Causes and Effects of the French Revolution

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***Introduction***

The French Revolution was considered to be a period of radical political disorder in Europe and France. The society of France underwent several changes as religious, aristocratic, and feudal privileges ceased to exist. The monarchy was eliminated, and traditional ideas about culture and hierarchy gave into new Enlightenment inalienable rights and citizenship principles. The French Revolution transformed the world, and even today the people of France celebrated the Bastille Storming on 14 July 1789 as their national holiday. The social, political, and economic problems lead France into a revolution and consequently, influenced the urban development of the country.

***Discussion***

***Causes***

Absolutism is considered to be one of the most significant political cause of the French revolution. Before the revolution of French, they were under the absolute monarchy role where monarch demanded the power of the divine. Such monarchy was absolute in the sense that no individual, group, or institution had the right for resisting the command of the king. Similarly, the monarch also demanded that they are the individual whom the god put in the special power position over others. As power is handed over to others by God, so no can ask about their power legitimacy. However, asking the monarchy was also considered to be blasphemy as it meant that questioning monarch and God was not accountable to anyone else expect god. So, they lived in extravagance and luxurious lifestyle at their royal palaces. So if anyone wanted to oppose the monarch, they had to face extreme punishment. According to the law which was based on the Letter de Catchet, the monarch was authorized to arrest any individual at any time and could imprison them on their opposition. As a result of which the people of French got angry and started seeking for the reformation of their status.

Similarly, inequality of rights was considered to be another significant French revolution political cause. Before the revolution of French people were separated into legal categories which were known as the three estates or orders. Due to which the rights of people were varied from each other which was considered to be totally unjust. The most significant social division before the revolution in French was between commoner and noble. The first estate had the clergy which was number about more than a hundred thousand people. More than ten percent of the land was owned by the church. This clergy was exempt from the chief tax of France although the church had agreed for paying a voluntary contribution after every five years to the state.

The Second Estate was considered to be the nobility which contained more than three hundred thousand people who owned more than thirty percent of the land. Under Louis XVI and Louis XV, the nobility had continued for playing a crucial and important role in the society of French, that hold several leading positions in the law courts, military, government, and the higher offices of the church. Similarly, it had also been observed that several heavy French industries were also controlled by the nobles with the help of ownership or investment of metallurgical and mining enterprises. The Third Estate was known as society commoners, which constituted the overwhelming French population majority. They were divided by the vast differences in wealth, occupation, and level of education. This Estate consisted of shop keepers, skilled artisans, peasants, and other wage earners in the cities. The 18th century had been considered to be the period of quick urban growth as ninety percent of French towns had fewer than ten-thousand inhabitants and only nine cities had more than fifty thousand inhabitants. In the 18th century, the prices of consumer rose rapidly than wages, as a result of which such urban societies experienced a decrease in the power of purchasing. The Third state had their own grievances because they were excluded from the political and social privilege that was monopolized by the noble. Such middle-class resentments remained for a longer period of time which was assumed to be a major French revolution cause.

The collapse of the financial status of government was also considered to be the most important cause of the French revolution. Before the French revolution, the government of France was experiencing crises of economy and was well short of money. The expenditures of government were continued for growing due to costly royal extravagance and wars. So, the monarch enhanced the taxes for earning more revenues of government, but yet the enhanced taxes did not fulfill the budget deficit of the government. So in order to fulfill the expenditure of the government, it was heavily dependent on the taking loans. Moreover, the magistrate, prelates, and nobles were also refused for cooperating in bad condition of the economy. The attempt of government for completing the expenditures alone brought several disasters. Due to which the state experienced heavy bankruptcy whereas fully fifty percent of the annual budget of France went for paying interest of loans and other fifty percent were available for maintaining the military, spending on the court and the royal family as well as the state's productive functions respectively. So, such crises directly struck the monarchy which had lost several royal authority mantles. Another political consequences of the revolution of French were considered to be the absolute monarchy transformation into the representative government. As monarch had ruled over France for more than four hundred years which was terminated by the revolution of French[[1]](#footnote-1). As it was highlighted in the representative government that the king remained the head of state, but the power of lawmaking resided in the National assembly. Although the monarchy was reestablished by the great powers after Napoleon downfalls, but still it could not survive beyond 1830 as the monarchs were already weakened by the transformation caused by the revolution of French.

Declaration of man rights is another significant consequence of the revolution of French. In the eighteen century, the men of France never entertained the idea that the rights of citizen and men were reserved only for the Frenchmen. The constitutional parliament or assembly came out with the human rights documents. It guaranteed representative government, equality, freedom of an individual, and liberty such as freedom of property ownership, worship, association, press, and speech. As they were abused during the period of terror, they became the freedom foundation. Moreover, the rights inequalities during the past political system had also transformed by the reforms of the constitution, so the particular privilege for the noble could be abolished. The revolutionaries also thought of equality and liberty as the mankind common birthright.

The leading social stress cause in France before the revolution was considered to be its large population. At the starting of the nineteenth century, France had twenty million people living near its borders, and this number was equal to nearly twenty percent of the population of Europe of non-Russian. Over the century course, this number was enhanced by another eight to ten million as acute food shortages and epidemic diseases were diminished, and the death rate was declined. It has risen by only one million between the fifteenth century and sixteenth century, and this population was concentrated in the rural side of France which was considered to be nearly thirty million French under Louis XVI. The most exception was considered to be of Paris, which was home to about six hundred thousand by 1789. Other cities such as Marseilles, Bordeaux, and Lyons had more than one hundred thousand within their limits. Such demographics had a great impact on both outsides and inside France. Moreover, the eighteenth century also saw capitalism intrusion into everyday life. As a result of the overseas trade's large expansion and domestic trade's longer-term development, the economy experienced continued growth. Although local exchange or self-sufficiency, preponderant style of economic life but such capitalism incursions started drawing everyone into some regional form and even international exchange. Amongst such a broad population and economic shifts, lifestyle in the country remained the same, especially in the small farms of family. Their workers and owners were called as peasants, although they separated considerably in statues and wealth. A few others rented their land to others for work, but still, there were several laborers who were anxious for work in exchange for food to eat and a place to stay. According to some historians, more than ninety percent of the peasants lived in the lean years lived below the level of subsistence earning only enough for feeding their families. So, the documents on life in the countryside reflected the poverty omnipresence at that time[[2]](#footnote-2). The Arthur Young who was one of the famous observers of the French countryside in eighteenth-century considered such tiny farms the greatest weakness of agriculture of France, particularly while comparing with the commercial and large farms. Other researchers also commented on the several impoverished peasants before 1789 by blaming them for the tension between poor and rich on the vast social differences of the country. Bread were considered to be the staple of several urban diets due to which the sharp rise in prices were felt quickly and were also protested loudly at the market of grains or at the local shops of bakers. Most people also diverted their anger at the suppliers of bread rather than the authorities of politics. As a result of the popularity and credibility of government officials came to be linked to the functioning of bread and grain makers. Urban workers were found an opportunity for expressing their discontent by-elections to the Estates General. These elections were performed in the neighborhood gatherings form at which the electives collectively complied and designated a representative list of grievances for presenting it to the King, who communicated them for guiding the representative. Many of such petitions expressed opposition to the privileges of officeholders and nobles. The National Assembly decrees against privilege which had been the French social order privilege and was undoubtedly cheered by the populace. This elimination of privilege marked the starting of another social distinctions system which set forth into the new constitution that was introduced by the National assembly.

***Impact***

The most important French revolution consequence was considered to be the establishment and constitution of the rule of law in France history. Till the second last decade of eighteen century, France had no constitution for safeguarding the freedom and rights of people. In 1791, the government of France enacted the constitution which as amended in the last years of the eighteenth century. By the construction of such a constitution, the role of law was reflected in the law for serving the French society which was violated in the past. The constitution also differentiated the legislature, judiciary, and the executive. This constitution also decreased the excessive powers of the king for writing the principle of all sovereignty that is essential for the nation.

Liberalism is a moral and political philosophy which is based on equality and liberty. During the revolution of French, the hereditary aristocracy was given with the slogan of fraternity, equality, and liberty". As a result of which France became the first state in the history for granting universal suffrage of male. There were two significant events which marked the liberalism triumph during the revolution. The first was the feudalism abolition in France on the night of August 4, 1789. This noted the feudal collapse and also the traditional privileges and rights. The second event was considered to be the Declaration passage for the rights of the citizen and man in August 1789. This declaration is the document of the foundation of both human rights and liberalism. As a result of the success of revolution of French, governments of liberal were maintained in the nations all around Europe, North America, and South America through the 19th century. Hence the revolution of French is considered to be the defining moment in Liberalism.

The revolution of French did not produce ideologies of the 19th century known as communism and socialism. However, it also provided a social and intellectual environment in which such spokesmen and their ideologies could flourish. The communist philosophers of France of the late 18th century not only criticized the personal properties but also known for its establishment and abolition of a society based on the communal and egalitarian ownership of property. The political journalist and agitator of France François-Noël Babeuf went to the extent of revolutionary action of the advocating violent in the name of wealth socialization. The French revolution also had a great impact on the neighboring countries. The armies of the French revolution during the 1790s and after under Napoleon, controlled and invaded Italy, Netherlands, Belgium, parts of Germany, and Switzerland. The French invasion of such territories removed the economic and legal barriers which had protected the urban oligarchies, guilds, clergy, and nobility. The revolution of French thus destroyed the power of elites and oligarchies which opposed the economic change. Evidence related to the French revolution suggested that areas which were occupied by the French and underwent reforms of institutions experienced quick economic and urbanization growth particularly after 1850. The arrival of new industrial and economic opportunities in the 2nd half of the 19th century which then resulted in the more economic Europe’s growth.

During the period of the French Revolution, the slaves in Saint Domingue were inspired for revolting French leaders in order to recognize the full revolution meaning. The Revolution of Haitian started on August 22, 1791, as the Saint Domingue slaves started for killing their masters converted the colony into a civil war which involved British, Spanish, French, mulattoes, and black participants. Before the Revolution of French, Catholicism had been considered to the official religion in France and the Catholic Church of France was also very powerful. It owned around more than ten percent of the land and received tithes that were considered to be the one-tenth of common people annual earnings which were taken for supporting of the clergy. From such a dominant status, the Catholic Church was destroyed during the French Revolution. The nuns and priest were turned out, its leaders exiled or executed, the property was controlled through states, and the tithes were abolished. The 1801's Concordat, an agreement between Church and Napoleon, terminated this period and manufactured rules for a relationship between the French State and Church. Although the Concordat restored some traditional Church roles it did not restores its monasteries, lands or power and the worship of religion could never become prominent in France as before.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Nationalism is considered to be the ideology which emphasized allegiance, devotion, or loyalty to a nation and places such obligations above other group or individual interests. The Revolution of French started the movement towards the modern state of the nation and played a significant role in the nationalism birth across Europe. As the armies of France under Bonaparte of Napoleon captured the territories, so the nationalism ideology was spread all around Europe. The Revolution did not impact the nationalism of France but also had a long and profound lasting impact on intellectuals of Europe. As a result of such struggle, national liberation became one of the most significant themes of nineteenth and twentieth century of the world and Europe[[4]](#footnote-4). Before the revolution of French, people of France generally lived in the government form which had been placed for centuries, and that form was considered to be a monarchy in several places while after the Revolution of French, no government was considered to be legitimate without any justification. The Republicans opposed those who were in favor of monarchy. So several ideologies were arising due to the Revolution of French which includes communism, socialism, liberalism, and nationalism.

***Conclusion***

So, it is concluded that the revolution of French had a significant impact on Europe modern history. There were there major French revolution political causes which included the collapse of government political economy, rights inequalities, and the absolutism. Although there were some other political factors as well, but these three play a significant role in the revolution of the French. The consequences of these causes were considered to the absolute monarchy transformation into the representative government. The second most significant consequence was the man's right establishment where all the people got their privileges and rights regardless of another social status. Similarly, the most significant consequence was the construction of the role of law and constitutions.

Annotated Bibliography

Palmer, Robert R. *The world of the French Revolution*. Routledge, 2016.

Palmer's book offers a brief history of the French Revolution. He was considered to be one of the most highly regarded historians in the 20th century. The palmer’s main contribution to the debate over the most contentious and significant events in the French Revolution was to deploy evaluation skill of critical thinking for revealing the weakness in existing arguments related to the causes of French Revolution. He described a compelling new narrative for explaining why the monarchy of French destroyed in 1789.

De Tocqueville, Alexis. *Recollections: French Revolution of 1848*. Routledge, 2017.

Tocqueville offers exciting and candid scenes in his book about what actually happened in the French revolution. Book has a relevance that extends beyond France and other countries. This book shows that Tocqueville was not only an active participant in the Revolution of French in 1848 but also a keen observer with a disconnected attitude of mind. It is presented as a translation basis on the definitive edition of French in 1964. In this, he beautifully described some common economical causes of the French Revolution.

Gough, Hugh. *The newspaper press in the French Revolution*. Routledge, 2016.

Gough in his book describes the importance of newspaper press in the French Revolution. When the ancient regime destroyed in 1789, the newspaper press was free for the first time in the history of French. This result was an explosion in the newspaper number with over two thousand titles appearing between 1789 and 1799. This book published in 1988 which describes the French Press growth during that time by displaying the importance of provincial newspaper emergence and determining the journalism relationship with political power. The concluding chapters discussed the newspaper economic during that decade by analyzing the machinery of sales, distribution, and printing.

Popkin, Jeremy D. *A Short History of the French Revolution (Subscription)*. Routledge, 2016.

This book of Popkin is considered to be one of the best books on the history of the French Revolution. In this book, the historical events are studied more closely which took place in France between 1789 and 1815. This study seeks to explain the Revolution origins, leader's goals, men and women role in the event for drawing up the balance sheet of its failures and its success. This new edition of A Short History of the French Revolution includes coverage of women during the French Revolution, coverage of struggles over slavery and race, and also some political violence during the Revolution. After reading this book, the readers can get comprehensive knowledge of the causes and consequences of the French Revolution.

1. Palmer, Robert R. *The world of the French Revolution*. Routledge, 2016 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. De Tocqueville, Alexis. *Recollections: French Revolution of 1848*. Routledge, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Gough, Hugh. *The newspaper press in the French Revolution*. Routledge, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Popkin, Jeremy D. *A Short History of the French Revolution (Subscription)*. Routledge, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)