The Olmec civilization was a sophisticated Central American culture between 1200 and 1400 BC. It possibly sprouted from the Maya civilization, which was considered to be the parent culture in Mesoamerica.

Where was it located?

The Olmec heartland is an area on the south coast of the Gulf of Mexico coastal plain of southern Veracruz and Tabasco. The oldest Olmec site originated in San Lorenzo.

What is the significance of Olmec civilization?

Olmec means “the rubber people” in Nahuatl, a Mexican dialect. These people extracted latex from trees and mixed it with some juice of local vine to create rubber. The Olmec were also referred as “Tamoanchan”. The rise of this civilization was assisted by the local ecology of rich alluvial soil that encouraged high maize production.

What was the lifestyle of the Olmec inhabitants?

The Olmec inhabitants were basically farmers and fishermen who also did a small amount of hunting. Their major crops included maize, beans and squash. The fishing season coincided with the flooding of the river. Besides fishing, the Olmecs would go turtle hunting.

What kind of architecture did Olmec develop?

The Olmec architecture included public ceremonial buildings, elite residences and common houses. Another important feature of the Olmec civilization were the drainage systems they built. It consisted of a buried network of stone drain lines, long U-shaped rectangular blocks of basalt laid in structured patterns. They had similar systems, which they used to provide drinking water to the various settlements.

What other factors flourished during the Olmec civilization?

The Olmecs were clever mathematicians and astronomers who made accurate calendars. They made use of zero, during the early 4th century BC. The Olmecs developed a unique writing system using ‘logosyllabic’ script, which consisted of syllables as well as logos or signs. Olmec art was highly stylised and consisted of carvings and jade jewellery.

What marked the extinction of Olmec civilization?

The main centre of Olmec at San Lorenzo was abandoned around 900 BC. The changing course of the various favourable living conditions including vegetation, climate and rivers hampered the growth of the Olmec civilization.

The French Revolution

The French Revolution brought in a wave of change in Europe during 18th century. The Fall of Bastille was an important event, which not only demonstrated the brutality of the Revolution, but also represented the triumph of common people over dictatorship.

What built up the atmosphere for the attack?

A disastrous harvest in 1788 had provoked food riots in Paris and surrounding regions. The economic crisis situation that followed caused unrest among the poor and the middle class. Alarmed by the situation, Louis XVI called in the troops to maintain order and suppress the National Assembly, meant to gather its supporters consisting of commoners and rural farmers to ask for government changes. However, when the government failed to assure support, the people moved towards the Bastille.

As the agitated crowd gathered outside the prison, the warden gave the order for his troops to open fire. Nearly one hundred Parisians were killed in the attack when the French Guard threatened to bombard the Bastille. With the crowds hurling attack on the fortress, the warden surrendered. But the crowd paid no heed and instead killed him along with several soldiers.

What were the consequences of the attack?

The Fall of Bastille marked the beginning of French Revolution. The liberalism followed by the attack sparked further revolutions in Europe. The most immediate effect of the Revolution was the Declaration of the Rights of Man, which stated equality of all persons before the Law and state.