

## Democratic and Nationalist Revolutions (1600-1900 CE)



Figure 8.1: A march for democracy in Hong Kong

You must have come across words like ‘nationalism’ and ‘democracy’ in books, political speeches, newspapers, TV and radio. What do you think is the meaning of these words? What is the difference between the rule of kings and democracy? Discuss in class.

In 1600 CE, most of the regions of the world were under the rule of kings, emperors or feudal lords. These rulers very often acted on their whims - imposing taxes and duties, punishing those who opposed them, either imprisoning them or killing them, confiscating people’s property, changing laws or making new ones. The kings and feudal lords made the laws, implemented them and dispensed justice. So there was no restraint on them.

The kings managed the affairs of their kingdoms and the people played no part. There was no place for their ideas, culture, needs and feelings. They could not choose their rulers. The people had no role in the formation of the kingdoms. The kings used their armies to conquer lands and establish their kingdoms. So there were kings and kingdoms but there were no nation states. There was no democracy. That’s why people were not very emotionally attached to the kings who ruled them.

The political revolutions that took place from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries played a big part in changing this situation. Today, most countries in the world are governed democratically. All their adult citizens elect their representatives who make laws and govern the state. After a fixed period, the people again hold elections and choose a new set of representatives to lead them. The law protects the rights of the citizen.

We shall study this process of change, which began in England, in this chapter.

## 8.1 The Conflict Between the King and the Parliament in England

**Locate England and its neighbouring countries on the world map in your classroom. If you know anything about any of these countries, share with the class.**

England was ruled by kings at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In those days, there was a system for the king to consult his subjects and listen to their suggestions. It was called the Parliament. Whenever the king wished to impose a new tax or make an important decision, he convened the parliament for consultation. This became the traditional practice and no tax could be imposed without the consent of the parliament.

The parliament was divided into two houses – the House of Lords and the House of Commons. The House of Lords was composed of high-ranking priests of the church and hereditary feudal landlords. The people who owned property in the villages and towns voted to elect their representatives in the House of Commons. Women, poor peasants and labourers had no vote.

India did not have a parliamentary system in the Middle Ages. The kings and emperors consulted their close confidantes and advisors but they were not bound to take their advice. They acted on their own, using their discretion to raise or lower taxes. The people had no formal role in the process.

**Do you think the parliament in England during the 17<sup>th</sup> century was democratic? Discuss, giving reasons.**

**The Indian kings and emperors consulted their close confidantes and advisors before making decisions. Was there any difference between the systems in England and India?**

The relationship between the king and the parliament began breaking down in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The parliament wanted a bigger role in state matters but the king didn't want to be accountable to the parliament. James I became king in 1603. He believed that kings received their power from god and were answerable only to god. So the parliament had no legal right to object to whatever he decided.

The rift between the king and the parliament widened after Charles I ascended the throne in 1625. They fought over who had the right to impose taxes. Charles I imposed a new tax without getting the consent of the parliament and began forcing the merchants and landowners to loan money. Those who refused to give the loans were imprisoned. The parliament tried to warn the king and presented him with a Petition of Right in 1628. The petition pointed out that the king had not convened a sitting of the parliament for 11 years because of the breakdown of relations.

In 1640, the royal treasury was empty because of a war against a neighbouring country. The king had to impose new taxes to pay for the war so he was compelled to convene the parliament. But the parliament wanted to control the despotic behaviour of the king and his councillors. It announced punishments



*Figure 8.2: The English parliament during the reign of King James I. The king sat on a raised dais in the centre of the assembly*

**An Extract from the 1628 Petition of Right**

**... no person should be compelled to make any loans to the king against his will ... your subjects ... should not be compelled to contribute to any tax ... not set by common consent in parliament ... no free man may be taken or imprisoned or be (dispossessed) of his freehold or liberties ... or be outlawed or exiled, or in any manner destroyed, (except) by the ... law of the land.**

for the ministers and officials. This sparked a civil war between the supporters of the parliament and the royalists (supporters of the king) that continued for five years. Oliver Cromwell assembled an army of the common people and led the parliamentarians to challenge the king. Charles I was defeated in 1649 and the parliament sentenced him to death.

After the execution of Charles I, England became a Republic in which the king had no place. This Republic lasted for only 11 years because Cromwell himself began behaving like a despot. After Cromwell's death, the parliament invited Charles II, the son of Charles I, to become king. Charles II and his heir James II again tried to establish their authoritarian rule independent of the parliament. The parliament, on its part, continued its efforts to curb the despotism of the king. In 1688-89, it invited Mary II, the daughter of James II, and her husband William of Orange to ascend the throne. But it placed some strict conditions on how she should rule, which Queen Mary accepted.

The conditions were that no law shall be enacted or changed and no new taxes shall be imposed without the consent of parliament. Also, the parliament would be consulted to raise the strength of the army. Other conditions included convening the parliament regularly, not interfering in parliamentary elections and not punishing any member for anything they said during the parliamentary sessions. Mary II and William became queen and king of England only after accepting these conditions.

These changes occurred without war and bloodshed. Hence, it was called the Glorious Revolution of 1688 or the Bloodless Revolution. It saw the establishment of a Constitutional Monarchy in place of the despotic and authoritarian rule of kings. In such a monarchy, a representative body of the people was elected to review the king's governance and restrain him from behaving like a despot. The people were also given several rights: freedom of expression and assembly, arrest and punishment only by legal means, etc. This attempt to look for a compromise between the king and the people did bring about a change in the political system. It can be seen as a step towards democracy.

**What were the differences that arose between the king and the parliament between 1600 and 1688?**

**'The king shall not interfere in the election of the members of parliament' – why was this condition imposed?**

**What do you think may have happened if the members were not free to express their views and opinions in parliament (including opposing the king)?**

**Should the governance of a state be left to the whims and desires of a king or not? Discuss in class.**

**In India, Emperor Akbar and Jahangir were ruling the Mughal Empire at this time. If their court had a parliament, like there was in England, would the situation have changed, and how? Discuss in class.**

There were two aspects to the evolution of democracy in England. The first was controlling the power of the kings and replacing authoritarianism with the rule of an elected parliament. The second was universal franchise – allowing every citizen to vote. Gradually in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the parliament established a council of ministers that was accountable for its work. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, even the labour class got the right to vote and, going forward into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, women could also exercise their franchise. In this way, it took more than 250 years for these changes to take root.

## 8.2 The Middle Class and its Political Views

One interesting question is: why did it take so long to establish democracy? Equally interesting is the question: why did similar changes take place in European countries after England? Who were the leaders of these struggles and what inspired them?

The leading role in the struggle for democracy was played by the middle class, whose emergence we had discussed in the earlier chapters. In England, this class was made up of big and small merchants who earned a living by trading in different countries. There were also small landowners who tried to earn a profit by selling their farm produce. They were all distressed by the despotic behaviour of the kings and the feudal lords. They wanted a government which would safeguard the interests of the trading class and lower taxes.

Apart from these people, there were artisans, serfs, labourers and others who were fed up with the feudal system. They not only wanted to end the exploitation of the kings and feudal lords but wanted to make fundamental changes in their society to narrow the gap between the rich and the poor and promote equality among all. Many among them even wanted to establish a Republic in which the people would collectively own the productive assets like land and everyone would work for a livelihood.

We can see that there were striking differences in the thinking of the middle class and the peasants and artisans. Although both groups joined hands to defeat Charles I, the poor still had no power after the Glorious Revolution. Take a look at this illustration in a paper published in 1649 (Figure 8.3). The paper says that the people of England cannot be free as long as the poor do not have land and do not have the right to farm their land collectively.

Trade and industry gained importance in the new economic system emerging in England. This increased the clout of people who wanted change. The kings, feudal lords and large landowners in the 17<sup>th</sup> century could no longer thwart the ambitions of the emerging new socio-economic groups.

*"England is not a free people, till the poor that have no land, have a free allowance to dig and labour the commons..."*  
Gerrard Winstanley, 1649



During those days, the European middle class was deeply influenced by the ideas of the Renaissance, Scientific Revolution, Reformation and Enlightenment. There were many political thinkers who opposed authoritarian rule and enthusiastically supported democracy. Prominent among them were John Locke (born 1632, died 1704) of England and Jean Jacques Rousseau (born 1712, died 1778) of France. Their ideas inspired the democratic thrust of the French and American revolutions.

*Figure 8.3: What atrocities do you see the peasants being subjected to in this picture?*



### John Locke

Locke is counted among the most influential philosophers in the world. He wrote against authoritarianism and in favour of democracy. He criticised the policies of Charles I and James II. He fled England to live in Holland in those days, returning only after Mary II became queen of England in 1688. He helped establish the theory of 'social contract' along with other philosophers of his age. According to the theory, people cooperate to establish a state that helps them meet their livelihood needs and protects their individual rights. People's rights and entitlements are the supreme concern of such a state. The king and his ministers derive their power from the people, hence they are accountable to the people.

Locke suggested that the different functions of the state be separated to protect people from authoritarian rule. He suggested creating three independent divisions – making laws, implementing laws and dispensing justice. In such a system, the parliament would make the laws, the king would implement them and an independent judiciary would dispense justice. This would prevent any one of these three institutions from becoming too powerful. The French thinker Montesquieu (born 1689, died 1755) later established this idea as the theory of 'separation of powers'.

*"All mankind being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty or possessions."*

What do you think Locke was trying to convey in this quote? Translate it into the language you speak at home.

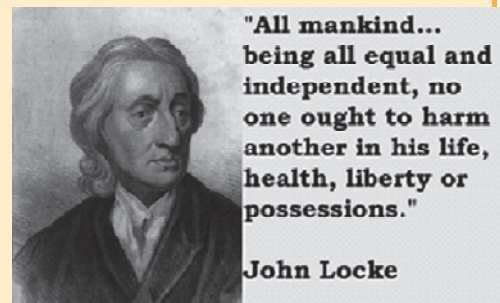


Figure 8.4: John Locke

**The constitution of India also separates the powers of the state into three branches – executive, legislature and judiciary. Has this helped to protect the Indian people from despotic rule?**

### Jean Jacques Rousseau

Rousseau outlined his political thoughts in two books – 'Discourse on the origin of inequality' (1754) and 'On the social contract' (1762). He believed that humans are naturally ethical and self-controlled when they live in a state of nature.

Rousseau said there was no private property in the beginning and the land and forests belonged to everyone. People worked together according to society's needs and consumed what they produced. They resolved their problems through dialogue. But with the progress of civilisation, private property, division of labour and inequality began corrupting humans. The rich and powerful people began to enslave others and impose their will on them. They deprived the people of their freedom and rights to perpetuate this inequality.

One of Rousseau's most famous quotes is: "Man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains."

He said the only solution to this plight is for all the people to enter into a 'social contract', sacrificing the primacy of their natural desires and rights to give primacy to the 'General Will'. This will is established through collective dialogue and is based on the principles of justice. Giving primacy to the General Will ensures that no individual can be controlled by any powerful or wealthy person. Rousseau's theory formed the basis of the democratic revolutions in the coming age.

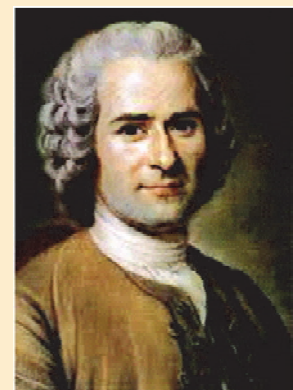


Figure 8.5: Jean Jacques

**Rousseau suggested ways to analyse, challenge and overcome social evils and problems. Do you also think about your society? Discuss your thoughts with the class.**

**In today's world, can any country, village or town make a 'social contract'? If they want to enter into such a contract, what preparations should they make?**

### 8.3 The American War of Independence (1775-1783)

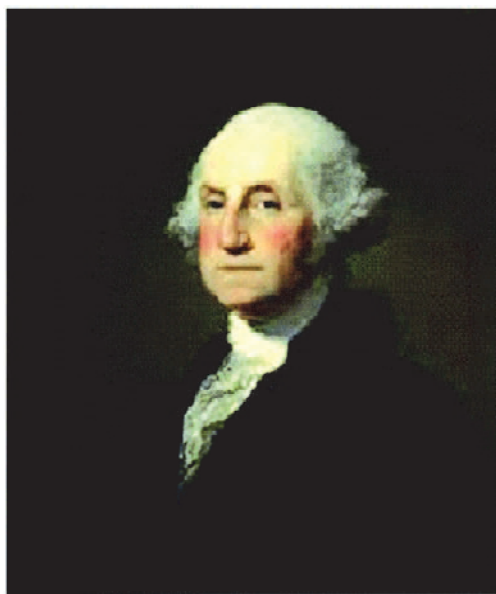


Figure 8.6: George Washington

England established its colonies in North America during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. They were spread across 13 states. Peasants, artisans, traders and others emigrated in large numbers from England to settle in these colonies. During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the English parliament passed laws to govern these colonies. But the colonies did not have the right to send their delegates to the parliament.

The laws made by the parliament and the taxes it levied favoured English traders and merchants, not the people living in the colonies. These people began protesting against this unfair treatment, coining the slogan: '*No taxation without representation!*' The 13 colonies raised the banner of revolt against England in 1744. They organised a joint meeting of their representatives in Philadelphia, which they called the Congress. The Congress petitioned King George III to give the colonies the right to make their own laws. The king saw this

petition as a sign of rebellion and declared war on the American colonies in 1775.

The people living in the colonies decided to challenge England. Their Congress met for the third time in Philadelphia and declared America's independence from England on July 4, 1776. The author of the declaration was Thomas Jefferson. You can read a part of the declaration of independence here:

**We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.**

**- That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their powers from the consent of the governed.**

**- That whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to abolish it, and to institute a new government ...**

**We ... the representatives of the United States of America ... do, in the name and by the authority of the good people of these colonies, solemnly publish and declare that these united colonies are ... free and independent states ... absolved from all allegiance to the British crown.**

America won the war against England in 1781, taking the help of France. George Washington, who led the American army to victory, was elected the first president. The United States of America announced a Republican constitution (where people elect the president) that same year. Among the architects of

the constitution was Thomas Jefferson, who was deeply influenced by the ideas of Locke and Rousseau. Their efforts ensured that the American constitution included the rights of citizens, a federal system of government which gave a lot of powers to the states, separation of powers (executive, legislature, judiciary), etc.

**How many different languages do the students in your class speak? Translate this English slogan into these different languages: 'No taxation without representation!'.**

**Why did the American people feel they were not part of the English nation even though their forefathers had come from England, their language was English and they followed the same religion?**

**What were the ideas expressed in the American Declaration of Independence that were similar to the ideas of Locke and Rousseau?**

**Do you agree with the idea that god gave every human being the right to life, freedom and happiness? Discuss in class.**

**Women in America were not given the right to vote at that time. In those days, people were brought from Africa to work as slaves in the American plantations. They, too, did not have the right to vote. What could be the reason for not giving women and slaves the right to vote? Do you think this was a well-reasoned decision? Tell the class what you think.**

**Prepare and act a play together. Show how the English king and the parliament must have reacted and what they discussed after the American declaration of independence from English rule and how they must have prepared to go to war with the 13 states of America.**

## 8.4 The French Revolution

The French Revolution from 1789-92 followed the English revolution and the American war of independence. It is considered to be among the events that had the most wide-ranging impact on world history.

Like England, France was an authoritarian state in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Here, too, the king followed the practice of taking permission from the representatives of the people before levying a new tax. An assembly called the Estates-General used to be convened for the purpose. French society was divided into three segments or 'estates' at the time. The first estate was the Clergy – the priests of the Catholic Church. The second was the Nobility – the aristocratic landowners. The third was the common people - lawyers, traders, artisans, peasants, labourers etc. In terms of numbers, there were very few people belonging to the first two estates (2.5% of France's population), while the rest (97.5%) were in the third estate.

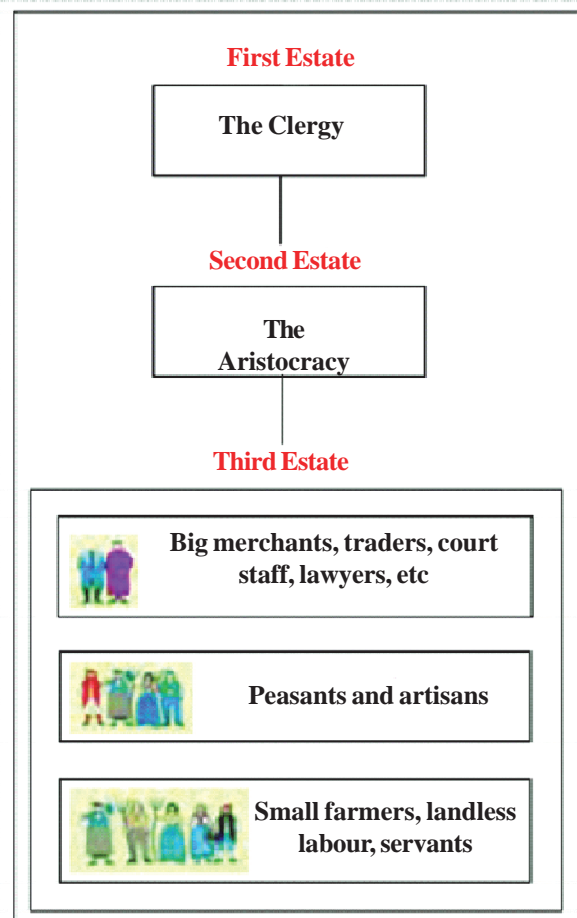
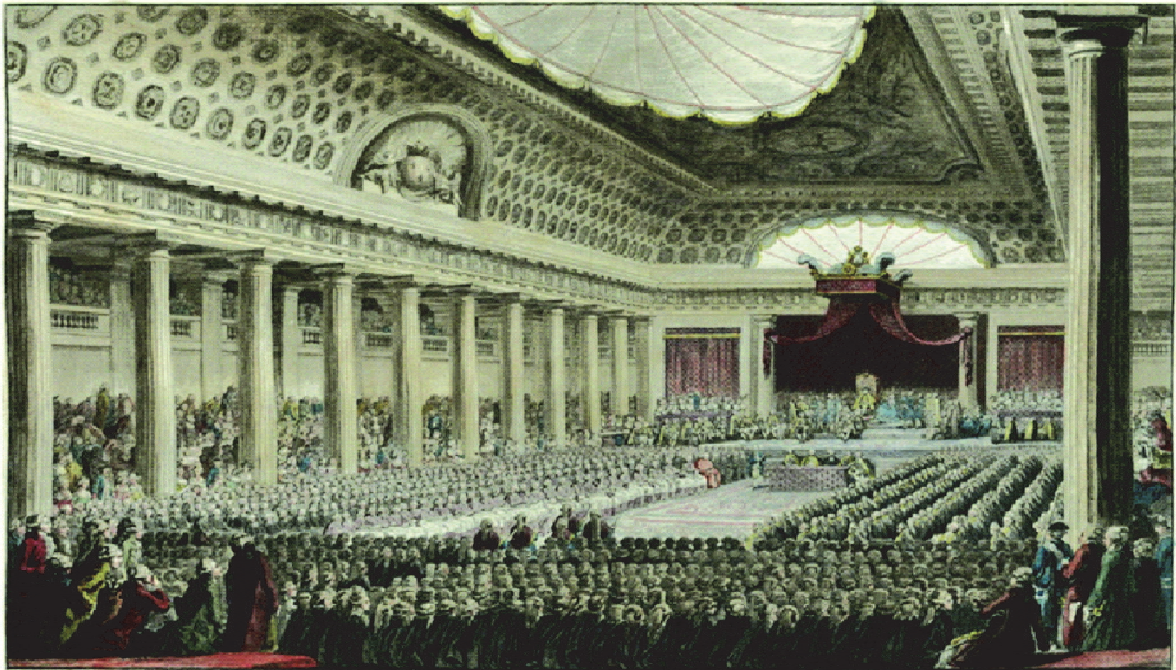


Figure 8.7: The estates system in France





*Figure 8.8: A view of the Estates-General. The king is sitting on a throne in the middle. To his right are the clergy and to his left the aristocratic landowners. The delegates of the third estate stand facing the king. Women and other spectators are seated in the galleries. Compare this picture with the scene from the English parliament (Figure 8.2)*

The people of the first two estates enjoyed certain legal privileges. For example, they did not have to pay any taxes nor did they have to do forced labour for the crown. The priests also levied tithe or religious tax on the people. Since most of the senior clergymen were from the ranks of the nobles, the interests of the first two estates usually coincided.

Each estate voted as a bloc in the Estates-General. So any proposal that was supported by the first two estates was passed by the assembly. The third estate, which represented 97.5% of the people, could not get any proposal passed unless it had the support of at least one of the other two estates. Thus, while the decision to tax was in the hands of the first two estates, it was the third estate that bore the weight of taxation.

By the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the French people were fed up with the despotic behaviour of the authoritarian king and the self-serving aristocracy. The feudal landlords extorted high rents from the peasants and made them pay sundry dues. They also made them do unpaid labour. The king and his officials were constantly trying to levy new taxes, not sparing even items of daily consumption and use. The king would give monopoly rights to sell these daily use commodities to his favourites. They hiked prices as and when they wished.

The French middle class wanted to end feudalism in the country and replace it with a regime that favoured the interests of trade and industry. To some extent, these people were influenced by the democratic ideas of Locke, Rousseau, Diderot and other thinkers. The French soldiers were also fighting in the American Revolution at this time, so the revolutionary ideas from America spread in France.

When Louis XVI was on the French throne, he faced a financial crisis in 1774. The wars the country



was fighting, including helping the Americans, were putting a heavy financial burden on the state. The king failed to resolve the crisis so the only solution left for him was to levy more taxes.

The king called a meeting of the Estates-General and presented his proposal for new taxes. The first and second estates had sent 300 delegates each to the assembly while the third estate had 600 delegates – mostly the wealthy and learned from the middle class. These delegates were elected by the

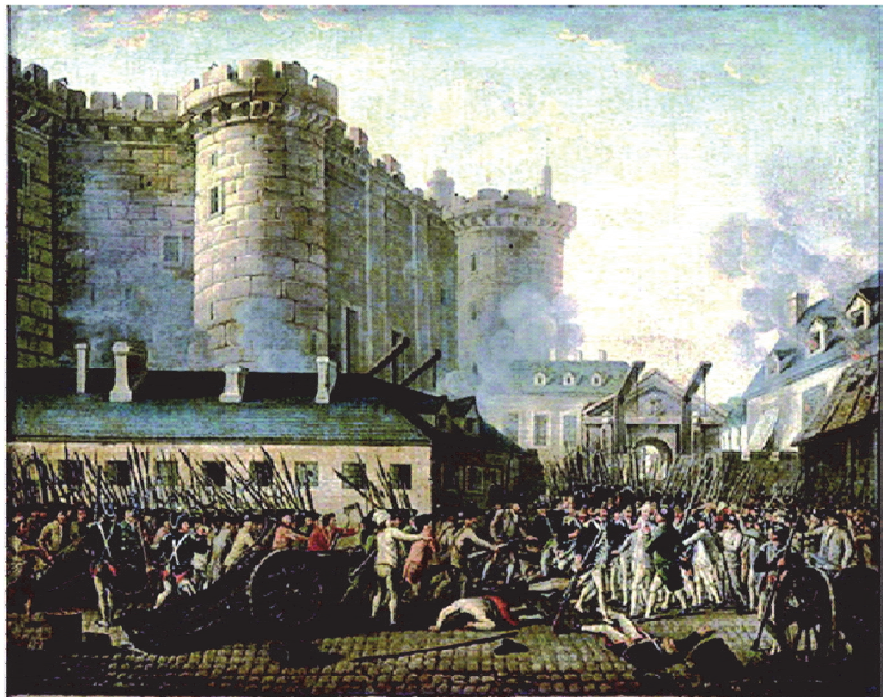
villages and towns but there was no representation of women, peasants and artisans. Even so, they submitted 40,000 complaint letters listing the problems of their constituencies to the Estates-General.

As we have seen, each estate had the right to one vote according to the rules. But the third estate demanded that voting should be conducted in the full assembly this time, which would give each delegate one vote and strengthen their hand. This was a democratic principle contained in Rousseau's book 'On the social contract'. The king turned down the proposal. The third estate delegates protested and walked out of the assembly.

They believed that they were the true spokespersons of the French people so they announced their own National Assembly. On June 4, 1789, these delegates assembled in the indoor tennis court in the city of Versailles. They swore a pledge that the assembly would continue until it prepared a constitution that curtailed the powers of the king. The National Assembly, now called the National Constituent Assembly, got down to the work of preparing a democratic constitution.

The king expressed his willingness to establish a Constitutional Monarchy. But the aristocracy opposed the new constitution and created obstacles in the assembly because it did not want the feudal system to be dismantled.

At that time, items of daily consumption were becoming so costly that they were out of the reach of the common people. The crops had been badly hit by cold weather and the cost of bread had become exorbitant. One day, an angry mob of women raided the shops in Paris. The king called out the army to control the mobs. Angered, the crowd stormed the Bastille prison, a symbol of the monarchy, on July 14, 1789. The commander of the fort was killed and the prisoners were set free.



*Figure 8.9: The storming of the Bastille by the citizens of Paris in 1789. The French Revolution started with the capture of the fortress. Can you distinguish between the army of the common people and the royal soldiers?*

Inspired by the storming of the Bastille, the people in many other towns and cities of France joined the protests and took power into their own hands. The peasants rebelled against the feudal landlords. The rumour spread that the feudal lords were preparing an army to destroy the peasants and their crops. Frightened but incensed, the peasants armed themselves with sickles and spades and invaded the palaces of the landlords. They looted the granaries and burnt the land documents. The aristocratic lords abandoned their estates and fled in large numbers, seeking refuge in neighbouring countries.

The peasant revolt continued from August 4 to 11, 1789. Inspired by its intensity, the Constituent Assembly passed an order to end the feudal system, along with its taxes, duties and restrictions. Many feudal rights and the tithes collected by the church were abolished without compensation. A few months later, the state confiscated the lands of the church and auctioned them. But there was some talk of paying compensation to the feudal landowners for the land their tenants were farming. This angered the peasants who intensified their revolt.

At the same time, work on preparing the new constitution was under way. The 'Declaration of the rights of man and of the citizen' was the first step. The Constituent Assembly approved this declaration on August 26, 1789. Let's take a look at some of the main points in the 17 articles of this declaration.

### **'Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen'**

#### **'Inalienable right':**

a right that cannot be taken away from a person and given to someone else.

1. Men are born and remain free and equal in rights.
2. The goal of any political association is the protection of the natural rights of man which cannot be taken away under any conditions. These rights are liberty, property, safety and resistance against oppression.
3. The principle of any sovereignty resides essentially in the nation. No body, no individual can exert authority which does not emanate expressly from it.
4. Liberty consists of doing anything which does not harm others.
5. The law has the right to forbid only actions harmful to society.
6. The law is the expression of the general will. All the citizens have the right of contributing personally or through their representatives to its formation. It must be the same for all, either that it protects, or that it punishes.
7. No man can be accused, arrested nor detained but in the cases determined by the law, and according to the forms which it has prescribed.
9. The free communication of thoughts and of opinions is one of the most precious rights of man: any citizen thus may speak, write, print freely, (but can be punished for abusing this liberty as determined by the law).
11. A common contribution is essential for the maintenance of the public forces and for the cost of administration. This should be equitably distributed among all the citizens in proportion to their means.
17. Since property is an inviolable and sacred right, no one shall be deprived thereof except where public necessity, legally determined, shall clearly demand it, and then only on condition that the owner shall have been previously and equitably compensated.

**What are the kinds of freedom given to man and the citizen in the declaration?**

**Who can give the right and authority to anyone to rule the people?**

**The law cannot interfere in some matters. Which are these matters?**

**What is the process of making laws?**

**Under what circumstances and by what methods can the freedom of an individual be curtailed?**

**What was the rule governing taxation in France and what new provisions did the declaration make?**

We can see from the title of the declaration that it talks only of 'man'. Up until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the democratic thinkers and revolutionaries talked only about the rights of 'man'. They believed that the place for women was in the home and they should not venture into public life. That is why only the rights of 'man' were established in the public sphere. It is also the reason why the French Revolution did not enfranchise (give the vote) women and excluded them from the rights of 'man and citizens'.

Opposition to this viewpoint surfaced in 1791 when many women began to protest against their exclusion. They came out with their own 'Declaration of the rights of woman and the female citizen' but the Constituent Assembly rejected it. The sustained protests of women since then led to women winning citizens' rights, such as the right to vote, in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **The New Constitution of 1791**

The new French constitution curtailed the powers of the king. The powers centralised in the monarchy was separated into the legislature, executive and judiciary. This laid the foundation of Constitutional Monarchy in France. The constitution suggested that priests should be chosen by the citizens. Earlier, priests were appointed by the Pope. Though the king disagreed with the new constitution, he had no choice but to accept and approve it in September 1791.

The constitution states that the source of all power is the citizen. But who is a citizen? All the people living in France were accepted as citizens but not all of them had the right to vote. The state divided citizens into two categories: active and passive. Only the active citizens had the right to vote. They were males aged over 25 years who had paid at least three days wages in a year as taxes.

The passive citizens enjoyed citizens' rights but they did not have the right to vote. They included the poor who were not in a position to pay even the minimum tax, women and all those aged below 25 years. Their number totalled around three million.

There was wide dissatisfaction about such a large number of people being disenfranchised (not given the right to vote). The king and the aristocracy also tried wreck the new constitution. They asked the kings of neighbouring countries to help them against their own people.

**Both men and women participated in the French Revolution. So why did women not get the same rights as men?**

**If both the aristocracy and the poor did not accept the French constitution then who would have found it acceptable?**

### **Between 1792-94**

In 1791, the majority of the French people were unhappy with the constitution because it accepted only people with property as active citizens. In those days, people met in political clubs or societies to discuss political issues. These clubs were the predecessors of the political parties of today. The most



Figure 8.10: Robespierre

popular was the Jacobin club. Its members belonged to the less wealthy sections of society. They included shopkeepers, artisans, servants and daily wage labourers. Their leader was Maximilian Robespierre (born 1758, died 1794).

In 1792, the neighbouring countries invaded France in support of King Louis XVI. The residents of Paris were angered by the attack, the scarcity of daily commodities and rising prices. They unleashed their anger in a massive and violent outburst. They attacked the royal palace on August 10, 1792 and imprisoned the king after killing his bodyguards. Fresh elections were held. In this election, all adult males aged over 21 years, whether they owned property or not, were allowed to vote. But women were still not allowed to vote.

The newly constituted assembly, called the National Convention, abolished the monarchy on September 21, 1792 and declared France a Republic (where the head of the government is elected by the people). Louis XVI and his wife Marie Antoinette were declared traitors and sentenced to death.

The sans-culottes – the poor people of France – were now politically active, freed from the pressures of the aristocracy and the middle class. They demanded political and economic equality for all the people and wanted to put a limit on private property and profit. They put pressure on the government to control prices to protect the poor. They wanted their elected representatives to be answerable to the people and wanted people to have the power to remove them if they did not perform their duties. They also wanted citizens to participate in governance and not leave everything in the hands of their elected representatives.

The influence of the sans-culottes was at its peak from 1792 to 1794. They enlisted in large numbers in the French army. They fought against the neighbouring countries to safeguard the revolution and ensure victory for France.

In 1793, the National Convention decided that peasant-tenants would not have to pay their landlords any compensation for getting the title to their holdings. The land of those who fled to neighbouring countries was also seized and divided into small holdings that were distributed among small and medium peasants along with the ownership rights. In 1794, many social welfare schemes were launched, including social security for the poor, pensions for the aged and helpless, child-support allowances for destitute mothers and widows, free medical care for the sick, etc.

A Committee of Public Safety, created in April 1793 under the chairmanship of Robespierre, was given the responsibility of running the government from 1793 to 1794. Robespierre, the leader of the Jacobin club, took control, arresting the enemies of the Republic – the aristocrats, clergy and royalist sympathisers – and sentencing them to death. He controlled wage rates and the prices of bread, flour etc, severely punishing anyone who flouted the rules.

Robespierre exercised such strict control and implemented his policies so harshly that even his supporters were distressed. With so many people being executed as traitors and criminals, this period was labelled the Reign of Terror. Eventually, the court sentenced Robespierre to death in July 1794. After the fall of his government, power again passed into the hands of the wealthy class and royalty and the poor were disenfranchised.



### Why were King Louis XVI and his wife Marie Antoinette sentenced to death?

#### France's Campaign Against the European Kings and its Defeat

During the French Revolution, the Constituent Assembly had announced in 1792 that France would help to end the monarchies and dynasties of Europe and establish democratic regimes. The French army began a victorious campaign across Europe. The people of all these countries welcomed the French. In 1799, an ambitious general called Napoleon (born 1769, died 1821) took over power in France and established his monarchy in 1804.

Napoleon became a strong ruler. He fought against many countries in Europe and took over their kingdoms, merging them into France. This expansion angered the people of Europe and they were disillusioned with France and Napoleon. The royal dynasties of Europe got together to form a coalition under the leadership of England to oppose Napoleon. The coalition finally defeated Napoleon in 1815 and tried to restore the feudal system across Europe. The old monarchies and landowners began to rule once again and tried to suppress all democratic ideas. These confrontations between the people and their kings continued across Europe. Eventually, France established itself as a Republic in 1891.

## 8.5 A New Wave of Democratic Nationalism in Europe

The French Revolution (1789-1804) led to a new wave of revolutionary ideas sweeping across the world. One idea was what we call Democratic Nationalism. It is based on the premise that citizens together constitute the nation and the governments should function as per the interests of the nation. Such states are called nation-states. The middle class youth of Europe were enthused by this revolutionary idea and were keen to build their nation-states.

In those days, Italy and Germany were split into many small states. On the other hand, Austrian, Russian and the Ottoman emperors had conquered many different countries and merged them into their vast empires. When nationalistic ideas spread, the young revolutionaries in these small nationalities under the empires were emotionally charged and wanted to unite their own people into nation-states. But the monarchies restored after the Napoleonic era did not tolerate such separatist, democratic tendencies. So the youth formed secret societies to keep their ideas alive.

The ruling kings realised they could not stop the spread of nationalist ideas, which were becoming very popular among the people. The only way for them was to allow nation building but to separate the concept of 'nation' from the concept of 'democracy'. They tried to link the concept of nation to language, culture and religion. They wanted to use nation building to strengthen monarchic rule.

The wars between countries that had been raging for the past several years were changing the political map of Europe. The political leaders and thinkers who played a leading role in these developments included Guiseppe Mazzini, Guiseppe



*Figure 8.11: Mazzini launching a secret revolutionary patriotic society called Young Italy in 1833*

Garibaldi, Otto von Bismarck, Cavour, Kaiser Wilhelm I, Victor Emmanuel II, etc. Their efforts led to many small kingdoms combining into the nation-states of Italy and Germany under the leadership of King Victor Emmanuel II and Emperor Kaiser Wilhelm I, respectively. Countries like Greece and Poland were also formed as nation-states out of the earlier Austrian empire. You may learn about the efforts of these political thinkers in detail later sometime. But first, let us have some glimpses of the spread of nationalist ideas in Asia.

## 8.6 Nationalism in Asia

### 8.6.1 Japan

Japan is considered to be the first Asian country to establish a nation-state. But, interestingly, like in Germany, it was the king who promoted nationalism in Japan.

Japan was ruled by an emperor but, after the 12<sup>th</sup> century, actual power lay in the hands of the powerful military generals called the Shogun. The Tokugawa family established their Shogunate from 1603 until 1867. During this period, Japan was divided into over 250 feudal provinces that were ruled by the feudal government. But the emperor was a ruler only in name, with the Shogun exercising authority.

The feudal lords lived in palaces and the warriors who fought in their armies were called Samurai. They were paid paddy for their livelihood. They also enjoyed several legal privileges and entitlements.

The peasants in the villages farmed the land of the feudal lords and paid a large portion of their harvest as rent. The rent made up around 80% of the value of the harvest. In addition, the peasants had to do compulsory service for the government, whenever required. They were not allowed to leave their

lands and go anywhere without permission. Most of them were forced to take loans from traders at high interest rates to meet their family expenses. The money-lenders were thus able to establish their rights over the land of the tenants. These conditions of indebtedness and poverty led to peasant revolts in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that shook the foundations of the feudal empire.

The traders and merchants had also emerged as a wealthy class during this period. Even the feudal lords and the Shogun took loans from them when the need arose. But they had little political power or influence.

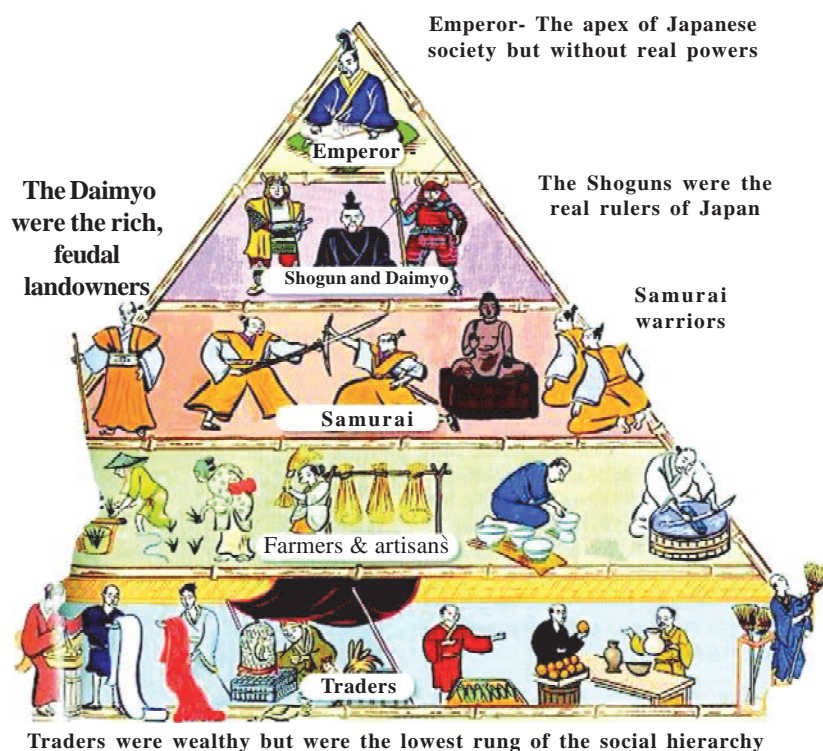


Figure 8.12: The structure of Japanese society

**Compare Figure 8.12 with Figure 8.7. What are the similarities and differences between the feudal system in Japan and France?**

Many of the Samurai were able administrators and intellectuals. They came in contact with European merchants and began learning European languages, science etc. This was the class that took up the task of bringing change in Japan.

**The Fall of the Shogun and the Restoration of Emperor Meiji**

During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Western countries were establishing their colonial empires in India and China. To save their country from this colonisation, the Japanese Shogun decided to stop all trade with Western countries and sever all ties with them in 1824. But this policy could not be implemented for long. In 1853, America sent Commodore Perry with a naval squadron to negotiate a trade treaty with the Japanese government. Following some minor skirmishes, Japan was forced to sign a treaty with America.

The Japanese people were generally unhappy with the Shogun but their opposition grew after Perry arrived and got the Japanese to capitulate and sign the treaty. In 1868, the Samurais launched an armed rebellion with the help of many feudal lords and rich merchants to overthrow the Shogun. They were victorious and they invited Emperor Meiji to assume power. They believed Japan would unite under the emperor and become a powerful nation that could challenge the Western countries.

The new government took some revolutionary initiatives. At that time, the feudal lords were independently ruling their territories. This system was abolished and a central government was established, with all its officials reporting to the emperor. But the emperor was careful not to annoy the feudal lords too much. He included them and their followers in the new administrative system.

The second important step was to abolish the system of tenancy rents paid to the feudal lords. The state now began to collect the rents directly from the peasants. The feudal lords were compensated with cash pensions. They may have lost their power under the new system but they emerged as a wealthy class because of the generous pensions. They now had a job in the government as well as wealth so they began investing in trade and industry. Japan began industrialising rapidly as a result in the hope of becoming an industrial power.

Another important step was to make all people equal under the law. This initiative effectively put an end to the special rights and privileges enjoyed by social classes like the Samurai.



*Figure 8.13: The Japanese emperor 'gifting' the Meiji constitution to the people. What are the European cultural influences that you can see in this picture?*



**Why was it important to end the autonomy of the feudal lords in order to establish Japan as a modern nation-state?**

**Do you think this might have improved the condition and life of the peasants?**

A Japanese mission visited European countries and America in 1882 to study their constitutions and prepare a report. The constitutional study mission presented its recommendations to the emperor. A committee of experts was set up to draft the constitution. This committee did not hold any public hearings to discuss the constitution or talk to the common people to get their views. The new constitution was promulgated in 1889 and came to be known as the Meiji Constitution. It was basically modelled on the German constitution of Bismarck.

The Meiji constitution stated that it was the emperor's gift to the people – which implied he was gifting power to the people. But it also clearly said that the emperor was supreme and all powers resided in him. Authority was concentrated in the emperor and the cabinet of ministers appointed by him. It also said the emperor will conduct the affairs of the state in accordance with the constitution. It had a provision for an elected parliament but the right to vote was given only to people with property. Moreover, the role of the parliament was limited. The constitution also conferred rights on the people such as equality before the law, freedom of religion, constitutional welfare, punishment only through a legal process, etc. But the right to freedom was limited.

### **8.6.2 The nationalist movement in India**

India was under the control of the British and nationalism in the country evolved to oppose British rule. In 1857, Indian sepoys and some of the subordinate rulers tried to expel the British from the country but they were not successful. The aim of these rulers was to restore the rule of the Mughals and old kings. Around 1880, the emerging middle class began a struggle to make India a free, democratic and modern nation. Unlike Japan, where the emperor took the lead in developing the country into a modern nation-state, the kings of India did not play such a role.

One striking feature of the emerging Indian middle class was that it was made up of people of all castes, religions and regions of India. There were intellectuals like Dadabhai Naoroji and Pherozeshah Mehta, political leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Gopal Krishna Gokhale, and nationalist patriots like Badruddin Tyabji and Rahmatullah Sayani, Pandita Ramabai, Lala Lajpat Rai, G. Subramania Iyer and Ramasamy Mudaliar, Vamanrao Lakhe, Pandit Sundarlal Sharma, Rash Behari Bose, Madhusudan Das and Joachim Alva, etc. We can see that there were Parsis, Muslims, Christians, Dalits, Brahmins – people from different religions, social classes and regions. In other words, the new middle class represented the whole of India and its different communities. Several British men and women living in India (A.O. Hume, Annie Besant) also contributed to India's political evolution.

One other striking feature of the middle class was that most of its members had been educated in the English education system, so they were aware of and familiar with the democratic and nationalist ideas that were spreading across Europe. They believed that if India wanted to develop into a modern and developed nation, it should first discard the traditional-feudal path and embrace the path of democracy, science and industrialisation. They launched the Indian National Congress in 1885, which met every year to review the country's political situation and to petition the British government to introduce reforms.

Dadabhai Naoroji analysed the economic situation in India under British rule, pointing out how it was impoverishing people day-by-day. Such writings sowed the seeds of nationalism in people. The sprouting



seeds took the form of a mass movement after 1905, with people from all the provinces joining the protest against British rule. There were also underground revolutionary groups who felt that a violent armed rebellion was the only way of freeing the country from the British. They tried to assassinate many oppressive English officials. The most well-known among them were the Chapekar brothers and Khudiram Bose.

The period from 1905 to 1920 was the age of 'Lal-Bal-Pal' (Lala Lajpat Rai, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Bipin Chandra Pal). Nationalist feelings and ideas spread and developed among the youth under their leadership.

The peasants, labourers, adivasis, Dalits, and women affected by the British policies also raised the banner of revolt. There were rebellions and movements by these groups in many places. These groups were not just fighting against British rule but were strongly opposing the evils of Indian society. They wanted to put an end to exploitative practices such as zamindari, bonded labour, etc and the social discrimination against women, Dalits and others. Many movements were against the caste system and the inequalities embedded in it.

### **The Role of Gandhiji in the Freedom Struggle**

Gandhiji returned to India in 1915 from South Africa, where he was leading a struggle against the South African government for the rights of the Indian community there. He tried to link the nationalist movement in India with the many other movements in the country so that the peasants, adivasis, labourers, women and Dalits would have a voice in the freedom struggle. These social groups began to participate in the mass movement in large numbers.

Gandhiji also propagated the idea of Swarajya or self-rule in which there would be no social discrimination or inequality. He said the objective of the freedom struggle was not just to put an end to British rule but to change Indian society. He was not in favour of a violent revolution. He propagated a new type of protest called satyagraha. This involved convincing the oppressors about the truth and resolve of the objectives of the movement.

The freedom movement strengthened nationalism in India. Even the common people began seeing themselves as part of an Indian nation, binding them to a common destiny. Folk songs, folk tales, art and other cultural forms were used to strengthen this sense of unity and pride in the nation. Despite all attempts of the British, this feeling of nationhood could not be suppressed. People were not ready to accept any compromises or reforms to continue living under British rule. They called for total Swarajya and launched the 'Quit India' movement in 1942.

There were people who were not happy with Gandhiji's leadership of the national movement. They felt its momentum was too slow. They also felt that it did not clearly address issues like ending inequality in Indian society. Many of the younger revolutionaries felt that an armed struggle was the only way to gain freedom from the British.

In the midst of all these different strands of thinking, the country got its freedom in August 1947, after being divided into two nations – India and Pakistan. The leaders of the new nation formed the Constituent Assembly to discuss the drafting of a new constitution for independent India. A committee was set up under the chairmanship of Dr B.R. Ambedkar. After three years of deliberation and consultation, the constitution was finalised and announced in January 1950.



*Figure 8.14: The Dandi march*

The new constitution declared India as a Democratic Republic. It said the state would work to ensure equality, freedom and justice to all and promote brotherhood among its citizens. The apex body of the nation-state would be a parliament of people's representatives elected by all adult citizens aged above 21 years. It would have the authority to make laws and levy taxes and the government would be answerable to it. The constitution also guaranteed various freedoms and rights for all citizens. In this way India became a modern, democratic nation-state.

**The people of a vast and diverse country like India united under the emotional pull of nationhood. What are the factors that promoted this feeling of nationhood? Discuss in class.**

## EXERCISES

1. What steps did the parliament of England take to end authoritarianism?
2. Who was the main architect of the American constitution? List the special features of this constitution in your own words.
3. You have read about England, America and France. Which country do you associate with the following:
  - a. The king still had residual powers after the revolution.
  - b. The slogan: 'No taxation without representation'
  - c. 'Declaration of rights of Man and citizen'.
4. What were the main features of the relationship between the Tokugawa Shogun and the Japanese emperor?

5. What do you understand about the concept of satyagraha? Write in your own words.
6. How did the English parliament control the monarchy's right to levy taxes?
7. Rousseau believed that private property corrupted human society and robbed humans of their freedom. What reasons do you see behind this argument?
8. What were the factors that led to the American Revolution? Explain in your own words.
9. In what ways was the French declaration of rights similar to the American declaration of independence?
10. What was the attitude of the French revolutionaries towards women that you find reflected in the Declaration of Rights of Man and Citizen?
11. We talk about fundamental rights in India today. How did they emerge during the French Revolution?
12. What was the role of the poorer classes, especially the peasants, in the democratic revolutions of the different countries discussed?
13. What is the difference between Indian and Japanese nationalism? Write in your own words.
14. What changes occurred in Japan after the re-instatement of the Meiji dynasty?
15. What was the main reason for India's freedom struggle picking up momentum after Gandhiji's return from South Africa? Discuss in class.
16. What difference do you see in the following table between India and other countries on the issue of the right to vote for all adult men and women?

Country	Men	Women
England	1918	1928
America	1862	1920
France	1875	1944
Germany	1871	1919
Italy	1912	1945
Japan	1925	1946
India	1950	1950