

Report on Screening of the Documentary on the French Revolution

The Department of History, under the aegis of Aks – The History Film Society, Mata Sundari College for Women organized a documentary screening on the French Revolution at Mata Gujri Hall on 20 August 2026, from 1:30 pm onwards. The event was attended by the students of third year History Honours and ITEP and BAP History Major, with Dr. Simmi Kapoor Mehta and Dr. Shivangi Naithani Devrani as event coordinators.

The session began with Dr Simmi Kapoor Mehta, who introduced the topic and briefly outlined the condition of France before 1789. She then introduced the screening of the 2005 documentary The French Revolution, directed by Doug Shultz, which traces the major events of the Revolution from its outbreak and the key figures involved in it. The documentary situates these events within the interpretations of different historians, marking one of the most significant episodes in modern European history that transformed France's political and social structure from 1789 onwards.

The documentary explained how deep economic distress, social inequality, and political discontent gradually escalated into revolution. Pre-revolutionary French society was divided into three estates: the Clergy (First Estate), the Nobility (Second Estate), and the Commoners (peasants, workers, merchants, and others forming the Third Estate). Though the Third Estate formed the overwhelming majority of the population, it bore the heaviest tax burden while enjoying the fewest privileges. Compounding this, France's finances were strained by costly wars and extravagant royal expenditure, while rising bread prices deepened popular hardship.



To resolve the fiscal crisis, Louis XVI convened the Estates-General on 5 May 1789. When its demands for proportional representation were rebuffed, the Third Estate declared itself the National Assembly on 17 June, and on 20 June its members swore the Tennis Court Oath, pledging to draft a constitution a direct challenge to royal authority. On 14 July 1789, Parisians stormed the Bastille, a symbol of royal despotism; the event became the Revolution's defining moment, later commemorated as Bastille Day. The unrest soon spread to the countryside in the Great Fear, as peasants destroyed feudal records and demanded the end of seigniorial dues.

The documentary further traced the Revolution's radicalisation: the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (August 1789); the Women's March on Versailles (October 1789); the abolition of the monarchy and proclamation of the Republic (September 1792); the execution of Louis XVI (January 1793); the Reign of Terror under Robespierre and the Committee of Public Safety; and the Thermidorian Reaction (July 1794), which ended the Terror and paved the way for the Directory and, eventually, Napoleon Bonaparte's rise.

The screening gave students a vivid, chronological understanding of the forces that reshaped modern Europe, complementing classroom study with a compelling visual narrative.