

Renaissance in Europe

Renaissance is one of the first developments that marked the beginning of modern history. Renaissance simply means '**rebirth**', but it was more than that, it was not merely the rebirth or revival of the achievements of classical civilisations, but it was a state of mind, where Europeans developed a new world view. It was a new development that brought about a series of changes in almost all spheres of knowledge – arts, literature, science, religion, philosophy and politics. It was a system of thought that prompted the Europeans to think for themselves and the world in which they live on. It was development that enabled man to discover himself and the World about him, along with his ability to change the outlook of life.

Renaissance can better be considered as a cultural and intellectual movement which paved the way varied changes in almost all walks of life. It was an age of transition- transition from medievalism with its emphasis on Scholasticism, authority of the Church to modernism with its emphasis on reason, rationality and scientific thinking. It also heralded the revival of humanistic approach, idea of individualism, new concepts of state, questioning faculty and the spirit of adventure. All these striking features became the foundation from which other historical developments flourished not only in the history of Europe but that of the world too.

Renaissance in Italy

Renaissance began in Italy roughly between AD 1300 and AD 1500 and then spread to other parts of Europe by the first half of the 16th century. There were many factors that helped Italy to become the home of renaissance.

The emergence and growth of cities was the primary factor that made Italy the home of renaissance. Cities like Genoa, Venice, Florence, Milan etc. emerged which facilitated growth in the economy of Italy, This growth of cities produced changes in the society, which witnessed the emergence of new wealthy class of Middlemen and merchants. This class encouraged those who were interested in the study of the achievements of Classical civilisations.

These two developments consequently led to the disintegration of the then existing social structure and the middle class enjoyed

considerable degree of freedom. This amounted to the growth of the idea of individualism and scientific thinking.

Like Greece, Italy was the centre of classical civilisation –Rome. Italy had and continues to witness the remains of classical literature, art forms and architectural monuments. The remains of Rome's imperial glory were to be found all over the Rome and Greek remains could be seen in southern Italy and Sicily. This prompted the people of Italy to study the achievements of classical civilisations.

The patronage of the rulers of Italian states also responsible for the beginning of Renaissance. Reference is to be made to the Medici family of Florence and the ruler Lorenzo de Medici.

Influence of the East

Traditionally, Renaissance was seen from a European centered perspective and it was believed that only European ideas and concepts were responsible. But modern research has undermined this surmise and historians have posited the impact of the Asian World behind European Renaissance. Several of the basic ideas of Renaissance had their origin in the East- Particularly from India, China, Iran, Arabia and Central Asia.

Through the Crusades, the Europeans imbibed many an idea. The Europeans could read many classical Greek authors and works, thanks to the translations and their preservation of these by eminent Arab scholars. These include Ptolemy, Plato, Aristotle, Archimedes and Euclid.

Further, the ideas of navigational tools like mariner's Compass, astrolabe and maps were provided from the Asian World .The ideas for the printing Press were of the Chinese wood block printing. Even for the gun powder, which was put for the destruction of the feudal castles, the Europe was indebted to the Asian world. Thus, the impact of Asian ideas and innovations cannot be sidelined as far as the origin and significance of Renaissance.

Development of Humanism

Humanism was the hallmark of Renaissance. Humanism was a specific way of thinking, emphasising man and his activities. Hence Renaissance marked the shift from 'God- centred or Religion –centred' view to 'Man –centred' perspective.

During that period, the Humanism had been used at two levels. At the first level, that is, at the technical level Humanism was used as a programme of studying humanities – man and his activities- the emotions, actions and thinking of man which were represented in language, literature ,history, politics, philosophy, ethics etc. This naturally revolutionised the theory and practice of education, which underwent drastic changes. Thus ‘New Learning’, as a cultural phenomenon developed in the place of existing curricula. This new phenomenon enabled the study of humanities but natural sciences as well.

At the second level-that is at the general level, Humanism stood for the dignity, the rights and the value of man. Renaissance openly declared that man is worthy of study and expressed deep faith in the creative potential of man. Hence it proclaimed the freedom of individual, which became and continues to be the striking feature of modernity. The Renaissance thinkers strongly believed that man with an active mind and body was capable knowing and controlling the world and orienting one’s own fate and happiness. Thus, Renaissance rejected the Church centred concept of life and highlighted the earthly life.

Renaissance in Literature

The impact of Renaissance first appeared in the field of Literature. Instead of the Latin, the Renaissance writers took the language of the people. Thus Renaissance marked the emergence of language of the people as the language of literature. In other words, Renaissance marked the beginnings of modern European Languages – the Italian, the French, the English, the Dutch, the Spanish, the German and the like. Moreover, it also led to the creation of new literary forms such as



Dante

sonnets, essays, short stories and literary criticisms. The emergence of humanistic literature was the lasting impact of Renaissance on literature. Secular themes also became the subject matter of literature. Finally, the use of prose for all kinds of writings was the key of Renaissance literature.

Dante was the foremost literary figure of Italy during this period. The author of Divine Comedy and The Monarch, Dante used Tuscan language, which led the development of Italian Language, for writing his works.

Petrarch (1304 -1374) was another figure, who is considered as the 'father of humanism'. He developed a new literary form called Sonnet from vernacular folk songs, through his 'Sonnets to Laura'. He is also the author of an epic, 'Africa' written in Latin Language.

Boccaccio (1313 -1375) is considered as the 'father of Italian Prose', he had written the work 'Decameron', a collection of 100 short stories with themes selected from contemporary popular life. Another notable writer of the period was Machiavelli, the author of 'The Prince' which furnishes the ways and means to be in power and to exercise and practice absolute power. He is often considered as the father of Modern Political Science.

Spread of Renaissance to Other Parts of Europe

Renaissance had spread to other parts of Europe from Italy. **Francois Rabelais** and **Michel de Montaigne** were two eminent Renaissance writers in France. The former, the author of 'Gargantuan' used native French in a manner that the most humble person could enjoy, exposed the abuses of papacy and monks. The latter developed a new literary form called 'Essay' in the French. He was a polished, urbane essayist and a leading humanist. He can be considered as the forerunner of modern psychology of education, and was thinker who noted that the problems of human life are more important to solve than the syntax of an obscure sentence. He earned the title 'the first modern man'.

In England, Renaissance produced greatest literary figures of the age, the most notable are **Sir Thomas More**, William Chaucer, John Lyly, Robert Greene, Christopher Marlowe, Ben Johnson, Edmund Spenser and William Shakespeare. The author of '**Utopia**', Thomas More vividly pictures an ideal society. **Chaucer** is the father of English poetry and his tome, 'The Canterbury Tales'. Shakespeare was the greatest dramatist of the age and made a lasting impact on the drama.

In Holland, the spirit of Renaissance finds itself in the writings of Erasmus of Rotterdam, the author of 'In Praise of Folly', a satire through which he made fun at the corrupt practices of the Church. It contains his conception of human nature.

Spain was another country which produced leading writers of the age. Among them, the name of Cervantes deserves mention. He wrote his magnum opus '**Don Quixote**', a novel in which he mocked at the life of medieval knights and their idea of medieval chivalry.

Martin Luther was the leading thinker of Germany during this period. He brought about the German translation of Bible, which paved the way for the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century.

Renaissance also sharpened man's critical scholarship, which in course of time developed as a discipline. Accurate scholarship became the hallmark of Renaissance.

Renaissance in Art and Architecture

Renaissance made lasting impact on art, architecture and sculpture. The Renaissance artists made art humanistic in nature, though they selected religious themes and Biblical subjects. What they had done was that they made a humanistic and secular touch to their creations. Along with this, they separated painting from architecture. Further, new materials were used for paintings viz, canvas, wood etc. along with frescoes. They also made oil painting very popular.

Hence, painting had undergone the thrilling influences. Two separate schools of painting developed in Italy during this period which are the Florentine and the Venetian Schools. The former was centred on the city of Florence, while the latter that of Venice. The founder of the Florentine school is Giotto. This school produced the world's greatest painters – Leonardo da Vinci, Michael Angelo and Raphael.

Leonardo da Vinci was multifaceted personality who had excelled himself in almost all spheres of knowledge. He was, basically a painter, an engineer, architect, musician, mathematician and what not? He is famous as a painter for his three creations – Mona Lisa, The Last Supper and The Virgin of the Rocks.

Michael Angelo was another prominent painter of the period. He made his mark as a painter for his The Last Judgement and The Fall of Man which were painted on the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican.



The Last Supper painted by Davinci

The Venetian school was characterised by the absence of mystic and spiritual themes. It was noted by the emphasis on materialistic themes. Giovanni Bellini can

rather be considered as founder of this school, which was the final expression of the secularisation of painting. Titian is represented this school with his Portrait of Pope Paul III.

Along with painting, sculpture also had undergone changes during this period. Sculpture began to get its independent stature in this period. Besides, this period witnessed the emergence of “free standing sculpture”, where separate and independent works of art as separated from buildings emerged. The Renaissance period witnessed the remarkable works of renowned sculptors – Donatello, Lorenzo Ghiberti, and Michael Angelo. Donatello is famous for his Bronze statue of ‘David’. He also developed sculptures of three dimension character. As a sculptor, Michael Angelo is famous for his sculptures like the huge statue of David, the gigantic statue of Moses and the well adored ‘Pieta’.

In the sphere of architecture, the Renaissance architects excelled. They had given away with the Gothic style of architecture, instead, they emphasised the significance of arches, dome and decorative columns. Architecture also had become secular during this period. The specimens of secular architecture can be witnessed in many parts of Europe – The Pitti Palace in Florence, the Farnese Palace in Rome, and the Piccolomini Palace in Siena. The Church of St: Peter in Rome is one of the examples of new style of architecture.

Renaissance in Science

Renaissance marked the beginning of Modern Science for it was the thinkers of the period, who had given importance to observation and experimentation in gaining knowledge and totally rejected the medieval practice of blind faith and speculative thought. It is Francis Bacon, who introduced the method of systematic observation and experimentation as the guide to valid knowledge, thus he is considered as the father of Inductive Method or Scientific method.

Almost all segments of Science underwent changes during the period of study- geography, astronomy, chemistry, physics, mathematics, anatomy, engineering and medical science. In the field of geography and astronomy great advances had been made- the Heliocentric theory of Universe and earth as a planet. Here the names of various scientists deserve mention- Copernicus, John Kepler, Tyco Brahe and Galilee Galileo. Sir Isaac Newton made a remarkable discovery, the theory of gravitation during this period.

In the arena of medical sciences, innovative advances were made. Vesalius made an in-depth study on human organs that made far

reaching changes in Anatomy. William Harvey discovered the circulation of blood. Scientific discoveries such as printing press, gun powder and mariners compass revolutionised the thinking of the people during the Renaissance period. This period also witnessed the establishment of scientific societies like Paris Academy in Paris and Royal Society in London.

Renaissance in Political Thought

As already stated, Renaissance marked the beginning of modern political thought, as distinct from medieval theological or religious thought. The Renaissance thinkers tried to separate politics from religion this had been reflected in the works of Nicolas Machiavelli. The early thinker of the period, Dante was also a shrewd political thinker, the author of 'The Monarch', in which he stated that a ruler should be supreme in non-religious matters.

It was the Renaissance political thinker Marsilius of Padua, who criticised the political intervention of the Pope of Roman Catholic Church in his book, 'The Defender of Peace'.

The father of Political science, Machiavelli stood for authoritarianism in the conduct of administration and he openly stated that a ruler can use any means to be himself in power. His works, The Prince and The Discourses influenced the political thinking of the west not only in the Renaissance period but the later years also.

Thomas Hobbes and John Locke were the two prominent political thinkers of the age. Thomas Hobbes is well known for his theory of Social Contract, which is the core theme of his book The Leviathan. John Locke, the author of The Two Treatises of Government also advocated his own theory of Social Contract.

All these streams of political thought did impact the political history of Europe. It experienced the rise and growth of Nation States in the following centuries and made their manifestations in life and political behaviour of the people.

Conclusion

To conclude, Renaissance, as a new process of thought and action laid the foundation for other historical developments to come, hence, other developments, particularly, the Reformation is often called as the child of Renaissance.