THE FRENCH REVOLUTION – Summary

The French Society during the Late 18th Century

- The French Society Comprised: 1st Estate: Clergy, 2nd Estate: Nobility, 3rd Estate: Big businessmen, merchants, court officials, peasants, artisans, landless labourers, servants, etc.
- Some within the Third Estate were rich and some were poor.
- The burden of financing activities of the state through taxes was borne by the Third Estate alone.

The Struggle for Survival:

Population of France grew and so did the demand for grain. The gap between the rich and poor widened. This led to subsistence crises.

The Growing Middle Class:

- This estate was educated and believed that no group in society should be privileged by birth.
- These ideas were put forward by philosophers such as Locke English philosopher and Rousseau French philosopher.
- The American constitution and its guarantee of individual rights was an important example of political theories of France.
- These ideas were discussed intensively in salons and coffee houses and spread among people through books and newspapers. These were even read aloud.

THE OUTBREAK OF THE REVOLUTION:

- The French Revolution went through various stages. When Louis XVI became king of France in 1774, he inherited a treasury which was empty.
- There was growing discontent within the society of the Old Regime.
- 1789, Convocation of Estates General. The Third Estate forms National Assembly, the Bastille is stormed, and peasant revolts in the countryside.
- 1791, A constitution is framed to limit the powers of the king and to guarantee basic right to all human beings.
- 1792-93 France becomes a republic. Jacobin Republic overthrown, a Directory rules France.
- 1795 A new Convention appointed a five man Directorate to run the state from 26 October, 1795.
- 1799 The Revolution ends with the rise of Napoleon Bonaparte.
Time Line: The French Revolution

- 1788-1789 — Bad harvest, high prices, food riots
- 1789, May 5 — Estates General convened, demands reforms.
- 1789, August 4 — Night of August 4 ends the rights of the aristocracy.
- 1789, August 26 — Declaration of the Rights of Man
- 1790 — Civil Constitution of the Clergy nationalises the Church.
- 1792 — Constitution of 1791 converts absolute monarchy into a constitutional Monarchy with limited powers.
- 1792 — Austria and Prussia attack revolutionary France
- 1793 — Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette are executed.
- 1792-1794 — The Reign of Terror starts. Austria, Britain, the Netherlands, Prussia and Spain are at war with France.
  — Robespierre’s Committee of Public Safety repels back foreign invaders.
  — Executes many “enemies of the people” in France itself.
- 1794 — Robespierre is executed. France is governed by a Directory, a committee of five men.
- 1799 — Napoleon Bonaparte becomes the leader.

WOMEN’S REVOLUTION

- From the very beginning, women were active participants in the events which brought about so many changes in the French society.
- Most women of the third estate had to work for a living. Their wages were lower than those of men.
- In order to discuss and voice their interests, women started their own political clubs and newspapers.
- One of their main demands was that women must enjoy the same political rights as men.
- Some laws were introduced to improve the position of women.
- Their struggle still continues in several parts of the world. It was finally in 1946 that women in France won the right to vote.

THE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY

- There was a triangular slave trade between Europe, Africa and Americas.
- In the 18th century, there was little criticism of slavery in France. No laws were passed against it.
- It was in 1794 that the convention freed all slaves.
• But 10 years later slavery was reintroduced by Napoleon.
• It was finally in 1848 that slavery was abolished in the French colonies.

THE REVOLUTION AND EVERYDAY LIFE

• The years following 1789 in France saw many changes in the lives of men, women and children.
• The revolutionary governments took it upon themselves to pass laws that would translate the ideals of liberty and equality into everyday practice.
• One important law that came into effect was the abolition of censorship.
• The ideas of liberty and democratic rights were the most important legacy of the French Revolution.
• These spread from France to the rest of Europe during the 19th century.

NAPOLEON

• In 1804, Napoleon crowned himself emperor of France.
• He set out to conquer neighbouring European countries, dispossessing dynasties and creating kingdoms where he placed members of his family.
• He saw his role as a moderniser of Europe.
• He was finally defeated at Waterloo in 1815
THE FRENCH REVOLUTION – Notes

1. What was the subsistence crisis? Why did it occur in France during the Old Regime?
   Ans.
   1. The population of France was on the rise. It rose from 23 million in 1715 to 28 million in 1789. This led to an increase in the demand for food grains.
   2. The production of food grains could not keep pace with the demand and the price of bread, which was the staple diet of the majority, rose rapidly.
   3. The wages also did not keep pace with the rise in prices. The gap between the rich and the poor widened. This led to the subsistence crisis.

2. What was the system of voting in the Estates General? What change did the Third Estate want in this system?
   Ans.
   Voting in the Estates General in the past had been conducted
   1. According to the principle that each estate had one vote.
   2. Members of the Third Estate demanded that voting must now be conducted by the assembly as a whole, where each member would have one vote.
   3. This was according to the democratic principles put forward by philosophers like Rousseau in his book, The Social Contract.

3. Describe the incidents that led to the storming of the Bastille.
   Ans.
   1. National Assembly was busy at Versailles drafting a constitution; The rest of France was seething with turmoil.
   2. A severe winter had meant a bad harvest, the price of bread rose. Often bakers exploited the situation and hoarded supplies.
   3. After spending hours in long queues at the bakery, crowds of angry women stormed into the shops.
   4. At the same time, the king ordered troops to move into Paris. On 14 July, the agitated crowd stormed and destroyed Bastille.

4. Describe how the new political system of constitutional monarchy worked in France.
   Ans.
   The constitution of 1791 vested the power to make laws in the National Assembly, which was indirectly elected. That is,
   1. Citizens voted for a group of electors, who in turn chose the Assembly. Not all citizens, however, had the right to vote.
   2. Only men above 25 years of age who paid taxes equal to at least 3 days of a labourer’s wage were given the status of active citizens, that is, they were entitled to vote.
   3. The remaining men and all women were classed as passive citizens.
   4. To qualify as an elector and then as a member of the Assembly, a man had to belong to the highest bracket of taxpayers.

5. What was ‘natural and inalienable rights’?
   Ans.
1. The constitution began with a Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizens
2. Rights such as the right to life, freedom of speech, freedom of opinion, equality before law were established as ‘natural and inalienable rights’, i.e., they belonged to each human being by birth and could not be taken away
3. It was the duty of the state to protect each citizen’s natural right.

6. Why did slavery begin and why was it abolished in French colonies?
   Ans.
   1. The slave trade began in the 17th century. The colonies in the Caribbean – Martinique, Guadeloupe and San Domingo – were important Suppliers of commodities.
   2. But the reluctance of Europeans to go and work in distant and unfamiliar lands meant a shortage of labour on the plantations.
   3. Throughout the eighteenth century there was little criticism of slavery in France. The National Assembly did not pass any laws, fearing opposition from businessmen whose incomes depended on the slave trade.
   4. It was the Convention which in 1794 legislated to free all slaves in the French overseas possessions. This, however, turned out to be a short term measure. Napoleon reintroduced slavery.
   5. Slavery was finally abolished in French colonies in 1848.

7. Explain what a revolution is. In what way did the French Revolution mean different things to different people?
   Ans.
   It is an attempt by a large number of people to change the government of a country, especially by violent action.
   1. The Third Estate comprising the common men benefitted from the Revolution. The clergy and nobility had to relinquish power.
   2. Their land was confiscated. Their privileges were finished. The people of lower middle class also benefitted.
   3. Position of artisans and workers improved.
   4. Clergy, feudal lords, nobles and even women were disappointed. The revolution did not bring real equality as everyone was not given the right to vote meaning women who got it finally in 1946.

8. Who was the people who comprised the Third Estate? Who paid the taxes and to whom?
   Ans.
   1. The people who comprised the Third Estate were big businessmen, merchants, lawyers, peasants, artisans, small peasants, landless labour and servants.
   2. These were 95 per cent of the population. They had to pay taxes to the state. Taxes included taille, tithes and a number of indirect taxes.

9. Who formed the National Assembly? On what date is ‘Bastille Day’ celebrated and why?
   Ans.
   1. The representatives of the Third Estate assembled at Versailles on 20 June and declared themselves a National Assembly.
2. The Bastille Day is celebrated on 14th July every year because on this day the unruly Paris mob stormed and attacked the prison of Bastille which was considered a symbol of terror and despotism.

10. Name three famous writers and philosophers who influenced the French Revolution. What were their ideas?
Ans.
1. Jean Jacques Rousseau – a French Swiss philosopher. His main idea was – man is naturally good and that society of civilisation makes man anxious and unhappy.
2. Mirabeau – he brought about a journal and delivered powerful speeches to the crowds at Versailles.
3. Voltaire – A famous French writer. He exposed the evils prevailing in the Church and administration. The numbers of the first two estates were the (i) Clergy and (ii) Nobility respectively.

LONG ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS (5 MARKS):

1. Explain the importance of the following events on the course of the French Revolution:
   (a) Storming of the Bastille (b) The passing of the Civil Constitution of the clergy
Ans.
   (a) On July 14, 1789, a mob of Paris stormed the fortress – the prison of Bastille – considered a symbol of oppression and despotism. The Swiss guards were killed and prisoners set free. The mob stole arms and ammunition. To this day, France celebrates ‘Bastille Day’ on 14th July every year.
   (b) In 1790, the Civil Constitution nationalised the church. The clergy or group of persons who enjoyed special powers in the church were also forced to relinquish power. Tithes were abolished and lands owned by the church were confiscated.

2. Describe the Reign of Terror and role played by Robespierre in it.
Ans.
The period from 1793 to 1794 is referred to as the Reign of Terror.
   1. Maximilian Robespierre, leader of the Jacobins, followed the policy of severe control and punishment.
   2. All those he saw as enemies of the Republic — ex-nobles, clergy, political opponents — were arrested, tried and guillotined if found guilty.
   3. He issued laws placing a maximum ceiling on wages and prices.
   4. Meat and bread were rationed.
   5. Use of expensive white flour was forbidden.
Robespierre followed his policies so relentlessly that even his supporters began to demand moderation. Finally, he was convicted, arrested and guillotined in July 1794.

3. What did the following symbols convey in the Declaration of Rights?
   (i) The broken chain
   (ii) The bundle of rods or fasces
   (iii) Sceptre
(iv) Snake biting its tail to form a ring
(v) Red Phrygian cap
(vi) The law tablet

Ans.
(i) The broken chains: Chains were used to fetter slaves. A broken chain stands for the act of becoming free.
(ii) The bundle of rods or fasces: One rod can be easily broken, but not an entire bundle. Strength lies in unity.
(iii) Sceptre: Symbol of royal power.
(iv) Snake biting its tail to form a ring: Symbol of eternity. A ring has neither beginning nor end.
(v) Red Phrygian cap: Cap worn by a slave upon becoming free.
(vi) The law tablet: The law is the same for all, and all are equal before it.

4. Write short note on Jacobins?
Ans.
1. They got their name from the former convent of St. Jacob in Paris.
2. They belonged to the less prosperous sections of the society.
3. They included small shopkeepers, artisans such as shoemakers, pastry cooks, watch-makers, printers, as well as servants and daily wage earners.
4. Their leader was Maximilian Robespierre.
5. A large group among the Jacobin decided to wear long striped trousers similar to those worn by dock workers.
6. This was to set themselves apart from the fashionable sections of society especially the nobles who wore knee breeches.

5. Discuss the participation of women in political clubs, their activities and demands.
Ans.
From the very beginning, women were active participants in the events which brought about so many important changes in French society.
1. They hoped that their involvement would pressurise the revolutionary government to introduce measures to improve their lives.
2. Most women of the third estate had to work for a living. They worked as seamstresses or laundresses, sold flowers, fruits and vegetables at the market, or were employed as domestic servants in the houses of prosperous people.
3. Most women did not have access to education or job training. Their wages were lower than those of men.
4. One of their main demands was that women should be given the same political rights as men.
5. Women were disappointed that the constitution of 1791 reduced them to passive citizens.

7. Describe the causes for the fall of Jacobin government in France.
Ans.
1. The Jacobin government in France was based on extreme measures. The period from 1793-1794 is referred to as the reign of terror.
2. Robespierre followed a policy of severe Control and punishment.
3. All those he saw as being ‘enemies’ of the republic nobles and clergy, members of other political parties, even members of his own party who did not agree with his methods—were arrested, imprisoned and guillotined. This led to chaos and resentment among the people.

4. Robespierre’s government ordered shutting down of churches and converting church buildings into barricades or offices. Thus the clergy turned against the Jacobin regime and hastened its fall.

5. Robespierre pursued his policies so relentlessly that even his supporters turned against him. They began to demand moderation and a middle path. Finally, he himself was tried by a court in July 1794, arrested and guillotined.

HOTS
1. What landmark decisions were taken by the National Assembly led by the Third Estate on 4th August, 1789?
Ans.
1. Louis XVI finally accorded recognition to the National Assembly and accepted the principle that his powers would be checked by a constitution.
2. On 4 August 1789, 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
3. Tithes were abolished and lands owned by the church were confiscated. As a result, the government acquired assets worth at least 2 billion livres.

2. Describe the importance of Declaration of the Right of Man in France.
Ans.
1. The Declaration of the Right of Man in France was a landmark decision in the history of France.
2. The constitution began with a declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. Rights such as the right to life, freedom of speech, freedom of opinion, equality before law, were established as ‘natural and inalienable’ rights. That is, they belonged to each human being by birth and could not be taken away
3. It was the duty of the state to protect each citizen’s natural rights. The declaration of the Right of Man and Citizens influenced revolutionary movements elsewhere too.

3. Discuss the participation of women in political clubs, their activities and demands.
Ans.
1. Women played important role regarding various activities. In order to discuss and voice their interests women started their own political clubs and newspapers. About sixty women’s clubs came up in different French cities.
2. The Society of Revolutionary and Republican Women was the most famous of them, their main demands were that
   (a) Women should be given the same political rights as men.
   (b) They demanded the right to vote, to be elected to the Assembly and to hold political office.
3. In the early years, the revolutionary government did introduce laws that helped improve the lives of women. Together with the creation of state schools, schooling was made compulsory for all girls. Their fathers could no longer force them into marriage against their will. Marriage was made into a contract entered into freely and registered under civil law. Divorce was
made legal, and could be applied for by both women and men. Women could now train for jobs, could become artists or run small businesses.

4. Women’s struggle for equal political rights, however, continued. During the Reign of Terror, the new government issued laws ordering closure of women’s clubs, and banning their political activities. Women’s movements for voting rights and equal wages continued through the next two hundred years in many countries of the world. It was finally in 1946 that women in France won the right to vote.
THE FRENCH REVOLUTION – MCQs

1. The Third Estate comprised
   (a) Poor servants and small peasants, landless labourers
   (b) Peasants and artisan
   (c) Big businessmen, merchants, lawyers etc.
   (d) All the above

2. That ‘each member should have one vote’ was advocated by:
   (a) Georges Danton
   (b) Rousseau
   (c) Jean Paul Marat
   (d) the Jacobins

3. Which of the following decisions was taken by the convention
   (a) Declared France a constitutional monarchy
   (b) Abolished the monarchy
   (c) All men and women above 21 years got the right to vote
   (d) Declared France a Republic

4. Which of the following is not the idea of the revolutionary journalist Desmoulins about Liberty?
   (a) Liberty is finishing off your enemies
   (b) Liberty is Happiness, Reason, Equality and Justice
   (c) Liberty is the Declaration of Right
   (d) Liberty is not a child who has to be disciplined before maturity

5. How does a ‘Subsistence Crisis’ happen?
   (a) Bad harvest leads to scarcity of grains
   (b) Food prices rise and the poorest cannot buy bread
   (c) Leads to weaker bodies, diseases, deaths and even food riots
   (d) All the above

6. In the war against Prussia and Austria, the army sang which patriotic song
   (a) ‘Liberty’, written by an unknown woman poet
   (b) ‘Marseillaise’ written by the poet Roget de Lisle
   (c) ‘Viva France’ written by a French peasant
   (d) None of the above
7. Which of the following statements is untrue about the Third Estate
   (a) The Third Estate was made of the poor only
   (b) Within the Third Estate some were rich and some were poor
   (c) Richer members of the Third Estate owned lands
   (d) Peasants were obliged to serve in the army, or build roads

8. Who wrote the pamphlet called 'What is the Third Estate'?
   (a) Mirabeau, a nobleman
   (b) Abbe Sieyes
   (c) Rousseau, a philosopher
   (d) Montesquieu

9. A guillotine was _______________________
   (a) A device consisting of two poles and a blade with which a person was beheaded
   (b) A fine sword with which heads were cut off
   (c) A special noose to hang people
   (d) None of the above

10. When did the French Revolution begin?
    (a) July 14, 1789
    (b) January 10, 1780
    (c) August 12, 1782
    (d) None of the above

11. The word livres stands for:
    (a) unit of currency in France
    (b) tax levied by the Church
    (c) Tax to be paid directly to the state
    (d) none of these

12. What was the effect of the rise of population of France from about 23 million in 1715 to 28 million in 1789?
    (a) Education became difficult
    (b) Rapid increase in the demand for food grains
    (c) Housing problem occurred
    (d) All the above
13. What was the ‘Subsistence Crisis’ which occurred frequently in France?
   (a) An extreme situation endangering the basic means of livelihood
   (b) Subsidy in food grains
   (c) Large-scale production of food grains
   (d) None of the above

14. What was the name of tax which was directly paid to the state by the Third Estate?
   (a) Tithes
   (b) livres
   (c) taille
   (d) all of these

15. What was ‘Estates General’?
   (a) Post of Army General
   (b) A political body
   (c) Head of all landed property
   (d) Advisor of the king

16. Which social groups emerged in the 18th century?
   (a) Lawyers
   (b) Administrative officials
   (c) Middle class
   (d) All the above

17. The term ‘Old Regime’ is usually used to describe
   (a) France before 1000 B.C.
   (b) Society of France after 1789 A.D.
   (c) Society and institutions of France before 1789 A.D.
   (d) None of the above

18. In which of these countries was the model of government as advocated by Montesquieu put into effect?
   (a) USA
   (b) China
   (c) USSR
   (d) All the above
19. Which of these books was written by John Locke?
   (a) The Spirit of the Laws
   (b) Two Treatises on Government
   (c) The Social Contract
   (d) All the above

20. When did Louis XVI call an assembly of Estates General to pass proposals for new taxes?
   (a) 2 January, 1775
   (b) 10 March, 1780
   (c) 5 May, 1789
   (d) 14 July, 1789

21. In the meeting of the Estates General, the members of the Third Estate demanded that
   (a) All the three Estates should have one vote altogether
   (b) Each Estate should have one vote
   (c) Each member of the three Estates should have one vote
   (d) None of the above

22. On 20th June, the representatives of the Third Estate assembled in the indoor tennis court of
    Versailles for
   (a) hunger strike
   (b) Drafting a Constitution for France which limited the king’s power
   (c) Declaring a revolt
   (d) Making an appeal to support the king in times of need

23. Who led the representatives of the Third Estate in Versailles on 20th June?
   (a) Mirabeau
   (b) Abbe Sieyes
   (c) Louis XVI
   (d) Both a and b

24. What did Louis XVI do, seeing the power of his revolting subjects?
   (a) He accorded recognition to the National Assembly
   (b) Accepted checks on his powers
   (c) Ordered his army to crush the revolt
   (d) Both (a) and (b)
25. Which of these provisions were passed by the Assembly on the night of 4 August, 1789?
(a) Abolition of feudal system of obligations
(b) Clergy had to give up its privileges
(c) Tithes were abolished
(d) All the above

26. The new Constitution made France a
(a) Constitutional Monarchy
(b) Communist state
(c) Fully democratic state
(d) none of the above

27. According to the new constitution of 1791, the National Assembly was to be
(a) Elected directly
(b) appointed by the king
(c) elected indirectly
(d) a hereditary body

28. Which of these people were entitled to vote?
(a) Only men above 25 years of age
(b) Men and women above 30 years of age
(c) Men who paid taxes equal to at least 3 days of a labourer’s wage
(d) Both (a) and (c)

29. Which of these rights were not established as ‘natural and inalienable’ rights by the constitution of 1791?
(a) Right to life
(b) Freedom of speech and opinion
(c) Equality before the law
(d) All the above

30. Which of these provisions form a part of the ‘Declaration of Rights of Man and Citizen’?
1. Men are born free
2. They are equal in rights before the law
3. Liberty means powers to do what is not injurious to others
4. All the above