided into twelve months on the basis of seasons and they were named after Brumaire, Thermidor etc.

Results

- End of Ancient Regime
- Establishment of Secular State
- Establishment of Democracy
- Recognition of Individual's dignity
- Beginning of Socialism
- Growth in trade and commerce
- Abolition of Slavery
- Responsibility of education upon government
- Beginning of National Calendar
- Women Movement

Women Movements: The women of France had also participated in the French revolution with a view to bringing about a change in the French society. They had established an organisation 'The society of Revolutionary and Republican Women'. Olympe de Gouges, a leader, had played very important role in the organisation. Under her leadership, the demand of political rights for women as equivalent to male was accepted, but they were not guaranteed political rights in the beginning. The French revolution taught a lesson of awakening by which later on the women movement continued till a long time. And as result of that the French women got the right to franchise in 1946.

3.5. Effect of the revolution on other countries

The effect of French revolution influenced not only France but other countries of Europe too. The people of Italy and Germany and other countries welcomed Napoleon as 'the harbinger of revolution' when making reforms in France he reached there in course of his victory campaign. He gave a lesson of nationalism to the people of those countries.

Effect on Italy: That time Italy was divided into different groups. After the French Revolution, Napoleon gathered his troops in the different parts of Italy and made preparation for war and organised Italy State. By fighting unitedly, sense of nationalism developed among them and this paved the way for future unification of Italy.

Effects on other countries

- End of Ancient Regime
- Effect on Italy
- Effect on Germany
- Effect on Poland
- Effect on England

Effect on Germany: That time German was also divided in 300 small states that were condensed into 38 states by the effort of Napoleon. The Germans followed the spirit of the French revolution - 'Liberty', 'Equity', and 'Fraternity' -and later on the unification of Germany receive strength through it.

Effect of Poland: Napoleon the forerunner of French revolution infused restlessness for independence in Poland. Earlier it was divided among Russia, Prussia and Austria. Though Poland did not get independence quickly but nationalism was transfused among them through the French revolution. As a result of a long term effort an independent state of Poland could be established after the Second World War.

Effect of England: England was also influenced by the victory campaign of Napoleon but later on became the reason of its downfall. Nevertheless the influence of the Revolution appeared in England to a great extent. The people of England started raising voice against feudalism. As a result, in 1832 'Parliament Reforms Act' was passed in England by which the power of landlords was abolished and many ways were opened for reforms in favour of the people of England. The revolution provided immense contribution in the development of the industrial revolution of England.

3.6. Nature of the Revolution:

In terms of the French revolution, it is said that its nature was totally decisive, therefore, the pace and direction of the revolution was same as the other revolutions. However, before deciding the nature of a revolution it is important to see the causes of the revolution; which class of the society took main part in the revolution and which class of the society received maximum advantages. Many historians have told that the French Revolution of 1789 was a bourgeois (middle class) revolution. According to them the revolution established government of another privilege class instead of an already privileged class. There was no dearth of capital among the middle class of France. They often used to give loan to the government but they had no participation in power. However, there were many causes of the French Revolution, but the discontentment among the middle class and arousing public consciousness by them made the revolution inevitable. All the philosophers who aroused the intellectual consciousness belonged to the middle class. Most of the leaders who headed the revolution also came off the middle class. It is true that the peasant and the workers unitedly made the revolution success; but power did not come in their hands. The abolition of feudalism by National Assembly on 4 August 1789 and the economic policies adopted by them clarified that the bourgeois group had the upper hand in the revolution. The middle class got advantages from the revolution; the common people were not given the right to vote. By formulating a law, the National Assembly banned the organisation of the factory workers. Use of the slogan of the revolution 'Liberty', 'Equity' and 'Fraternity' was just for abolition of special privileges of the clergy and feudal; and to get special privileges for the middle class. From 1789 to 1815 the authority of power

remained in the hands of middle class. This was the reason that the Jacobin group had done temporary effort for administering political and economic rights to the proletarian group. On the basis of the facts the view of the historians that the nature of the French revolution was middle class seems factual. Because the bourgeois was the remarkable cause of the revolution, they headed the revolution as well and they got the maximum advantages.

Conclusively, the French Revolution of 1789 initiated such an era in France in which foundation of liberty, equity and fraternity was laid down and human rights was protected. At the same time, the other European countries were also influenced by these thoughts and a chain of reforms of new age started there also.

EXERCISE

I. Objective Questions:

- 1 .When did the State Revolution of France happen?
a. 1776 b. 1789 c. 1779 d. 1832
2. When was the Bastille fallen?
a. 5 May 1789 b. 20 June 1789
c. 14 July 1789 d. 27 August 1789
3. Who belonged to the First Estate?
a. commoner b. peasants
c. clergy d. king
4. Who belonged to the Second Estate?
a. clergy b. king
c. nobility d. middle class
5. Who belonged to the Third Estate?
a. philosophers b. nobility
c. clergy d. judges
6. Voltaire was a.....
a. scientist b. mathematician
c. writer d. craftsman

7. Which principle Rousseau was follower of?
 a. socialism b. General Will
 c. separation of powers d. autocracy
8. Which book was written by Montesquieu?
 a. Social Contract b. Law of the Spirit
 c. Das Capital d. Macro Knowledge
9. Who was the king of France at the time of State Revolution?
 a. Napoleon b. Louis XIV
 c. Louis XVI d. Moravia
10. When is the Independence Day celebrated in France?
 a. 4 July b. 14 July
 c. 27 August d. 31 July

II. Fill in the blanks:

1. Louis XVI took the throne inAD.
2.was wife of Louis XVI.
3. The Parliamentary System of France was called.....
4. The capitalist contractual tax collectors were known as.....
5. The Principle ofwas established by Montesquieu.
6. 'The Social contract' is the famous book of.....
7. The national Assembly of France declared.....on 27 August 1789.
8.was the famous leader of the Jacobin Club.
9. Slavery was completely abolished in.....
10. The women of France got right to franchise inAD.

III. Short Answer Questions:

1. What were the political causes of the French Revolution?
2. What were the social causes of the French Revolution?
3. Throw light on the economic causes of the French Revolution.
4. Explain the intellectual causes of the French Revolution.
5. What do you understand by 'letter de cachet'?
6. What was the influence of American freedom struggle on the French Revolution?

7. What do you understand by human and peoples' right?
8. What was the effect of French Revolution on England?
9. The French Revolution influenced Italy, How?
10. How was Germany influenced by French Revolution?

IV. Long Answer Questions:

1. What were the causes of the French Revolution?
2. Mention the outcomes of the French Revolution?
3. The French Revolution was a bourgeois revolution. How?
4. What was the contribution of the philosophers of France in the French Revolution?
5. Mention the achievements of the French Revolution.
6. How did the French Revolution influence the European countries?
7. 'The French Revolution was a landmark'. Support the statement.
8. How was Louis XVI responsible for the French Revolution?
9. What was the role of Jacobins in the French Revolution?
10. Which reforms were passed in France by National Assembly and National convention?

