

RENAISSANCE MOVEMENT

MEANING:

Renaissance is a French word that means 'rebirth or revival'. The name Renaissance stands for all those intellectual upheavals which were discernible towards the end of the Middle Ages. In other words, it comprises the intellectual changes that occurred at the end of medieval and the outset of the modern periods. Renaissance suggests a regeneration of civilization, a revival of ancient learning, culture, arts and letters and a reformative attitude of man towards life, culture and religion. Renaissance may be taken as period, when the people developed a new culture based on medieval Europe to which they added ideas and inspirations drawn from the ancient Greeks and Romans. According to the historian Davies, the word Renaissance "expresses those freedom loving, intrepid ideas of people which had been imprisoned by the religious authorities in the Middle Ages".

The Medieval period in the history of Europe is regarded as the Dark age. The Culture and Civilization was dormant and almost dead. In the middle ages man enjoyed little freedom of spirit and he was not conscious of his own worth. The catholic church had dominated the intellectual and cultural life of Europe for Centuries. The Society remained Submerged in total ignorance. Ignorance was bliss. In 13th and 14th centuries there came a time when there was re markable surge of activity and creative energy. Man became eager to learn an investigate. Blind faith and superstitions gave birth to reasoning .

Defining the term 'Renaissance' Hayes writes, "the word "Renaissance" literally 'Rebirth' was unfortunately employed to describe the whole period of transition from Middle Ages to the modern times. There was during this period, a Rebirth of classical art and learning with significant efforts on politics, economics and even the scientific speculations of early modern Europe. But many of the most important characteristic events of the period from 14th to the 17th century proceeded neither from 'Rebirth' nor did they have their roots in ancient Europe".

We may therefore define Renaissance in this way: Renaissance was an intellectual, liberal and cultural movement in which new Europe was taking shape on the strength of ancient European inspiration and critical as well as inventive tendencies were coming to the fore. As a result, man snapped all the medieval bonds. Various phases of human life emerged which permeated the art, literature, philosophy and science of that period.

CAUSES:

Renaissance in Europe was due to the combination of many events. These events did not crop up in any country at a time. As a matter of fact, they emerged in the different countries from time to time and shaped the background of Renaissance gradually. Therefore, the Renaissance did not happen all of a sudden but had its origin in the combination of events:

1. **Decline of feudalism:** Feudalism was the primary basis of life during medieval period, but it started declining towards the end of 12th century A.D. With the passage of time trade and commerce developed that led to the rise of prices. These rising prices benefitted merchants. As feudal lords could not increase their rents, they had no way out but to borrow to maintain them. The Lords were overburdened with debts. This led to the end of feudalism and manorial life. Therefore, decline prepared ground for Renaissance.
2. **Decline of Church Influence:** Under the holy Roman Empire, the Pope of Rome was Supreme head of the Christian world. But with the Decline of Empire Nation-State emerged and with that emerged the National Churches. The National Church began to criticize the commands of the Pope. So, the commands of the Pope came under Scientific enquiry.
3. **Crusades:** The Military expeditions undertaken in Europe from the end of the 11th century to recover the Holy land, Jerusalem, from Muslims (Seljuk Turks) were called Crusades. Because of these crusades, the Christians (Europeans) came in contact with enlightened people of the East. The Arab had enriched their civilization by establishing by contacts with Greeks and Indian Civilizations. The crusaders encouraged Voyages and the study of Geography. The Crusaders met strange people and got new ideas from them. The intellectual horizon of the crusaders had broadened. the crusades helped in ending the European Segregation. Aristotle's Scientific books, Arabic numerals, Algebra, Mariner's compass and paper reached Western Europe through crusades. The Christians were very much influenced by the rich culture of East. Crusaders caused many intellectual curiosities in the minds of Christians. Thus, Crusades played important in Renaissance.
4. **Commercial Prosperity:** The crusades and decline of Feudalism encouraged trade and commerce and led to the establishment of free and flourishing towns. This led to the rise of the middle class, that played an

important role in Europe. The commercial prosperity shaped the renaissance in four stages:

- (a) The European businessmen came to know about new ideas.
- (b) The development of business built new cities like Venice, Milan, Florence etc. These cities became the center of international trade. This facilitated the exchange of ideas. The permissive atmosphere in these cities cultivated the spirit of freedom of thought among people and made them skeptical.
- (c) Abundance of wealth created a desire of learning among businessmen.
- (d) The business class criticized the church. The new learning and education liberalized their ideas and broadened their outlook and gave a severe blow to blind faith.

5. **Geographical Explorations:** Navigators of Portugal and Spain played an important role in the geographical explorations. Prince Henry the navigator of Portugal discovered a sea route to Africa. Bartholomew Diaz was successful in reaching the cape of Good Hope. Vasco-da-Gama discovered India and Columbus discovered America. These Geographical discoveries brought the people of Europe into direct contact with the people of Asia and thus greatly broadened their outlook.
6. **Spirit of Inquiry:** During the Middle Ages church-controlled education and learning. But with the advent of modern times, scholars endowed with advent of mind and spirit of enquiry began to challenge the age-old beliefs. The question such as 'How', 'when' and 'Why' became imperative among the thinkers. Independent thinkers like Peter Abelard and Roger Bacon staked their lives in championing truth. Thus, spirit of enquiry was one of main causes of Renaissance.
7. **Paper and Printing Press:** The European learnt paper making from Arabs in the Middle Ages. Before 15th century job of Printing on paper was difficult and costly but later it was not so. John Guttenberg introduced printing press in Germany in 15th (1454 A.D.). William Caxton of England introduced a more improved type of printing press in 1477 A.D. The printing press and paper gave encouragement to the literary activities of the Renaissance. New books reached the common people and went a long way in spreading knowledge through books. Superstitions and orthodox practices were weakened self-confidence increased in people and Europe followed the path of reasoning.
8. **Fall of Constantinople:** Constantinople had become the Capital of Eastern Roman Empire (Byzantine Empire) and it remained in possession of Christians for more than 1000 years. During this period it was

maincenter of learning in Europe. But in 1453 A.D. the Turks(Muslims) captured Constantinople and the Greek and Roman Scholars migrated to various towns of Italy. These scholars diffused their knowledge amongst the people. Italy was the first European country to reap the benefits of migration of Scholars from Constantinople.

9. **Patronage of Rich:** many rich people became the patrons of the movement. Greek Scholars adorned the court of Francis I of France, Henery VIII of England, Charles of Spain. Patronage was also extended by medici family of Florence. The wealthy people encouraged the revival of Graco-Roman Classics. Rich families began to buy antiques and patronized artists to decorate their house.
10. **Development of Sciences:** It created Spirit of Enquiry. It gave severe blow to old beliefs, blind faiths, dogmatic attitude etc. Leonardo placed before the people his new scientific ideas. Copernicus proved the earth moves round the sun. Various inventions broadened the outlook of people.

CHARACTERISTICS OF RENAISSANCE

Renaissance redeem people from their thinking which was gripped by medieval religion and conventions, and promoted logical rational thinking. Following are main characteristics:

Humanism:

one of the characteristics aspects of Renaissance was 'humanism'. Humanism means to take interest in human problems, to show respect to human beings, accept the importance of human life, to make creative efforts in order to improve human life and make it noble and prosperous. The ancient Greek literature reflects a distinctive concern for human life because the Greek took deep interest in the world in which they lived. In the period of Renaissance, the ideology which emphasized temporal outlook rather than spiritual was called Humanism. Humanism controlled man, stressed his essential worth and dignity, expressed invisible faith in his tremendous creative potential, and proclaimed freedom of the rights. It recognized the dignity and beauty of Human body, opposed religious asceticism.

The supports of humanism were called Humanists. Humanists writers were interested in the pleasure and pain of living beings. The humanists maintained that the good of life and culmination of happiness were there in the welfare of people instead of serving God or

demonstrating military valour. Humanism developed first in Italy and later on spread to other countries. Dante and Petrarch were the well-known Humanists.

Rationalism:

Rationalism, other characteristics of the Renaissance movement brought a great revolution in moral and material outlook of mankind. Scholars like Peter Albert, Roger Bacon refused to believe in things simply because they had the sanction of the Bible. Bacon advised his age to apply reason for ascertaining the truth of things.

Secularism:

The Humanist is more interested in the material world around than in Gods, Angel or Demons. The medieval men regarded life as a painful preparation for a happier life which they thought would come after death. This transformation which the renaissance inaugurated may be termed as marking the passage from religion to secularism.

Individualism:

The individualistic spirit of the ages was marked by the development of idea of nationalism. The growth of the spirit of nationalism led to the growth of powerful nation states such as England, France etc. Further, the spirit of individualism led to the growth of maritime towns. These new towns acted as a medium to receive and transmit the light of eastern civilization to the west.

Adventurousness:

The spirit of adventure was an important characteristic of the renaissance movement. In the medieval age the people of Europe believed that the earth was flat mass of land surrounded by the oceans. But the revival of the Greek and the Roman writings made the man of the Renaissance age to doubt about the earth being a flat mass of land. After the fall of Constantinople at the hand of Muslims it was difficult to carry on trade with the East. So, the men of the adventurous spirit aided with the invention of maritime compass moved through the seas in search of new routes to the unknown world.