

Revision Notes

Chapter 7: Changing Cultural Traditions

SNIPPETS FROM THE CHAPTER

Significant changes took place in Europe from fourteenth to seventeenth centuries which influenced the cultural traditions of Europe. From the nineteenth century, historians used the term 'Renaissance' to describe the phenomenon that mark this change of cultural traditions of the period.

Meaning of Renaissance

- The term 'Renaissance' literally means 'rebirth', this French word was first used by a Swiss scholar, **Jacob Burckhardt**, in 1860. During the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries, a new humanist culture popularised the idea that man is an individual. Italian universities were centres of legal studies .
- Renaissance meant revival of the ancient Greek and Latin culture. It first began in Italy, followed by Rome, Venice and Florence.
- The term '**Renaissance Man**' is often used to describe a person with many interests and skills, because many of the individuals who became well known at this time were people of many parts. They were scholar-diplomat-theologian-artist combined in one.
- Renaissance aroused the spirit of equality among the people and attacked on the superstitions and rituals prevailing in the society.
- Social, political and economic life of the people were deeply affected by Renaissance.

Causes of Renaissance

- **Contact of the East and the West:** With the expansion of trade between the Byzantine Empire and the Islamic countries, the ports on the Italian coast revived. From the twelfth century, as the Mongols opened up trade with China via the Silk Route and as trade with western European countries also increased, Italian towns played a central role. They no longer saw themselves as part of a powerful empire, but as independent city-states.
- **Fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks:** In 1453 Ottoman Turks defeat the



Byzantine ruler of Constantinople. In the late fourteenth century, long-distance trade declined, and then became difficult after the Turks conquered Constantinople. Italians managed to do business with Turks, but were now required to pay higher taxes on trade. The possibility that many more people could be brought into the fold of Christianity made many devout Christian Europeans ready to face adventure.

- **Crusades:** The 'Crusades' against the Turks began as a religious war between Christians and Muslims.
- **Decline of Feudalism:** By the end of sixteenth century, feudalism began to decline paving the way for new order in the society.
- **Rise of new towns & trade:** Expansion in agriculture was accompanied by growth in three related areas: population, trade and towns. From the fourteenth to the end of the seventeenth century, towns were growing in many countries of Europe. A distinct 'urban culture' also developed. Towns – particularly Florence, Venice and Rome – became centres of art and learning. One of the most vibrant cities was Venice, another was Genoa.
- **Rise of the new middle class:** With the downfall of feudalism a new middle-class emerged which mainly comprised the townspeople. They began to think of themselves as more 'civilised' than rural people.
- **Rise of nations:** A new concept of nation-state emerged as people were more inclined to a liberal society based on equality and freedom. King was no more the supreme authority. Nation-state received more power and vigour from 'Reformation';

Effects of Renaissance

(a) BEGINNING OF MODERN AGE

i) **Humanism:** Humanism was one of the movements that started in Italy in fourteenth century. Italian universities were centres of legal studies. **Francesco Petrarch** is known as 'Father of Humanism'. He suggested a shift from the study of law to the ancient Roman culture and texts. The term 'humanism' was first used by Roman lawyer and essayist **Cicero**. Humanists thought that they were restoring 'true civilisation' after centuries of darkness, for they believed that a '**Dark Age**' had set in after the collapse of the Roman Empire. The period from the fifth to fourteenth centuries was the **Middle Ages**, and the **Modern Age** started from fifteenth century.



- Humanistic art: In the fifteenth century, Florence was recognised for its two prominent Renaissance men. **Dante Alighieri** (1265-1321), an eminent poet and philosopher of Italy who wrote on religious themes (he is known for his classic '*The Divine Comedy*'), and **Giotto** (1267-1337), an artist who painted lifelike portraits, very different from the stiff figures done by earlier artists. From then it developed as the most exciting intellectual city in Italy and as a centre of artistic creativity.
- Humanistic literature, Humanities stream: By the early fifteenth century, the term 'humanist' was used for masters who taught grammar, rhetoric, poetry, history and moral philosophy. The Latin word *humanitas*, from which 'humanities' was derived, had been used many centuries ago to mean culture. These subjects were not drawn from or connected with religion, and emphasised skills developed by individuals through discussion and debate. **Giovanni Boccaccio** was the greatest writer and humanist who wrote *Decameron*. The universities of Padua and Bologna had been centers of legal studies.
- Humanists reached out to people in a variety of ways. Though the curricula in universities continued to be dominated by law, medicine and theology, humanist subjects slowly began to be introduced in schools, not just in Italy but in other European countries as well.

Periodisation used by humanists and by later scholars

5th–14th century

The Middle Ages

5th–9th century

The Dark Ages

9th–11th century

The Early Middle Ages

11th–14th century

The Late Middle Ages

15th century onwards

The Modern Age

The revival of Italian cities: Western Europe was being reshaped by feudal bonds and unified under the Latin Church and Eastern Europe under the Byzantine Empire, and Islam was creating a common civilisation further west, Italy was weak and fragmented. The ports on the Italian coast were revived. From the fourteenth to the end of the seventeenth century towns were growing in many countries of Europe. A distinct 'Urban Culture' also developed. Florence, Venice and Rome became centers of art and learning. The invention of printing at the same time made books and prints available to many people. A sense of history also

developed in Europe. Religion came to be seen as something which each individual should choose for himself. The church's belief was overturned by scientists. (refer to the Map at page 153)

Printing Press:

- Johannes **Gutenberg** invented the first printing press in 1455.
- The first printing press was set up by Caxton in 1477 in Europe.
- The invention of printing press increased the volume of books. It also helped in the spread of education.

The Arab's Contribution: In the fourteenth century, Arabs translated Ancient Greek and Roman texts. They called **Plato** as *Aflatun* and **Aristotle** *Aristu* in Arabic. Noted Muslim writers during this time were **Ibn Sina** ('Avicenna' in Latin) and **Ibn Rushd** ('Averroes' in Latin), **Ptolemy** wrote in Greek *Almagest* on astronomy. Muslim writers were regarded as men of wisdom in the Italian world.

ii) Rationalism

- Viewpoint: It developed the ideas among the people and they abandoned the superstitious beliefs and rituals that prevailed in the entire society. It paved the way for new invention which changed the way of life.
- Rationalist art: A thousand years after the fall of Rome, fragments of art were discovered in the ruins of ancient Rome and other deserted cities. Their admiration for the figures of 'perfectly' proportioned men and women sculpted so many centuries ago. Artists' concern to be accurate was helped by the work of scientists. To study bone structures, artists went to the laboratories of medical schools. The anatomy, geometry, physics, as well as a strong sense of what was beautiful, gave a new quality to Italian art, which was to be called 'realism' and which continued till the nineteenth century.
- Rationalist Literature: The greatest revolution of the sixteenth century was the mastery of the technology of printing. For this, Europeans were indebted to other peoples – the Chinese, for printing technology, and to Mongol rulers because European traders and diplomats had become familiar with it during visits to their courts. (This was also the case with three other important innovations – firearms, the



compass and the abacus.)

- Knowledge of geometry helped them understand perspective and that by noting the changing quality of light, their pictures acquired a three - dimensional quality. Anatomy, geometry, physics, as well as a strong sense of what was beautiful, gave a new quality to Italian art, which was to be called 'realism'.

iii) Scientific viewpoint

- Viewpoint: Scientific Revolution was another characteristic of this era. Not the God, but the nature- the source of all creation - was a revolution in thought. People became more rational and scientific in their approach towards life of mankind during Renaissance movement. Scientists used the method of experimentation, observation and new thoughts, which was just contrary to the Christian beliefs.
- Development of Science: Scientific discoveries of Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler and Issac Newton brought about new changes in the world. Copernicus asserted that the earth rotates around the sun. The revolution in science reached at its climax with Newton's theory of gravitation. The theory of earth as a part of the sun centred system was made popular by Kepler's *Cosmographical Mystery*.
- Art: Donatello made many life-like statues in 1416. Vesalius, a Belgian professor of medicine, was the first to dissect the human body. **Leonardo da Vinci** (1452-1519) had an amazing range of interests from botany and anatomy to mathematics and art. He painted the *Mona Lisa* and *The Last Supper*. **Michelangelo Buonarroti** painted the Sistine chapel, made the sculpture of the Pieta and the Dome of St. Peter's Church.

Aspirations of women - The new ideal of individuality and citizenship excluded women. Men from aristocratic families dominated public life and were the decision-makers in their families. A few women were intellectually very creative and sensitive about the importance of a humanist education. Women's writings revealed their conviction that they should have economic power, property and education to achieve an identity in a world dominated by men

(b) REFORMATION MOVEMENT

The church mainly influenced the life of people a lot. Reformation movement was a protest movement that took place in the sixteenth century against the church and the pope. In 1517,



a young German monk called **Martin Luther** (1483-1546) launched a campaign against the Catholic Church. He asked his followers to have complete faith in God, for faith alone could guide them to the right life and entry into heaven. This movement – called the Protestant Reformation – led to the churches in Germany and Switzerland breaking their connection with the Pope and the Catholic Church.

Causes of Reformation Movement: Autocracy of the Church and Catholic Corruption

- Luther argued that a person did not need priests to establish contact with God. In 1517 he wrote the '*Ninety-Five Theses*', challenging the authority of the church.
- However, Luther did not support radicalism. The Catholic Church itself did not escape the impact of these ideas, and began to reform itself from within.
- **William Tyndale** (1494-1536), an English Lutheran who translated the Bible into English in 1506, defended Protestantism. He said that clergy had forged the process, order and meaning of the ancient texts particularly because it was in Greek and Latin, inaccessible to the common man.

Consequences of Reformation

- **Niccolo Machiavelli** wrote about human nature in the fifteenth chapter of his book, *The Prince* (1513). Machiavelli believed that 'all men are bad and ever ready to display their vicious nature partly because of the fact that human desires are insatiable'. The most powerful motive Machiavelli saw as the incentive for every human action is self-interest.
- **Counter Reformation Movement** came into being as a result of Reformation Movement. Many defects had come into Catholicism but Roman Catholic did not pay heed to it. According to this movement, the church tried to reform itself of some of its objectionable practices. For instance, the Bishops were now appointed on the basis of their ability.

Result of Renaissance

- An important change that did happen in this period was that gradually the 'private' and the 'public' spheres of life began to become separate: the 'public' sphere meant the area of government and of formal religion; the 'private' sphere included the family and personal religion. The individual had a private as well as a public role. He



was not simply a member of one of the 'three orders'; he was also a person in his own right. An artist was not just a member of a guild, he was known for himself.

- In the eighteenth century, this sense of the individual would be expressed in a political form, in the belief that all individuals had equal political rights.
- Another development was that the different regions of Europe started to have their separate sense of identity, based on language.

Timeline: Refer to page no. 155 & 165

Keywords: Renaissance, Machiavelli, Reformation, Rationalism, Petrarch, Humanism, Martin Luther, Gutenberg, Tyndale

