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Renaissance, Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution

1

Chapter

With the fall of the Western Roman Empire in 5th century CE the centre of Greek and Roman learning shifted to the Byzantine Empire. The Byzantine Empire also known as the Eastern Roman Empire successfully preserved the classical antiquity cultures. On the contrary, western Europe suffered from the lack of scientific and cultural advancement – which conferred the period (i.e. 5th-14th century CE) the title of ‘Dark Ages’.

Dark Ages

Francesco Petrarca (known as Petrarch), an Italian scholar of the 14th century, first coined the term ‘Dark Ages’ as he was dismayed at the lack of good literature in western Europe after the fall of Roman Empire. His observation was largely based on the degeneration of classical era’s wisdom which was characterized with cultural advancement and both Roman and Greek knowledge had provided the world with contributions to art, science, philosophy, architecture and political systems.

In addition, the Dark Ages were characterized with overwhelming authority of the Roman Catholic Church and feudalism. However, between 18th and 20th centuries, scholars restricted the application of the Dark Ages term to (c. 5th-10th century). Some even altogether reject the Dark Ages hypothesis.

However, with the capture of Constantinople in 1453 by the Ottoman Turks, the Byzantine-Greek scholars were compelled to migrate to Rome.

Thus, Rome witnessed revival of the Greek and Roman heritage which brought spirit of enquiry in forefront, thereby stimulating the progress of science, art, architecture, sculpture, painting, literature, geography and religion.

Further, the emergence of City-States like Florence and Venice served as the patronage centre of the refugee Byzantine-Greek scholars. This paved way for Renaissance.

Renaissance

The term Renaissance literally means “rebirth” or “revival”. In historical context, it refers to the significant changes that took place in Europe during the transition period between the medieval and modern.

There was a revival of literature and art on the intellectual side based on Graeco-Roman knowledge. The spirit of enquiry led to scientific inventions. Politically, this period witnessed the end of feudalism and the emergence of nation-states. The spirit of individualism and humanism began to dominate in the social sphere. The religious transformation was symbolized by the Reformation.

The Renaissance was mainly a consequence of the decline of Feudalism and is largely marked by the three features: the emergence of humanism, the beginning of modern

science and the advent of reformation in the religion. The most important among them was the emergence of spirit of humanism which was in fact the trigger for the other features and also for numerous other developments.

Humanism

By the 14th century, humanism gained momentum in Italy, which professed the idea that man was the centre of his own universe, and people should embrace human achievements in education, classical arts, literature and science.

Further, in 1450, the invention of the printing press by John Gutenberg allowed for improved communication throughout Europe and for ideas to spread more quickly. Bible was the first book published by Gutenberg.

Subsequently, ideas of early humanist authors such as Francesco Petrarch and Giovanni Boccaccio, which promoted the renewal of traditional Greek and Roman culture and values, were printed and distributed to the masses.

Also, many scholars believe that Mercantilism had a strong influence and impacted culture in Europe and set the stage for the Renaissance.

Spirit of Humanism

The spirit of humanism basically meant a decisive shift in concern for human as distinct from divine matters.

- Humanism as a system of views eulogised man, stressed his essential worth and dignity, expressed deep faith in his tremendous creative potential, and proclaimed freedom of the individual and inalienable rights of the individual.
- It was centred on the man with all his earthly joys and sorrows, opposed to religious asceticism.
- It defended man's right to pleasure and the satisfaction of earthly desires and requirements.
- It meant the glorification of the human and the naturals opposed to the divine and other-worldly.

Mercantilism

Mercantilism is the name given to economic theory and practice, which was carried out in Europe between 16th and 18th century that promoted governmental regulation of a nation's economy for the purpose of augmenting state power at the expense of rival national powers.

It is also considered as the economic counterpart of political absolutism. The Scottish economist Adam Smith in his *Wealth of Nations* (1776) popularised mercantilism.

Beginning of Modern Science

The growth of modern science was an offshoot of the emergence of humanism which was characterized by the rejection of the authority of the Church and divine in controlling the lives of the people. Rather a new faith in the intellectual and physical capacities of man to control nature and change his life was developed.



The Renaissance marked the beginning of modern science. Earlier, the intellectual life in medieval Europe was dominated by the Church – any view to be held true had to be supported by the authority of the scriptures, of the Church.

The Renaissance thinkers rejected the blind acceptance of authority. They asserted that knowledge could not be gained by speculation. This new outlook marked a break with the past and prepared the way for the advancement of science. As Francis Bacon, an English philosopher, who once said that knowledge can be gained only by observation and experimentation.

Thus the Renaissance scientists began learning by questioning and observation – the scientific method of experimentation is used by scientists even today. Empirical observation became the bedrock of science instead of mysticism, superstition or spirituality.

Reformation

This was another offshoot of the spirit of humanism which changed the focus of importance from the Church to man his deeds and his needs. The term 'Reformation' refers to two major developments in the history of Europe that took place towards the latter part of the Renaissance. The first was the Protestant Reformation which resulted in a split in Christianity and the secession of a large number of countries from the Roman Catholic Church and the establishment of separate churches in those countries, generally on national lines. The second development concerned reforms within the Roman Catholic Church, generally referred to as Catholic Reformation or Counter Reformation.

The Protestant Revolution can be said to have begun in Germany in 1517 when Martin Luther, a monk of the Order of St. Augustine, proposed his ninety-five theses or statements.

- He rejected the entire system of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, introduced German as the language of Church services, abolished the special status of priests as representatives of God on earth and emphasized faith rather than pilgrimages.
- He occupied himself with the task of building an independent German Church and in expounding his doctrine.
- The German rulers and common people of Germany supported Luther.
- The rulers wanted to be free from the authority of Popes and get possession of the wealth in German monasteries of themselves. The common people, on the other hand, liked Luther's teaching because it gave them an opportunity to demand more freedom from their rulers. Luther questioned many of the practices of the church and whether they aligned with the teachings of the Bible. As a result, a new form of Christianity, known as Protestantism, was created.

The Protestant movement soon spread to various parts of Europe. In Switzerland, the Protestant Reformation was led by Zwingli and John Calvin. Religious sects similar to the Calvinists were called Puritans in England and America, Presbyterians in Scotland and Huguenots in France. In England, Henry VIII declared himself the head of the Church. Henry VIII's reign was followed by a long conflict between Catholics and Protestants. However, in 1559, Queen Elizabeth I established the Church of England as the official church.

The Protestant Reformation did not, lead to the establishment of a universal Protestant Church under a single authority like the Catholic Church was under the Popes. It led to



the establishment of separate national churches under the control of the state. But by the 17th century, half of Europe had adopted one or the other of the Protestant creeds.

The Protestant Reformation was followed by a realization that there was a need for a moral regeneration of the Catholic Church and the Papacy. Hence, the term Counter-Reformation refers to a number of ideological, organisational and theological changes which occurred in the Roman Catholic Church in response to the emergence of Protestantism. This was the period in which Catholic Church officials attempted reform and worked to bring back to the Church some of its lost power.

Renaissance: Art, Architecture and Science

Artists like Leonardo Da Vinci incorporated scientific principles in artworks to showcase human anatomy with extraordinary precision in the 'Vitruvian Man' artwork.

Further, scientists like Copernicus proposed the heliocentric theory in which he proposed that heavenly bodies do not revolve around the Earth instead they do around the Sun. Later, his claim was supported by Galileo, who invented the telescope and Kepler too contributed through his planet's elliptical orbit theory.

The advances in science enabled Voyagers to discover new shipping routes to the Americas, India and the Far East. Notable voyagers were Ferdinand Magellan, Christopher Columbus, Amerigo Vespucci (after whom America is named), Marco Polo, Ponce de Leon, Vasco Núñez de Balboa, Hernando De Soto. This revolution in science reached its climax with Newton's theory of Gravitation.

Architects such as Filippo Brunelleschi employed mathematics to accurately engineer and design immense buildings with expansive domes for religious buildings. Artist strived for realism and naturalism as evident in their depiction of people and objects in a true-to-life way. They used techniques, such as perspective, shadows and light to add depth to their work and infused expressions of emotions in their paintings for instance Da Vinci's Mona Lisa.

Thus, art, architecture and science closely interacted with each other during the Renaissance period.

End of the Renaissance

Multiple factors were responsible for the demise of the Renaissance.

- **Disruptions in Italy:** By the end of the 15th century, numerous wars had plagued the Italian peninsula. Spanish, French and German invaders battling for Italian territories caused disruption and instability in the region.
- Also, changing trade routes led to a period of economic decline and limited the amount of money that wealthy contributors could spend on the arts.
- **Counter Reformation:** The Catholic Church, in retaliation to Luther's Protestantism, censored artists and writers which critiqued the papal authority. This generated a sense of fear which hastened creativity and innovation among Renaissance thinkers.
- In addition, the Council of Trent of 1545 issued key statements and clarifications of the Church's doctrine and teachings in which Protestantism and humanism were regarded as sin. Also, any views that challenged the Catholic church was considered as an act of heresy punishable by death.



However, by the early 17th century, the Renaissance movement inspired the Age of Reason or Enlightenment in Europe.

Impact of the Renaissance Spirit

Discovery of New Sea Routes and Rise of International Trade

- The Renaissance spirit that led to new developments in art, literature, science and religion and the consequent scientific discoveries were responsible for geographical discoveries – development of the art of ship-building, invention of Mariner’s Compass and other astronomical and other scientific discoveries raised the hope of the adventurers to explore new sea routes.
- These new geographical discoveries opened up a whole new world for the explorers. These discoveries resulted in increased trade and hence increased wealth.
- This wealth was further utilized in the development of science and technology, which improved the capacities of their armies, which led to the colonization of newly captured territories and enslavement of the colonial subjects.
- These slaves were further utilized for the exploitation of the natural wealth of these colonies bringing even more riches for the colonial powers.
- These accumulated riches vested them with the capacity of making huge investments for increasing production for commercial purposes, marking the emergence of the spirit of capitalism, which culminated in the end of the feudal era and the onset of the Industrial Revolution.

Spirit of Capitalism

Renaissance’s products like Protestantism offered a concept of the worldly “calling,” and gives worldly activity a religious character. Further, Calvinists believe in predestination that is God has already determined who is saved and who is damned. As Calvinism developed, a deep psychological need for clues about whether one was actually saved arose, and Calvinists looked to their success in worldly activity for those clues.

Thus, they came to value profit and material success as signs of God’s favor and the spirit of Capitalism arose as a consequence of the Protestant ethics of showing gratitude to God by attaining material success.

- Capitalism is a system of production in which the means of production and distribution are owned by individuals or corporates and where competitors participate in a free market.
- The means of production are land, labour, and capital (factories, farms, mines, natural resources and money). Individuals invested their capital, or money, hoping to make a profit.
- Much of the profit was reinvested. Producers competed with one another to make better quality products at lower prices. In theory, competition resulted in the best product at the lowest possible price.

Age of Enlightenment

The Age of Enlightenment, also known as the Age of Reason, was the period characterized by rationality, as ‘reason’ superseded cultural and religious tradition and dogmas. Rationale



was the primary authority used to settle philosophical, scientific and political problems. Contributions to the human knowledge was made through means of observation, experimentation, and inference. The impact of Age of Reason was following:

- **Scientific Approach:** Earlier science was largely dominated by the ‘deductive method,’ which began with generally accepted conclusions, that were culturally and theologically accepted as true, and then applied to particular observable cases. Post-Renaissance, this deductive method gave way to the inductive method – which was based on observations leading to newer and newer conclusions.
- **Philosophical:** Descartes critique of all previous philosophies as uncertain, paved way for a fresh approach which mandated that reliance on facts is absolutely certain, particularly the fact that he was thinking, and thus he himself existed (‘Cogito, ergo sum’).
 - His methodology influenced French and German Rationalism, English Empiricism and German Idealism. It contributed to the emergence of ‘Modern Philosophy’ in which appeals to authorities such as Plato and Aristotle were not made except citing them for examples. Personal experience gained paramount importance in terms of the formulation of a theory or observation. Since different peoples have different personal experiences, toleration and pluralism increased which fostered ideas such as freedom of thought and freedom of religion. This was accompanied by political theories which called for a ‘new order’ as the old order was understood as the primary source misery and slavery.
- **The Emergence of the Public Sphere:** The Enlightenment was marked with emergence of a space in which individuals were able to come together as a public. This public sphere included coffeehouses, reading societies, etc. With the growth of the international book trade and the emergence of mass-produced pamphlets and news bulletins, it was possible for the people from different parts of the world to read diverse literature and discuss the events, persons and ideas at global level. Books on science and natural philosophy were increasingly read for intellectual stimulation.
- **The Spread of Democratic Values:** In the 17th century various attempts were made by monarchs to establish the principle of the Divine Right of Kingship but by the 18th century, their failure was evident. The monarchs, which were bankrupt, had to turn to assemblies and parliaments to raise money to finance their projects. This resulted in participation of different groups in decision-making which in turn put limits on the power of the monarchs.

Important Personalities

- **Galileo Galilei (1564-1642)** was an Italian astronomer and mathematician. He is accredited for the discovery of the moons of Jupiter. He was a proponent of the heliocentric theory. He faced intense opposition and persecution for his views, especially from the religious authorities. The conflict between fundamentalist religious beliefs and scientific progress was clearly manifested in his lifetime.
- **Rene Descartes (1596-1650)**, a French philosopher, widely regarded as the ‘Father of Modern Philosophy.’ He made a new beginning by discarding the traditional scholastic methodology and beginning with the one fact that he could be certain of – the fact that he was thinking. He concluded that his own existence was also a certainty – ‘Cogito,



ergo sum' (I think, therefore I am'). Thereon, he built his entire philosophy using a mathematical style of reasoning. He had published his philosophical reflections in several works such as 'Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy'. He was also an excellent mathematician and is known for his contributions to coordinate geometry.

- **Benedict (Baruch) Spinoza (1632-1677)**, was a Dutch Jewish (later Christian) rationalist and philosopher. Like Descartes, he used geometric method in his philosophy. He propounded that mind and matter were two aspects of the same substance. He advocated a kind of pantheistic view under which all things were somehow included in God, and that nature was a manifestation of God. Further, he called for a government that would be broad-minded and liberal. However, his views were not easily accepted in 17th century Europe.
- **John Locke (1632-1704)** in his 'Essay Concerning Human Understanding' laid the philosophy of sense experience as a means of attaining truth in contrast to Descartes' method. This began the movement known as 'Empiricism' which held that all our ideas come ultimately from sense experiences. The mind combines simple ideas to produce more complex ideas. Locke also wrote significant treatises on economics and politics, and argued in favor of religious toleration, which was rare in the 17th century. His theories gradually led to the creation of our modern understanding of human rights.
- **Francis Bacon (1561-1626)** was an English philosopher, statesman, orator and scientist. He is considered as the 'father of empiricism' for his work and advocacy of scientific method and methodical scientific inquiry in investigating scientific phenomena. He encouraged an empirical approach both through his own example and philosophically.
- **Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778)** in his most important work, 'The Social Contract', emphasised that human beings are naturally in competition with one another and hence they join together to form groups so that they stand a better chance in the struggle. Thus, this 'Social Contract' was at the base of modern civilization and society. He criticized the concept of private property because it created social inequality and advocated freedom, equality and justice for all – these theories heavily influenced French Revolution.
- **Voltaire (1694-1778)** was a famous French thinker who believed in God, but not in any particular religion. He strongly advocated the three principles of free trade, religious tolerance and freedom of expression for progress and prosperity. He too had considerable influence on French Revolution.
- **Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)** was a German philosopher who claimed that we can never know objects in themselves, but only as they appear to us. He laid that knowledge is not determined by the nature of the external world of objects, but rather by the nature of human rationality. This approach led to the foundation of idealism in German philosophy. He is considered as the most influential philosopher of Enlightenment.
- **Montesquieu (1689-1755)** was a pioneering French political thinker and advocate of human freedom. In his work, 'The Spirit of the Laws', he studied different systems of government such as the Republic, the Monarchy and the Despotic State and offered critical analysis. He propounded that the most suitable government would have three branches of government, namely the legislative, executive and judicial, that would be separate from each other. His views greatly influenced the constitutions of many countries, including India.