



THE RISE OF RADICAL BOURGEOISIE AND THE DYNAMICS OF FRENCH REVOLUTION

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INTRODUCTION

The French Revolution of 1789 is a great memorable episode and landmark not only in the history of France but also in that of Europe. Ramsay Muir calls it a 'world revolution'. The French revolution was a general mass movement of the nation against the privileged class. It was the first victory of the common people against the despotism of bourbon monarchy. The French revolution is known as the 'second renaissance' of Europe. According to Arthur young "it was a chapter of an unexpected events'. The American revolution of 1776 was chiefly political, but the French revolution of 1789 was a combination of political, social, religious and economic. It offered a new gospel of liberty, equality and fraternity. It shook the age old institution of monarchy n the world and paved the way for the establishment of the democratic government. It gave a clarity of nationalism to the world community and was caused for several Revolutions of so many European countries. In short, the French revolution opened a new chapter in the history of human race. C.D. Hazen has summed up its importance in the following words, "with the outbreak of the French revolution European history merges into the history of one nation, one event and one man. The nation is France, the event is the French revolution and the man is Napoleon".

Usually, we can explain the causes of French revolution with the title of political, social, economic, intellectual and with the site of American Revolution. Edmond Burk was the first man to discuss the causes of the French revolution. The French monarchy was absolute and despotic. The bourbon monarchs of France

believed in the theory of Divine Right of kings. Anarchy and inefficiency was the order of the day. Louis 14th, Louis 15th and Louis 16th were utterly responsible for the outbreak of the French revolution of 1789.

Louis 14th was an autocratic ruler of France. He was popularly known as ‘the great king and the king of sun’. He successfully ruled in France from 1643 to 1715. He believed in Devine right of kings. He used to say ‘my words are law’. He felt that ‘he was the state’. He used his power for his own selfish ends and not for the welfare of the people. He abolished representative assembly. Hence, Annie Besant says ‘Louis 14th was the founder of the French revolution’. He waged a number of wars. For example: he made war with Holland in 1672 and he made war with Spanish Nederland between 1701-14. Louis the 14th lived in grand palace at Versailles. It was built at a cost of 11 crores of rupees. As a result the treasury of the country became empty. It was said: ‘the court is the tomb of the nation’. The political situation was so severed after the death of Louis 14th because Louis was not capable to rule the French. In the words of Saint Simon “when his subjects heard of the death of Louis 14th they trembled with joy and thanked God for their deliverance”.

After the death of Louis 14th his great grandson Louis 15th came to the throne of France in 1715. He had very much proud and was malpractice. He felt that he was the “Representatives of God”. He did not shown interest on his people welfare. According to Carlyle, “the king and his court eat all and did nothing. Louis 15th loved very much the company of women and liquor. In the words of Hayes, “the Government under Louis 15th was one of the petti coats more than of talents. The monarchism will be triumph till the capable and energetic king and being a dictator on the throne. Even during his reign France had to face several costly wars for example:

The war of the polish election,

The war of the Austrian succession,

The seven year’s war.

As a result of these wars the economic condition had being very complicated and the popularity of the government of Louis 15th was decreased. When his ministers tried to discuss with him the serious problems of the state, he said, “after me the deluge”. In the words of Aveling “the Louis 14th led France to abyss but Louis 15th to sewer it”. After the death of Louis 15th his grand son Louis 16th came to the throne of France in 1774. Louis 16th was 20 years old when he came to the throne. In the words of Louis 16th “how unhappy are we, we are too young to rule and it seems the whole world is falling on me. Oh! God what a burdon is mine and they have taught me nothing”. When Louis 16th came to the throne of France, the people of France felt that the fourth coming days might be good. But it became lie. Louis 16th naturally was a good man but he was not a good king.

There was no doubt regarding his virtues, honesty and good sense, but he had no constant mind. During his time the French revolution took place.

The influence of women was always great in France under the Bourbon monarchy and Marie Antoinette was no exception to the rule. She was the daughter of the great empress Maria Theresa of Austria and she had been married to Louis 16th in the hope that thus an alliance would be cemented between the two states which had so long been enemies. Gradually Marie Antoinette interfered in the administration of Louis 16th without the reasons. She honoured her friends, relatives and neighbours, but she punished her enemies. She had a strong will, power of rapid decision but she was lacking in wisdom. She was beautiful, gracious and vivacious. She maintained aristocratic life because she had grown up in Vienna, one of the gayest capitals of Europe. As a result, the treasury of the country, became empty. She had the face of an angel but the heart of a devil. “People of France called Marie Antoinette as ‘madam deficit’”. In the words of H.A.L. Fisher “Marie Antoinette drove the French dynasty as a ship in the ocean at the midst of the dangerous rock and made it pieces.

The National Govt. of France was absolute. It was arbitrary, chaotic, inefficient and unscientific. Unfortunately, France had no uniform code of laws. Almost 400 varieties of laws were enforced in different parts of France. In addition to that estates general which did not meet for last 175 years. Above all these reasons were utterly responsible for the outbreak of the French revolution.

Another important cause of the French revolution was the social cause. **There was too much of social inequality in France.** The French society was based on the principle of inequality. The French revolution of 1789 was much less a rebellion against despotism than a rebellion against social inequality. While the political conditions of France were unstable, her social condition was **antiquated, irrational and oppressive.** **The French society was broadly divided into 3 classes,** namely –the **Nobles** (The nobility of the sword and the nobility of robe), the **Clergy** (higher clergy and lower clergy) and the **Common People.**

The nobles and clergy belonged to the privileged class and enjoyed all kinds of facilities in France. Whereas the common people belonged to the unprivileged class. The nobles and clergy exploited the common people like Kings in the form of taxes. The nobles and clergy did not pay most of the taxes and the burden naturally was shifted on the holders of the 3rd estate. According to French proverb “The nobles fight, the clergy pray and the common people pay”. Luxury and aristocratic life was the day to day life of the nobles and clergy. They were the owners of the 40% of the total property of the state. The government higher posts were the hereditary rights of the nobles and clergy. H.A.L. Fisher comments that “The French revolution attacked privilege, not property”. So th

revolution was a rebellion against inequality. There were three groups in the 3rd estate or common people namely, the middle class people, artisans and the peasants.

Merchants, doctors, physicians, lawyers, bankers, literary men belonged to the middle class. Many of them were rich, progressive and educated. The artisans were living in cities and towns. They were a comparatively small class. The artisans were gradually organized in guilds. Another large number of 3rd estate was the peasantry. In France the life of the peasantry was very severe. The peasantry had to work in their landlords field from dawn to dusk. They had to work for 5 days in a week without wages during the period of harvest. A peasant had to pay to the government, nobles, clergy and he had to lead his life with the remaining income. His life was very critical because of food problem, to satisfy his hunger he had to go to forest to collect fruits and roots. As a result, thousands of peasantaries died of starvations. It has been opined that “In France out of 10 persons 9 persons died of starvation and the remaining person died of indigestion”. According to Abbesieyes “what is the 3rd estate? everything. What has it been in politics until now? nothing and what does it desire? To become something. Such were a glaring social inequalities in France on the eve of French revolution. In the words of Napoleon Bonaparte “The French revolution was a general mass movement of the Nation against the privileged class”.

France gained nothing from them. As a result the economic condition of France had been very complicated. The financial situation in 1774 was a very serious one. Because France had a large debt and debt grew year by year. Almost of the national income was devoted to the payment of interests on the national debt. During the period of Louis XVI the ministers like Turgot, Necker and Kalon put forward some reforms to change the economy had become useless. But Marie Antoinette, the nobles and clergy opposed all the reforms, because of the influence of Marie Antoinette, the nobles and clergy Turgot, Necker, Kalon were dismissed. After their retirement the economic condition of France became orphan.

In addition to that the French system of taxation was both unjust and unfair. The nobles and clergy did not pay most of the taxes and the burden naturally was shifted on the shoulders of poor peasants. The common people had to pay the taxes like Taile (Tax on personal property). The gabille themselves to the revolution because they thought that the reforms were impossible except revolution. Such were a glaring economic inequalities in France on the even of French revolution.

The French revolution was undoubtedly rooted in both the political and social condition of France in the 18th century. Besides it has been frequently ascribed to the influence of the philosophers of the 18th century. The 18th century was an age of enlightenment. So the 18th century has been described as “the grave of one epoch and the cradle for another”. It is said “ideas ruled the world”. Intellectual like Montesquieu, Voltaire and J.J.

Rousseau were indirectly responsible for the French revolution. The inflammable writings of Montesquieu, Voltaire and Rousseau prepared the backdrop of the drama of French revolution in 1789. They exposed that “pen is mightier than sword”.

Montesquieu was the most popular philosopher. He was a famous advocate and a master of history. Montesquieu was born in 1689 at Bordeaux in the famous family of a judge. He was a student of human institutions and a constitutionalist and stood for a constitutional form of government. He was deadly against the “Divine Right Theory of Kings”. He was supporter of individual liberty. Montesquieu believed in the supremacy of law. He wrote “**the Spirit of Laws, Persian Letters, Considerations and causes of the Greatness and the Decadence of the Romans**”. In his great book the ‘**Spirit of Laws**’ he has analysed the principles of Government and traced the evolution of Laws and Constitution. One special contribution which he made to political thought was his insistence upon the separation of the legislative, the executive and the judicial part of the state. In short, he advocated the establishment of a democratic Government on the principles of separation of powers on the model for the British Government. He died in 1755 but his thoughts continued to influence the people of France. The constitution of 1791 was based on Montesquieu’s Theory.

He was popular as one of the political philosopher of Europe. He was born in 1694 in a middle class family. He was given the title “**King Voltaire**” and “**Intellectual God of Europe**”. He wrote a book called “**Letters on the English**”. Voltaire published “**History of Charles XII and Philosophical Letter**” in 1731 and 1734 respectively. He had good hopes of four cultural events like Periclean Athens, Augustian Rome, Renaissance Italy and France under Louis 14th. He strongly criticized and hated Roman Catholic Church. He used to say “Worship God and be a good man”. He had no love for democracy. Voltaire never tolerated the exploitation. His ideal Govt. was a benevolent despotism. He said once “**The rule of a lion is much better than the rule of 1`00 rats**”.

He was the most outstanding political philosopher in France. He originally belonged to Geneva of Switzerland. He was born in 1712. His father was a watch maker. He did not receive any education in any school regularly. He travelled in countries and to cities like Geneva, London, Paris, etc. He was corrupt in his personal life. According to D. Alembert “Rousseau was like a horrible animal”. Johnson says “Rousseau was so bad man that he should be hanged at the nearest tree”. Whatever he had demerit, he was the prophet of the French Revolution. He was inspiration for the French revolution. In the words of Napoleon Bonaparte “If there would not have been Rousseau, there would not have been revolution in France”. His famous work “**Social Contract**” made an immense impact on the people of France. It was published in 1762. This book has been described as the Bible of French revolution and Gospel of Democracy. Rousseau supplied the spirit of revolt

against tyranny and injustice. He denounced the “**Divine Right Theory of the Kings**”. He preached democratic ideas. He propagated the sovereignty of the people in his book called “**Social Contract**”. He preached return to nature. He says that “Man is born Free” but everywhere he is in chains. His tribute to mankind are liberty, equality and fraternity. The French revolution took place on the basis of these principles.

In this way the philosophers like a mirror to the society showed all the loopholes of the church and administration. All these seeds fell upon fruitful soil, the harvest was remarkable. Afterwards the people of France were influenced by the writings of the philosophers and started the revolution. According to a historian “There was lying a dry firewood, the philosophers provided a spark to flame it”.

The American revolution was an indirect cause for the French Revolution of 1789. The French Volunteers under Lafayette helped the people of American Colonies in the American war of independence against the English. Moreover, in the bold fight of the Americans the French had a part. The victory of the Americans was an inspiration to the French. A number of young Frenchmen had sought romantic adventure in fighting beside Washington in the new world and had returned home with Romantic enthusiasm. They preached the democratic ideas. Then the people of French started the Revolution against the privileged classes and despotic monarchy in their country. In short, France was immediately affected and influenced by the American Revolution. In the words of Webster “The American war of Independence became an eye opener to the nations of Europe and in particularly gave leaders to the French revolution”.

It is very difficult to give precise answer when exactly the French revolution began. However, it is the opinion of many historians that it broke out with the convocation of the States General which assembled at Versailles on May 5, 1789. Louis 16th convened the meeting of the National Assembly after the Lapse of 175 years. Naturally the people and their representatives were full of pleasure and happiness. This Assembly had three groups, namely nobles, clergy and common people. The nobles and clergy refused to discuss and sit with the common people. Whereas the common people challenged that every one should sit together and discuss. But the Nobles and Clergy who were very small in number opposed the idea of the common people. However, on June 17, 1789 the third order proclaimed itself a “National Assembly” and invited the Nobles and Clergy to join it in the work of National Reformation. In the meanwhile the King began to obstruct the work of the National Assembly. As the king classed the hall the common people went into the neighbouring Tennis Court and there they took an oath not to separate until they drafted a constitution for France. This is called Tennis Court Oath.

To drive away the Revolutionists Louis XVI ordered the army. The greatest mistake done by Louis XVI was that he sent the army to suppress the revolutionists. In case, he had not sent the army to suppress the

revolutionists the French revolution of 1789 would not have taken place. The crowd attacked the Bastille, a royal fortress and let free the political prisoners. These prisoners joined the Revolutionists. The fall of the Bastille which is regarded as an important event in the history of the French revolution. The flame of the French Revolution spread like wild fire in Paris. Thereafter the Revolutionists proceeded killing the nearby the Relatives of the Louis XVI, nobles and Clergy.

In the meanwhile the scarcity of food problem was created in Paris. On October 5, a women's demonstration against the scarcity of food in Paris was turned into a movement against the palace of Versailles. A long line of the poorest women of Paris, armed with sticks and clubs, marched from Paris to Versailles, crying bread, bread, bread. They surrounded the Royal Palace, demanding the bread from the king and his return to Paris. The king consented to accompany the mob back to Paris. All along the route the mob shouted "we have the baker and the baker's wife and the little cook boy, now we shall have bread". The king lost his control over the revolution when it reached its climax. After considering this, Louis XVI and his wife tried to flee to save their lives. From the beginning itself. The revolutionaries observed very closely their movements. In the words of Robespierre the leader of Jacobin "Louis must die because the country must live". They caught them and sacrifice to them to Guillotine machine. With their death the French revolution came to its end.

The first great achievement of the National Assembly was the legal destruction of feudalism and serfdom and class privileges. The abolition of old privileges took place in the famous "August Day's of 1789". In short, it proclaimed social equality and with this the age-old class society of France ended and the substitution of modern individualist society being legalized. As a result of the abolition of Feudalism, the large estates of the nobles were broken up and divided among the peasants, tenants' who became full owners of the land they worked. The middle classes were relieved of the heaviest burdens of taxation and enabled to take part freely in politics.

The second great achievement of the N.A. was a famous document, a clear statement of human rights and liberties. It was based on the philosophical ideas of Rousseau and constitutional laws of England and U.S.A. The Declaration was adopted on August 1st, 1789. Lafayette proposed them after the example of American colonists. According to Ketelbey "The Declaration of Rights of Man were inspired by American declaration of Philadelphia". France now was given its 'Declaration of the Rights' of man and of the citizen. It was called the gospel of modern times in the history of France. A few of its most striking sentences are "men are born and remain free and equal in rights" which are "liberty, property, security and resistance to oppression". In the words of Lord Acton, the Declaration of human rights was stronger than all the aims and guns of Napoleon". France became the spokesman of the entire human race. In the words of Grant and Temperley "Declaration of the Rights

of Man is the most characteristic example of the nobler side of the Revolution” and paved the way for human rights of U.N.O. But according to Leo Gershey “It was death certificate of old regime”.

Another achievement of the National Assembly was the establishment of a new and uniform administrative system in France. The local and judicial administration was reorganized. The old administrative system was abolished. For the purpose of administration, the country was divided into 83 departments. The provincial councils were established for their administration. The local councils were established in the Communes. A new system of law courts with elected judges was setup. The Central and Local courts were established and the Jury system was put into force. A Supreme Court was established in Paris. The inhuman punishments were abolished.

The treasury was empty and there was a deep financial crisis in France. National Finances were in great confusion. It was impossible to collect direct taxes at once. Therefore, many reforms were introduced to tackle the economic and financial problems. The property of the Church was confiscated and it was declared as national property. Paper currency was introduced in France and it came to be known as assignees.

Though much of the Church land was brought by the middle classes, a considerable share passed into the hands of the peasants. Thus the peasants gained not only freedom from tithes but also the ownership of much new property. This is the most significant achievement of the National Assembly.

The Assembly had undertaken to reorganize the whole government of the Church. In 1789 the property of the Church was confiscated. In July 1790, a Civil Constitution of the Clergy was established. According to it, the Clergy was made a salaried class of the Government. They were made subordinate servants of the government. The number of Monasteries was reduced to 83 from 133. According to Ketelbey “The civil constitution had brought the revolution face to face with its enemies”. Consequently, the Church became a department of the State. Religious toleration was proclaimed. The National Assembly established a new constitution in 1791. It was the first written constitution of France. It provided for a separation of powers. According to this constitution the King had to swear loyalty. It had its control over the King's powers.

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