

# School of Arts, Humanities and Social Science

CSJMU Kanpur

## Sociology



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# THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

The French Revolution, which erupted in 1789 marked a turning point in the history of human struggle for freedom and equality

## French society

- 1. The First Estate** consisted of the clergy, which was stratified into higher clergy, such as the cardinal, the archbishops, the bishops and the abbots. They lived a life of luxury and gave very little attention to religion,
- 2. The Second Estate** consisted of the nobility. There were two kinds of nobles, the nobles of the sword (big landlords) and the nobles of the robe (nobles by title as magistrates and judges).
- 3. The Third Estate** comprised the rest of the society and included the peasants, the merchants, the artisans, and others.

## The Political Aspects of the French society

1. Divine Right of King
2. Under the rule of the King, the ordinary people had no personal rights.
3. The King's word was law and no trials were required

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## Intellectual Developments in France

Some of the major philosophers, whose ideas influenced the French people, were rationalists who believed that all true things could be proved by reason. Some of these thinkers were, Montesquieu (1689-1755), Locke (1632-1704), Voltaire (1694-1778), and Rousseau (1712-1778).

**Montesquieu** in his book, *The Spirit of the Law*, held that there should not be concentration of authority, such as executive, legislative, and judicial, at one place. He believed in the theory of the separation of powers and the liberty of the individual.

**Locke, an Englishman**, advocated that every individual has certain rights, which cannot be taken by any authority. These rights were (i) right to life, (ii) right to property, and (iii) the right to personal freedom. He also believed that any ruler who took away these rights from his people should be removed from the seat of power and replaced by another ruler who is able to protect these rights.

**Voltaire, a French philosopher,** advocated religious toleration and freedom of speech. He also stood for the rights of individuals, for freedom of speech and expression.

**Rousseau** wrote in his book, *The Social Contract*, that the people of a country have the right to choose their sovereign. He believed that people can develop their personalities best only under a government which is of their own choice.



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