

Run up to the Bastille Day

Description



Wine had become a daily item of consumption in pre-revolution France

In this post I return to the original theme for the fortnight and that is the Bastille Day which as I wrote earlier, falls on 14th July and commemorates the storming of Bastille fort by revolutionaries in France in 1789.

Now its not that I'm obsessed with french revolution or culture (though I need to fully confirm this with myself), rather it is their wines which fascinate me. And as a student of wine, I get keenly interested in any major historical event related to wine and the french revolution is reputedly one of these.

Here I endeavor to paint a vivid picture for the reader, to bring out the prevalence of wine in day to day pre-revolution life of French citizens. In words of the reputed french historian Noelle Plack thus

Wine and revolution are key aspects of French national identity and they certainly became intertwined during the upheaval of 1789. Alcohol and its consumption were central to eighteenth-century French society at all levels. The popular classes drank in taverns and wine shops, while elites frequented the grand caf  s in Paris and other large cities . Drinking was essentially an act of sociability, a way for people to relax and spend time together.

Wine was the most frequently consumed alcoholic beverage among all groups, with cheap poor quality wines for the commoners and luxury crus from Burgundy, Bordeaux and Champagne for the rich. Perhaps around 300 liters of wine were drunk in Paris per year per adult male on the eve of the Revolution and by 1789. Wine had become a daily item of consumption for most Parisians (see picture) .

From above it is quite clear that wine was an integral part of the social and cultural fabric of the pre-revolution french society. And this would go on to be a major phenomenon which would act as a catalyst in future course of events unfolding and leading up to the revolution and beyond. We will talk more about this in the next post.

Picture from "Age of Revolutions" by Noelle Plack