

Q. Is it correct to say that enlightened despots were really enlightened?

Ans. 18<sup>th</sup> century is called as the age of enlightenment. Many rulers of 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe got attracted towards the ideas of enlightenment and brought reforms in the political, social and economic fields.

The most commonly known enlightened despots were Catherine the Great, Maria Theresa & Joseph II, Frederick the Great, Charles III of Spain. Their enlightened outlook reflected in following measures:

- They believed the state should work towards the benefit of people.
- Joseph II made the serfs free.
- Frederick and Joseph II took several measures to promote agriculture, industries and irrigation infrastructure.
- They took measures to check the control of church over common people.
- They formulated a common legal code which was based on the principle of equality.

Despite all these measures taken it is not correct to say that the enlightened

despots were really enlightened because:

- Though they wanted to work for the betterment of the people, they did not want to be guided or directed by them.
- They were firm believers in the divine right of monarchical rule.
- Their enlightened ideas were limited to their personal beliefs only.
- While implementing some of the enlightened ideas, they became very doctrinaire as Joseph II neglected political and social realities of Austria while implementing reforms.
- These rulers adopted enlightenment ideas due to force and not due to choice. As in 18th century, people were becoming more rational it was impossible for them to continue their old measures to save the empire.
- In foreign policy they showed scant regard to international law and political principles as reflected in partition of Poland (1793) between Catherine and Frederick.

Q. "The promptings of the heart are more to be trusted than the logic of the mind" - Rousseau

Ans. The famous French political-philosopher Rousseau was part of the 18th century enlightenment but he was also a representative of reaction against the ideas of enlightenment.

- While the enlightenment focused on the ideas of rationality and logic to achieve ultimate happiness, Rousseau criticised too much focus on cold aspects of reason and logic.

- Thus, Rousseau unchained the tigers of emotions. This focus on emotions is reflected in his romanticism. Rousseau begins his famous book "social contract" with the statement, "Man was born free yet he is everywhere in chains." By this statement, Rousseau gives the idea of natural man which was free and uncorrupt. It was the arrival of state system and civilisation which put him in chains and made him corrupt.

- Rousseau's romanticism also gets reflected in "the discourse on origins of inequality."

Rousseau says that conventional inequality is the result of state system and creation of private property.

- Thus, Rousseau's romanticism criticizes the notion presented by enlightenment that everything in the past was dark and bad, Rousseau said that the men had an emotional connect with the past and happiness can be found in randomness of the nature.

- Rousseau thus meant that too much focus on reason and logic makes human life mechanical, it is emotions which make him humane.

Q. What was the Kant's idea of enlightenment?  
How he differentiated between age of enlightenment and enlightened age?

- Ans. Emmanuel Kant was a famous German philosopher-thinker of the age of enlightenment.
- However, Kant's idea of enlightenment was different from the enlightenment ideas prevalent in 18th century i.e. rationality and logic.
  - Kant represented ~~epistemic~~ skepticism (a reaction against enlightenment), which means there was no ultimate reality and every individual's perception of reality is different and he sees the world in that way only.
  - Kant also focussed on the role of conscience and intuition rather than totally relying upon reason and logic.
  - Thus, Kant introduced an ideal of morality for understanding human actions and behaviour. Kant formulated this moral concept as 'the categorical imperative' which he defined as the ultimate moral principle.
  - Kant's idea of enlightenment was that a person is enlightened if he can take

decision out of his own understanding rather than being guided by anyone else.

It is a famous statement of Kant that "Voltaire was living in the age of enlightenment but the age itself was not enlightened." By this statement Kant was trying to differentiate between the age of enlightenment and enlightened age. According to Kant, an enlightened age is the one in which modern ideas are scattered across all the sections of society and they are not limited to just a limited literate section. Moreover, in an enlightened age the modern ideas need not be forced upon anyone, as they are accepted by them with free choice. In the 18th century, which is usually known as the age of enlightenment the ideas of enlightenment were limited to just a few sections of society. The farmers and workers were unable to grasp these ideas. Because of this limitation, ideas could not ~~be~~ come into practice.