



## The French Revolution

Q1. Describe the circumstances leading to the outbreak of revolutionary protest in France.

Ans. The circumstances leading to the outbreak of revolutionary protest in France:

Social Inequality - French society in the eighteenth century was divided into three estates, and only members of the third estate paid taxes. The members of the first two estates, that is, the clergy and the nobility, enjoyed certain privileges by birth. The most important of these was exemption from paying taxes to the state.

Political Causes - Long years of war had drained the financial resources of France. The war added more than a billion livres to a debt that had already risen to more than 2 billion livres. To meet its regular expenses, such as the cost of maintaining an army, the court, running government offices or universities, the state was forced to increase taxes.

Economic Problems - The population of France rose from about 23 million in 1715 to 28 million in 1789. This led to a rapid increase in the demand for food grains. Production of grains could not keep pace with the demand. So the price of bread rose rapidly. But wages did not keep pace with the rise in prices. This led to a subsistence crisis.

Emergence of middle class - The eighteenth century witnessed the emergence of social groups, termed the middle class. All of these were educated and believed that no group in society should be privileged by birth. Rather, a person's social position must depend on his merit. These ideas envisaging a society based on freedom and equal laws and opportunities for all.

Other causes - On 5 May 1789, Louis XVI called together an assembly of the Estates General to pass proposals for new taxes. Voting in the Estates General in the past had been conducted according to the principle that each estate had one vote. But members of the third estate demanded that voting now be conducted by the assembly as a whole, where each member would have one vote. When the king rejected this proposal, members of the third estate walked out of the assembly in protest.