

## French Revolution : 1789-93

1. The French Revolution was a great event in the history not only of France & Europe but of mankind as a whole. It gave to humanity new ideas of 'Liberty & Equality & Fraternity'.
2. The French Revolution is the name given to the struggle which swept away the Old Regime in France and brought about fundamental changes in the socio-political set-up.
3. This political upheaval began in 1789. King Louis XIV and his successors had brought divine-right absolutism to the peak. The French king, in the 18th century, had unlimited powers. Opponents were put in prison without trial.
4. French society consisted of three estates or classes. The first (clergy) and second (nobility) estates were privileged in many ways. Members of third estate - commoners (middle class, workers & peasants) were the 'under dogs'. They made 90% of the population. Almost the entire tax burden fell on third estate. But the privileged classes were exempted from these taxes.
5. These undemocratic features of French society were sharply criticised by able writers and thinkers like Montesquieu (1689-1775), Voltaire (1694-1778) and Rousseau (1712-1778).
6. The immediate cause of the French Revolution was the bankrupt condition of the French treasury brought about in part by the extravagant expenditure and inefficiency of Louis XV & Louis XVI.
7. The French Revolution started with the fall of Bastille Fort. The mobs in Paris attacked the Bastille on July 14, 1789, killed its governor and freed the prisoners. This ancient fortress, where political prisoners were kept, was the symbol of tyranny in France. Its capture aroused the whole nation. Peasants in the provinces plundered and burnt several castles.
8. 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity' became the watchword.
9. Government in France broke down, as royal officials fled and the people stopped paying taxes. The National Assembly governed France from 1789-1791. It drafted a constitution which created a limited monarchy. Its preamble was the famous Declaration of the Rights of Man. All feudal rights were abolished. Local government was reorganised. The old provinces were replaced by 83 departments. Church lands were confiscated and sold to peasants. Special Church privileges were abolished. The first Republic was proclaimed on sep. 21,

1792. King Louis XVI and his queen Marie Antoinette were beheaded on the guillotine on Jan. 21, 1793 and Oct. 16, 1793 respectively on charges of treason. Napoleon, after some time, emerged as the strong man of France.

**10.** The French Revolution was an event of fundamental importance not only for France but for whole of Europe and ultimately for the whole world. In France, the Revolution established the political supremacy of the middle class in the towns and transferred the bulk of landed property to the peasantry in the countryside. For Europe and the world, it represented an ideal of popular sovereignty and equality before the law.

