

# The Renaissance-An Age of Enlightenment

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**Abstract---** Renaissance movement is remarkable for creating a new awareness to the life and for widening the horizon of the people. The light of Renaissance came first of all to Italy and then France and lastly to England. The Renaissance period was the succeeding epoch of the Middle Ages which was the gap defining the classical and modern period. The widespread influence of Renaissance movement was felt upon the literature and philosophy of England during 16th Century.

**Keywords---** Reawakening of Learning, European Phenomenon, Christian Mythology, Cultural, Artistic, Political and Economic Rebirth.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Renaissance is a great Movement in history of Europe which pervaded all the branches of knowledge and which touched every aspect of life of Europe in 14th and 15th century. It is very much difficult to give any definition of Renaissance. Etymologically Renaissance means rebirth. Thus Renaissance symbolizes the reawakening of learning which came through the touch of Greek literature with the European scholars.

The Renaissance was a fervent period of European cultural, artistic, political and economic “rebirth” following the middle Ages. In this period England’s population doubled; prices rocketed, rents followed, old social loyalties dissolved, and new industrial, agricultural, and commercial veins were first tapped.

The Renaissance was not only an English but a European phenomenon. The movement is clearly felt in European life after the Turkish invasion on Greek which made the Greek Scholars to leave Constantinople and to fled to Italy, France and then England. This Great event of the Turkish conquest of Constantinople made the Greek Scholars to live their country and to migrate to the places of their refuge. They went as refugees to search countries of Europe like Italy, France and England. These Scholars who took refuge to save their lives in these countries became a great event in the national lives of these countries. These Scholars brought along with themselves the rich treasure of learning which was to revolutionize the art, philosophy, culture and the way of living of the European people. The study of the Greek literature brought by these Refugee Scholars fired up the soul and imagination of the Italy, the France and the England of their times and created a new kind of intellectual and Aesthetic culture absolutely different from that of the middle ages.

The movement is remarkable for creating a new Awareness to the life and for widening The Horizon of the people. The widespread influence of Renaissance movement was felt upon the literature and philosophy of England during 16th Century. However the germination of the seed of Renaissance knowledge was clearly seen during 14th and 15th century in England and Italy. There are certain characteristic features of this movement which can be listed as below:

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## **II. CHANGED THE OUTLOOK OF THE PEOPLE**

The first thing worthy of mention in this connection is that the Renaissance knowledge changed the outlook of the people. The new attitude towards life born out of The Renaissance knowledge put more and more stress upon free, frank and bold enjoyment of life. The Renaissance knowledge totally rejected the theory of other worldliness and gave more and more emphasis on present worldliness. The new attitude rejected the mediaeval beliefs, ideas and theories completely and it was substituted by a new spirit of enquiry. It rejected every mythological belief. As a matter of fact it only accepted a tradition, convention established values on the basis of rational enquiry. So the blind faith was substituted by the mode of rational enquiry.

## **III. GENERATED A CONSCIOUSNESS**

The Renaissance movement also generated a consciousness which out rightly rejected authoritarianism. The spirit of Renaissance knowledge made the people rational and critical. They established ideas and set of values because they were given by some great men. The new attitude was only ready to accept those things, which could be tested by the reason and logic. So this spirit of enquiry and rejection of authority is a characteristic feature of The Renaissance spirit.

## **IV. LOVE FOR FREEDOM**

Love for freedom is another important characteristic feature of the new Renaissance attitude of the people. The Renaissance attitude is based on the love for freedom as an essential condition of life. It is opposed to all kinds of slaveries- social, political, economic and spiritual. It gives stress more and more on the ideal of equality, fraternity and liberty and is opposed to every sort of human bondage.

## **V. IMPACT ON ART & LITERATURE**

1550-1660 were the years which produced a gallery of authors of genius, some of whom have never been surpassed, and conferred on scores of lesser talents the enviable ability to write with fluency, imagination, and verve. The Renaissance started in Florence, Italy, a place with a rich cultural history where wealthy citizens could afford to support budding artists. Great Italian writers, artists, politicians and others declared that they were participating in an intellectual and artistic revolution that would be much different from what they experienced during the Dark Ages. Renaissance art was characterized by realism and naturalism. Artists strived to depict people and objects in a true-to-life way.

They used techniques, such as perspective, shadows and light to add depth to their work. Emotion was another quality that artists tried to infuse into their pieces.

Some of the most famous artistic works that were produced during the Renaissance include:

- The Mona Lisa (Da Vinci)
- The Last Supper (Da Vinci)
- Statue of David (Michelangelo)
- The Birth of Venus (Botticelli)

- The Creation of Adam (Michelangelo)

The Renaissance promoted the rediscovery of classical philosophy, literature and art. Some of the greatest thinkers, authors, statesmen, scientists and artists in human history thrived during this era. The Renaissance spirit is clearly visible in making its impression upon literature as early as 14th century. Chaucer is called the morning star of Renaissance. Chaucer's nationalism and his jest for life are the Renaissance tendencies. Further his free, frank and realistic description of the 14th century society gives the glimpse of Renaissance tree growing and inching forward towards modernism. The modernism of Chaucer's characters is the product of Renaissance. We are shown that materialism becomes a powerful force in life. We come to know to the "Prologue" that Chaucer's characters such as Squire, Monk, and Franklin took keen interest in the matters of food, dress and drinks etc. We are told about Squire -

**"Embroidered was he, as it were mead,<sup>1</sup>**

**All full of fresh flowers white and red.**

We also come across with merchant, Dyer, Typecer and Wife of Bath who was a fine weaver. All this indicates growing importance of trade and Commerce in national level. Wife of Bath presents before us the example of the emancipation of woman from conventional and traditional morality in respect of sex.

The Renaissance spirit attains full flowering in the Elizabethan drama. Marlowe's "Dr Faustus" 'The Jew of Malta' and 'Tamborlain' are all the expression of Renaissance spirit. The heroes of Marlowe are the very embodiment of Renaissance spirit. The boundless ambition and the thirst for attaining the infinite and unattainable is the Renaissance spirit which is expressed through the heroes of Marlowe. The heroes of Marlowe are the average human beings who attained superhuman heights and achieve a surprising glory in life. For example we can see that Marlowe's 'Dr Faustus' is born in a very ordinary family. Not only he is able to pursue his study with the help of some of his relatives, but his knowledge is deep and becomes the instrument of his Cosmopolitan reputation. Faustus is known far and wide for his encyclopedic range of knowledge. He is not satisfied with earthly glory. Faustus reviews his knowledge and is pained to note that his knowledge is useless since it is not an instrument of power. He thinks that pure academic knowledge is useless. He is dissatisfied with his knowledge as he himself says,

**"Could thou make men to live eternally<sup>2</sup>**

**or being dead, raise them to life again"**

Faustus is not satisfied with his own progress because with all his Treasure of knowledge he is only Faustus, a man. His remark is very much significant:

**"Yet art thou still but Faustus and a man."<sup>3</sup>**

He wants to explore all the mysteries of nature and universe and wishes to become all powerful and almighty like God. Mark his own words-

**"O! what a world of profit and delight,<sup>4</sup>**

**Of power, of honour, of omnipotent**

**All things that move between the quiet poles**

**shall be at my command."**

In this way in ordinate and insatiable ambition unquenchable thirst for knowledge to make it an instrument of power is the chief characteristic feature of Faustus' personality. These are all Renaissance tendencies which express themselves in the character of Faustus. Unlimited ambition, unlimited adventure and unlimited curiosity and unlimited appetite for the enjoyment of life. Free, frank and bold enjoyment of life was the chief Renaissance tendency which can also be seen in Dr Faustus'. Rejection of conventional ideas, beliefs and moralities is also found in the character of Dr. Faustus'. The new Renaissance attitude out rightly rejected the other worldly attitude and accepted the present worldliness, materialism and just for life for the product of Renaissance spirit getting powerful in the society. Marlowe's heroes believe in free and bold enjoyment of life without caring for the traditional morality. Marlowe's 'Dr. Faustus' is the very incarnate of this spirit. He wants to enjoy life and he wants to feel all carnal pleasures of life. Looking at the Helen he says-

**"Was this the face that launched A Thousand Ships?"<sup>5</sup>**

**And burnt the topless towers of Tlium?**

**Sweet Helen makes me Immortal with thy kiss."**

The Renaissance spirit is also clearly seen in the Dramas of Shakespeare. Shakespeare gives us heroes who present before us the marvelous example of the unique qualities of head and heart. Shakespeare's tragic heroes impress us with their intrinsic worth, rare intuitive power and great courage and capacity to fight the end circumstances of life. They impressed with their glorious struggle of life. Although they are crushed but they never keel themselves before the circumstances. This tendency of unconquerable will power is that gift of Renaissance expressing itself in the Dramas of Shakespeare. Hamlet's expression about man is expression of Renaissance Spirit by runs by a Renaissance man-

**"What a piece of work is man?**

**How noble in reason?**

**How infinite in faculties,**

**In form, how moving? How expresses and admirable in action**

**How like an angel in apprehension?"<sup>6</sup>**

This renaissance spirit is also to be found in the poetry of metaphysical poets. Herbert Grierson's opinion is very much correct when he says that-

"Metaphysicism in English poetry was the renaissance tree becoming over ripe and approaching putrescence. The frank discussion of sex, intellectual analysis and too much argumentation, introspection are the renaissance tendencies find the expression in metaphysical poetry."<sup>7</sup>

The writers of the Renaissance not only wanted to imitate art, they hoped to change reality through art. The writers reflected a spirit of exploration that was going on throughout the world. Renaissance writers, like Shakespeare, brought settings to life beyond the English borders. Writers also believed in the art of imitation, gravitating toward the Greek and Roman writers and writing styles.

Key Renaissance writers were John Milton, William Shakespeare, Edmund Spenser, Philip Sidney, and Ben Jonson. The invention of the printing press enabled writers to publish their works. Because of the printing press,

literacy also increased. With more writers, there was a greater demand for literature. English literature was positive and forward thinking. English writers were trendsetters. There was a whole world to discover and conquer.

## **VI. REJECTION OF CONVENTIONAL IDEAS**

The Christian mythology regarded the man as a sinner. The Christian mythology gave much and much emphasis on the other worldliness. It rejected every kind of pleasure from life like literature, art, music, painting etc. The knowledge that was imparted to the people was also based on theology. There was no scope for the secular knowledge because of this Theological bondage. So broadly speaking Renaissance symbolizes the emancipation of human soul from the bondage of theology.

This movement encouraged Europeans to question the role of the Roman Catholic Church during the Renaissance. As more people learned how to read, write and interpret ideas, they began to closely examine and critique religion as they knew it. Also, the printing press allowed for texts, including the Bible, to be easily reproduced and widely read by the people, themselves, for the first time.

In the 16th century, Martin Luther, a German monk, led the Protestant Reformation – a revolutionary movement that caused a split in the Catholic Church.

## **VII. NEW CONCEPT OF HUMANISM**

During the 14th century, a cultural movement called humanism began to gain momentum in Italy. Among its many principles, humanism promoted the idea that man was the center of his own universe, and people should embrace human achievements in education, classical arts, literature and science.

In 1450, the invention of the Gutenberg printing press allowed for improved communication throughout Europe and for ideas to spread more quickly.

As a result of this advance in communication, little-known texts from early humanist authors such as those by Francesco Petrarch and Giovanni Boccaccio, which promoted the renewal of traditional Greek and Roman culture and values, were printed and distributed to the masses.

Additionally, many scholars believe advances in international finance and trade impacted culture in Europe and set the stage for the Renaissance.

## **VIII. SCIENTIFIC DISCOVERIES LED TO MAJOR SHIFTS IN THINKING**

Galileo and Descartes presented a new view of astrology and mathematics, while Copernicus proposed that the Sun, not the Earth, was the center of the solar system. Nicolaus Copernicus Mathematician and astronomer made first modern scientific argument for the concept of a heliocentric solar system.

Thus the sphere of renaissance influence on English literature is so wide and comprehensive that it needs volumes to cover it. However we can finish our discussion by saying that renaissance has revolutionized the English literature, philosophy and the mode of thought. The Renaissance is credited with bridging the gap between the middle Ages and modern-day civilization.

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