
WOMEN IN FRENCH REVOLUTION

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Abstract:

The period of radical political and societal change in France is known as French Revolution that began with the Estates General of 1789 and it ended in November 1799 with the formation of the French Consulate. The ideas of revolutionary principles Liberty Equality and Fraternity generated the new force and inspired campaigns for the abolition of slavery. This revolution saw different roles of women as a political leaders, activists and intellectuals. The goal of this research is to understand the role of Women in French revolution.

Key words: Women, Crisis, France, French revolution, Status, Role, Impact, Traditional role.

Introduction

In times of crisis, women have historically been important players. They were devalued almost always, and history didn't give them much of a mention in terms of what they contributed and whether it had beneficial or harmful impacts. The task of setting the table and caring for the family fell to women. In moments of famine, they had traveled to the city's heart and launched many attempts to alleviate their misery. The role of women during the French Revolution was mainly an amusement. A turning point in their history was their involvement in the French Revolution.

First-time political rights requests from women were made. They wanted their situation to change, and they assumed the French Revolution would bring about those improvements and give them proper chance they deserved to prosper. They were conscious that they would face many challenges in securing their privileges and improving their social position. Even though they significantly contributed to the French Revolution, there was always some question around their involvement. Unfairly, men who backed the uprising did not endorse women's rights. Women were therefore torn throughout the French Revolution between acceptance and

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denial.²

What roles did women hold during the revolution, and what was their status? Why did women decide to participate in this rebellion? Which social classes were the ladies that took part in the struggle? The article gives an answer to all these questions.

Women's Status and Role before the French Revolution

Women were expected to play inferior responsibilities to men in France during the 18th century and to have little privileges. The arrival of a girl child was not greeted with joy. The Gancourts claim that the new arrival was both a thrill and a sorrow for the family. So even if a child was born healthily, her parents would still be unhappy. In affluent homes, the mother would frequently send the baby to a wet nurse because she felt that looking for him or her was just a pointless exercise. She might get wedded as quickly as possible because her family may choose her partner when she became older. Women were thought of as being of the weaker sex. Authors and church leaders both offered a variety of viewpoints on this subject. For instance, mediaeval and classical writers argued that women were the hazardous sex because they were motivated by stronger sex impulses than males. Contrarily, Catholic and Protestant groups accepted the idea that women are less valuable than males and need to be subservient to them. They should also devote the majority of their time to prayer.³

The 18th-century medical professionals looked for physical parallels between male's and female's bodies. They discovered that the sexuality of men and women was completely different. They thought that a woman's only distinguishing feature was her capacity for work. Women's sexual and social identities are a result of this trait. According to Visey's thinking, she is merely a being inherently subservient to man because of her needs, her tasks, and most importantly because of her physical constitution because she needs the conjunction of man in the case of multiplication⁴. Diderot also claimed that women were under the control of their uteruses, which are prone to horrible spasms and which rule them and awaken in them the Phantoms of each brief. In these ways, women were fragile, emotional, and mentally inferior

² Par Guillaume Debat, *Women in the French Revolution*, HYPOTHESES (July 13, 2022), <https://sms.hypotheses.org/25827>.

³ *Women in French Revolution*, UKESSAYS (July 14, 2022), <https://www.ukessays.com/essays/history/women-in-french-revolution-acceptance-and-denial-history-essay.php>

⁴ Mari Mikkola, *Feminist Perspective on sex and gender*, STANFORD ENCYCLOPEDIA OF PHILOSOPHY (July 14, 2022), <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-gender/>.

since their reproductive systems governed them.

Though some Enlightenment thinkers attempted to alter the notion of women as alien and inferior in ancient and mediaeval times and make them stand out as distinct human beings. They think that women were less dangerous than they were thought to be and were more spiritual than sexual. They didn't think that a woman's primary purpose in life was to be a wife and a mother. This truly indicates that all thinkers supported gender equality for men and women. The great Jean-Jacques Rousseau is a standout example. He believed that women should only engage in domestic activities outside of the home. They were responsible for raising their children at home and serving as their husbands' wives. According to him, women were incapable of making wise political choices.

Women possessed a great amount of authority in the Ancient Regime. Of course, ladies from the female elite appeared to be so strong and sexually uninhibited, possibly for the first time ever, as the Goncourt brothers suggested in their classical book. This provided aristocratic hostesses like “Sophie de Condorcet” and “Suzanne Necker” the capacity to establish intellectual bars where the contemporary thinkers might converse.

Women during French Revolution

Women were given the chance during the French Revolution to demand their own independence in addition to participating in the revolution. They contributed significantly to the dispute right from the start. They wouldn't think twice to start a riot when food prices started to rise because they were worried about the wellbeing of their kids. They used their military involvement as an opportunity to demand equality with males. They pushed for common-law unions and universal suffrage. Participating in the movement were women by both the elite and labouring⁵ strata. They made an effort to contribute to the revolution in all areas.

The Revolution had an impact on aristocratic women who founded clubs. Friends of Truth by Ettad Palme was the first. In these communities, where women congregated, they exchanged and explored progressive ideas and learned and to become individuals instead of dependents of a king. Levy, et al. assert that women throughout the American Revolution fought for full equality in matrimony, the freedom to divorce, greater entitlements for widow and widowed mothers concerning their minor children, and publicly mandated academic possibilities for

⁵ Women and the revolution, LIBERTE EGALITE FRATERNITE (July 12, 2022), <https://revolution.chnm.org/exhibits/show/liberty--equality--fraternity/women-and-the-revolution>

women. All regions should provide job privileges, public schooling, licensure, and support for doctors, as well as the barring of men from some typically feminine professions like clothing. “Actress Claire Lacombe” and “chocolatier Pauline Leon” founded extreme club, the “Revolutionary Republic Women (RRW)”.

However, from the outset of the war, metropolitan women also contributed significantly to maintaining the revolution. They marched to the royal house of Versailles and demanded their bread during this difficult period when it was too expensive and famine was spreading since they needed to feed their family members. Disgruntled Parisian women marched to the royal palace on October 5, 1789, and presented the monarch with their petitions. The king, his wife, and their kid were addressed as "the Baker," "the Baker's wife," and "the Baker's boy," respectively. The huge audience gathered inside the “Palace of Versailles” was urging the monarch to walk up to the balcony. “King Louis XVI” was out hunting in the woods during this time. In spite of the risk, Marie Antoinette stood for several minutes on the balcony before bending her head and calming the crowd. A group of fishwives herded the royal family to Paris on October 6. Former courtesan Anne Theroigne de Mericourt served as the mob's leader.

Attempts were made by women to enlist as well. A bunch of women known as the Amazons made a significant impact. They begged the Federal Parliament to let them join the militia, but their requests were rejected. They asserted that they were capable of combat using tools other than a needle and spindle. Despite the fact that France needed soldiers, women were no longer permitted to serve in the military as of the end of 1792. The Rameau sisters, who enlisted in the war while dressed as men, provide an intriguing example. It is crucial to highlight their valour and prowess in combat.

In addition to the clubs that were discovered, we have created brochures to compel women to keep pressing for their rights. The two publications On “Giving Women the Right of Citizenship (1790)” and “Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen (1791)” are notable examples. In response to the “Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen”, Olympe de Gouges penned “the Declaration des droits de la Femme et de la Citoyenne (Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen)” in 1791.⁶

⁶ *Women in French Revolution*, UKESSAYS (July 14, 2022), <https://www.ukessays.com/essays/history/women-in-french-revolution-acceptance-and-denial-history-essay.php>

Acceptance and Denial

We felt it was important to start by describing the contribution made by the earning women's sector to the family dynamic. In effect, everyone in the household had to help out. The woman searched for yet another means of revenue in case the familial guy was just not ready to cover their needs. Women worked as weavers, makeup artists, dressmakers, corset makers, ribbon makers, and manufacturers of mittens and ribbons in towns. Poor women frequently undertook unpleasant and taxing home tasks like lugging loads. They worked as waste pickers, ash sifters, rag stockers, and masonry aides in the metropolis. "Madame de Coicy", a contemporary feminist, highlighted the contribution these women made to the domestic economy and referred to them as the parent heroines.

Second, we want to explore certain women's attempts to upgrade their social status. It's undeniable that divorce rates were higher in the years before the uprising. Women who visit me in Bort, close to Clermont, not only plead for food but also blamed their spouses of endangering to quit them if they really do not enable the youngest kids to die, claiming how they can handle solely and that even functioning all day they should support their relatives; in comparison, a cure from Tours claimed that women not the first to die and that they encounter food cravings because first they destroy individuals in order to support their spouse and kids. He ended by evoking a moving comparison between the mother who donated her milk to feed her children and the sacred bird of the adoro te. Women sought divorce because they were no longer willing to accept being treated unfairly and as inferior.⁷

When the Old Regime declared men's rights to freedom, fairness, and solidarity in 1789, women also dreamt of a new society. The supporters of the Rights of Man deemed their demand for sex equality in politics and the law sacrilegious. Following the denial of their social, legal, political, and economic rights, women came together to form the feminist movement in order to have their voices heard. Finally, on October 5 and 6, 1789, a bread riot would be planned in which revolutionary women will demand reform. It would be more than just a bread rage, something that would go down in history. We would like to provide excerpts from some of our original sources to help you better comprehend this feminist movement.⁸

⁷ Taru Spiegel, *Women in the French Revolution: From the salons to street*, LIBRARY (July 14, 2022), <https://blogs.loc.gov/international-collections/2020/07/women-in-the-french-revolution-from-the-salons-to-the-streets/>.

⁸ *Condorcet on the admission of women to the rights of citizenship*, REVOLUTION (July 15, 2022), <https://revolution.chnm.org/d/292>.

Did women have a revolution?

Ladies have always been active participants in the movements that brought about numerous fundamental changes in French society. Early on, the progressive administration introduced laws that improved women's lives. The agreement of marriage was entered upon freely and enrolled under general law. Separate was given legitimacy and became open to use by all. Over the next 200 years, women's advancements toward equal pay and the opportunity to vote continued in many countries around the world. The election campaign the right for women to vote in France was finally achieved in 1946.

Revolutionary role of French Women

When the Revolution started, a few women made a great impact, utilising the erratic political climate to affirm their vivacious attributes. It was impossible to keep women out of politics during the height of the Revolution. They made "grave declarations of dedicated commitment," "promises of faithfulness," and "attestations of the political obligations of citizenship."

"De Corday d'Armont" is the epitome of this type of woman; in consideration for the liberal Girondists, she assassinated "Jean-Paul Marat", leader of the Jacobins. Throughout the Revolution, several women supported the extreme "Jacobins", staged events in the National Assembly, and participated in mobs, frequently using armed force, like Pauline Leon and her Society of Revolutionary Republican Women.

Feminist Agitation

- Nevertheless, one example of women's activist aggression during the French Revolution is the Women's March on Versailles. Since the question was left unanswered in the "Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen" in 1789, campaigners like "Pauline Léon and Théroigne de Méricourt" fought for women to be granted full citizenship, but the issue was mostly avoided. In any event, women were "denied political liberties of 'dynamic citizenship' (1791) and citizenship based on popularity".
- On March 6, 1792, Pauline Léon sent a petition to the National Assembly with the support of 319 women asking for permission to create a public garden to protect Paris in the event of a

military attack. Her request was turned down. Théroigne de Méricourt made a decision later in 1792 to create "armies of amazons" to protect the insurgency.

- On June 20, 1792, numerous dressed-up women took part in a procession that "passed past the Legislative Assembly lobbies, through the Tuileries Gardens, and then through the King's residence".
- The “Society of Revolutionary Republican Women”, which Léon and her partner Claire Lacombe founded on May 10, 1793, was the most severe of women's activist activism.⁹
- Following the Convention's adoption of the knot regulation in September 1793, the RRW requested active authorization to enforce the regulation, which would have made it mandatory for all women to wear the tricolored rosette symbol to show their unwavering commitment to the Republic.
- The Jacobins' rulers condemned the RRW as dangerous agitators in the interim.
- After October 30, 1793, coordinated women were never again allowed to participate in the French Revolution; many of them were even publicly killed for "scheming against the cohesion and the inseparability of the Republic."

Conclusion

The article discusses the struggle of women during the French Revolution. Both before and during the French Revolution, women made a concerted effort to improve their position in society. They played a huge and crucial role during these years. Women participation in the French Revolution and their quest for voting freedoms constituted a changing moment in history, even though their accomplishments do not yield the anticipated results.