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[HISTORY]

INDIA AND THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD-I



SECTION I: EVENTS AND PROCESSES

1

THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

SUMMARY

1. French society during the late Eighteenth Century-

- (i) French society in the eighteenth century was part of the feudal system. French society was divided into three estates—
 - (i) Clergy
 - (ii) Nobility
 - (iii) Merchants, servants, labour etc.
- (ii) First two categories were freed from paying taxes. Only the people of third estate had to pay tax.
- (iii) A tax tithe levied by the church, comprising one-tenth of the agricultural produce.

1.1. The struggle to Survive-

Due to increasing population of France, increasing demand for food grains, increase in food items, low wages etc. increased the gap between the poor and the rich. Due to outbreak of drought and hail, the fall of yield led to a subsistence crisis.

1.2. A Growing Middle class Envisages and kind to Privileges-

The eighteenth century witnessed the emergence of social groups, termed the middle class. In addition to merchants and manufacturers, the third estate included professions such as lawyers or administrative officials. The ideas envisaging a society based on freedom and equal laws and opportunities were put forward by philosophers such as John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau. The American constitution and its guarantee of individual rights was an important example for political thinkers in France. The news that Louis XVI planned to impose further taxes to be able to meet the expenses of the state generated anger and protest against the system of privileges.

2. The Outbreak of the Revolution-

- (i) On 5 May 1789, Louis XVI called together an assembly of the Estates General to pass the proposals for new taxes.
- (ii) When the king rejected the proposal, members of the third estate walked out of the assembly in protest. On 20 June 1789, they assembled in the hall of an indoor tennis court in the grounds of Versailles and declared themselves as National Assembly.
- (iii) The public was also agitated due to inflation. At the same time, the king ordered troops to move into Paris. On 14 July 1789, the agitated crowd stormed and destroyed the Bastille.
- (iv) Finally, Louis XVI gave recognition to the national assembly and accepted the principle that his powers would from now on be checked by a constitution. On the

night of 4 August 1799 the Assembly passed a decree abolishing the feudal system of obligations and taxes. Members of the clergy too were forced to give up their privileges. Tithes were abolished and lands owned by the church were confiscated.

2.1. France Becomes a Constitutional Monarchy-

In 1791, the National Assembly completed the drafts of the constitution and main object was to limit the powers of the monarch.

3. France Abolishes Monarchy and Becomes a Republic-

The constitution of 1791 gave political rights only to the richer sections of society. On 21 September 1792 it abolished the monarchy and declared France a republic.

3.1. The Reign of Terror-

In France, the period from 1791 to 1794 is referred to as the Reign of Terror.

3.2. A directory Rules France-

The fall of the Jacobin government allowed the wealthier middle classes to seize power; denied the vote to non-propertied sections of society. It provided for two elected legislative councils, which then appointed a Directory, an executive made up of five members. Due to the directors and the legislative councils clashings, the political instability of the Directory paved the way for the rise of a military dictator- Napoleon Bonaparte.

4. Did Women have a Revolution?

Women were active participants from the very beginning in the events which brought about so many important changes in French society. Women were disappointed that the constitution of 1791 reduced them to passive citizens. Women could now train for jobs, could become artists or run small businesses. It was finally in 1946 that women in France won the right to vote.

5. The Abolition of Slavery-

The convention of 1794 legislated to free all slaves in the French overseas possessions. Ten years later, Napoleon reintroduced slavery. Slavery was finally abolished in French colonies in 1848.

6. The Revolution and Everyday life-

In 1789, law that came into effect was the abolition of censorship and the Declaration of the rights of Man and citizen proclaimed freedom of speech and expression to be a natural right. Opposing views of events could be expressed. This brought about many changes in the men, women and children of France.

Conclusion— The ideas of liberty and democratic rights were the most important legacy of the French revolution. These ideas were spread in the nineteenth century in Europe and the feudal systems were abolished.

INTEXT QUESTIONS

See Fig. 3

Activity 1

Page No. 5

Q. Explain why the artist has portrayed the nobleman as the spider and the peasant as the fly.

Ans. (i) The fly wanders, here and there and does hard labour for the food whereas the spider makes the system to trap the fly.
(ii) Thus the spider does not do any hard labour for the food like the fly.

- (iii) Likewise, the nobleman makes a system where he gets his food due to his system in which a peasant is trapped to bring all eatables for the nobleman.

Activity 2

Page No. 6

- Q.** Fill in the blank boxes in Fig. 4 with appropriate terms from among the following :

Food riots, scarcity of grain, increased number of deaths, rising food prices, weaker bodies.

Ans.

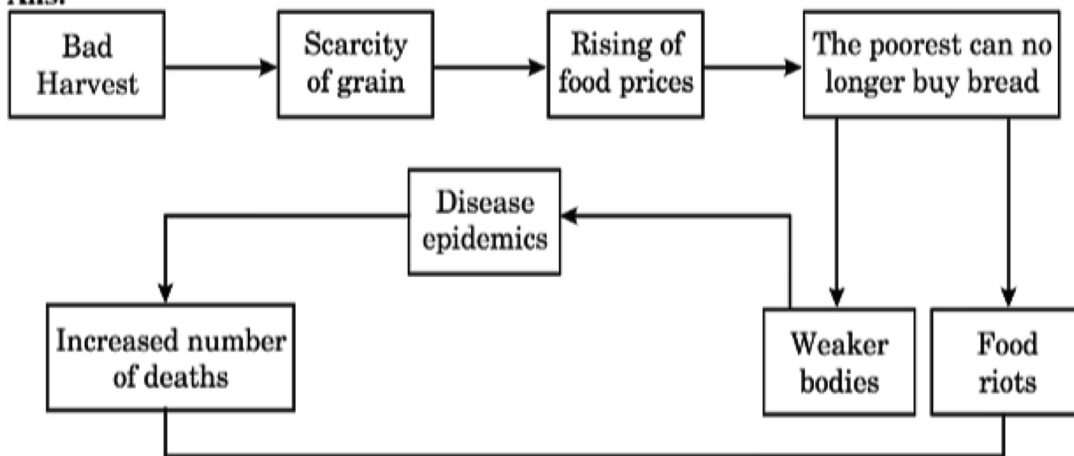


Fig : The course of a subsistence crisis

Activity 3

Page No. 7

- Q.** An Englishman, Arthur Young, travelled through France during the years from 1787 to 1789 and wrote detailed descriptions of his journeys. He often commented on what he saw.

Ans. 'He who decides to be served and waited upon by slaves, ill-treated slaves at that, must be fully aware that by doing so he is placing his property and his life in a situation which is very different from that he would be in, had he chosen the services of free and well-treated men. And he who chooses to dine to the accompaniment of his victims' groans, should not complain if during a riot his daughter gets kidnapped or his son's throat is slit.'

- Q.** (i) What message is Young trying to convey here?
 (ii) Whom does he mean when he speaks of 'slaves'?
 (iii) Who is he criticising?
 (iv) What dangers does he sense in the situation of 1787?

- Ans.** (i) Arthur Young is conveying the message that the Lords were aware of the situation which would be different if they had chosen the services of free men from instead of slaves. The privileged should not complain when they face the consequences of their actions.
 (ii) By slaves, young means to unprivileged or deprived sections. 'Slaves' were the victims of French Social system.
 (iii) He is criticising nobles and the clergies who had made the poor people victims.

- (iv) He points out a sense of danger in the situation of 1787 in which the victim's groans can take the form of riots where lords' families are not safe. He thinks that in the situation of 1787, the underprivileged people can adopt the violent methods.

Activity 4

Page No. 8

Q. (i) Compare the views of Desmoulins and Robespierre. How does each one understand the use of state force? (ii) What does Robespierre mean by the 'war of liberty against tyranny'? (iii) How does Desmoulins perceive liberty?

- Ans.** (i) Robespierre understood the use of terror for a democratic government in the time of revolution was justified, whereas Desmoulins said that the state force should be applied on the basis of law.
- (ii) Robespierre meant the war of liberty against the tyranny to annihilate the enemies of the republic of home and abroad.
- (iii) Desmoulins perceives that liberty is happiness, reason, equality, justice. It is the declaration of Rights.

Activity 5

Page No. 20

Q. Compare the manifesto drafted by Olympe de Gouges, with the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen

- Ans.** (i) The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen (Source C) is about the rights of man and citizen only, not for the rights of woman as they are not mentioned in any article.
- (ii) The manifesto drafted by Olympe de Gouges (Source F) is about the rights of both men and women on the basis of equality.