

Block-1

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Unit 1 : Feudalism and Social Stratification

Space for Learner

Unit Structure:

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1.1 Objectives

This is the first unit in our discussion of English social and literary history. Here we are going to look at the various aspects of society in the English Middle Ages with reference to a social structure known as “feudalism.” In the course of the discussion you will come across different conditions related to this particular structure of the society.

- We shall try to find out its spheres of influence, the features that characterized it, and what social functions it addressed.
- You will also find out that feudalism was closely associated with the form of governance that prevailed in England from the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries, after which we can observe its gradual decline.
- By the end of the unit, you should have a fair idea of how feudalism affected English people in the Middle Ages and also be able to trace its influence on contemporary literature

1.2 Introduction

We are going to look at the social system called “feudalism,” which affected various aspects of life in the English Middle Ages. In studying history, you must bear in mind that social developments are not necessarily isolated and independent situations but are connected to other aspects of life that may not appear to be directly related to it. Feudalism provides a very good example of this process of continuity and interconnectedness.

You will be aware that feudalism did not appear in England suddenly; in fact, what we call feudalism in England was to a great extent influenced

by a similar structure that was already a part of medieval life in different parts of Europe. Feudalism as a social structure did not originate or remain confined to England alone. It was a phenomenon that affected life and society in various parts of Europe. Its impact can be seen in various developments in arts and culture in countries other than England as well.

In trying to understand feudalism, we are going to briefly look at its prevalence in countries other than England and also consider the differences. Since feudalism was both a social and governmental system, it affected people both professionally in their chosen spheres of social activity and in their individual lives. At the same time, you must recognise that the function of literature in the middle ages was very different from our own times. Society was structured in such a way that men and women looked at cultural activities as an integral part of their regular routine. It was more a matter of social necessity than choice. We shall try to assess such relationships between the feudal structure and human life or literature and the impact of feudalism in this unit.

1.3 What was Feudalism?

Feudalism has been one of the controversial terms in historical discourses of the West. It is not an easy term to define and scholars are reluctant to agree about its scope, influence and nature collectively. What is clear, however, is that “feudalism” was a political and social structure that had a far-reaching influence on the lives of the people in the English Middle Ages.

As we approach such commonly used terms as “Middle Ages” we have to be clear about what we mean. Historically, depending on which country you are referring to, the Middle Ages may be said to begin as early as the sixth century or from the eleventh century. If we adopt “Middle Ages” as one of the signifying terms in our definition of feudalism we must qualify its range for our purpose. This is why it becomes necessary to situate the term “feudalism” in its English context.

Feudalism effectively came to England with the overthrow of the existing English monarch Edward the Confessor by William the Conqueror in 1066. So, for us, as students of English history, feudalism acquires significance as a social system from the eleventh century. At the same time, the fact that the feudal system was operating in other European countries from a much earlier time, must also be taken into account in order to understand how the English version of feudalism was similar to or different from the other versions.

The word “feudalism” seems to have originated from ‘fee’ or ‘fief,’ a term which makes reference to a contract in which one side offers service in exchange for some material benefits – like land or cash. This contract in the Middle Ages, was based on landholding and tenancy but it influenced every aspect of medieval life – cultural, political, social and even religious. The functioning of the feudal economy and its corollary – socio-political hierarchy – points out that the medieval polity was founded on the principle of decentralization. This implies that though the king was regarded as the head of the nation, the local administration was totally in the hands of the feudal lords, the landowners, who could be quite exploitative in their transactions with their retainers, the bonded labourers. All the land-owners, however, could not exercise the same sort of power over their subjects; the small landholders had to offer loyalty to the large landholders.

Stop to Consider

Feudalism and the King: Feudalism did not curtail the central authority of the King yet at the same time it provided the local lords with a sense of independence and responsibility. Although feudalism in England was primarily based on the question of economic power structure, William the Conqueror effectively used it to maintain political stability all over the country. The Norman King asserted himself as the controller of the nation’s wealth, distributed it among the nobles and made them answerable to the King. This strategy proved very effective in keeping any threat of revolt against the foreign administration at bay.

1.4 The Rise of Feudalism

The rise of feudalism was inextricably connected with the agricultural economy of England, but its consolidation was solely due to the Normans. The period between 1066 and 1485, between the Norman conquest of Britain and the establishment of the Tudor dynasty, witnessed the consolidation, modification and the final collapse of the feudal order.

The French nobility who came with William the Conqueror found the decentralized feudal administration to provide the best arrangement for governing the local people without resistance. In England, the system retained its basically centralized character because the king confirmed the allegiance of all landowners to the royalty. On the other hand, the system allowed the lords to enjoy the sense of independence and responsibility towards the retainers.

The Hundred Years' War increased the political authority of the nobles and their retainers. The military as well as the financial resources for the war were provided to a considerable extent by the English nobility and their retainers. In the feudal economy, ownership of the land and property was concentrated in the hands of a few who played a significant role in the socio-political arena with their powers of discretionary authority over their subjects. In medieval England, the Church was also feudal in character as the clergy received landed property and gifts from the nobles and the Kings. The Church officials had to carry out every responsibility associated with the maintenance of the land although they were not required to follow other regulations meant for the secular nobility. This was the specific strategy of William to avoid the possibility of his subjects' unrest and to keep them under control. The application of feudal norms in the holy orders largely benefited the bishops and abbots who received a considerable amount of landed property and even Knight-service allowance for their proper upkeep. Needless to say, this measure contributed to the empowerment of the church in the management of financial and administrative affairs within its jurisdiction.

Stop to Consider

1. Norman

Refers to those Vikings, or Norsemen, who settled in northern France. They founded the duchy of Normandy and sent out expeditions of conquest and colonization to Southern Italy and Sicily and to England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland.

2. Hundred Years' War

An intermittent struggle between England and France in the 14th-15th century; this was carried over a series of disputes, including the question of the legitimate succession to the French crown. The struggle continued several generations of English and French claimants to the crown. It finally occupied a period of more than 100 years which, by convention, is said to have started in 1337 and ended in 1453. But there had also been periodic fighting centred on the question of English fiefs in France going back to the 12th century.

3. Feudalism in Europe

In Europe, feudalism was a political and economic system of governance and landholding and it was based on a reciprocal arrangement between vassal, lord and king. The noblemen were authorised to hold lands by the king for a specified amount of military

service; these noblemen in turn commanded knights and peasants who gave him homage for the opportunity he provided them. The noblemen gave his retainers and the peasants under him military and social protection. This basic structure was prevalent in most European provinces, including England. However, the more aggressive side of feudal activity, that was military domination and control, was more observable in other parts of Europe than in England. The process of exercising military control perhaps became evident when the Germans dominated the Roman soldiers in the fifth century and replaced the conquered army with their own. The process of hiring soldiers to settle conflicts was not only convenient but also free from the financial burden that characterised the maintenance of a regular army. Certain noblemen who were able to keep armed knights ready for battle became very powerful and commanded the respect of the king. We find these individual armies maintained by noblemen acting with great authority in the eighth and the ninth centuries in Europe. Maintaining an individual army was not easy and the lord was required to generate resources, which usually came from the lands he held. In this way, landholding and military service came to be combined within the feudal structure in Europe.

Space for Learner

In our survey of feudalism, we must first of all recognise that it was primarily a system of contract; the contractual system bound the members of the nobility with people from the lower strata of society in a hierarchical way. A primary feature of feudalism was the allocation of “fiefs,” often in the manner of land and labour, for political and military allegiance. The fief was owned by the king but the noblemen who commanded it were free to exercise their authority so long as it did not go against the principles of governance laid down by the king. The contract was characterised by an oath of homage and “fealty” to the lord.

Feudalism successfully maintained balance in the governed territory, and also maintained a process of economic understanding. Everybody in the social and political ladder was closely related to the one positioned above in a chain of professional relationships. This chain started from the king in whom the political and economic authority was vested. The most important thing about feudalism, however, was that it was a system of power-relationships that sought to provide a sense of equilibrium in the conflict-ridden social structure of the medieval period. When William the Conqueror came to England, he had to bring together not just the chieftains of the many groups in the new country, but also the noblemen who fought

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alongside him and whose demands he had to satisfy. Feudalism provided William a way out of the complex situation and enabled him to come to terms with the problems of governing a new and hostile people.

SAQ

How would you define feudalism? (100 words.)

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What are the primary marks of distinction between the feudal system in England and in other parts of Europe? (150 words.)

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Why is feudalism also considered to be a system determined by relationships of power? (100 words.)

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It is important to recognise the many social and political functions of the feudal structure in English society. You have already seen how the feudal structure facilitated the balance and maintenance of power in a society preoccupied with conflict. Apart from the power-equations with which it stayed preoccupied, feudalism also combined the system of landholding with the structure of political and military governance. Each nobleman who became a powerful feudal lord was not just politically or militarily powerful, he also had great economic clout as he was a owner of land. Landholding was simultaneously a mode of economic control and political clout; the feudal lord was respected by his peers for his power that came from his lands. His vassals owed their allegiance to him and were dependent on him for survival. Society was organised in such a way that it was very difficult for a vassal to get away from a lord and still survive independently; although there are accounts of vassals or serfs fleeing their masters, these were exceptions rather than the common practice. Generally, the control of the feudal lords over their serfs was absolute and extended to considerable domination over their personal lives and activities.

Why did feudalism become predominant in the European Middle Ages? This is an interesting question, for which you must try to understand the factors responsible for the feudal pattern.

The medieval period in Europe, including England, was dominated by regular conflicts between the different warring groups. Wars and battles were commonly taken to be an integral aspect of medieval life. Maintaining an army put great demands on the king; moreover, this was also an age of intrigue and intense politicking where it was very difficult to trust just one military agency. In such a climate of war and distrust, the noblemen who provided the king with the military resources became very powerful. He received homage from his vassals, peasants and knights and won the praise of the king for the services that he offered. Feudalism thus was a structure dominated by relationships of power. Feudalism also thrived because of social and political inequality. By the fifteenth century when there was greater democratisation in various fields, feudalism declined; in England feudalism was at its peak from the eleventh to the middle of the fourteenth century.

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Stop to Consider

Terms Commonly Associated with Feudalism:

allodium: land held in absolute ownership, rather than subject to feudal restrictions

ceorl/churl: lowest ranking freeman

corvée: day's unpaid labour owed by a vassal to his lord

cottar: villein granted a cottage and land in return for work

demesne: lands kept by a feudal lord for his own use

droit de seigneur: rights of a feudal lord over his vassals, especially his supposed right to have sexual intercourse with a vassal's new bride

escheat: return of lands to a feudal lord, as when the tenant has no heir

esquire/squire: candidate for knighthood in the service of a knight

fealty: allegiance owed by a vassal or tenant to his feudal lord

fee/feoff/fief/feud: feudal land granted by a lord to a vassal in return for homage and service

frankpledge: joint responsibility among members of a tithing for the good conduct of others

hide: amount of land adequate to support a peasant family

homage: formal acknowledgement of allegiance by a vassal to a feudal lord

liege: lord to whom feudal service is due; vassal, liegeman owing allegiance to a lord

mesne lord: feudal lord holding land from a superior

pannage: right of a villein to pasture his pigs in woodland; rent paid for this right

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quitrent: rent paid by a freeman in lieu of various feudal services
serf: peasant bound to the land by a tenant in return for payment or services
suzerain, seigneur: feudal lord or overlord
thane/thegn: freeman ranking above a churl but below a noble
vassal: liegeman or feudal tenant owing allegiance to a lord
vavasor/vavasour: knightly vassal ranking just below a baron, and having other vassals subject to him
villein: semi-freeman, owing some rents and services to his lord, but not in bondage

Check Your Progress:

A: Why did feudalism succeed as an economic and social structure in medieval English society? (About 200 words)
(Hint: Due to the interdependence of vassal and lord.)
B: Discuss the relationships between the vassals and the feudal lords. (About 200 words)
(Hint: Emphasize the various spheres of activity, including social, economic, military and domestic that bound the serfs and the lords in the feudal relationship.)

1.5 Feudalism and the Contemporary Agricultural System

Feudalism is closely associated with the manorial economy of the Middle Ages which originated as an arrangement beneficial to both landlord and landless labourer. The primary method of cultivation, in the time of Norman occupation, was the open field. It was an unenclosed field, called a manor—the size of which varied from 350 to 5000 acres. The independent landowning small farmers existing before the Norman Conquest themselves opted for the open field farming because the farmers could reap the benefit of sharing farming equipments and security arrangements through community-farming. Manorial farming provided the group of farmers the opportunity for crop-rotation, use of the common grazing ground and even space for festive community occasions. But community-farming would have remained impracticable had it not benefited the manorial lord. The manorial lord, under the system of community-farming of the large open field, found the rent-collection and distribution of small tracts of lands more convenient than before.

SAQ

Why is feudalism described as ‘relations of power’ ? What made the nobles so powerful ? (150 words.)

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What was the nature of literary production in this period ? (150 words.)

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Under the open-field cultivation of the manorial economy, the landlord kept a plot of land for his own personal needs. This plot of land was known as “demesne”. The farming of demesne-land was done by the lord’s retainers. The landlord distributed the remaining part of his field to the tenants according to his own discretion. The landlord was the sole administrative authority in controlling the functioning of the manor and its tenants. In exchange for the land, the individual tenants had to provide service or money or the products of their land to the manorial lord.

The economic transaction that existed between the manorial lord and the tenants was the foundation of the feudal hierarchy of the medieval England. The tenant who received land from the feudal lord was known as the villein. It was his obligation to farm the demesne of his landlord for a few weekdays. Besides this customary duty, he was required to provide such other services as harvesting, carrying the produces, haymaking and sheep-rearing. On the other hand, he was required to pay a fixed sum for using the lord’s mill and oven, and the use itself was made mandatory. Moreover, the villein was to pay seasoned duties on festive occasions. The villeins, tormented by such a life of multiple obligations, sometimes attempted to get release by entering the religious order. The open- field farming implies that the villeins were to work on strips of lands allotted to them by the manorial lord. The strips were divided from one another by open drains made by the plough. Each farmer had a certain number of strips of half an acre or one acre, scattered over the unenclosed open field. The open field was surrounded by movable hurdles and when the harvesting period got over it was used as common pasture ground by all the tenants.

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SAQ

What were the benefits to the serfs under the manorial system ? (150 words.)

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Was there a concept of personal freedom in such a society ? (100 words)

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What was the nature of the network between the various social classes in medieval England ? (80 words.)

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How did the feudal system maintain balance in medieval English society? (100 words.)

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The tenants enjoyed the benefits of community life under the manorial agricultural system; belonging to a single economic managerial system, they were tied with each other as members of a single cohesive unit in the village. Festive occasions provided them with the scope for enjoying close community life. But the disadvantages of the manorial life sometimes overweighed the advantages since they had to lose some of the basic conditions of freedom even in personal life. They had not the right to give up their occupation and when they were summoned to work in the lord's demesne they could not manage time to work on their own land. The villeins were not even allowed to give their children in marriage without the consent of the lord and if his daughter got married to someone outside the manor he was required to pay a fine.

The Norman rulers in England insisted upon uniformity in the functioning of the manorial economy. But in the early Middle English period some changes had definitely taken place: these took the form of the provision of money-rents instead of forced services on the demesne-land

of the lord. But other forms of servility in the life of the tenants did not end and the manorial lords reserved to themselves the right to revive the old system of personal service. In some cases the concession of personal field-services for money payments was accompanied by new obligations on the villeins. The increase of population also compelled the villeins to comply with the demand for field-service on the lord's demesne because the villeins often looked to the tenure of more lands to maintain a growing family.

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Stop to Consider

Feudalism and Contemporary Society

You have already seen how feudalism contributed to the maintenance of social order by its complex system of political hierarchy and landholding structure. It was an arrangement that organised the various elements in society in a network. The social structure was organised around the fief of the nobleman who served as the link between the lowest and the highest order in society. This organisation was actually a form of contract, which was not always written down, wherein the lord protected his serfs and vassals for the services that they gave him. The vassals gave military and other services to the lord.

The feudal order also affected the economic aspect of contemporary medieval society. We have noticed how the relationships between the various classes were determined and the nobility, clergy and the peasantry were bound together in a network. The church possessed feudal lands and much of its wealth derived from such a pattern of landholding.

1.6 Feudalism and Literature in the English Middle Ages

Feudalism thrived in England from the arrival of the Normans in 1066 to the middle of the fourteenth century. This was a period of great conflict among various warring groups that were battling for control. When the Normans came to England they brought with them the French language, which dominated political discourse for the major part of the early reigns of the new monarchs. Most literary compositions during the early years of the Norman reign were either imitations of models from the French or attempts to come to terms with the growing impact of Christianity. You will therefore find many versions of similar narratives in the Middle English

period that repeat tales that were already circulating in France. Some of the archetypal themes (that of Reynard the Fox, which appears in Chaucer's "The Nun Priest's Tale", is one example) were thus experimented with across the Continent, including England.

The Middle English period was one of political and social consolidation. You have already seen how conflict was one of the major conditions of life in the English Middle Ages and it is not surprising that creative activity during these years was greatly influenced by the contemporary developments in society. Christianity was a major aspect of medieval life (as you shall see in the next unit on "The Role of the Church") and most literary activities were governed by the religious impulse. The major writers of the feudal period in English literature were thus occupied by both a religious concern and the need to negotiate contemporary developments. As a social and political structure, feudalism was a reality that the English writers could not escape.

Perhaps the best example of a writer's response to feudalism is evident in the writings of Geoffrey Chaucer, whose preference for the London dialect of English rather than Norman-French can be seen as a political act challenging Norman predominance. You will find that Chaucer was very much alive to the historical circumstances in which he lived and wrote; he was a much-travelled man and was conversant with the hierarchy that existed in his time. Many of the tales in *The Canterbury Tales* demonstrate Chaucer's recognition of the inherent social structuring that characterised the English Middle Ages.

For two-and-a-half centuries following the Norman Conquest, 'English' underwent a process of refinement. French had pushed down the vernacular English till it slowly rose up again in the social scale to pose a challenge to French. Chaucer is important in English Literature because his work represents the recognition of the rise of 'English', that it had now become a "universal national language" of both Court and the people.

English in this period was marked by a variety of Middle English dialects. The East Midland dialect became, effectively, "the standard literary language" toward the end of the Middle English period. The reason for the variety of dialects at this time was historical and political: Wessex had lost its cultural importance due to the Conquest and therefore, its dialect, West Saxon, had lost its former prestige as the language of literary art.

French became the new language of the aristocracy and the Court and without any single Middle English dialect gaining preeminence, writers used the language of their own region. By the end of the Middle English period,

London was the dominant city of England and its dialect reigned over all. Standard modern English derives from East Midland.

Chaucer gives us an insight into his times by his choice of language and choice of subject in *The Canterbury Tales*. We get a partial glimpse of social hierarchies and biases as well as a consciousness of the troubles surrounding the times: a time of “rapid change and even of confusion”, a depopulated countryside, the loosening of the bonds binding the villein to the lord, labour-service commuted into money-payment giving the labourer more freedom to bargain, general discontent in the final years of Edward III’s reign and the beginning of Richard II’s reign, heavy taxation, and then the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381. Why does Chaucer give idealized portraits of the Knight, the Parson, and the Plowman ? It has even been suggested that these were perhaps almost anachronisms by this time.

The social structure that you encounter in “The Prologue” to *The Canterbury Tales* exemplifies these twin influences of religion and social hierarchy. But Chaucer was writing at a time when feudalism was already showing signs of imminent decline; before him, the literary culture in England was characterised not by a preoccupation with authorship but by a prevalence of texts that were mostly anonymous. Works like *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, which are steeped in traditions of allegiance to a chosen social superior, combined the features of the French romance, the pursuit of the chivalric ideal and a demonstration of social hierarchy.

As a student of literary history you may often face the difficulty of using texts to illustrate a social order. To read the texts of the Old and Middle English periods as illustrating a complex political and social condition as feudalism will have to be done with care because we cannot isolate specific examples to prove our point. Like religion, feudalism was a manner of daily living so that to us it can even sometimes appear to be a philosophy which explained the world. Many overtly religious texts of the medieval period carry the influence of the feudal order – either in the way the characters are socially structured or the relationships they are shown in.

SAQ

How do the economic system influence the prevailing social practices of an era? (60 words.)

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Why do we think of “literature” as something separate from our normal existence? Does that show us something of our own situation ? (80 words.)

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Can a religious text to be counted as “literature” or is it separate from the “literary” realm ? (50 words.)

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The feudal experience was not just evident in the narratives of the great writers of medieval England like Chaucer, Gower and Langland but also in such works as John Mandeville’s *Travels*. Published in the mid-fourteenth century, this was a narrative that chronicled the unknown world and opened to the European visions of fantasy and the unexpected. Mandeville referred to faraway lands which had societies very different from the feudalised structure that the English people were familiar with and perhaps this is one of the first instances of the representation of the European “other.” By offering an account of cultural difference, Mandeville opened up a new world before the English people.

Stop to Consider

Chaucer and Medieval Literature

Chaucer remains the central literary figure of the English Middle Ages. His versatility as a creative writer is evident in his successful handling of a variety of genres, many of which were remarkably enriched by his distinctive stamp.

Which literary genres can be said to characterize the Middle Ages ? The fabliau, the fable, the bestiary, the Middle English lyric, the carole, the courtly love lyric, the political lyric but commonest was the religious lyric, the allegory (the best-known being the allegorical romance, *Roman de la Rose*), the dream allegory, and the ballad belong to the period. Chaucer not only chose ‘native’ material but also the ‘Continental’. He was well conversant with European traditions such as Italian poetry and also with the rich heritage of the ancient Greek and Roman world.

In *The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer’s brilliant irony helps to realise each pilgrim as an individual and as representative of his or her class or profession. The narratives of the travellers demonstrate their individual and class prejudices and preferences and beautifully display the complex social web of fourteenth century England. You will realise that it would be improper to categorise the vast panorama of *The Canterbury Tales* as a ‘text’ that deals merely with social structuring, as it covers a wide range of medieval life from religion to politics. Chaucer’s own perspective on his society can be gauged by the selection of his characters as much as of the format in which they are to tell their tales.

The relationship of writer to feudal society and English literature can be studied in different ways—for instance, choice of themes and subjects, as well the genres chosen. Feudalism in literature can be seen in a variety of guises and often in combinations. If we ask the question, why does Chaucer decide to bring in a variety of pilgrims ? —the answer might lead us to a closer understanding of medieval English society. This is the understanding that helps us to see why it is common to find issues of social conflict and religion dominating the works of contemporary writers like John Langland and John Gower, not to mention the numerous texts of the period written anonymously.

SAQ

How will I place the works of Geoffrey Chaucer in the context of the feudal order in medieval English society? (50 words.)

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How did feudalism and religion dominate contemporary literary activity? (100 words.)

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One of the important features of medieval society in England was the presence of the manor. This was not merely a house or residence of the lord, but the centre of all the major activities of the community: it was organised in the manner of a coordinating centre and all aspects – financial, social, domestic, cultural (including the conduct of festivities), agricultural –

were controlled from the manor. Farming was the primary means of sustenance for the manor. The vassals, serfs, knights and other retainers were all controlled by the manor. I think you can visualise the complex administrative structure of a manor, which was controlled by certain officials employed for the purpose. The organisation of the manor was such that it affected the entire life-pattern of the people in a significant way. However, the conditions of life in the manor were not very comfortable; there was a lack of hygiene and people hardly paid attention to their health. But the manor was also the centre of entertainment as different festivities, including marriages, local jousting tournaments, jesting meets and musical events were organised there.

SAQ

How did the various social classes in medieval England perceive themselves and their society? (50 words)

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How did the feudal system contribute to the maintenance of balance in medieval English society? (80 words.)

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1.7 The Decline of Feudalism

A major cause behind the gradual collapse of feudalism in the later part of the fourteenth century was the occurrence of the ‘Black Death’ of 1348. Due to the sudden depopulation caused by the epidemic, manorial farming had to face an acute shortage of labour. The manorial lords were not in a position to stop the movement of the villeins from farming to other occupations like sheep-rearing, which was considered more convenient because of the increasing availability of pasture land. The value of labour shot up, but the price of farmland came down considerably. Those who survived could now cultivate quite a good number of strips and even hire labour in the larger units of land. Reluctant to offer field-service at the lord’s demesne, some villein cultivators deserted their own holdings for a better opportunity in the nearby manors and towns where they settled for a better bargain. Many villeins bought their freedom in exchange for cash which

became available in their hands mainly because of the high price of labour and sheep-rearing. The shortage of labour compelled the landlords to let out homeland on lease to the farmers. Thus a new middle class of Yeomen came into existence to fill in the gap between the upper and lower rungs in the ladder of social hierarchy, represented by the manorial lord and the villein farmer.

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SAQ

What was the ‘Black Death’? (50 words.)

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Was currency in use at that time ? (50 words.)

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What is meant by : “the value of labour shot up” ? Did farmers have the scope for bargaining ? (60 words.)

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How significant was the parliament then ? Who enforced parliamentary decisions and how were they enforced ? (80 words.)

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The three-tier system put a check on the powers of the feudal magnates and ultimately dismantled the whole foundation of feudal structure. However, cash-payment introduced as a substitute for field-service on the demesne, did not completely emancipate the villeins. They were still required to pay various unreasonable dues like “merchet” (fine for marriage) and “heriot” (offering the best beast on the villein’s death) and to use the lord’s mill compulsorily at a high price. The villein’s aspiration for full freedom was also brought down by the passing of a parliamentary law to fix wages over the whole realm.

The villein-serfs came forward against such abuses of the parliament and resorted to violent methods to voice protest. The Peasants’ Revolt of 1381 is the event which marked this conflict. The rising did not immediately

end the life of servitude of the peasantry; but the very fact that serfdom ended in England ahead of any other European country shows just how instrumental this political event had been in bringing down feudalism in England.

The growth of the medieval towns also provided the villeins with the scope for running away from conditions of servitude in manorial farming. Growing urbanization was the major cause behind the collapse of feudalism in Europe. Although the growth of the towns as commercial centres eventually led to the fall of the feudal system, the feudal lords themselves contributed to the origin of towns through their increasing interest in mercantile activities and trade-relations with other feudal lords. It is interesting to note how, after the 'Black Death', depopulation led to a greater availability of pasture-lands. Availability of pasture-land facilitated sheep-rearing, just as sheep-rearing led to the flourishing raw-wool trade. Dependent on the wool trade, many commercial centres developed in England, heralding the decay of the feudal economy and the rise of the capitalist economy.

In the fourteenth century the rivalry between salaried officials of the King and the lords also became another cause for the decline of the feudal order. The royal functionaries wanted the king to interfere with the growing authority of the feudal lords by formulating a set of rules defining and limiting the exercise of their power. By the fifteenth century the glorious days of feudal hegemony were over and the powerful position enjoyed so far by the landed gentry now set out to be occupied by the emerging burgher class.

Although feudalism originated in response to the needs and conditions of the village economy, it acquired social and political connotations in the subsequent periods of its existence. Feudalism introduced the concept and culture of hierarchy or a social structure in which the master and the serf, the landlord and the tenant related to each other as powerful master and powerless serf. As a decentralized method of governance, feudalism substantially weakened the power of the King, but the King himself did not want the abolition of the system because the manorial lords could manage the local problems in more effective ways than the King did. Although the King was regarded as the head of the feudal structure, in practice, the feudal lords exercised legal power to deal with the local disputes of the members of his manor. The most positive aspect of the feudal administration was that it imposed order in medieval society. Although the

villein peasantry was exploited by the manorial lords through the imposition various of taxes, in most cases there prevailed the sense of a bond between the manorial lord and the serf.

Space for Learner

Check your Progress:

1. Which set of events led to the collapse of feudalism? (About 100 words)

Hint: The growth of trade, Black Death, rising cost of labour could be some of the areas for you to focus on.

2. How did the social structure change following the disintegration of feudal society? (About 100 words)

Hint: Release of labour, growing trade-transactions across the towns and cities of Europe.

1.8 Summing Up

We can remind you here of all that has been covered so far by clarifying “Points to Remember”:

- a) Feudalism in the original sense suggests the formulation of an economic mechanism which determines the relationship between the lord and the retainers.
- b) The Norman period witnessed the consolidation of the feudal administration which served the interest of the King.
- c) Feudalism affected every aspect of the lives of the people in the medieval period.
- d) Many factors like the Black Death, Peasants’ Rising, growth of urban centres, and trade and capitalist economy led to the eventual decline of the feudal order.
- e) Although feudalistic order characterized the administrative and economic set-up of most of the European nations, in England it evolved a centralized pattern to suit the political strategy of the monarchy.

1.9 Glossary

Black Death: The plague known as Black Death was one of the most damaging natural catastrophes in medieval Europe. It decimated thousands of people in the fourteenth century. It is said to have originated in China but arrived to the shores of Europe through travellers and gradually spread across different countries, including Europe.

Open-field system: The open-field system was the traditional mode of farming in medieval England. The system involved the entire community farming large unenclosed fields that were divided into strips and subsequently allotted to the peasants. The whole “open field” was surrounded but individual strips were not enclosed. One of the two or three open fields lay fallow and the remaining were used for cultivation.

Peasants’ Revolt: The Peasants’ Revolt (also known as “The Rising of 1381”) was caused by a crisis precipitated by the lack of labourers following the multiple deaths during Black Death. When there was crisis of workers, the wages increased, but following a Statute of Labourers to ward of the wage-rise there was a severe agitation among the workforce who demanded better work-opportunities, including financial advancement. The Peasants’ Revolt was not successful but it is played an important part in the collapse of the existing landholding system in the medieval period.

1.10 References and Suggested Readings

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Unit 2 : The Church and the Medieval World

Space for Learner

Unit Structure:

- 2.1 Objectives
- 2.2 Introduction
- 2.3 A Historical Survey of Christianity
- 2.4 The Authority of the Church
- 2.5 The Structure of the Medieval Church
- 2.6 Learning and the Medieval Church
 - 2.6.1 The Church and Culture
 - 2.6.2 Theology and Intellectual Currents
- 2.7 The Church and the Community
- 2.8 Summing Up
- 2.9 Glossary
- 2.10 References and Suggested Readings

2.1 Objectives

In this the second unit in our discussion of English social and literary history, we are going to begin with a brief historical tour of Christianity and the Church. The Church, as an institution, consists of its members and its doctrines. It has its own unique structure and its own institutional approach to the world at large. We can understand this organization through its history, its contributions in different fields of social activity and the nature of its authority. Thus in this unit you will gain knowledge of these various aspects so that you can

- *study the ways* in which the church gave a special character to medieval times
- *evaluate* the role of the church in the lives of the medieval people
- *understand* life in the medieval period
- *conceive of* the various issues related to medieval life and the role of the Church.
- *see* the connections that existed between the institutions sanctioned and supported by the medieval Church and the people.

2.2 Introduction

By considering as many of the different aspects of the medieval church as possible, we should be closer to an exact estimation of the importance of the church in the lives of the people in the English Middle Ages than

otherwise. In fact, the church had a significance beyond the medieval period well into the Renaissance period. To some extent we can understand this given that unlike the modern period where opportunities are wide-ranging and determined by ever-emerging possibilities, the medieval world offered considerably limited scope for individual and social development. We have already seen in our discussion of the feudal system that social hierarchy was quite rigid and social positions were inflexible. Within this system the Church played an important role in regulating life in the Middle Ages. All human activity—births, deaths, marriages, festivities, and other celebrations—required the mediation of religion.

The influence of Christianity in medieval England, as in other parts of Europe, was immense. Among other things, you know about the role of religion in providing the themes for the medieval entertainments such as the ‘Miracle’, and later, the ‘Morality’ plays. The ‘Mysteries’, which were connected to the different craft-guilds who sponsored and even performed them, served as agencies of religious propaganda; these performances were great examples of community exercises where all members of society participated. As we study the role of the Church in medieval society, we shall try to clarify the close relationship that existed between medieval life and religion.

2.3 A Historical Survey of Christianity

As students of literature, you should be aware of the changes that occur in the history of ideas, over time, as greater research is undertaken into various aspects of contemporary disciplines. While some of these changes may not affect your practices of reading and learning in a dramatic fashion, it is important that your views within your discipline, at the very least, should not be “medieval”!

The earlier perception of the Middle Ages as the era of darkness, superstition, and ignorance, which prevailed until some time ago has been challenged by many scholars. It is suggested that the very term “Middle Age” (or “medium aevum”) was devised by humanist thinkers of Renaissance Italy to mark a line of distinction between their own times and the preceding ones.

It is also acknowledged that from the breakup of the Roman Empire resulting from the assaults of the Germanic tribes in the fifth century until 1000 or thereabouts, there was a perceptible decline into intellectual and economic primitivism. However, in the ninth century there was, indeed, a “renaissance” during the reign of Emperor Charlemagne. Moreover, in the

later Middle Ages, i.e., from the eleventh till the thirteenth centuries, there occurred great intellectual and cultural progress.

The rejection of medieval scholasticism came with the Renaissance humanists who upheld classical learning, and in seeing themselves as the legitimate successors of the classical Greek and Roman authors, perceived the intervening stretch of time, as condemnable. Such condemnation was reinforced by the Protestant Reformation, whose reformers associated medieval literature and philosophy with Roman Catholicism.

The Middle Ages were formed by a number of factors : remnants of the Roman administrative and legal systems, the legacy of the classical world, the contact with Islamic civilization, the traditions of Christianity which were still evolving, and the social and political patterns of the newly dominant Germanic tribes. It was, nevertheless, Christianity which gave medieval civilization its distinctive shape. Even in the Roman Empire, before its fall in 410, Christianity was given recognition. It was recognized by the Romans as the official religion. The Gospel of St. John, the letters of St. Paul, and Clement of Rome, incorporated Greek philosophy with Christian tenets. In the early Middle Ages, however, Christian doctrines, were not fully formalised.

Space for Learner

Stop to Consider

The structure of the Church :

Christianity had its own particular conception of religious grace and spiritual authority. As religion, it began in Palestine and spread to regions surrounding it belonging to the Graeco-Roman world.

The terms, “presbyteros” (or, “elder”) and “episkopos” (or, “overseer”) which appear in the New Testament and in the early church, probably meant the same thing. Later, from the 2nd century onwards, the hierarchy elevated the bishop, or the title “episcopus”, to those who presided over the hierarchy, the presbyterate or the “sacerdotes” (sharing in the ‘episcopal sacerdotium’ or “priesthood”).

The ‘episcopate’ had the authority to ordain presbyters, or confer holy orders, exercise jurisdiction over the diocese (the area of jurisdiction), among other things. Subsequently, over time, the bishops, the priests, together with the deacons (those who assisted in administration and the liturgy in a parish) came to constitute the threefold ministry who held sway over a diocese. This practice continued until the Reformation in the 16th century.

Space for Learner

In the Middle Ages, in Europe, Christianity was closely tied to judicial, social and political structures so much so that the Church and the state were virtually identical. The great Italian poets of the late 13th to the 14th century, saw the pope as being ordained by God to rule over the spiritual realm just as the emperor was ordained to rule over the temporal realm. The welfare of mankind was held to be sustained by this division. This led to an encroachment on the powers of jurisdiction of kings and emperors by the church gradually although this arrangement of dual control did mean that life in medieval times was much integrated and given shape by the papacy and priests.

SAQ

What are the different situations in which the Church was likely to play a role in daily life ? (80 words.)

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What kind of economic obligations—like taxes—did the Church impose on the community? Who punished offenders ? (60 words.)

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2.4 The Authority of the Church

“A great deal of the Middle Ages may be interpreted as a conflict between Roman and Germanic traditions: On the one side the Church, on the other the state; on the one side, theology and philosophy, on the other Chivalry and poetry; on the one side the law, on the other pleasure, passion and all the anarchic impulses of very headstrong men” – this comment by Bertrand Russell in his essay “Life in the Middle Ages” highlights the picture of the Medieval Ages as being marked by the relationship of tension between the Church and the state, as well as the Church and the individual.

In the medieval period, the Church of England functioned as a constituent of the Roman Catholic Church. The Roman Catholic Church, upholding the theocratic claim to state power, developed an ecclesiastical state. According to this theocratic ideology, the Roman Popes were the

representatives of Christ and the only guarantors of order. As you can see, this form of understanding was very important for the allocation of authority that the church officials claimed they possessed. The Roman bishops, beginning with Gregory I the Great (who lived from 590-604 A.D.) turned to ‘missionizing’ (establishing missions) the peoples of the West. Under Gregory, England was brought into the Christian fold.

The relationship between the Roman Church and the rulers of England was always marked by tension. Whereas the rulers of England considered the Pope as a member of the Christian state and therefore under its jurisdiction, the Popes saw the rulers as members of the Church and therefore subject to the rule of God through the popes. These conflicting perspectives were the cause of interminable struggles between the Popes and rulers throughout the Middle Ages. The bishops were awarded their rights and privileges by the King, and as a result, they became more interested in the political acts of their dominion rather than in the spiritual awakening of the masses. The Church renewal movement of the 10th and 11th centuries proclaimed the freedom of the Church from state control.

The Church, however, did not gain a complete victory in terms of full papal authority over the worldly and spiritual realms of activity. The rise of the European nation-state consequent upon the weakening of the Holy Roman Empire functioned as the great threat to the exercise of Church authority. At the same time, the rise of papal schisms spread great uncertainty among the believers about the validity of the consecration of bishops and the sacraments administered by the priests.

In 1378, Europe saw two rival Popes; England supported Urban VI, the Pope of Rome, while France was on the side of Clement VII of Avignon. These papal schisms and other forms of corruption associated with the church undermined the faith of the people in the sanctity of the Papal authority. The conflict between the state and the Church, on the other hand, remained unabated until the 16th century when the Reformation compelled the church to remain satisfied with its purely spiritual tasks and placed the legal powers of the Church leadership in the hands of the princes. It was under King Henry VIII that a revolutionary dissociation of the English Church from papal supremacy took place after centuries of debates over the issue.

Space for Learner

Stop to Consider:

The Church of England traces its history back to the arrival of Christianity in the 2nd century in England. Inheriting the traditional framework of the Anglo-Saxon and medieval English Church, it has retained part of the structure of medieval Roman Catholicism in its church government and its liturgy, while also retaining some fundamentals of the Reformation.

The clash between the Church and the English *state* constitutes one of the contradictions of feudalism: the Church as an autonomous institution within feudalism, and the single source of religious authority. A number of religious reform movements had helped to concentrate the authority of the pope and the Church by restricting the power of the nobility from extending to the monasteries, the clergy or the appointment of church officials. As Bertrand Russell has remarked, the wresting of Church functions from the hold of the feudal aristocracy was one of the main causes for the “emergence of Europe from the dark ages”. The medieval epoch was marked by the conflict between Church and state power.

Around the 10th and 11th centuries, in the church-renewal movement, the King’s position as sacred was challenged by the papal church. Thereafter, the Church saw itself as free from authority and as superior to worldly rulers. With the decline of the Holy Roman Empire, the new nation-states laid the challenges to the authority of the papal church. The prestige of the papacy was further eroded by schisms. With the 16th-century Reformation, princes gained predominance as the legal powers of the church leaders came into their hands. In Germany, rulers became the rulers of the Protestant episcopate. This was partly already begun in the late Middle Ages. In England, Henry VIII effected a radical separation between the English Church and the papacy.

Check Your Progress

1. How did the Popes gain both ecclesiastical and political control in medieval Europe? (About 250 words)
(Hint: Remember to distinguish between “ecclesiastical” and “political” !)
2. In what manner did the Church determine the lives of the people in medieval times? (About 500 words)
(Hint: This should be a longer answer containing at least 3 paragraphs.)

3. What kind of interconnections existed between politics and religion in the medieval period ? (About 350 words)

(Hint: Mainly pertaining to administration but also economic.)

4. Explain the meanings of “ecclesiastical state”, “diocese”, “Roman Church”, “Church of England”.

Space for Learner

The Church displayed a characteristic rigidity and intolerance that refused to accept any move towards a change in the system. Historically, this was partly based on the nature of its own perception of itself as a revelation of the divine truth. The ecclesiastical intolerance of any view which seemed to oppose it led to a lack of introspection and self-questioning over time which further allowed the scope for self-seeking deviations from the pursuance of its own religious ideals. Thus came the indulgence of vicious desires for wealth and power through dishonest means at all levels of the sacerdotal hierarchy. The Pope himself was involved in such abuses as ‘simony’ and the sale of indulgences. Despite vehement criticism from several quarters both from men of learning and from rising discontent among laymen against church corruption, reformation of the church could not take place particularly due to the growing nexus between the king and the clergy. As the appointment of the bishops was usually in the hands of the king, the bishops expressed their loyalty to the royal ministry rather than to the ideals of Christianity. The priests, chaplains and even the monks acted as business-agents and trusted confidants of lords, squires and other royal patrons. The monks, particularly, indulged in a lavish life-style.

Stop to Consider

The Lollards against Church Corruption

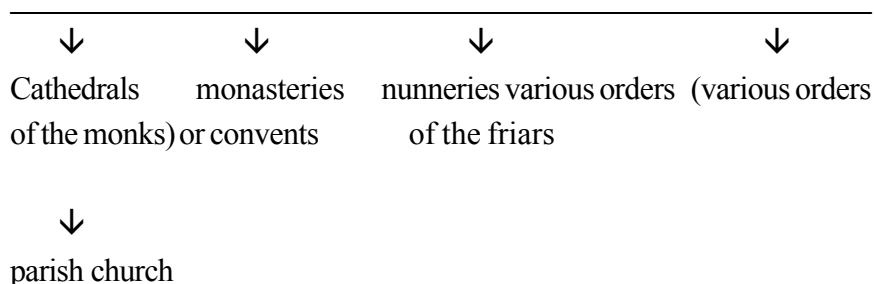
The Lollards’ movement under the leadership of John Wycliffe originated in the protest against the degradation of church ideals in the hands of the church officials. The literary works of Chaucer and William Langland also bear testimony to the corruption of religious order by the officials of the church. The medieval church was one of the richest institutions in claiming one-tenth of an individual’s income besides getting regular gifts and even landed property from the court. To be a part of the economically resourceful clergy was considered to be a profitable business and this led to such corrupt practices as obtaining a position in the church by bribing. Thus, the church which was entrusted with the responsibility of disciplining the life of the common

man himself fell prey to the snares of materialism. Although rampant corruption characterized the functioning of the medieval church, the institution nevertheless provided medieval men with a system of values to direct their life and daily activities. Even the Lollards, who were known for their strong resistance to the corrupt authority of the church officials in the fourteenth century, never questioned the system of values or belief associated with the church.

2.5 The Structure of the Medieval Church

The Church life followed a hierarchical system with the parish church at the bottom. The country was divided into dioceses and these dioceses were divided into parishes. The cathedrals of the dioceses were served by bishops, while the parish churches were served by priests. These church officials were expected to be celebrated and educated in Latin. The hierarchy can be presented with a diagram as follows:

The Medieval Church



Being entrusted with the responsibility of uplifting the moral conscience of the masses, the parish priests and bishops greatly contributed to the consolidation of the religious sensibility and education in medieval England. On the other hand, the monasteries, served by educated monks were more or less free from the direct influence of the church administration in their functioning. The greater monasteries were called “abbeys” and were under the charge of abbot and a few other officials. Although the monks were supposed to lead lives of pious contemplation, prayer, labour and learning within the four walls of the monasteries, many of them developed crude materialistic interests and developed lavish life-styles. The moral degradation of the monastic orders took place particularly because of wealth gifted by rich patrons. Within the cloister, however, many monks were committed to a life of reasonable dutifulness.

Some monasteries became notable centres of learning with well-equipped libraries and study rooms, called “scriptorium”. The scriptorium in Herefordshire was credited to be the birthplace of the ‘Ancrene Riwe’ and Katherine group of prose manuscripts in English. Some monks were wholeheartedly involved in the compilation of some major English works which might include texts on various subjects and languages – both religious and secular, English and Latin. The monasteries, however, failed to make any notable contribution to the development of vernacular literature. John Lydgate, the monk of Bury St. Edmunds, was the only contributor to vernacular literature worthy of mention.

The role of the Friars is another aspect that we can take a look at. While the monks had to lead a cloistered life, the friars were allowed freedom of movement. There were various orders of the friars: the Franciscan order, founded by St Francis in 1209, arrived in England in 1224. The Franciscans practised an ideal of popular preaching and poverty. Some Franciscans were also involved in the production of pious, emotional English lyrics and carols. The Dominican order arrived in England soon after the Franciscans, but they could not make any significant contribution to the enrichment of the vernacular literature and consolidation of popular religious feelings. Another religious order, the Augustinians, a mixture of secular clergy, monks and friars, was known for the production of religious vernacular literature. It is said that many anonymous lyrics and prose pieces were the works of the Augustinian canons. Besides these organized religious orders, various men and women leading the life of recluses were highly instrumental in the production of devotional works in both English and Latin. The chief among those recluses were Julian of Norwich, Richard Rolle, Mergery Kemp and Christina of Markyate.

SAQ

What were the reasons for the rise in corruption in the church ? Who could have helped to control it ? (100 words.)

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How did the Church acquire wealth ? (60 words.)

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Space for Learner

Why did the clergy give in to materialism ? (50 words)

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The monastic order, the order of the friars and the recluses constituted the margins of the Church where a creative interaction between the religious and secular aspects of life took place on whose nourishing warmth depended vernacular literature. It reaped the benefit of such fertile correspondence. The flourishing of general religious literature in English in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries bears witness to the success of the Church in its mission of spreading spiritual values through literary works. The teaching of religious ideals at a popular level required knowledge of English, although the major theological and intellectual works were written in Latin. Even Latin devotional works nourished vernacular writings by providing it with examples and subject-matter. The Church also cultivated a sense of self-scrutiny, individual identity and moral responsibility among the masses through the insistence on personal confession.

The use of English in religious teaching by the Church gave subsequent rise to a popular desire for the Bible in English. The general dissemination of religious education also sowed the seeds of dissidence among laymen, who did not question the authenticity of Church ideals, but denied the value of the priesthood, and demanded the dispersal of church properties and the Bible in English. The dissident group, which came to be known as ‘Lollardry’ and was cruelly repressed, was led by John Wycliffe, the Oxford philosopher. Nevertheless, the proliferation of sentimental stories of saints’ lives, religious lyrics, sermons and other treatises in English, all bear witness to the bridging of the gap between lay and clerical life. This ultimately paved the way for the achievement of a national church and a unified national culture. In the medieval period, the performance of religious ceremonies like baptism and unction and the vivid presentation of biblical stories and other scriptural subjects were expected to foster ideals of proper living for the masses.

Stop to Consider

The medieval church in England was inevitably led to a relationship marked by conflict with the state. You should be clear as to the reasons for this.

The Churchmen played a significant role in guiding the spiritual lives of laymen though they were not divorced from the secular interests of life. In promoting the ideals of the Gospel among people, the clergy at the lowest level would be involved with the community. In the religious hierarchy, the monks and the friars would, expectedly, be required to have a sympathetic understanding of people's needs. This alone can be seen as a strong reason for such clergymen to have gone astray and deviate from the high ideals laid down by Christ's teachings. At the same time, in their intercourse with common people at large, these very same clergymen helped in the mingling of the vernacular with the religious discourses and thus to stimulate a new spirit in the two cultures centred in Latin and the vernacular.

Space for Learner

If the social conduct of men went against the prescribed religious norm then the offender was punished with such punitive practices as ostracism. However, the sinner could get rid of the actual punishment by bribing the concerned officials of the Church. Despite such scope for circumvention of moral ideals, the laymen kept unshakeable faith in the need for following the ideals of Christianity because such observances were linked with the expectation of a better life after death. The parish churches, the monasteries and the nunneries played an active role in directing the daily life and faith of men in the medieval ages.

Stop to Consider

Monastic Life in Medieval England:

The monks were closely associated with community life and the monasteries were seats of learning particularly for those boys who aspired for a career in the religious order. The monks were expected to lead an ascetic life devoted to the ideal of physical labour, contemplation and scholarship. The monasteries played a significant role in the preservation of manuscripts of both secular and religious subjects. But the monks' growing preoccupation with material prospects created widespread social discontent which subsided only with the dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII in the period 1536-40. The monasteries had been popular centres of pilgrimages for long and the dissolution of monastic establishments reduced the importance and wealth of many towns and districts.

2.6 Learning and the Medieval Church

The medieval Church played a significant role in the evolution of European civilization. It held ancient writers like Virgil and Ovid in great esteem. School education during the Middle Ages was based on teaching and the learning of Latin and the classics written in that language. There was considerable provision for the education of boys in Latin. Grammar schools were entrusted with the responsibility of disseminating knowledge of Latin among boys. In the early Middle Ages a system of schools was formed to educate the clergy and the civil servants who were expected to be familiar with Latin. In medieval scholasticism, the elevation of Christian belief to the status of universal knowledge was the primary cause of the establishment of a chain of grammar schools.

The Christian church created the bases of the Western system of education through the schools, monasteries, cathedrals and convents, and contributed to the civilization of the West. The Church was responsible for the system of schools even after the Reformation. Only in the eighteenth century did the school system get separated from the church to come under the control of the state. The Christian system of education early laid the foundations of universities that had been formed in the beginning through the unification of schools for monks and regular clergy; these succeeded in gaining independence from both the church and the state. The universities so founded fostered the ideal of unity through the common use of Latin and communal living in colleges. The educational curriculum consisted of the *trivium* (grammar, rhetoric and dialectic) and *quadrivium* (music, arithmetic, geometry and astronomy) and all these subjects came within the purview of theology. The church had sown the seeds of both higher education and its own eventual disruption of the ecclesiastical content of knowledge. Open conflict between science and theology began to emerge when the traditional biblical view of the world became a subject of scrutiny especially in intellectual circles. The universities as centres of Latin learning in medieval England did not make any significant contribution to English vernacular literary culture. The Universities at Oxford and Cambridge were attended by the Clerics for the purpose of acquiring mastery in theology, written in Latin.

SAQ

1. Can you state the difference between what was “ecclesiastical” and what was “theological”? (50 words.)

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2. Explain the implications of “The church had sown the seeds of both higher education and its own eventual disruption of the ecclesiastical content of knowledge.” Would you call this a historical ‘insight’? (Organize your thoughts in about 100 words.)

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Space for Learner

2.6.1 The Church and Culture

After the collapse of the Roman Empire the Church emerged as the upholder of order, unity, and moral guidance. Under the increasing dominance of the papacy in Rome, and with increasing sophistication in its organization, the Church became the repository and transmitter of classical learning, moral values and ideals of social conduct. It has even been described as the single institution which bridged the the historical stretch from antiquity to the Middle Ages. By having preserved classical culture it made possible the later dissemination of this learning to a wider population. Latin ws transmitted in this manner and remained the language of law and learning during the Middle Ages.

The growth of the vernacular languages from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries onward meant that Latin now forked out onto two levels, among the learned and among the common people. Even thereafter, Latin remained alive in the fields of education, law, government, diplomacy, and science.

The singularly important aspect of Christianity was its monasticism. This was rooted in early Christian asceticism and was in the principles of St.Basil and St.Benedict. It advocated strict discipline combining poverty, humility, obedience, devotion and labour. The monks, who submitted to this regimen, did most of the writing of books, transmitting ancient manuscripts, maintaining

libraries, schools, and even hospitals. The monks would later go on to become the regular clergy in contrast to the secular clergy and the various denominations of bishops and priests who dealt with the operations of the worldly sphere.

By fostering manual labour along with intellectual labour, “in the service of God”, the monastic orders helped to endow manual labour with the dignity of divine worship. In this sense, this was an important movement forward from the ancient mode of production by the slaves. In this ancient system of production, manual labour had been looked down upon which led to a stagnation in technology. By releasing, as it were, technology from the slavish mode, Christianity contributed to the inevitable transition from one epoch to the other.

Commerce and industry declined in the early Middle Ages and the economic system was limited mainly to local trade. Life was centred on villages, monasteries and feudal estates. Famine and disease was often widespread. Land belonged only to the few. This static and hierarchical way of life was sanctioned by the Church as the social order, where each was placed in his or her own place, was seen as a part of the larger cosmic order, ordained by God.

SAQ

1. How important was the influence of the Church for the vernaculars and for cultural ideals ? (80 words.)

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2.6.2 Theology and Intellectual Currents

Intellectual currents in the early Middle Ages can be seen in two broad terms: the heritage of classical thought and the varying adaptation of Christian theology to this heritage.

The “other-worldly” disposition of the Church tended to subordinate the position of literature and the arts to issues of salvation and readiness for the next life. Withdrawal from this life was promoted as an ideal especially in view of the widespread instability, illiteracy, and insecurity. As Christianity developed its

theological content, an approach to classical literature gradually developed. The theologian Tertullian (c. 160 - c. 225) and Pope Gregory the Great (540-604) stressed faith and revelation over reason. Secular knowledge and literature were viewed as idle pursuits. Monasticism viewed worldly beauty and art with Christian anxiety as distractions inimical to the contemplation of divinity. Early Christian philosophers generally endorsed the Platonic objections to art, seeing it as removed from truth and as counterfeiting or image-making. Christians also saw the pagan arts as representing emotions of greed, violence, ambition, pride, hypocrisy and others which were opposed to the Christian virtues of meekness, love and humility.

The other approach to classical thought attempted to reconcile ancient Greek philosophy with Christian tenets. Third-century Christian theologians, such as Origen (ca.185 - ca.254) wrote *On first Principles* which was the first systematic account of Christian theology. Other Christian theologians and scholars continued the attempt to reconcile Christian philosophy with the classical heritage of Greek and Roman thought : Gregory of Nissa, Gregory of Nazianzus, St. Augustine, St. Bonaventura, and St. Thomas Aquinas, besides others. This led to the partial acceptance of poetry and history although drama, and visual art, were associated with idolatry and therefore faced opposition. Thus Christian writers cannot be neatly categorized into either assent or dissent regarding classical culture but must be seen as displaying divergent attitudes.

Some thinkers of the early medieval period continued to be influential for many centuries. Augustine's influence persisted through the later Middle Ages as did the influence of Boethius. Grammatical criticism and the exegesis of texts, continuing from the late classical era, remained a fairly continuous tradition. Neo-Platonism, a prominent stream of thought in the early Middle Ages, was revived in the twelfth century. The later Middle Ages (beginning around 1050) also saw new intellectual movements, mainly different forms of humanism and scholasticism, which had grown in the institutions of the later medieval period, the cathedral schools and the universities.

The major currents of the medieval curriculum consisted of various forms of humanism which themselves derived from the classical grammatical tradition, Neo-Platonism, and scholasticism which was largely rooted in a revived Aristotelianism. These later intellectual streams were helped by educational developments such as the rise of the cathedral schools and the universities.

2.7 The Church and the Community

The Church had a great influence on social life and the ideals of society. The Christian community defended and preserved the patriarchal family-structure wherein women's position remained always subordinate to that of men. Early Christianity contributed to the spiritualisation of marriage and family life. The family became the very archetype of the Church. Marriage was regarded as the most intimate form in which the fellowship of believers in Christ was realised. But gradually a tendency toward asceticism demanding exclusive devotion to God or Christ developed. Consequently celibacy was demanded not only of ascetics and monks but also more and more of members of the clergy as a sign of their dedication to the ideals of Christ. This medieval concept of the true life of religion as celibacy and monastic isolation from the worldly interests was, however, later rejected by the Reformists.

Spiritual care of the sick and the invalid was a major area of concern of the church monasteries during the Middle Ages. The growing number of pilgrims to the Holy Land and the necessity of the care of their numerous sick led to the establishment of hospitals by the monasteries. Healing was often carried out as an exorcism as well. The monasteries also helped in the founding and the maintaining of orphanages; through these services the medieval church contributed to the general welfare of society. The medieval church also fostered a variety of paradoxical ideals like peace and militarism. The figure of the Knight in Middle English literature (Chaucer's Knight; Sir Gawain and the Greene Knight) was an ideal Christian, a faithful servant of Christ who fought against heathen forces threatening Christendom.

Stop to Consider

The Medieval Church and Architecture

The church in the Middle Ages, played an active role in the synthesis of the techniques of art with the ideals and practices of Christianity. Medieval Church architecture was a clear example of such creative

endeavour on the part of the church which demonstrated medieval love of magnificence in architecture and culture. The church was located in towns and villages and metaphorically it suggested the faith of the Christian community in the presence of God in the world. Until the Renaissance, the arts were patronized by the Christian community. The symbolic significance of the church building in the shape of a cross, the carefully designed proportions of the building, the use of light and shadow in relation to statues and stained glass — all these illustrate the didacticism behind medieval Christian art. The sculptures and stained-glass windows bore graphic presentations of biblical stories and other scriptural matters to which the illiterate congregation could turn for reflection and self-education.

The Norman Conquest influenced the architecture of many parish churches with the introduction of the 'arch' in stones. This style is known as the Romanesque. On the other hand, the large, bright windows introduced by Gothic styles, another transcultural form of church architecture, symbolised the spiritual aspirations for the brightness of Heaven. The Gothic form is known for its indulgence in richness of decoration; the highlighting of openness and brightness in structural form, however, had idealistic motivations and certainly influenced the style of late medieval literature. The Gothic style gave an entirely new form to the representation of Christ on the cross. While Anglo-Saxon and Norman art projected Christ on the cross as a noble, unmoved figure with his body straight, the Gothic Christ was shown as tormented, dying or dead, with bowed head and one foot placed above the other, pierced by one nail.

The Gothic Christ would seem to be more realistic than the Romanesque one and it inspires the beholder to pity and to suffer like Christ. The proliferation of church buildings throughout the country – cathedrals, parish churches, monasteries and chapels indicates that the institution was an integral part of the life of the medieval laity who could not overlook the presence of spiritual reality in their everyday life. The primary purpose of religious life, however, was sometimes overshadowed by the excessive importance given to over-elaboration of religious fantasy and saints' lives in pictorial forms. The Reformation, inspired by the goal of a unified national Christian culture, successfully attempted to eliminate some of these malpractices of the Church.

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Nevertheless, this goal of the Reformists was given shape by the medieval church culture itself by its cultivating a close correspondence with the life of the laity.

The evolution of architecture with pomp and lavishness in the churches continued with a brief pause due to the occurrence of the Black Death. Besides architecture, the greatest contribution of the Church to England in the Middle Ages was in the field of literature. As Latin flourished under church patronage, numerous Latin words got incorporated into the English language. The church also played a very active role in the evolution of English drama in the form of 'mystery plays' in its initial stage.

Check Your Progress

1. Discuss how the church penetrated the lives of people in medieval England. (About 350 words)

Hint: Remember to point out how the Gospel had to be spread by the Church through the lower clergy.

2. What was the role played by the medieval church in the dissemination of education and general community-life? (About 350 words)

Hint: Emphasize how learning was in the hands of the clergy and how people found connections with the church.

3. How did the hierarchical structure of church administration prove conducive to the enrichment of vernacular culture and secular ideals in medieval England? (About 300 words)

Hint: This answer is easy!

4. Discuss the tendency towards moral degeneration in Christianity in the Middle-English period and show how it affected the socio-political atmosphere. (About 500 words)

Hint: A long answer, this one. Organize it properly. Divide largely into moral degeneration, and political corruption.

5. How does medieval architecture reflect the role of the Church in this period? (About 450 words)

Hint: Look at relevant passages above.

2.8 Summing Up

After such a full survey of the medieval Church, little remains for summarizing. However, for those of you who are interested in knowing more, there are many other aspects of the activities of the Church which

you can find out about. We have observed some of the more important points here related to its historical antecedents, its gradual dominance over Europe and England, the focal points of medieval Christianity, the conflicts which gave final shape to the church, the importance of the Church as an institution in medieval social life and its role as a keeper of tradition. One important part of the history of the Church relates to the Crusades which we have not covered and we hope that you will include it as part of your library-work.

2.9 Glossary

John Wycliffe: John Wycliffe (1330-1384) was an English reformer; he was a lecturer in Oxford and a prolific writer. He attacked the corruption in the medieval church and is considered to be one of the precursors of the Reformation. His followers are known as the Lollards.

Morality Play: Any of the medieval allegorical dramas, teaching a moral lesson, in which the main characters are personified human qualities. Everyman is the most well-known morality play in English.

Mystery Play: A medieval religious play performed in the vernacular; the various guilds produced these plays based on biblical stories. They were performed in “cycles” and the York, Chester, Coventry and Wakefield are the best known versions of these plays.

2.10 References and Suggested Readings

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Ford, Boris ed. *The New Pelican Guide to English Literature, Vol. 1: Medieval Literature*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984

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Unit 3 : The Growth of Towns and Commerce

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Unit Structure :

- 3.1 Objectives
- 3.2 Introduction
- 3.3 Before the Norman Conquest
- 3.4 The Growth of English Towns
- 3.5 The Medieval Economy
- 3.6 The Medieval Economy—Land Tenure
- 3.7 Urbanisation and London
- 3.8 Summing Up
- 3.9 References and Suggested Readings

3.1 Objectives

The history of towns in England, especially in the Middle Ages, is a most interesting subject. Our study of this history tells us a lot about the society that existed then and the social and cultural environment which nurtured it. In this unit we shall try to understand some of this fascinating history by turning our attention to some notable aspects of it. By the end of the unit you should be able to

- *trace* the history which leads to our idea of ‘urbanisation’
- *understand* the nature and historical significance of ‘urbanisation’
- *relate* the story of urbanisation to the development of English society
- *comprehend* the settlement patterns and organisation of English society which existed
- *trace* the growth of trade and commerce and its impact on English lives
- *develop* your ability to apply the concepts here to literary history

3.2 Introduction

What role did the towns play in the lives of medieval English people? The question makes us acknowledge that the towns were the results of the increase in trade. With the growth of the towns, there was also a corresponding change in the lives of the people. Earlier, there had been towns where the King’s courts were held and which were really military and judicial centres. In reality, these were rural towns unmarked by any special privileges. With the growth of trade, the new towns were notable for their new character. These were places sought out by merchants. Italy and the Netherlands saw the first such towns of commercial growth, places

where trade was easier by being situated at the mouth of a river, or where might be a cathedral, and which might have a fortification called a “burg”. They also reflected a new source of wealth,—money. They also reflected the new scope to be free of feudal bondage to the lords of the manors. At the same time these urban centres provided greater professional opportunities to the people.

Below is a very brief sketch of England before the Normans. It is essential that you get a clear picture of how English life evolved to its current stages.

Life in Anglo-Saxon England (9th to 11th centuries) –

This period in English history is one of Scandinavian invasions. In the last years of the 8th century, the Vikings began to make plundering raids in Britain. Since Britain had a long coastline, she was particularly vulnerable to this enemy who could attack her at any time, at any point.

The Danes, from Denmark, came to East Anglia in late 865. The Danes were defeated in 871, at Ashdown about the time that Alfred the Great, son of Aethelwulf, became king. Alfred made peace with the Danes which warded off trouble till 876. In 877, Alfred forced the Danes to leave Wessex but trouble returned later. Alfred routed the Danes later and subsequently the Danish king, Guthrun, settled in East Anglia, after accepting Christianity. Another Danish settlement was already in Northumbria.

Alfred was instrumental in preventing the Danes from achieving full control over England. He captured London in 886 which gained him acceptance from the English living outside the Danish areas. With this strength behind him, Alfred later won back Wessex from the Danes. Alfred gained the friendship of the Welsh Kings and this can be counted as one of the factors behind his ability to stave off the subsequent Viking raids, aided by the Danish, which took place in 892-96.

SAQ

Why is Alfred important in English history ? (60 words)

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Who were the Vikings ? (35 words)

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How far is Europe from England ? (20 words.)

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How close is Denmark to England ? (15 words.)

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3.3 Before the Norman Conquest

After the death of Alfred the Great, his son, Edward, inflicted a crushing defeat in 910 on another large incursion by the Danes of Northumbria. Edward proceeded to win back ‘Danelaw’ , or Danish territory in England, until he regained Essex, East Anglia, and the Danish areas of east Midland. Edward was helped by his sister, Aethelflaed, who won back some of the Danish territory of Derby, and Leicester. However, Edward continued with his success in gaining supremacy over other Danish territories. His troubles resurged due to the insurgency of Norsemen from Ireland, one of whom made himself King at York in 919. Edward received the submission of this Norse King, Raegnald, in 920. But Norse Kings continued to rule from York till 954.

Only in 927 did Edward’s son, Athelstan, become the first king to have direct rule over all of England after the death of Raegnald’s successor, Sithric. Athelstan called himself—justly so—”King of all Britain”.

The above is a brief description of a short period of English history which helps us to see some of the ethnic roots of English society. If we read further of this period we see more conflicts between Athlestan’s successors and the Irish and the Scots. The West Saxon Kings who ruled thereafter had to administer areas with variant customs and practices susceptible to West Saxon, Mercian, or Danish laws.

Historical evidence, in the form of place-names and personal names, tells us of Danish settlements and Anglo-Saxon settlements. The town or city of York was known in the 10th century as Jorvik, when as a Danish settlement, it is supposed to have been a centre of international trade, and economically prosperous. Currency had its own character in Danish areas. The kings granted local autonomy to the Danes so that places retained their own peculiar character. But Athelstan brought in some measure of uniformity by imposing uniform coinage in all the king’s dominion.

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Gradually, there came some uniformity in administrative divisions revealed by the fact that ‘shires’ (on the pattern of Wessex) came to be divided into ‘hundreds’ .

We find that the Anglo-Saxons organised themselves around villages. Many of these may not have continued into the medieval ages. From the 7th to the 8th centuries, many of these villages were abandoned but some continued to later times as the foundations of trading towns. Some of these later urban settlements grew out of King Alfred’s and subsequent defenses against the Vikings. It is said that the trading towns ending their names in “-wich” (from Latin, “vicus” = “village”) date back to the Middle Saxon period of these centuries

We can understand from the above that when we discuss “urbanisation”, we do not merely mean a material growth and development in the sense of greater civic amenities but also the gradual movement towards uniformity and governance from above. In England, the description of the times of the West Saxon Kings shows us that early settlements were often ethnic in origin.

At the time of the Norman Conquest, local government was constituted in the manner described below.

SAQ

What is meant by ‘urbanisation’ ? (50 words.)

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When did trade really become a profitable activity ? (50 words)

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What were the items of trade and who were the traders ? (50 words)

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Stop to Consider

Albion was the earliest name by which Britain was known. Greek geographers of the 4th century BC and earlier distinguished ‘Albion’ from (Ireland) ‘Ierne’ and other smaller parts of the British Isles. Where did the Greeks and then the Romans receive this name from ? Probably

from the Gauls or the Celts. ‘Albion’ has been translated a “white land” which the Romans explained as referring to the chalk (“white”) cliffs at Dover.

Native Britons had begun, by the end of the 7th century, to regard themselves as belonging to “the nation of the English,” although divided into several kingdoms. A “bretwalda”, or a single overlord, reigning over all the kingdoms south of the Humber river for long periods helped to nourish a sense of unity. As a word, “bretwalda” appears first in the 9th century.

Our knowledge of England from the time of William the Conqueror is heavily dependent on the ‘Domesday Book’ which recorded his survey of England. The survey was carried out amidst popular resentment which gave rise to the name ‘doomsday’, meaning that people had to face the record from which they could not appeal. By the mid-twelfth century this was the name given to the operation.

The survey is remarkable for what it accomplished in terms of detail and its completeness. It covers all of England except the northern parts.

Most English towns and villages trace their origins to the survey recorded in Domesday.

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English History

Domesday England Map



Explanations :

Look at Norwich ; a cathedral city what has been a traditional centre of East Anglia, the easternmost traditional region of England. It takes in the counties of **Norfolk, Suffolk**, and parts of the counties of **Cambridgeshire** and **Essex**.

Northumbria was one of the most important kingdoms of Anglo-Saxon England. lying north of the Humber River. The Humber river was somewhere in-between (on the map) Lincoln and York. **Northumbria** was formed from the coalition of two originally independent states, **Bernicia**, which was on the Northumberland coast, and **Deira**, to the south of it. Aethelfrith, who ruled Bernicia (593-616), took control of Deira thus creating the kingdom of Northumbria.

Look at Winchester (on the map) To its west was **Wessex**, one of the kingdoms of Anglo-Saxon England. The name Wessex is an elision of the Old English form of “West Saxon.”

Sussex was to the east of Wessex.

Stamford and **Leicester** were in Middle Anglia.

To the west of Middle Anglia was **Mercia**.

To the east of Stamford was **East Anglia** and below it was **Essex**. **Kent** is to the east of Sussex—it was the first kingdom to be converted to Christianity.

Check Your Progress

1. What is the period of the medieval ages ? (About 350 words)
Hint: Not before the Norman Conquest. Read pages 3-4 and 31 of Volume 1 of *A Critical History of English Literature* by David Daiches to get the best picture of the history.
2. What was the pattern of human settlement in the period of the Anglo-Saxon kings ? (About 400 words)
Hint: Remember history is continuous—also keep in mind what happened before the Anglo-Saxons came.
3. What was the nature of local government in the Anglo-Saxon period ? (About 400 words)
Hint: Not much uniformity except in the single coinage decreed by Athelstan. But gradually in the kingdom of Mercia, like Wessex, ‘shires’ became divided into ‘hundreds’ and soon this became a universal form of the administrative unit.

3.4 The Growth of English Towns

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Medieval England contained few towns and such towns were small. The population of medieval England consisted largely of peasants. Religion being the predominant factor in most people's lives, the religious centres provided the nuclei around which grew the later towns and cities. Apart from London, cathedral cities like Lincoln, Canterbury, Chichester, York, Bath, and Hereford, were the biggest towns. Such big cities were the results of pilgrims flocking to them. It follows almost naturally that trade would follow those routes where the market was available. One city that stands out here is Canterbury whose cathedral attracted large crowds of pilgrims after the death of Thomas à Becket in 1170.

In its pages, the 'Domesday Book of 1087' recorded only six towns in its survey. Surviving accounts of these towns from the medieval times do not give accurate figures as no account was made of the population and the figure would not have remained constant through the years. The procedure by which the material was collected during the survey was based on geography : by shires, hundreds, and villages. The account of each country was divided according to the Norman conception of feudal honour : the estates of the King and his tenants in chief being treated as one unit.

Such surveys are important for our knowledge of medieval English history as the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 was partly an outcome of just such a process, if we consider the fact that taxation followed if one's name appeared on the list. The 14th century is important for the increased use of English and the attempt to make it the official language for the law courts. Although this failed, English did make its appearance in public documents.

Stop to Consider

The Norman Conquest brought England closer to the Continent by bringing in changes in administration and other practices. The Church was connected to the Continent in many ways and this led to the arrival of new religious orders.

William began with the prevailing Anglo-Saxon practices of his predecessors but this trend was overtaken by the need for change gradually. The Anglo-Saxon council, the "witan", became the King's council or meeting of the royal tenants in chief, both ecclesiastical and non-ecclesiastical. Chroniclers have recorded that William held full courts three times a year at which he wore his crown and to which all the great men of the kingdom or realm were summoned.

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There is some debate as to the purpose of the Domesday Book survey. Possibly it was meant for the purposes of taxation although northern parts were left out. Another view is that the survey was meant for the assignment of feudal duties and obligations. William brought in changes in the administration of justice. As for language, French was used by the aristocracy while Latin became the language of administration.

The Domesday Book surveyed an essentially agrarian economy. The main unit was the manor where the unfree peasant worked on the lord's land or demesne for performing labour service. Towns, especially London, flourished and were granted many new privileges.

You must understand the significance of such aspects of medieval England as they throw light on social organization and on settlement patterns. Public assemblies tell us of the means of communication, the roads and systems of transport as much as they tell us of the culture of hospitality and social bonding.

Medieval towns grew out of the meeting-places of people. As with all cases of human settlements, the presence of rivers and sources of water determined the pattern of human habitation. The other factors were roads and means of communication, shelter from marauders and invaders, and finally, trade became a decisive factor in the pattern of settlements. From the twelfth century onwards trading activity became the determinant of urban growth. Records of population could be incomplete so there are no exact figures to indicate the density of population.

Stop to Consider

By some accounts, it has been suggested that medieval life included certain other aspects which are peculiar to its own history and require the question as to what was the nature of medieval settlements. You can understand this after you consider the following. After the withdrawal of the Roman occupation of Britain, there was a period when the older towns and cities were no longer to be seen on the English landscape. However, the medieval landscape is dotted with settlements. One answer to this puzzle is, what do we mean by 'towns'?

Towns may not be judged according to the size of the population contained but by the importance of a town in the system of administrative, judicial, social and commercial functions. In Anglo-Saxon England, these functions were not concentrated in a single town

but over many places. “The king’s tun” is suggested as another significant feature of the Anglo-Saxon kings. This relates to the practice of the king’s moving around the kingdom along with his court settling disputes, collecting tributes and dispensing justice. Thus where the monarch stopped on his tour would be the place of public assembly since people would gather to approach the monarch for their appeals and supplications, to obtain grants and gifts, among other things. Other reasons for settlements to come up was the practice of holding fairs where surplus produce was sold and specialised crafts found their market.

The reasons for the pattern of Anglo-Saxon settlements are multifarious and of overlapping complexity. Even the continuities of these settlements are open to question as besides religion, topography, or military worth of a place other changes came in gradually. For instance, the administration of revenue and taxes could be a deciding factor in the manner that these settlements could connect to each other.

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SAQ

How were royal summons conveyed ? (40 words)

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How do we distinguish between a “village” and any other settlement ? (60 words)

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3.5 The Medieval Economy

Following the break-up of the Roman empire there was a period of economic decline and work came to be organised in small, self-sustaining units. Thus there was no need for specialised production. With the new feudal economy, trade and town life resurged so that there was a new growth in commerce between different regions. The growth of new forms of

production and cultivation and increasing population paved the way for the rise of a new economic order based on trade and commerce and the origin of cities, large and small. The life-blood of the medieval town was trade, though the towns differed from each other in the intensity and nature of activities in trade.

Some important technological innovations occurred in different areas of production (as in agriculture, power, transportation, metallurgy, and machines). The new burgher class helped in the rise of industrialisation since it had resources of wealth and was willing to undertake breadth of enterprise.

The townspeople in the Middle Ages were free unlike the serfs who were bound to the land. The towns were inhabited mostly by merchants. Town land was in the control of feudal lords, kings, nobles and bishops. Conflicts were inevitable as the merchants sought greater freedom than the old feudal relations were capable of allowing. The townspeople who engaged in commerce, including long-distance trade, formed corporate bodies known as merchant guilds. Most were small merchant-craftsmen, organised in craft guilds. Typically, in a craft guild would be a master with the highest accomplishment and status, journeymen, and apprentices (beginners).

The craft-guild organization was based on regulation. The guilds controlled conditions of entrance into a craft, thus limiting the labour supply. They regulated working conditions and the process of production by defining wages, hours, tools, and techniques. Prices and standards were also set by them. The guilds acquired a political voice which helped them to retain their monopoly over the market and in some towns achieved the right to elect a number of their own members to the town council.

The 14th century saw the craft guilds prosper. The fact that there were more than 100 guilds in large towns indicates that there specialization of production. However, there was also a simultaneous movement towards the amalgamation of different crafts. Again, this shows a growth in the market. The trend in the development of these craft guilds proceeded towards more trade as craftsmen wanted to share in the market. Even the growing search for raw materials ensured this focus on trade.

The trading function began to gain in precedence and craftsmen had to become dependent upon the traders. The merchant guilds, which had originally represented only traders, absorbed the craft guilds and subsequently came to control them.

Stop to Consider

In our study of medieval England we must take a brief look at the organization of work. This aspect of economic life tells us of the division of labour, the goods being produced, the social classes and the overall nature of that society.

Some industries in the Middle Ages grew in size over time as in the case of the wool-cloth industry. English wool and woollen cloth was in great demand and formed a most important item of trade. A single peasant household could manufacture woollen cloth. This also formed the basic clothing material in Europe.

But the cloth produced in this fashion was in less demand than better textiles and it gradually happened that such serviceable cloth made in the peasant household lost its market. The peasant household thus lost out skilled craftsmen in textile-production. However, the small peasant household retained its place in the economy because the spinners and weavers were peasants.

In this sense, agriculture and industry existed together because the wool was “put out” to such a household by a merchant clothier who had bought the raw wool. This merchant would carry the cloth through the finishing process with the help of skilled craftsmen after the earlier stages of production had been completed by the peasant.

The effect of this system was that the peasant, who worked the wool with his own tools, did not own the wool which belonged to the merchant. The peasant farmer was thus reduced to a position of dependency.

The merchant clothier, on the other hand, did not supervise the processing so that the peasant worked in his own home and not in a factory. Subsequently, in time, the merchant gained control over the whole process of production—as the capitalist would, in the 19th century.

This was called the system of “putting out”.

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The medieval towns, as centres of trade and economic activity, can be studied to understand the different stages of English and European history. But despite being the centre of industry and commerce, the medieval English town was not substantially distinguished from the rural and agricultural community. Historians of Anglo-Saxon England take note of the various stages of the history in which the settlement patterns on the

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landscape were decided by more than a simple difference between a village in the hierarchy of social importance and a more important town.

We can clarify our picture of the difference between town and village in this period by pointing to the manner in which settlements came up, as we have noted above. We have to add to this picture the fact that there was the question of control : the division of landed units was determined by overlordship. It could sometimes be that either a great church or a single lord might receive the dues payable to it by a landed unit similar to modern districts.

The rigid division between rural and urban did not exist prior to the Industrial Revolution and even London, the major urban settlement in the kingdom, did not rise above its half-rustic life as a majority of its inhabitants still depended on farming. The towns and cities however led a markedly different economic life from that of the villages in having a special system of economy, called ‘burgage’ tenure system.

SAQ

What is meant by ‘production’ ? (30 words)

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How do we connect production to urbanization ? What kind of goods were made by village artisans ? (30 + 20 words)

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How were these different from the goods made in the urban settlements? (25 words)

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.....

3.6 The Medieval Economy— Land Tenure

In its developed form, this system meant the arrangement by which tenants held land from their lords. This was the feudal land tenure and in this system the King was paramount lord with different ranks of lords and tenants below him. The tenures were divided into ‘free’ and ‘unfree’. (You have already about read about feudal land tenures under ‘feudalism’ in the

first unit of this block.) Among the ‘free’ tenures the one that involved payment instead of service is important in abolishing servitude and also that a ‘free’ tenant’s services to the lord were predetermined. Among the unfree tenures, it is important to note the arrangement which later allowed the royal court to protect the villein from being ejected from tenancy at the will of the lord in breach of the prevailing custom.

In England and Scotland, within a borough (or burghs) property could be held on payment either to a lord or to the King. As a form of English feudal tenure, burgage was like a form of socage, the holding of land in return for agricultural or economic services. Thus, even the landless tenants enjoyed property right for a certain period which was determined at the time of transaction. They utilized their holding right to procure the best profit through the optimum commercial use of the boroughs and it led to the economic flourishing of the cities and the towns as a whole.

In order to comprehend the quality of medieval life we must take into account the fact that social organisation was based on ideas of ‘kinship’ . This was the bond which tied a ‘freeman’ to his kindred for protection. Society was divided hierarchically according to the amount acceptable to that class or group in vengeance for the killing of a man. A man was bound to his lord as strongly as to his kindred.

In the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, the King was deemed to be of divine descent. This sacral character of the King later developed into the arrogation of special rights by the monarch.

Stop to Consider

Royal Sanction and the City:

The existence of a town often depended on receiving royal sanction. The consolidation of the power, privileges and activities of the merchant-class was highly instrumental in the changing nature of the economy of the English nation from rural-agricultural to urban-commercial. The towns, however, did not prosper at the same rate because many factors like population, location, size, trade, specialization and royal recognition in the form of granting a charter determined the importance of the town in matters of trade. The merchant-class was entrusted with more than purely economic activities and power. There were various merchant-guilds in medieval towns and these guilds, backed by the royal charter, were granted the power to

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be involved in the administration of the towns and the cities. Between the decline of the Roman Empire and the later Industrial Revolution, it was in the 12th and the 13th centuries that there was a large increase in the number of towns all over Europe. At the same time these towns saw a rise in civic autonomy. The “commune” consisted of various kinds of municipal institutions grouped together.

In one sense, medieval towns contain the history of merchant elites seeking to reduce lordly control over their communities and to acquire more power of governance. The merchant, in these times, was central to almost all medieval towns. With this new social energy feudal obligations lessened and European society entered a new phase in the city and commercial enterprise.

Besides the merchant-guilds, the medieval towns witnessed the presence of various craft-guilds with artisans and craftsmen as its members. The rivalry and the competition between the two kinds of guilds certainly resulted in the economic prosperity of the medieval towns and urban centres. These towns and cities provided commercial platforms for the consolidation of trading activities and trade- relations with other centres which transformed the very nature of the medieval social structure leading ultimately to the collapse of the feudal order.

SAQ

Is it correct to ask whether trading and good roads and transport go together ? (15 words)

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What made a settlement become either village or town ? Where do these words come from ? (20 + 15 words)

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At what point of time does trading come into existence ? (30 words)

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Is crime necessarily associated with towns and cities ? (20 words)

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Can we say that ‘burgage’ was also really necessary for towns to develop? (20 words)

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Medieval English towns enjoyed the privileges of self-government and the monopoly of local trade. In many ways their roles as centres of municipal trade or local economic interest coincided with the larger interests of the realm. The families living within the four walls of the boroughs were entitled to certain privileges and in exchange they had to respond to any call for defence of the walls and the fields if such a situation arose. The King had the right to use the resources of the town for the benefit of the kingdom. The townsfolk were actively engaged in all sorts of civic works like cleaning and repairing the streets and bridges and helping in the harvest of the town’s fields. In 1388 a parliamentary statute was passed to make it obligatory on apprentices and travellers to harvest the cornfields to be supervised by civic officials like the mayors, bailiffs and constables. The system of conscripted labour cultivated the art of self-help and self-rule both at the municipal and at the countrywide level.

Stop to Consider:

Medieval Towns and Commerce:

The growth of commercial culture in the towns necessitated the regular flow of capital and the Jews played a major role in the mobilisation of financial resources for commercial purposes. But in 1290 Edward I expelled the Jews from England putting an end to the traditional practice of raising loans at an exorbitant rate of interest. On the other hand, the King had no option but to borrow and the need was particularly felt during the Hundred Years’ War. As a result, a new class of creditors consisting of rich merchants came forward to lend money to the king and his subjects. These merchants, as financiers and public creditors, bargained with the King for commercial and other advantages for themselves, for their trade and for the city as well.

Medieval English cities and towns were popular centres for pilgrims as various monastic establishments flourished there and these busy

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marketplaces were also frequented by both the merchants and the laity. As this practice brought together people belonging to different social strata onto one platform, it certainly developed a culture of social exchange and assimilation leading to the collapse of the feudal hierarchies. While the early Middle Ages in England were marked by the presence of the dominant feudal class, the late Middle Age were characterised by growing urbanisation in various parts of England.

Check Your Progress

1. What role did the merchant guilds play in the development of medieval towns? (100 words)

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2. Discuss the importance of royal sanction in the functioning of the towns and cities in medieval England. (100 words)

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3. Describe the connection between the increase in trade and urbanization. (100 words)

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4. Explain the concept of civic duties in medieval towns. (100 words)

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3.7 Urbanisation and London

Urbanisation constituted one of the various aspects of life in medieval England. It can be understood as the result of economic growth and development of the cities, evident in the movement of people from one trade-centre to another. Apart from London, which was the major trade-centre in medieval England, the other towns also functioned as great centres of human and commercial mobility. People from other countries in Europe

came to England just as there was a corresponding movement from English towns to other cities.

The importance of London must be included in our account. As a city, the history of London goes back to the Romans who came to occupy Britain in A.D.43 under Emperor Claudius. The Roman armies quickly took control of much of the southeast of Britain. They established ‘Londinium’ on low hills just north of the Thames valley. The name of London appears in a Roman account of A.D. 60 as a celebrated commercial centre populated by traders. Historical accounts tell us of demolition and additional constructions at this great site. We read of walls being built, rebuilt and reinforced around London. By the 6th century, by the time of Pope Gregory the Great and Augustine, London had become a city of great importance. It was a major trading centre by the 7th century.

It was already clear at the time of the Norman Conquest that London was to become the seat of financial, military and political power. William the Conqueror built the ‘White Tower’ of the Tower of London. The Tower displays architectural styles of many periods because virtually every reign added to its establishment and because it was even used as a royal residence.

London was the major city where urban culture developed rapidly. This city was greatly instrumental in the rise of a new individualism and social freedom. The city people learnt the new capacity to regulate life objectively — time by clocks, space by precise measurements and value by money – all associated with the rise of the new economy. The Lord Mayor and the elected members from the merchant-guilds were entrusted with the responsibility of policy-making and administration of the city.

The rapid urbanisation of London can be partly attributed to William the Conqueror, known for his urbane lifestyle. On one side of London was Westminster and on the other side of it was situated the Tower of London. The Westminster Hall and Abbey and the Tower were recognised centres of royal administration and political activities during the Medieval Age. England could not stand comparison with the constellation of towns in the other European countries. At the end of the fifteenth century, London had a population of 60,000 while in France, Paris had a population of nearly 200,000. Norwich in England had a meagre population of 12,000 and Bristol only 10,000. But in the field of textile industry the English towns, particularly the cloth centres of East Anglia and Yorkshire, achieved a great

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success. By the fifteenth century, England had become an exporter of manufactured woollen cloth rather than of raw wool.

SAQ

What was the occupation of the inhabitants of London ? (20 words)

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How does urbanisation foster individualism ? (20 words)

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.....

What is meant by “social freedom” ? (12 words)

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When did the Romans occupy Britain ? (15 words)

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The medieval towns and cities of England witnessed frequent civic strife, both internal and external. The disputes of the big merchants with small merchants, the burghers with the outsiders, or with such officials as the kings’ Sheriff , lord’s or bishop’s bailiff or the monks, always made the socio-political atmosphere rife with legal battles and open riot. The various towns specialised in diverse trade fields like cloth, wool and coal. The towns were surrounded by stone walls or earth mounds. The roofing of the houses were usually of thatch. But after a major fire broke out in 1087 in London, causing devastation to many straw-roofed houses with wooden walls, red-tiles and stones were also used as preferable substitutes for thatch-roofing. The cities and towns were comparatively less sanitised particularly in the absence of a proper garbage-disposal and drainage-system. The frequent occurrence of plagues in the cities can be attributed to the absence of such civic amenities of life in the medieval English towns.

It will be wrong to assume that the activities of the medieval English town were only economic in character. The town guilds organised, and its members acted, in miracle-play cycles. The market places were also centres for the community’s celebration of festive occasions. Medieval

English plays were presented in the form of cycles and were connected to the town guilds. A town like Coventry was known not merely for its flourishing wool and cloth trade but for its association with the performance of a cycle of play, now known as the ‘Coventry cycle’.

Space for Learner

Check Your Progress

1. Discuss the relationship of interdependence between the rise of a new economic order and the growth of cities and towns in fifteenth-century England.

Hint : More towns and cities means a new economy !

2. Give a brief outline of the nature of commercial activities and administration in the late Medieval English towns and cities.

Hint: An easy-to-answer question.

3. Substantiate the view that the towns and the cities played a major role in the collapse of the feudal order and the beginning of a capitalist economy.

Hint: Same as the first question above.

3.8 Summing Up

In this unit we have arrived at a better understanding of what is actually meant by ‘urbanisation’ in the pages of English history. As we have seen above, ‘towns’ and urban centres are not static objects of history. While it is very easily said that people settle together to form these centres, our brief survey above has surely shown you that settlement happens due to complex combinations of factors and forces. As we have traced the growth of English settlements we have had to cover portions of English history which are not named in your curriculum but without whose knowledge we cannot grasp why towns came into existence in the first place. The question of what is a ‘town’ is tied to its difference from what is meant by ‘village’. As we try to understand these terms, we also have to keep abreast of the passage of historical time. This is what we have done here. The Domesday map gives some clues as to our subject although you should remember that this is a very old document. As you see here, we have simultaneously learnt about the importance of commerce as a feature of medieval life. So under “Towns and Urbanisation” we have looked at London, King Alfred and Athelstan, the Domesday survey, the significance of changing land tenure systems among other topics which collectively led to increased urbanisation.

3.9 References and Suggested Reading

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Unit 4 : Humanism and Renaissance in England

Space for Learner

Unit Structure:

- 4.1 Objectives
- 4.2 Introduction
- 4.3 What was Humanism?
- 4.4 Humanism and Renaissance Thought
 - 4.4.1 Humanism and the Classics
 - 4.4.2 Humanism, Philosophy and Science
- 4.5 The Character of English Humanism
- 4.6 The Renaissance in Italy: Reasons and Factors
- 4.7 The Renaissance and Contemporary Society
 - 4.7.1 The Transformations in the World of Religion
- 4.8 The Renaissance and Explorations of the New World
- 4.9 Summing Up
- 4.10 References and Suggested Readings

4.1 Objectives

The Renaissance was one of the most important intellectual and cultural developments in the Western World. It was a transnational phenomenon and profoundly affected life and thought in different parts of Europe. In this unit we are going to consider some of the primary aspects of the Renaissance in Europe and then with special reference to English letters and society. Our focus in this unit will be

- *to comprehend* the idea of humanism and its ideals
- *to relate* the humanist tradition to Renaissance ideals and thought
- *to describe* the character of the Renaissance and its manifestations in different European centres
- *to note* the importance of Renaissance ideals in English society and culture
- *to associate* Renaissance culture with English literary practice

4.2 Introduction

The Renaissance has for long been considered to be one of the ‘watershed’ moments in the history of Western civilisation. Like feudalism (which we have already read about in Unit 1), this period of development had far-reaching consequences in the lives of the people in Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth century. You must remember that the ‘Wars of the Roses’ and the Hundred Years’ War were extremely taxing conflicts for the

people and the movement towards a more liberal spirit in the intellectual and cultural sphere was not an easy one.

This was also a period of intense religious struggle and one of its most pronounced manifestations was evident in the form of the Reformation. The Renaissance and the Reformation thus form two extremely interesting aspects contributing to the character of English society and culture in a large way. Some historians have often viewed the movement from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment and then to the modernist period as a continuum based on the continuity of ideas and practices. As students of literature and culture you must develop the critical attitude that enables you to appreciate the underlying nuances and cross-currents that go into making society. This unit seeks to highlight some of the important aspects of humanist thought and suggest ways of approaching the phenomenon known as the Renaissance.

Stop to Consider

What is meant by the ‘Renaissance’ ? It signalled a return to the study of mathematics, medicine and classical literature.

The famous nineteenth-century historian of the Renaissance, Jacob Burckhardt, describes the essential spirit of the movement in his *The Discovery of the World and of Man* :

“To the discovery of the outward world the Renaissance added a still greater achievement, by first discerning and bringing to light the full, whole nature of man. This period, as we have seen, first gave the highest development to individuality, and then led the individual to the most zealous and thorough study of himself in all forms and under all conditions. Indeed, the development of personality is essentially involved in the recognition of it in oneself and in others. Between these two great processes our narrative has placed the influence of ancient literature because the mode of conceiving and representing both the individual and human nature in general was defined and colored by that influence. But the power of conception and representation lay in the age and in the people.”

4.3 What was Humanism?

“Humanism” refers back to the culture of the 14th century, extending beyond 16th-century Europe which was based on Greek and Roman learning. Etymologically the word comes from the Latin word “Humanus”

signifying “centred on human beings”. So, in the context of the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century post-medieval Europe, ‘humanism’ means the rise of a new learning in which the central area of interest is ‘man’ and his relationship with the Universe.

The term was coined by Italian humanists to suggest a continuity with the ancient classical humanist heritage in contrast with the long period of about a thousand years of what is known as the ‘Dark Ages’ or the “Middle Ages”. From this definition of humanism, you can perhaps make the inference that this new approach in humanistic studies radically broke away from the medieval system of education. However, we must also note that our inference here has to be qualified or modified by the views of recent scholars who prefer to call the Renaissance as the “early modern” period.

The main reason for recent modification is that scholars and historians now recognize that many ideas and modes of thought of the medieval period continued well into the Renaissance. Some of these continuations consisted in the reverence for and a knowledge of the classics. We often tend to think that while the medieval scholasticism put the stress on metaphysical speculation and abstract logical reasoning, the fifteenth-century humanistic learning was concerned with the elevation of the position of man in the Universe, his dignity and his creative powers. However, as in all sociological changes and other intellectual changes, ideas are modified and transformed through a gradual process. Moreover, we make the distinction between the medieval period and the Renaissance in such drastic terms in order to emphasize the sweeping transformations that are collected under the name of the ‘Renaissance’.

Scholars and historians now tend to recognize that perhaps we should not underscore the distinction between scholastic and humanistic thought. It is now accepted that scholastic thought continued to exert its influence well into the Renaissance. It is even felt that the brilliant achievements of the Renaissance or the ‘early modern period’ (as it is now called) are not as closely related to the classical past as previously thought.

The term “humanism” is considered to have been derived from Cicero and then used by Italian thinkers and writers to stress their difference from medieval scholastics. “Humanism” is used in a broad sense which implies a world view with a set of values revolving around the human rather than the divine. This meant defining the human without any reference to God and

focusing on human potential and human achievements instead of theological doctrines. One of the original definitions of the humanist was a teacher of the humanities and this sense was retained, thus linking the term to the liberal arts. The term came to include in general a secular and independent inquiry into different fields of thought which meant that one did not see these areas of study as being defined within a theological framework.

Humanism is really only one aspect of the profound shift in sensibility affecting other areas. It was a shift from an “other-worldly” sensibility (the idea that life in this world is a preparation for life hereafter) to a “this-worldly” one. That is, the new attitude was to see actions in this world as important not because they indicated some divine purpose but because they affected present life.

The culture of the humanist did not advocate a life of religious seclusion and contemplation. Rather the belief prevailed that nature had equipped men for action and usefulness to himself, to his family and to his fellowmen, and that the material prospects of human life provided man with the opportunity for virtuous deeds. The shift in sensibility described above underlay major transformations of this period. The most important transformations were at the level of the economic and the political. The institutions which had been typical of the later Middle Ages, such as the overriding authority of the Pope, the Holy Roman Empire, the feudal system, and trade controlled by medieval guilds, were all in a state of decline. Trade and commerce had expanded, manufacture was thriving, and economic life revolved around the cities rather than the manorial estates. In Italy, cities like Florence, Milan, Rome and Venice, were emerging as important new centres, affluent and culturally advanced. This was the “renaissance” of other cities such as London, Paris, Antwerp and Augsburg.

Therefore, the new humanistic education of 15th- and 16th-century Europe, with its central focus on human passion, ambition and action, exerted a tremendous transforming influence on the contemporary arts, history and politics. This intellectual movement is known as the “Renaissance” in the cultural history of Europe.

Stop to Consider

Classicism and Man’s Dignity

The philosophy of ‘Renaissance humanism’ is specifically tied to the renewal of classical learning. The late 15-century Platonist, Pico della Mirandola, wrote his famous ‘Oratio de hominis dignitate’, or, ‘Oration on the Dignity of Man’, in 1486, in which we find the emphasis on man’s centrality in the universe. This new focus on man was in good measure spurred by the rediscovery of important classical texts. Medieval learning received a great setback from this process.

In the early fifteenth century, Lorenzo Valla had used the newly discovered manuscript of Quintilian to establish the principles of modern rhetoric. Simultaneously, there was a contemporary enthusiasm for Platonic philosophy in Florence (in Italy). The *Platonic* idea of morality helped in defining Renaissance ideals just as Platonic influences strengthened the new sense of enquiry about the universe. In this sense, Plato’s influence also lent support to Renaissance science.

In yet another direction, the rediscovery of the Platonic dialogues, where the conversational method is used, suggested to thinkers a literary form in which philosophical and scientific insights could be presented: Giordano Bruno, the 16th-century Italian philosopher, wrote “De la causa, principio e uno” in 1584, or “Concerning the Cause, Principle, and One”, as a dialogue. Galileo wrote his “Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems—Ptolemaic and Copernican” in 1632, in the same form. Even the politician, Machiavelli, wrote in 1521 “The Art of War” in the form of a genteel conversation taking place in a quiet Florentine garden.

Space for Learner

SAQ

What caused the turn towards ‘man-centred’ studies ? (80 words)

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Did the Church try to forbid it ? How did the Church come to terms with it ? What were the manifestations of the movement ? (100 words)

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4.4 Humanism and Renaissance Thought

Behind the birth of humanism in Europe lies the intellectual contribution of a number of thinkers who wanted to dispense with the medieval scholastic frame-work by adopting a humanistic approach to the acquisition of knowledge. For them, cultivation of knowledge signified the development of the potentialities of men in the universe. These humanists were — Petrarch (1304-74), Dante Alighieri (1265-1321), Pico della Mirandola (1463-94, Italian), Marsilio Ficino (1433-99, Italian), Pietro Pomponazzi (1462-1525, Italian), Politian (1454-94, Italian), Lorenzo Valla (1407-1457, Italian) and Giosafat Barbaro (1413-1494, Venetian, Italy) was a famous merchant and explorer; Francois Rabelais (c.1490-1533), Guillaume Bude (1467-1540, French) and Jacques Lefevre d' Etaples (1455-1536, French humanist), William Grocyn, John Colet (1467-1519, English) and Thomas More (1478-1535, England); Nicholas of Cusa (1401-64, German), Gregor Heimburg and Albrecht Von Eyb (translator, Germany); and Desiderius Erasmus (c.1466-1536, Dutch) – to name a few among many.

'Renaissance' or spiritual rebirth evoked a new interest in Greek. Learned men like William Grocyn, Thomas Linacre, Thomas More, Desiderius Erasmus, John Colet, all shared this interest. Prior to this, only a few churchmen of the medieval period, such Robert Grosseteste and Roger Bacon could read Greek with ease. The names of the liberal arts of the medieval curriculum had been Greek but these had entered English through French.

4.4.1 Humanism and the Classics

Although the classical writers had influenced medieval thinkers, this influence was inflected differently in the Renaissance. A major attempt in the medieval period was to reconcile Christian learning with classical philosophy. Scholarship in the Middle Ages was in the hands of the clergy, especially the monks. It was by the middle of the fourteenth century that Italy experienced a conscious reaction against the form and content of chivalrous poetry and scholastic learning. Francisco Petrarca or Petrarch, formulated a curriculum of classical studies based on the assumption that men would be led to virtue through eloquence derived from the study of classical models. Petrarch believed in the Ciceronian "humanitas" which stressed upon the utility of education in liberating men from

social conventions through its concern for individual self and its genuine expression. In fact, Petrarch, Dante and Boccaccio built upon the foundation of Renaissance humanism for the later humanists to work upon it for further evolution of the process.

Another difference between the medieval and humanist attitudes was that while classical texts had been studied in Latin translations in the medieval ages, humanists insisted on thorough knowledge of the classical languages. Greek began to be studied from the fourteenth century. The humanists also insisted on the direct study of classical texts and tried to return to the pure Latin of the ancient authors rather than the medieval Latin of the Church.

Barbaro's (1454-93) aversion to medieval scholasticism found expression in his belief that Aristotle was to be studied directly from Greek, not in translated versions. Some Italian humanists were deeply involved in the humanist interpretation of Aristotle and Plato. Pico della Mirandola, Ficino and Pomponazzi played significant roles in endowing man with a privileged position and intellectual freedom in the Universe. It was through the translation work of Ficino that the Platonic philosophy of love obtained the central position in Renaissance literature, philosophy and art of the 16th century. Lorenzo Valla was another major Italian humanist who was credited with making substantial contribution to textual criticisms by his scientific examination of manuscripts.

We have to recall that printing had made it possible for classical texts to be more widely disseminated. Another important development was the rise of the vernacular languages and it is seen that the works of Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, and many other humanists the rules of grammar and composition also theorised about these newer languages. Thus Latin began to lose in importance. Some poets even cultivated the vernacular by writing in it as with the example of Petrarch's friend Giovanni Boccaccio who developed literary forms such as the pastoral, the idyll, and the romance by adapting classical forms to the vernacular. Chaucer was influenced by Boccaccio's model of Italian prose in his best-known works such as the *Decameron*.

An achievement of the humanists was the cultivation of prose of which a famous example is Baldassare Castiglione's treatise, *The Courtier*. The epic was another form which excelled in the hands

of Ludovico Ariosto (1474- 1533), in his *Orlando Ariosto*, different from medieval epics with their religiosity and moral ideals. Historiography as well as political writing became more realistic as we see with Machiavelli's history of Florence and in his treatment of politics as a domain free of theology and morality in *The Prince* (1513).

In France, Francois Rabelais (c. 1494 -1535) expounded a secular philosophy which ridiculed bigotry, abuses of the Church and scholastic theology. In England, Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) condemned the defects of his times.

Stop to Consider

You may find here a repetition of what has already been covered above. But there are some fresh indications —read on:

How did 'humanism' affect different areas of thinking? If we consider one account of 'humanism' as deriving from "studia humanitatis" or "studies of humanity" we are led to the end of the Middle Ages by which time tremendous changes had occurred all over in Europe in terms of economic development. As we have already seen, city burghers had acquired greater powers thus effecting a reduction in the authority of the ecclesiastic orders and feudal barons. We can understand, therefore, a new interest in studies that revealed human faculties and the nature of the universe in terms of the human. There was a need for new ways of thinking, of education, of new instruments of expression.

Humanism thus also brought in a change in education which answered the needs of a new urban population who now had a greater role to play in the economy. The theories formulated by humanists now looked back to classical Greek and Latin traditions thus bringing an end to the medieval way of explaining the world's phenomena. There was now a definite change in the way that education itself was conceived.

Education now began to be seen not as something limited to youth and childhood but as extending over various areas. This brought in the idea that games, pleasure and companionship were also instruments of education. Humanists also tried to develop a closer access to the past and attempted to discover methods by which the thought of the past could become available and intelligible.

In such a climate of thought it was inevitable that theology would be relegated to the background.

Check Your Progress

1. How would you connect humanism with the Renaissance ?

Hint: Show humanism as one aspect of the period.

2. What were the important manifestations of Renaissance humanism ?

Hint: The cultural and literary manifestations were the most important..

3. How did Renaissance humanism affect the study of classical texts ?

Hint: There was an effort to get closer to the actual texts and thus to develop appropriate methods for the purpose.

Space for Learner

4.4.2 Humanism, Philosophy and Science

The tendency away from scholastic philosophy led to an emphasis on the more material aspects of language, to ideas of rhetoric drawn from classical rhetoricians like Cicero. Platonism was revived by major philosophers like Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola who were affiliated with the Platonic Academy in Florence founded by Cosimo de' Medici. Ancient movements like Stoicism, Epicureanism and Skepticism were revived. Lorenzo Valla undertook a sympathetic examination of Epicurean ethics, while Machiavelli, also influenced by Epicurus, rejected asceticism and other-worldliness. Michel de Montaigne, in France, expounded skepticism.

Scientific outlook was greatly transformed during the Renaissance. Earlier, in the Middle Ages, the Ptolemaic geocentric view with the earth at the centre of the universe, had underpinned medieval cosmology and scholastic theology. The heliocentric theory of Nicholas Copernicus (1473 - 1543), later demonstrated by Galileo Galilei (1564 -1642) helped to shatter this view of the world. This humanistic scientific revolution was fuelled by a return to ancient Greek sources such as Aristarchus, the Hellenistic astronomer of the 3rd century, B.C.

4.5 The Character of English Humanism

Among the English humanists of the fifteenth century, John Colet played a major role in bringing the glorious world of classical literature to the English people. He was primarily concerned with the religious literature

of classical antiquity. From 1496 onwards, Colet delivered in Oxford public lectures on the epistles of St Paul. Colet, rejecting the scholastic framework of medieval religious studies, focused on Paul's human personality and his contribution to biblical humanism. Colet founded St Paul's School to meet the new needs of school education. It was a successful compromise between the ideals of the Renaissance and those of medieval Christianity. The Oxford scholars in the early sixteenth century like Erasmus, More, Grocyn, Colet, William Lily and Thomas Linacre exposed the English mind to the grandeur of Italian and Greek literature and trained their students to appreciate the classical antiquities. Colet and Thomas More were intellectuals with a new world-view whose area of concern extended from the purely religious to other areas of learning and activities – mainly social and political. Thomas More played an active role in the revival of Greek studies at Oxford. His *Utopia* was not merely a manifestation of his mastery in Latin prose but a classic example of Renaissance humanism, particularly of its idealistic dimension.

William Grocyn (1446-1519) was another notable pioneer of classical scholarship at Oxford. His major achievement consists in bringing theological studies within the purview of humanistic scholarship. Sir Thomas Elyot was a second-generation English humanist; he translated many Greek works like Plutarch's essay on the education of children. He produced a Latin English dictionary in 1538. Another notable humanist of this generation was Roger Ascham who used the vernacular tongue for disseminating humanistic ideals.

SAQ

Which European countries were first influenced by the Renaissance, which ones later? (30 words)

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.....

Were the English scholars not amenable to the dictates of the Church? (25 words)

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.....

How did a new movement get encouragement from scholars? (50 words)

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.....

Stop to Consider

One of the best-known figures of the English Renaissance was Sir Philip Sidney (1554 - 1586). He is often called the archetypal “Renaissance man” because he was greatly talented and had many accomplishments to his credit. Not only was he a poet and scholar, but he was a statesman, a courtier and a fine soldier. Among his friends was the poet Edmund Spenser, who wrote “The Faerie Queene”. Sidney wrote the pastoral romance, *The Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia* (1581), and the famous sonnet-sequence, *Astrophil and Stella* (1581 -1582).

Sidney’s “Apologie for Poetrie” (1580-1581) is recognized as a seminal text of literary criticism. It is said to represent the first English synthesis of the different strands of Renaissance thought, particularly in the field of literary criticism : the heritage of Aristotle, Horace, Boccaccio, and Julius Caesar Scaliger.

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4.6 The Renaissance in Italy: Reasons and Factors

During the period between 1490 and 1520, the ‘Renaissance’ emerged as an intellectual movement which was Italian in origin but European in scope. Now the question is — Why in Italy, not elsewhere? In fact, the fifteenth-century social and intellectual atmosphere of Italy was conducive for such a change. At the material level, Italy had ample resources to patronize the study of art, literature and moral philosophy. The curriculum in the Universities of Italy was not predominantly theological unlike the Universities in France and England. Italy experienced the growth of an urban culture when in the other parts of Europe, the feudal set-up still retained its stronghold. The Italian cities like Florence, Venice and Padua flourished both economically and intellectually. The Italian merchant-class actively patronized the study of classical art and literature.

Some changes in the period can be seen as applicable to all of Europe. Feudalism underwent a decline which meant that the power of the nobles and the feudal guilds had been lowered by the more centralised authority of absolute rulers and monarchs who had formed new centres of power with the help of the new middle classes. It was the rise of centralized governments and monarchies together with the gaining of freedom from the land for the serfs or villeins which helped to weaken the feudal lords. In this sense, it is important to note how warrior overlords’ absence, fighting in the Crusades, contributed to their increasing impotence as the villeins moved

to the cities in search of work. Meantime, the middle class grew in importance and power.

In Italy and elsewhere, the papacy was losing its prestige and power which, combined with the decline of the Holy Roman Empire, led to the increasing independence of states. Our own modern ideas of the state is derived from this period in that the state is emphatically secular and independent. The rulers of the most important and powerful Italian states such as Milan, Florence and Venice dislodged any religious notion from attaching to the conception of the state and instead tried to develop a “civic consciousness” which would make the state a goal in itself which justified all patriotism, and the responsibility of the citizen as involved with the political and economic interests of the state. If we examine these ideas closely we find such political modernity as recalling classical ideas of “civic humanism” and the high value placed on common welfare.

Fifteenth-century Italy experienced considerable development of libraries at places like Florence, Naples, Cesena, Venice and elsewhere. The mass-production of manuscript texts followed by the printing of various editions of ancient classics brought about a revolution in the field of humanistic studies. The Italian academies also played a major role in the circulation of humanist ideals ,because these academies provided the humanists with opportunities for exchange of ideas with their fellow scholars .The members of the ‘Platonic Academy’ made a conscious attempt to revive ancient forms of cultural exchanges as manifested in Plato’s dialogues and letters. They attended the informal meetings of scholars for philosophical discussions and the exchange of ideas on classical scholarship. The fall of Constantinople in 1453 due to the invasion of Turks led to the entry of a number of displaced Byzantine scholars into Italy. It resulted in the intellectual cross-fertilizations between the East and the West of Europe creating a conducive atmosphere for the pursuit of humanistic studies.

Stop to Consider

While discussing the ‘Renaissance’, it is also important to know that historians have diverging views on its origins and its significance. In our main text above and below, we follow the developments in art and literature as laid down by the great 19th-century scholars, Jules Michelet (who wrote *History of France*) and Jacob Burckhardt (who wrote *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, 1860). Over the

years, with much research having been done, many historians are likely to question ideas that exalt the European Renaissance as an instance of the great European march of progress towards modernity. Conventionally, the Renaissance is understood as the collective name for profound ‘achievements’: the break with medieval values and medieval institutions, the individual as deserving of study, a new interest in material phenomena and occurrences, recovery of the ancient Graeco-Roman heritage. In our time, all these ‘achievements’ have been laid open to doubt and scepticism. However, it is also recognized that between the medieval period and the 17th century there were indeed sweeping transformations that shook the Papacy and the Holy Roman Empire.

In keeping with this conventional view, there was too much focus on Italy and some of its centres like Florence, Venice, and Rome. Such a restricted view should be corrected with the awareness that Italy was well connected with the rest of Europe and that some of the lesser towns and semi-rural centres were perhaps equally to be held as being contributors to this famous movement. What is ultimately important for our study of literary history and the cultural background is that we remain critically open to rigid ideas that define the Renaissance in terms of simple dichotomies: modern versus the feudal, the gothic versus the classical, or the Renaissance versus the medieval. We should connect what went with the Middle Ages —private finance enabling commerce, classical scholarship, vernacular literatures, inquiries into phenomena of the physical world, among others— as leading upto the Renaissance.

4.7 The Renaissance and Contemporary Society

We have seen so far that the Renaissance represents a turning point in the history of European society as it shows transition. The renewal of interest in classical learning suggests that the Renaissance was a cultural movement. The new pursuit of knowledge aimed at the cultivation of human personality and the trend was facilitated by the presence of such material prospects in the continent as the extensive use of the printing-machine, the upsurge of commercial activities resulting in enormous economic wealth and exploration of new geographic areas. The cultivation of humanistic ideals through the regeneration of classical studies reached a high momentum in sixteenth-century Europe, but in England the movement continued up to the

seventeenth century and ultimately it set the stage for the scientific revolution and enlightenment of the eighteenth century.

In England, the enthusiasm for ancient classical art and literature was combined with a renewed focus on religious studies resulting in an endeavour to reconcile classical learning with the Christian tradition. English humanism succeeded in achieving a successful compromise between the excessively rhetorical preoccupation of the Italians and the narrow framework of theological studies, thus becoming Christian humanism.

The English Renaissance did not consist merely in the assimilation and adaptation of the Italian achievement in English education, literature, arts, philosophy and political thinking. It has a unique character of its own. Unlike the Italian Renaissance, in England the movement was rooted in the growth of Christian humanism. The classical emphasis on education introduced by the humanists did not lead to a sudden rejection of religious studies. On the other hand, more than half the books printed in England between 1468 and 1530 were religious books. The Oxford scholars like John Colet and Erasmus strengthened the foundation of biblical humanism through their intention to serve God by the advancement of learning.

4.7.1 The Transformations in the World of Religion

The early modern period —the other name for the Renaissance — is memorable for the events and changes in the world of religion. The Protestant Reformation broke out in 1517 and led to a major schism in the Church. The Pope and Roman Catholicism lost influence in most of Northern Europe. The Counter-Reformation, or the Catholic Reformation, which reached a height of intensity in the mid-sixteenth century, forced Catholicism to make a break with its medieval character. The Protestant Reformation was also the result of national consciousness as much as it was against some cardinal doctrines of medieval theology. It promoted individualism as much as nationalism which induced an independence from the dictates of Rome and helped to gain religious sanction for bourgeois thought and practice.

There were other causes for the Protestant Reformation as well : the papacy lost much prestige and authority due to the “Great Schism” which was a conflict of claims to the papacy by contesting popes in Rome and Avignon. As you will read later in the section on “The Beginnings of Modern Democracy”, the Protestant

reformers included leaders like Martin Luther and John Wycliffe. Humanist thinkers like Desiderius Erasmus and Sir Thomas More had led to a renaissance in religion through their association with a movement based on simple piety, called “Brethren of Common Life”.

Martin Luther called upon German princes in his published writings to reform the Church independently of the Pope. He believed that faith alone was necessary for man’s salvation and thus emphasized the primacy of the individual conscience. He advocated a direct relation of man and God and rejected the mediation of priests and saints.

The Catholic Reformation, which was not an integral part of the Protestant revolution, led to the redefinition of Catholic doctrines at The Council of Trent (1545 - 1563), convened by Pope Paul III. Part of this Catholic Reformation was due to the work of the Jesuits who were members of the Society of Jesus founded by Ignatius of Loyola in 1534.

These movements of religious transformation led to vast changes in Christendom. The Christian world now became schismatic : Scandinavia and northern Germany became Lutheran, England integrated Catholic doctrine with loyalty to the State, while Scotland, Holland, and French Switzerland took to Calvinism.

Stop to Consider

The Renaissance and English Nationalism:

The Renaissance strengthened the zeal of patriotism in English minds which was illustrated particularly by the growth of its national literature. In medieval England, literary activity, being modelled after the French, did not receive the inspiration of the spirit of nationalism. But the Renaissance nurtured the impulse to return to the cultural and historical past of the ‘nation’, resulting in the glorification of its legends, traditions and antiquities through poetry and drama. The theatre became an instrument for popular entertainment and ballads became a favoured literary form of the common people. Thus in England, the Renaissance remained always sensible of the masses. Even religion contributed to the stimulation of the nationalist consciousness in English soil.

The establishment of the national church, free from foreign

supremacy, was an expression of the growing patriotic impulse of the English people. Another regional peculiarity of the English Renaissance was that it led to an enrichment of vernacular culture. Although serious writing was still mainly in Latin, the writers made an earnest endeavour to make experiments with new themes and forms in their own language. John Skelton earned a reputation through his satirical allegories in English like ‘Speke Parrot’(1521) and ‘Collyn Clout’(1522) and ‘Why come ye nat to courte’(1522). Gawin Douglas is best known for his English translation of the Aeneid. Even the moralities like The Four Elements (1519) demonstrated a growing interest in science and in new discoveries, an unmistakable temperament belonging to Renaissance

4.8 The Renaissance and Explorations of the New World

The exploration of the new world by the navigators and professional explorers received a new impetus during the Renaissance in England. The spirit of imperialism fuelled maritime adventures, and besides the extensions of its imperial frontiers, it gave birth to numerous tales of distant exploration and success. Richard Hakluyt’s work, published in 1589, *The Principall Navigations, Voiages and Discoveries of the English Nation*, was a notable example in this regard.

In the medieval period, the monasteries in England were entrusted with the responsibility of developing scholarly activities. Towards the end of the fifteenth century, educational functions came under the purview of schools and Universities. Although the University of Oxford and Cambridge had not yet thrown theological studies out of its curriculum, it welcomed the inclusion of humanist learning particularly through the reception of new ways of grammatical teaching. The contribution of Oxford to the New Learning was much more remarkable than that of Cambridge. This was mainly due to the presence of such eminent scholars like Stefano Surigone, an Italian, William Grocyn, Thomas Linacre, Erasmus and Cornelio Vilelli, another Italian humanist at Oxford. Beyond the academic circles, renewal of interest in classical learning also received courtly patronage particularly during the times of Henry VII and Henry VIII. Many scholars attempted to get royal favors by writing flattering panegyrics and epistles in Latin and dedicating Latin treatises to the King.

The Context of Renaissance Philosophy

As in Italy, so in England, another noticeable trend during the Renaissance was the re-interpretation of Plato and his philosophy. Neoplatonism reached England through such books as Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* (1528). It taught Englishmen the appreciation of beauty as manifested in geometrical proportions and upliftment of the soul through courtly love. The works of Spenser and Philip Sidney were an exposition of the platonic ideal of harmony between the soul and the body. As the Renaissance programme was associated with the complete development of the multifaceted potentialities of men, every area of human activity such as poetry, history, philosophy, ethics, rhetoric, politics and economics came within the purview of humanistic studies.

In England, however, Renaissance did not make any significant impact on the plastic arts, but it ushered in radical changes in all the major areas of learning and creative endeavor. Renaissance philosophy did not place men in opposition to the theological framework. The Renaissance humanist put the insistence on the inseparable unity of the human soul and the body, of the spiritual and the material aspects of life. It is concerned with a vigorous revaluation of man's intellectual freedom and the centrality of his position in the divine order.

Renaissance philosophy is an assertion of the anthropocentric view of the world which regards man as an integral part of the divine order of the Universe. Therefore, the Renaissance cannot be defined as pagan in outlook. Renaissance humanism also facilitated a realistic estimation of the history of England. It cast doubt on the authenticity of the fantastic world of Medieval England and identified itself with the history of classical Greece and Rome which celebrated the potentialities of man. In the political sphere, Machiavelli was regarded as the mouthpiece of the Renaissance ideal of proper governance as his political treatise, *The Prince* (1532), expanded the thesis of effective governance which completely rejected the policy of decentralisation of the feudal society of the Medieval period. In Renaissance England, the monarchical control over parliament, the Church and the military orders ushered in an era of self-conscious royal activity and this extension of royal activity was accepted as a sign of effective administration.

Renaissance conditions, grounded in the ethics of self-development through action and pragmatic outlook, were amply manifested in all the major literary forms. The Morality plays, written in the last part of the fifteenth century, projected the struggle between the good and evil in terms of the conflict between knowledge and ignorance; the human soul, instead

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of renouncing the world, was shown as struggling for worldly virtues. In sixteenth-century English literature, the exposition of the new morality got more pronounced in the works of Bacon whose prose works aimed at glorifying the life of action rather than of philosophical contemplation.

Stop to Consider

A liberal attitude was adopted by Renaissance scholars towards language. Latin words were borrowed either through French or directly, Greek words through Latin or directly from Greek. Latin extended beyond Church Latin to include classical Latin. The whole Latin lexicon became potentially English for some time. Words like arbitrator, finis, gratis, explicit, memorandum, simile, abacus, were taken directly from Latin. Words like infidel came either from French or Latin.

Utopia by Sir Thomas More was written in Latin. It was translated into French and then into English only in 1551, after his death. Francis Bacon published his *On the Dignity and Advancement of Learning* in Latin in 1623. Latin was the language in which William Harvey announced his discovery of the circulation of blood in 1628, in *On the Motion of the Heart and Blood in Animals*. As secretary to Oliver Cromwell, Milton corresponded with foreign states in Latin. Newton wrote in both Latin and English : his *Principia* (1687) was in Latin, his *Opticks* (1704) in English.

[1] The all-round development of the individual was the central issue in fifteenth-century humanistic studies in Europe.

[2] Humanism fostered a reaction against the Medieval scholastic thinking.

[3] The Renaissance was a humanistic movement since it aimed at cultivating humanistic concerns through classical scholarship.

[4] Although taking root in Italy, the Renaissance in England exhibited a distinctive character of its own.

[5] Humanism was championed in England both by the court and by the Universities.

Check Your Progress

1. Write a note on the English scholars who helped to usher in humanism into England.

Hint: No help needed here !

2. Describe in brief the Renaissance in Italy.

Hint: Take care to connect cultural renaissance with the larger sociological changes.

3. What was the nature of the English response to Renaissance humanism ?

Hint: Organize your answer: in the world of letters, the effect on theology, nationalism, culture.

4. State the effects of Renaissance humanism on the study of philosophy and history.

Hint: Distinguish between effects on Europe in general and on England

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4.9 Summing Up

The Renaissance, as much as the topic of ‘humanism’, has been the matter of much historical and cultural studies. Scholars have conducted comprehensive investigations into these topics because it is recognized by thinkers how influential and lasting the influences of this period of history have been in modern life. As a result of many such excellent studies much material is available for the inquiring student. You will be able to find out much more than what we have been able to provide here in this unit. Our approach has been to guide you through the mass of information available elsewhere. So we have looked at connections between ‘Renaissance’ and ‘humanism’, the linkages between ‘humanism’ and the world of learning, what ‘humanism’ meant in terms of religion and culture, even philosophy, as surely any intellectual movement of power must mean. Meanwhile, we have been careful that you do not go away with limited ideas of this movement of great significance.

4.10 References and Suggested Readings

Briggs, Asa. *A Social History of England*, third edition, London: Penguin, 1999

Choudhury, B. *English Social & Cultural History: An Introductory Guide*, Prentice-Hall of India, New Delhi, 2005

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Unit 5 : The Beginnings of Colonialism

Space for Learner

Unit Structure :

- 5.1 Objectives
- 5.2 The Context of Colonial Expansion
- 5.3 Colonialism and the Renaissance
- 5.4 Colonial Growth and the Process of Consolidation
- 5.5 The Aftermath of Colonialism
- 5.6 Summing Up
- 5.7 References and Suggested Readings

5.1 Objectives

The Renaissance was not just a period of expanding the frontiers of knowledge – we have already read something about it in an earlier unit – it was also the time when various European adventurers crossed the sea to fan out in search of new territories. The Renaissance spirit of adventure was just one of the factors, the political and economic ones were equally significant, and this process of exploration can also be seen as the period when colonialism began.

As we shall study about the movement from colonialism to imperialism in the next Block, we shall limit this unit to just a brief description. A proper appreciation of the conditions under which colonialism began would give us a better view of the later developments. In this unit we are going to consider the various aspects and circumstances that facilitated the expansion of colonies for many European countries including England.

5.2 The Context of Colonial Expansion

Today we use the term “Renaissance” to describe the incredible flowering of art, scholarship and literature that took place as 15th and 16th century Europe moved forward from the middle Ages. And we include the many exciting geographical and scientific discoveries and the expansion of trade and commerce of the era in the phrases “The Age of Exploration” or “The Age of Discovery”.

But we are led to wonder whether the inhabitants of England in the late part of the 16th century did apprehend that they were living in the Renaissance, or The Age of Exploration or any other such tidy historical period. From their perspective the developments and discoveries were specific to their lifetime not part of wider historical movements. Few would have known the significance of the awareness that when they looked

around things seemed to be changing at a bewildering pace. The world was opening up and the possibilities were wonderful, if a little overwhelming. The recently rediscovered Greek and Roman writings were filling up the book-market, unleashing a new enthusiasm for education. Explorers were discovering worlds where nothing seemed to have existed. And although the English were still deeply religious, the institution of the Church was seesawing at a dizzying rate.

5.3 Colonialism and the Renaissance

The intellectual spirit of the Renaissance had given a new perspective on life and on oneself. Knowledge had broken out of the cloisters to the freedom of an increasingly secular society.

Translations of ancient Greco-Roman and contemporary Italian authors proliferated in England aided by the arrival of the printing press from Europe. Thus hundreds of old books in new translations, coupled with the expansion in education, were certainly broadening Elizabethan literary horizons.

Meanwhile, territorial horizons were expanding equally rapidly. European astronomers were challenging age-old beliefs about the universe. One of them, Copernicus even went so far as to suggest that the sun and not the earth was the centre of the universe; he further maintained that the earth was actually in motion, not fixed in place. Although such theories sound elementary to us now, at that time they ran contrary to everything people had ever thought about the centrality of the earth.

The ground beneath the feet of the Elizabethans was none too steady either, thanks to the crowd of explorers who were racing all over the globe propelled by better maps, new mathematical tables and other advances in technology. And the world was yielding to adventurous explorers of all the European nations as they sailed off in search of wealth and fame in what, in retrospect, we consider to be the beginnings of colonialism.

5.4 Colonial Growth and the Process of Consolidation

In the 16th century the greatest social change in Elizabeth's England was the expansion of overseas enterprise. The race was on to discover – and claim – sea routes to the phenomenal storehouses of wealth in the east. The Portuguese won the first lap when Vasco de Gama sailed around the southern tip of Africa and discovered an eastern route to India. Other nations turned west instead to find a throughway to the east. After Amerigo Vespucci ran into Brazil in the southwest and John Cabot found

Newfoundland in the northwest, it began to dawn on the people of the time that there was an entire continent in the way – which might prove valuable in itself. Spain wasted no time exploring and exploiting this possibility: explorers such as Francisco Vazquez de Coronado and Hernando de Soto sailed up the Pacific coast and around the southern areas of the place they called America.

The English were not far behind for they eagerly pursued their own avenues of discovery and trade. Significantly, the most influential writer in the age of Shakespeare was Richard Hakluyt, author of *The Principall Navigations, Voiages and Discoveries of the English Nation*, provides knowledge of almost everything about the early English voyages to North America. This book published in the year 1589 was enlarged and updated in three magnificent volumes ten years later. Hakluyt, while narrating adventurous sea stories, inspired other men to sail to virgin land.

More spellbinding than the actual explorations were these sensational stories and amazing descriptions of the peoples and customs of these strange new worlds. Everyday a new fantastic tale of incredible creatures in foreign paths docked with the ships in London, as the rumour of men with the heads of dogs – not unlike that “puppy-headed monster”- Caliban, who curses and drinks his way through Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*.

Of course the Elizabethans had always known about Europe and had grown up with tales of Turks, Moors and other infidels. But suddenly, seductive spices, strange clothes, glittering jewels and a new luxury drink “coffee”, were jumping off the safe pages of travel accounts and into the markets of London. The tobacco played a great part in English colonial and commercial expansion – in the last years of the 16th century, the new American weed was being smuggled into Cornwall, in open defiance of the customhouse. The habit of smoking tobacco in pipes was a general practice by the time the Queen died.

Stop to Consider

Colonialism and Contemporary Economy

A whole new order of economic activity was in the making promising wealth and glory. Upper class gentlemen, well-to-do merchants and the shrewd Queen Elizabeth herself were quick to sense the enormous profits to be made in foreign trade, and before long joint-stock companies were being formed to invest money in trade ventures. The expansion of overseas trade was closely connected with the growth of merchant capitalism leading to the emergence of overseas trading companies of a new type.

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These companies were of two kinds. The first was the regulated company, in which each member traded on his own capital, and was under the laws of the corporations, such as the Levant Company. The second was the joint-stock company, wherein trade was conducted by the corporation as a whole, and the profits and losses were divided among the shareholders, for example, The East India Company (1600). But the only way Queen Elizabeth devised to promote trade in distant lands was to assign a geographical sphere of influence and operation through the dictates of a royal charter. Such monopolistic trade was necessary because the royal navy could offer no protection to these companies nor fund the purchase of armaments. The spirit of this new trade was one of private enterprise because these new companies were only marginally dependent on the State.

Before long, the English ships were swarming the high seas. They were not vessels of the navy, nor were they pirates. Most of them were manned by sailors from Devon and Cornwall and most of their captains – Drake, Raleigh, Frobisher and Hawkins – came from that part of the world as well. They took commissions as privateers, often going shares with the Queen or one of her courtiers on the loot of their trips. The risks they ran were very great; if captured by the Spaniards and not killed on the spot, they would certainly be turned over to the Spanish Inquisition as heretics. The vessels they sailed, being very small, were quick and manoeuvrable. Drake’s, “The Golden Hind”, in which he sailed around the world and brought home a colossal fortune, was a vessel of about a hundred tonnes. And the Queen was happy because, without putting out any of her own money, she was building a naval force second to none.

SAQ

Why did colonial expansion capture the spirit of Europeans during the Renaissance? (35 words)

.....
.....

How did trade and commercial motives drive the colonial enterprise? (35 words)

.....
.....

Such heroes as Martin Frobisher, Hugh Willoughby, the Cabot family men and John Davis tried repeatedly to establish a northeast and then a northwest passage to Asia. After encouraging starts, all of them were ultimately unsuccessful, defeated by storms and solid blocks of ice. But English explorers, who combined in themselves, the roles of pirate, missionary and adventurer were planting the seeds of good trade relations in the Far East, which eventually grew into political domination and a sprawling empire.

Stop to Consider

Works from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* have always been remembered as efforts to determine the meanings and complexities behind colonial power. But there has always been a strong tradition founded on the imperialist myth of the Victorian era of which Kipling and Rider Haggard were the most famous spokesmen, that white intervention was made in the interest of native inhabitants, an idea popularised through the term, "the white man's burden".

5.5 The aftermath of colonialism

After World War I, the growth of nationalism in Africa and Asia started to reverse the process of colonialism. Post World War II, with the establishment of the United Nations in 1945 and the declaration that colonial policy was of interest to the entire world; there was a general move towards the relinquishing of former colonies. Spearheaded by freedom movements all over the world, colonialism, in its original form, died an inevitable but natural death. But its residues survive in its more insidious form as cultural colonialism.

5.6 Summing Up

In this unit, we have briefly discussed the link between the Renaissance and the process of colonialism. We have also dwelt on how colonial growth was connected to expansion of overseas enterprise and British economy. In subsequent units you will be able to understand the broader trajectory of colonial process, its metamorphosis into imperialism and the subsequent crisis that it faced from the late nineteenth century into the middle of the twentieth century.

5.7 References and Suggested Readings

Briggs, Asa. *A Social History of England*, third edition, London: Penguin, 1999

Choudhury, B. *English Social & Cultural History: An Introductory Guide*, Prentice-Hall of India, New Delhi, 2005

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Unit 6 : Exploration and Travel

Space for Learner

Unit Structure :

- 6.1 Objectives
- 6.2 Introduction
- 6.3 A Brief History of Travel and Exploration in the West
 - 6.3.1 The Age of Exploration: 15th to 17th century: Influence of the Renaissance and Revival of learning
 - 6.3.2 The Great Travellers and their Discoveries
 - 6.3.3 Major travellers in the West
 - 6.3.4 Discovery of the New World
- 6.4 Impact of the Age of Exploration
 - 6.4.1 The Scientific Revolution, the Enlightenment and Print Revolution.
 - 6.4.2 The Industrial Revolution and Globalization:
 - 6.4.3 Rise of Empire, Capitalism and Colonialism
- 6.5 Summing Up
- 6.6 References and Suggested Reading

6.1 Objectives

The present unit attempts to introduce you to the English social and cultural history of the West during the Age of Travel and Exploration. The unit will enable you to

- Understand the Age of Exploration in the West and its many discoveries
- Be familiar with the great travellers of the World who have contributed to the world of ideas and discoveries
- Explore the history of travel and subsequent growth of trade and commerce.

6.2 Introduction

The origin of the modern world dates back to the era of travels and explorations in the West during the Middle Ages and Medieval period. Merrick Whitcomb made an important observation in this regard when he stated that no sharp line of division separates the Middle Ages from modern times. The beginning of the modern era must be sought far back during the political upheaval of the fourteenth and fifteenth century following the decline of the medieval institutions (Whitcomb: 1). The transition from

Feudal to the modern form of government led to the rise of the modern state and establishment of central power. After the Renaissance, New Learning enlightened Europe with innovative ideas and creativity. A sense of wonder and curiosity inspired the Europeans to explore the unknown and explore the unexplored.

6.3 A Brief History of Travel and Exploration in the West

The desire for the unknown and unexplored led individuals across time to go on expeditions and travel. Since ancient times, such adventures and travels have transformed the socio-cultural and political structures of countries. For power and glory, ancient exploration was mainly related to some kind of military conquest. The great King Alexander (356-323 b.c) and his vast empire remained unmatched until the Vikings came for explorations. The Roman Empire expanded for colonizing endeavour. The Chinese explorers set out for India and the West to visit the birthplace of Buddha. Two such well known Chinese monks were Fa-Hsien (374?-462) and Hsuan- tsang (602-664). During the Middle Ages, merchants, monks and mariners went on expeditions to explore and conquer new lands and people. The Vikings (800-1150) were the dominant sea power with their expertise in seamanship and technology. Two important names in the history of European expedition were Bjanri Herjolfsson and Leif Erikson. Herjolfsson was the first European to see the eastern coast of North America while Erikson was known for his exploration of the coastline from Baffin Island to Cape Cod. During the 12th century, the Great Mongol Empire had n expansion into northern China, Persia and Russia under the leadership of Genghis Khan (1162-1227). After him many extensive explorations were made across Asia and the West.

SAQ

What led the Europeans to go for long expeditions and travel?
(60 words)

.....
.....

Mention the role of a few Chinese Explorers during the Age of Exploration. (60 words)

.....
.....

In the Western History many writers have written accounts on travels and explorations. Among them are Charles Dickens, William Thackeray, Joseph Conrad, Rudyard Kipling, Richard F. Burton. One of the oldest narratives about travel is *Marvels of the East*, which was written in old English in the 7th or early 8th century. John Mandeville's travels and Marco Polo's accounts of Asia were widely read by readers.

6.3.1 The Age of Exploration: 15th to 17th century: Influence of the Renaissance and Revival of learning

The 15th to the 17th century is ideally known as the age of great exploration and travel across the world. Sea routes were explored by various explorers in search of knowledge, trade and power. The history of our civilization is simultaneous with the history of great explorations and discoveries. The age of discovery was marked by the travellers and explorers from Portugal, Spain and Italy. It is known that the famous Portuguese explorer, Prince Henry the Navigator (1394-1460) made voyages along the African coast and inspired the explorers to explore new routes and trade channels. In 1419, the Madeira Islands were discovered by Portuguese explorers. John Cabot, an Italian explorer discovered the coast of Newfoundland in 1497. In 1524, Giovanni da Verrazano discovered the way to the Hudson river. England established its first permanent colony in North America in 1607. Significantly, in 1498 Vasco de Gama discovered his way to India. The discovery of new trade routes paved the way for maritime voyages and commerce. The discovery of the Silk Road marked an important incident in the history of travel and exploration because the new route made it possible for the Europeans to sell the Asian products such as spices and silk. Some of the prominent cities that dominated the European trade practices were Venice and Genoa. In 1492, the last of the Moorish states of Southern Spain, Granada was overthrown and led to the baptism or exile of the Moors. Following this important incident, the Spanish showed interests towards adventure and methods of accumulation of wealth. Adam Smith in his *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) mentioned 1492 and 1498 as significant events in history as it marked the discovery of America and passage to the East Indies by the Cape of Good Hope (Smith:). Apart from Spain, Italian influence was immense towards modern life and the influence was mainly intellectual than

political. During the 16th century two major voyages changed the course of history: Ferdinand Magellan's circumnavigation of the world and Captain James Cook's voyages and mapping of the world.

Stop to Consider

In the Middle Ages the feudal order was abandoned in favour of a republic devoted to industry and commerce in Italy. Even though the democratic spirit began to wane towards the end of the Middle Age, the political progress of the city called Florence restored the democratic spirit. Under the political influence of Cosimo de' Medici, the city Florence saw prosperity and endurance.

Now let us learn about the major influences that shaped the era of exploration. To understand this, you have to go through the history of Renaissance and subsequent revival of learning.

The Renaissance means rebirth and the philosophy refers to the rebirth of the old Greek and Roman manner of looking at man and the world. The recovery of the writings of the Greeks and Romans marked a transformation of ideas in the West. The Renaissance aroused wonder and curiosity amidst the intellectuals and people began to appreciate the life and culture of the classical period. Such a creation of wonder and curiosity inspired many to seek knowledge about the world. This quest for new knowledge was a determinant of the age of exploration. The year 1453 was crucial here for your understanding of the revival of learning. Even before the fall of Constantinople, Greek literature had been transplanted to Italy. The impact of such discovery of ancient literary treasure was immense. What is more remarkable here is that the spirit of inquiry of Greek Philosophy broke down the limitations of the medieval thought. The first European country to receive Renaissance influence was Italy due to great accumulation of wealth in the Italian cities. The Southern German cities saw the dawn of Renaissance during the middle of the fifteenth century. In France, the nobles were more interested in military exploits and use of arms. The French were more inclined towards the artistic side and the influence could be seen in the palatial buildings built by the French Kings of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. You will be able to

contextualize the Age of Exploration once you learn about the influence of the Renaissance in England.

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Stop to Consider

Growth of Schools and University System in Germany: After the great influence of the Renaissance the Germans applied the philosophy of new learning to practical lives. In the fifteenth century Germany saw the recognition of the school system. This impulse towards new learning enlightened the German lands from Holland to Switzerland, Rhine to Silesia (Whitcomb: 22). The Universities became sites of new learning where the theological content was prominently present.

The intellectual influence that England received during the Renaissance transformed the major social, political and religious institutions of the era. The spirit of criticism inspired the English people to seek reform of the medieval church and clergy. One of the major influences was the rise of the University of Oxford as centre of reform. Here you must be familiar with the Oxford Group of leaders. Among them were John Colet who founded the St. Paul's School in London in 1510 and Thomas More who was known for his book *Utopia* was the Lord Chancellor under the kingship of Henry VIII. A close friend of Jon Colet and More, Erasmus (1467-1536) did a major contribution by translating the New Testament from Greek to Latin which opened the way for religious reformation. Two remarkable books in this regard were *Praise of Folly* and *Familiar Colloquies*. Thus the Renaissance brought new light to the European world by contributing to the social, political and intellectual set up of the time.

SAQ

What kind of intellectual influence was experienced in Europe after the Age of Exploration? Do you think that the Renaissance affected the growth of learning in the West? (About 500 words)

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6.3.2 The Great Travellers and their Discoveries

The dawn of new learning and expansion of intellectual horizon inspired the world travellers to go on great expeditions and travel thereby promoting the civilization to new heights. Renaissance Humanism established new faith in human potential and actions. The breakdown of Medieval institutions and subsequent rise of individualism led to growth of material progress on the one hand and spread of modern spirit on the other. Some of the major inventions made by the explorers were the compass, printing press, paper and maps.

6.3.3 Major travellers in the West

Marco Polo (1254-1324), the famous Venetian Merchant and adventurer who travelled along the silk route from Europe to Asia between 1271 to 1295. He visited China and remained there for 17 years after being invited by the Court of Kublai Khan (1215-1294). Under the patronage of the Mongol ruler he went on a fact finding mission to distant lands. The travel of Marco Polo inspired many travellers and threw significant influence on European cartography.

Stop to Consider

Marco Polo's *Il milione* ("The Million") also known in English as the *Travels of Marco Polo*, is considered as a classic travel text in literature. The new geographic information shared by Marco Polo was widely used by navigators and explorers during the 15th and 16th century in their voyages and discoveries. After Marco Polo, another Venetian Explorer John Cabot (c. 1450-1498) made exploration of coastal North America.

Henry the Navigator (1394-1460): The Portuguese Prince went on an expedition across the Atlantic Ocean and the Western coast of Africa. He was considered to be the main behind the Age of Discovery and African Slave Trade. The Prince sponsored voyages of exploration to build colonies in the North Atlantic and West Africa. He was titled as 'the Navigator' as he assembled a group of designers and maritime experts for designing new ships, maps and instruments for navigation.

Christopher Columbus (1451-1506) was known for his four transatlantic voyages (1492–93, 1493–96, 1498–1500, and 1502–04). His voyages paved the way for European exploration and subsequent colonization of the Americas. Columbus undertook his voyages under the sponsorship of Ferdinand II and Isabella I, King of Aragon and Castile. Columbus was designated as the ‘discoverer’ of the New World. It is said that he was deeply inspired by Aristotle when he said that his purpose was to ‘seek the Orient by means of the Occident’ (Whitcomb 30)

Vasco da Gama (c. 1460- 1524): Vasco da Gama was the first Portuguese explorer to reach India by sea. His discovery of the Cape Route initiated the age of Portuguese exploration and colonialism in Asia. The voyages he made to India opened the sea route to the east from Western Europe through Cape of Good Hope. There is a famous bridge in Lisbon known as the Vasco da Gama Bridge named in his honour.

Pedro Álvares Cabral (1467- 1520) was the first European to reach Brazil in 1500. Today Brazil is the world’s largest Portuguese speaking nation.

The Florentine navigator Amerigo Vespucci (1454?- 1512) was known for his voyages to the New World in 1499-1500 and 1501-02. It is known that the name Americas is derived from his name.

Ferdinand Magellan (1480-1521) was a Portuguese Navigator and explorer who sailed from Spain around South America and discovered the Strait of Magellan, a channel linking the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. His expedition completed the first circumnavigation of the world.



Fig: This map illustrates the evolution of Portugal as a global colonial power after the age of European exploration in the 15th century. (source: World History Encyclopedia)

Space for Learner

SAQ

1. The Great Travellers in the West circumnavigated the world for many reasons. Mention two such reasons. (40 words)

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2. What were the prominent navigational discoveries during the Age of Exploration? (50 words)

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6.3.4 Discovery of the New World:

In ancient times, sailors and navigators used to steer their course by the stars. It was after the dissemination of knowledge about magnetic needle that changed the course of travel history. The Chinese first knew about the magnetic needle in antiquity and knowledge about its use was transmitted by the Arabs to the Mediterranean about 1150 when the second Crusade happened. By the fourteenth century the magnetic needle became a practical instrument for navigation, the compass. The invention of printing and movable letters heralded a new era of publication and circulation of books. The person who was mostly known as the inventor of the printing press was Gutenberg of Mayence in the middle of the fifteenth century. The explorations and travels conducted by the Portuguese, the Spanish and the English explorers opened up the road to the New World. Despite climate calamities and obstacles, the explorers headed their journey towards the unexplored sites of the world. The name Cape Verde came in 1450 while in 1452 the Gulf of Guinea was reached. It was adventure as well as the desire for gold that deeply inspired those travellers.

Stop to Consider:

Ancient *Papyrus* and Parchment for record keeping
In ancient times *papyrus* was used which was made from an Egyptian rush-like plant for books etc. Another sheet called parchment made of animal skins was used in ancient times to

keep written record. Due to their high cost their uses were not extensive. In the tenth century cotton paper was introduced by the Venetians and towards the beginning of the fourteenth century, the linen rags began to be used.

The overseas expeditions and expansions led to a close contact between the old medieval world and a New Capitalistic world. You must be familiar with the **Columbian Exchange** which refers to the transfer of plants, animals, population, culture, technology, diseases and ideas between the two worlds. This included interchange of wide variety of crops and livestock. Note that the term Columbian Exchange was first used in 1972 by the American Historian Alfred W. Crosby.

Stop to Consider:

Columbian Exchange of deadly diseases: The spread of syphilis from the native Caribbean people to Europe was an important incident in the past. The epidemic of swine influenza killed many Taino people in Caribbean islands in 1493. Small Pox was appeared in America in 1518 and it became the deadliest one. Apart from that other diseases such as bubonic plague, typhus, malaria, whooping cough also engulfed America

Let us name a few crops that were cultivated in the New World after the Age of Exploration:

By the 18th century, potatoes began to be cultivated and consumed widely in Europe which was not grown earlier. Potatoes became important staple of diet in India and Europe after that. It is known that Frederick the Great of Prussia and Catherine the Great of Russia popularized the cultivation of potatoes in Europe. The Portuguese from South America introduced maize and cassava in Africa in the 16th century while the Spanish colonizers made Asians familiar to maize and sweet potatoes. So far as livestock exchange is concerned, horses, donkeys, mules, pigs, cattle, goats, chickens, dogs, bees etc were transported.

In the realm of medicines also European exploration was deeply benefited. One of the prominent medicinal discoveries was the discovery of quinine which was widely used for treating diseases like malaria.

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In terms of political transformations, you see that the overseas expansions created a kind of political nationalism in the European states. Read the following extract from Britannica:

The organization of expansion overseas reflected in economic terms the political nationalism of the European states. This political development took place through processes of internal unification and the abolition of local privileges by the centralizing force of dynastic monarchies. (www.britannica.com)

In the quotation above the rivalries between Nation-states and dynastic powers have been indicated. Another major conflict that developed after the Renaissance was the clash between the secular idea of Renaissance and religious ideas propagated by Reformation which was initiated against the secular perspectives of the Renaissance. Martin Luther (1483- 1546), the famous German theologian and religious reformer was the prominent voice during the Protestant Reformation in the West. He was one among those influential figures who voiced against the corruption in the Church.

6.4 Impact of the Age of Exploration

You have learnt so far about the timeline and development of the age of exploration and the remarkable contributions made by the great travellers of the world. One of the main objectives of such explorations was the desire to find new routes to world for selling spices and silk threads etc. Besides, natural calamities and ethnic conflicts forced many people to migrate from one place to another in search of shelter and security. The impact of the age of exploration was manifold. The discovery of new trade roots and expedition of new lands opened the path for worldwide trade and commerce. There was a huge exchange of capitals and materials and subsequent growth of commercial centres and markets.

6.4.1 The Scientific Revolution, the Enlightenment and Print Revolution.

The Scientific Revolution, the Enlightenment brought drastic changes in the intellectual and social world of the West. One of the greatest impacts of the Age of Revolution was seen in the 16th and 17th centuries in the form of scientific revolution and the Enlightenment. New scientific discoveries and technological innovations dominated science and it almost replaced Christianity

as the major intellectual discourse of European civilization. The Renaissance and the Reformation transformed human's perspectives on natural philosophy and religion. See **Royal Society of London and the Academie des Sciences of Paris.**

Space for Learner

Stop to Consider

Royal Society of London: Mostly known as Royal Society of London for Improving Natural Knowledge was the oldest scientific society in the world working for the promotion of scientific research in Britain. The society originated in 1660 when a group of intellectuals including Robert Boyle, Bishop John Wilkins, Sir Robert Moray, William, the 2nd Viscount Brouncker. One of the major tasks that the society did was the establishment of a periodical *Philosophical Transactions* which became the mouthpiece of the society.

Academie des Sciences of Paris: In 1666, the French institution was established under the advisory of Louis XIV to guide the French Government about scientific matters of research. The academy was established by Jean-Baptiste Colbert. *Comptes rendus* is the name of the publication under the French Academy.

The Enlightenment philosophy brought new lights to the discourse of knowledge. Their emphasis on reason shaped the political, philosophical and scientific discourse from the 17th century onwards. The old world philosophy was discarded in favour of a more rational, liberal, individualistic, scientific philosophy. *The Bill of Rights* by William and Mary in 1689, Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* in 1651, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *The Social Contract* in 1762, Newton's *Principia Mathematica* were some of the path-breaking works around the time of Enlightenment. As it has been mentioned earlier one of the major inventions in the fifteenth century was the printing method which helped the Age of Exploration by huge exchange of information and knowledge. The Print Revolution helped in the creation of public libraries in the West. The Writing became a profitable earning source for many authors. It is significant to mention here that the German printer Johannes Gutenberg printed an edition of the Bible in 1456.

Space for Learner

SAQ

1. How did the travel and discoveries paved the way for the Enlightenment ideals in the 18th century? (100 words)

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6.4.2 The Industrial Revolution and Globalization:

The Age of Discovery inspired the West to expand the new knowledge to the Americas, Africa and Asia. The dramatic changes that took place after such expansion of new knowledge led to a revolution known as the Industrial Revolution. The revolution brought as transition of human economy towards newer methods of production and circulation. Newer technologies through use of the machines led to the rise of factory system. It was the textile industry first to use modern manufacturing methods. The revolution began in Great Britain and gradually disseminated to other parts of the world. Britain by its architectural and technological innovations became a controlling global trading empire by the mid-18th century. Subsequently, Britain expanded its military and political hegemony establishing its colonies in North America and the Caribbean. A few important technological innovations of the Industrial Revolution were textiles (textile machinery such as flying shuttle), steam power, iron making, silk, cotton, wool etc. Thus the Age of Discovery and Exploration impacted the period of colonialism beginning in the 16th century. The era of globalization began to flourish with the industrial revolution in the West.

The beginning of the Mercantilist Age after the Age of Discovery set the beginning of globalization also. The expansion of international trade and commerce, vast dissemination of knowledge, the contact between the Old and the New World paved the way for a globalised world. According to Manfred B. Steger,

Globalization involves the creation of new and the multiplication of existing social networks and activities that increasingly overcomes traditional political, economic, cultural, and geographical boundaries (Steger: 9)

Note that the revolution, however received major criticism due to its impact on rural life and urbanization. In the early nineteenth

century the Romantic Revolution in the West critiqued the very fabric of industrialization for mass extinction of biodiversity and ecological breakdown.

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6.4.3 Rise of Empire, Capitalism and Colonialism

The explorers for trade and commercial purpose occupied the newly discovered places like Africa and the Americas and improved upon methods of navigation and mapping. Through exchange and trades of goods, spices, precious metals, foods, animals and plants etc. the European countries accumulated massive wealth. However, one of the darkest episodes in the history of the west was the time of slave trade. After the discovery of the New World, the Europeans started the trade of enslaved people from Africa to support the massive plantations. This slave trade in the West continued for long three hundred years causing threats and misery to the African Blacks.

Stop To Consider

Slave trade practices Slave trade existed in history since ancient times. In Africa, women and children were mostly used as slaves for labour. In the 9th and 10th centuries, it is known that the Vikings sold east Slavic slaves to Arab and Jewish traders. In circa 1500, men were captivated and sold to Europeans and then transported to the Caribbean or Brazil. Significantly, enslaved African people were traded in Caribbean for molasses which was used to make rum in the American colonies. The captives were transported across the Atlantic in European ships through voyage known as ‘Middle Passage’. Sex Slavery was practised where prostitution and sex tourism were promoted. Such was the major human rights violations issue in the past which continued for a long time. Note that the British Govt abolished slave trade throughout Britain by passing an act in the Parliament in 1807. Report says that 480,000 people were enslaved by the 1790s in the British colonies.

One of the major impacts of the age was the birth of colonial era and expeditions. To understand this context you have to remember the important incident that took place in 1453 in the West when the Ottoman Empire took control over Constantinople and blocked

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European access to North Africa and the Red Sea by limiting trade. This incident paved the way for new trade routes. As you have already known that the Portuguese were the first explorers followed by Spanish and Italians. The Portuguese opened new routes along Africa while the Spanish looked for new routes in the far East. The journey of Christopher Columbus initiated the path for the Spanish Conquest of the Americas. The march of capitalism could be seen from the sixteenth century to the 18th century following the growth of the English cloth industries in Europe. In the eighteenth century the focus of the capitalists shifted from commerce to industry. After the Industrial Revolution capitalism reached its final stage.

Capitalism was called free market economy after the collapse of feudalism. Even though we know that capitalism dates back to the 16th century, it existed and flourished in the Middle Ages also. the capitalist ideology was expressed in the remarkable book *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776) by Adam Smith.

Note that the rift between the capitalists and wage earners sprang up as a result of economic inequalities when the capitalists failed to raise the wages. The growth of factory system created two classes- the industrialists and the industrial workers. The industrial workers had to work under unhygienic conditions.

SAQ

1. Mention the connection between Industrial Revolution and Capitalism. (60 words)

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2. Which countries were targeted for slave trade in the West? Mention two reasons behind the growth of slave trade. (40 words)

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The development of factory system and technological innovations revolutionized the era and transformed the matrix of economy of

the countries. Instead of human labours, the factories gave preferences to machineries and tools. Based on the economic status the world was divided into First World, Second World and Third World and such classification emerged during and after the Cold War. The colonizer's countries are still designated as the developed First World Countries while the colonized countries are tagged as developing third world countries. The unrest between the industrialists and industrial workers took revolutionary turn and inspired the philosophy of Karl Marx. The World War I was the climax incident in the history of the west after which the West had to face a major intellectual and social crisis. The western capitalist system suffered a major jolt leading to the era of Great Depression of the 1930s.

Stop to Consider

Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* in 1867

In this remarkable book by the German Philosopher and Economist Karl Marx (1818-83), the writer has explained the theory of the capitalist system by referring to concepts such as “surplus value’, ‘labour’. According to Marx, labour was merely a commodity and the system is self destructive and instable. Here ‘Labour’ means the general body of wage earners and the capitalists tries to appropriate the ‘surplus value’ to make profit.

Stephen Howe in his introduction to the book *Empire: A Very Short Introduction* writes that a great deal of the world's history is the complicated history of empires and that all history is imperial or colonial (Howe: 1). The complexity of the word is due to its association with concepts like imperialism, colonialism, globalization etc. if you study the history of colonialism and imperialism you will find that such practices were influenced by logic of domination which involves the domination or subjugation of one to another. The divisions of the world based on capital and economy was actually initiated by this practice of domination. In the nineteenth century history we see that the rift between liberal ideals and colonial practices reached its zenith as a result of the increased domination of Europe over the rest of the world. The colonial settlements in Asia, Africa, Australia and America tell us the real stories of

political domination and violence. Two bad influences of the age of discovery and exploration were: destruction of the native and indigenous cultures of the colonized countries and the horrific history of slave trade practices.

Thus the age of travel and exploration proved to be a turning point for the Europeans to establish and expand their territories for a broader 'civilizing mission'.

6.5 Summing Up:

As you explore the history of the Age of Exploration and Discovery you begin to understand that in constructing a new world economy, in exploring the domain of new sources of Energy and Power, in constructing scientific consciousness among the Western people, the Age of Exploration and travel had a major impact. The Age of Exploration saw its conclusion after the establishment of permanent settlements and colonies in the 17th century and expansion of trade and commerce through creation of trade networks among the countries.

6.6 References and Suggested Readings:

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Unit 7 : The Print Revolution

Space for Learner

Unit Structure :

- 7.1 Objectives
- 7.2 Introduction
- 7.3 A Brief History of Printing
- 7.4 Books and Manuscripts in Western Culture
 - 7.4.1 Christianity and the Book
 - 7.4.2 The Medieval Book
- 7.5 Caxton and Printing in England
- 7.6 Printing as Agent of Transformation
 - 7.6.1 Printing and Language
 - 7.6.2 Capitalism, Printing and Nationalism
- 7.7 Printing and Its Impact on Social Life
- 7.8 Printing and Renaissance Culture
- 7.9 Summing Up
- 7.10 References and Suggested Reading

7.1 Objectives

The development of printing led to what is also called “print-capitalism”. It consisted, partly, of the dissemination of knowledge. It also meant new ways of thinking. The invention of printing affected life and changed the conduct of many social institutions in an unprecedented way. In this unit, you will be persuaded to think of printing in various ways:

- *to understand* the physical process called ‘printing’
- *to trace* some of its history
- *to make the necessary connection* between printing and modes of thought
- *to grasp* its total and profound impact on culture and society

7.2 Introduction

The advent of printing in Western culture as a mode of publication did not merely affect social life; it changed it. Printing was instrumental in the spread of the ‘province of knowledge’ as it enabled people from different classes to come to terms with the ‘word.’ For example, in a society where religion was such a great influence in the lives of the people, the preaching of God’s word brought the Bible to new generations of readers. Through the printed word the preservation and dissemination of ideas became

greatly enhanced. You must also try to situate printing in the context of the Renaissance, which provided a fertile climate for the exchange and cross-currents of ideas, beliefs and practices. We are going to look at the various aspects of the invention of printing and the revolution it heralded in the West.

7.3 A Brief History of Printing

Stop to Consider

Some terms should be familiar to you before you proceed to learn of the history of printing:

papyrus : writing material of ancient times ; paper made from papyrus was the chief writing material in ancient Egypt. It was then adopted by the Greeks; and was then in widespread use in the Roman Empire. Not only was it used for the production of books (in the form of roll or the scroll) but also for correspondence and legal documents.

vellum and parchment: these are materials prepared from the skins of animals. Vellum is a finer quality of parchment prepared from calf skins while parchment is a greatly refined form of leather

codex: as a collection of written pages stitched together, this was the earliest type of manuscript in book form; because of its convenience it replaced the earlier papyrus-rolls and wax tablets.

stylus: a tool used in ancient times for writing or marking on parchment or papyrus, the stylus was a pointed instrument

ideogram: refer to block printing which was the first practical method used to reproduce writing mechanically. It was developed in China, 618 -907. In hieroglyphic writing, objects are represented as pictures of ideograms and these picture signs are allotted a phonetic value for these objects.

idelect: term used to indicate individual differences revealed in speech patterns but which do not amount to differences of language

Our history here is centred on Europe. The initial period of printing comes up to 1500. The early books of this period are called “incunabula” , meaning ‘swaddling clothes’ or ‘cradle’. However, we must note that the number of manuscript books in Europe before the invention of printing, ran into thousands. After about 50 years of printing, by 1500, there were more

than 9,000,000 books. By 1500, after only 50 years of printing, there were more than 9,000,000 books. The initial period of printing is well marked in the 16th century. As an enterprise it came to be regulated and to settle down only after about 1550. If we regard the swiftness with which printing spread, we can surmise that there was felt the need of an artificial script and that the press had a tremendous impact on life.

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7.4 Books and Manuscripts in Western culture

From Egyptian sources we learn that documents were written on leather as early as 2450 BC. The history of book-manufacture is a fascinating one as we are taken back to ancient Rome. The Greek book was introduced into Western Europe through Rome. Among the Romans, who conquered Greece, books and the book-trade, and libraries, flourished.

Leather preceded parchment as a writing material. The terms, vellum and parchment, have been used interchangeably since the Middle Ages although vellum is really a more refined quality of parchment made from calf skins. As material for writing, vellum makes its appearance in the Christian era. Leather had been occasionally used for writing in ancient Egypt but papyrus, being plentiful, was more widely used. The book as a form of sacred knowledge preserved on vellum and with great social potential has much to do with the dissemination of Christianity in their drive against pagans.

SAQ

Why was the book sacred in the Christian world ? (30 words)

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How old is the book's form and shape ? (20 words)

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7.4.1 Christianity and the Book

Books surviving from the first four centuries (A.D.), show that Christian writings were generally in the form of codices. Since the writers of these texts often followed a comparative method of referring to various sources, it was necessary to have a large

volume of material easily available. For this reason, the codex was attractive as its pages could be turned over easily. Pagan, or non-Christian writing was normally contained in rolls. These were some of the reasons why vellum and the codex were preferred in the Christian world.

The Christian world was also motivated by the move towards universality and thus towards the dissemination of the sacred word. Thus the book was an important instrument with great social potential in the Christian world as three centuries of introducing it as a universal religion in the Roman Empire showed. Moreover, the articles of faith were followed by explanations, commentaries, pamphlets and translations. Thus this world was marked by a great dependence on the book which also helped to forge links between places and people separated by thousands of miles. After A.D. 100, the greatest writers in Christendom were Christian scholars : Origen, Pamphilus of Caesarea, Tertullian, St. Jerome and St. Augustine.

7.4.2 The Medieval Book

Hordes of marauding barbarians who came to dominate the western Roman Empire after its dissolution in the 5th century, were unable to achieve the extinction of books due to the strength of the church which withstood their assaults. Monasteries protected books which ensured stable security for tradition. Some religious orders such as the 6th-century Rule of St. Benedict required of their monks to read at prescribed times.

Cassiodorus, the historian and grammarian (of Scylletium, now Squillace, in Italy), is of great importance in Western culture because in a time of barbarism he founded a monastery, Vivarium, where manuscripts were collected and monks made to copy these, both pagan and Christian. The establishment of his monastery and the scriptorium led to the preservation of many ancient authors' writings and thus helped in the perpetuation of the culture of Rome. The example of Cassiodorus was followed by many monasteries in the Middle Ages which kept libraries and scriptoria for the collection and the addition of copies of books. The scriptorium could sometimes be a large room. A scribe would sit during daylight hours copying in silence from a text before him. The process of producing books in scriptoria was a slow one and to have about

600 volumes in a monastic library was considered to be well-stocked. Throughout Europe were many scriptoria. A codex written on vellum or parchment made up the medieval book. By the 15th century, however, it was normal to have paper manuscripts. Monasteries normally contained copies of the Bible with commentaries, the writings of the Church Fathers, writings of contemporary theologians, and finally, worldly books on mathematics, some classics, on medicine, astronomy, law, historical and philosophical writings.

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Stop to Consider

The Story of Paper - Europe in the 12th century

The production of paper was, at first, known only to the Chinese. It came to be distributed across the Arab world via the caravan routes of Central Asia. The techniques of papermaking also followed the same route : in 751, Chinese were taken prisoner at the Battle of Talas, near Samarkand, and forced to reveal the secret.

Papermaking began and became widespread ; it came into Europe as a commodity in the 12th century, travelling through the Italian ports which commercial transactions with the Arab world. It is also possible that since papermaking had spread in the Arab world from the 8th to the 13th century, it came across to France through Spain. Centres for making paper came up in Italy after 1275 and in France and Germany during the 14th century.

The story of paper is important because it is the material that made printing a success. Printing would not have been possible had there been no paper.

.The invention of printing in the 1450s brought a vastly increased demand for paper. Through the 18th century the papermaking process remained essentially unchanged, with linen and cotton rags furnishing the basic raw materials. Paper mills were increasingly plagued by shortages; in the 18th century they even advertised and solicited publicly for rags. It was evident that a process for utilizing a more abundant material was needed.

By 1500, probably more than half the population acquired the ability to read, though not necessarily to write. The literate laymen

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were involved in the writing of manuscripts on both sacred and secular topics. The Paston Collection of the fifteenth century contained the family correspondence of several generations of a family of the wealthy Norfolk landowners with interesting information about the struggles, sufferings, thoughts and feelings of the family of the Paston estates.

With the invention of the printing press, writing proliferated .

SAQ

How were books written in ancient Greece, ancient Rome, and then in medieval Europe ? (30 words)

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What kind of matter was written ? (25 words)

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Stop to Consider

Several ideas need to be associated with the history of printing: the development of the writing material, the invention of durable typefaces which would give the same letter each time, the ‘fixing’ of the script, the content of the script, the transmission of the idea itself, the ink, and then social conditions, and so on. We have seen so far the importance of the book itself in the history of Western culture.

Let us recall that China is a name that is associated with the art of printing in the ancient world, as is the name of Egypt, or of the Arabs. However, as some scholars have argued, China did not undergo the experience of print-capitalism. So, we cannot refer to a ‘print revolution’ there.

By some accounts there had been several attempts in different places in Europe to develop printing and to develop paper.

You can refer to the Gutenberg Bible, so called because the German printer, Johannes Gutenberg, completed it about 1455 in Mainz, Germany. It is the first complete extant book, the earliest printed from movable type. It is in Latin and is a three-volume work.

7.5 Caxton and Printing in England

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Books in the medieval ages were written on vellum or parchment. In fourteenth-century Europe a number of paper mills could be found—in France, Germany, Italy and Spain. By the 15th century, manuscripts were written on paper. The later printed book had its first model in the medieval book. In the 14th and 15th centuries books in the vernacular made their appearance. Books by the great geniuses like Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Chaucer, and Villon made their appearance.

Printing has been called the German contribution to civilization and was even known as the German art. Johannes Gutenberg, a goldsmith of Mainz in Germany, is credited with the invention of printing about 1440-50. This invention was disseminated with great zeal by German merchants.

We must go over to Caxton's contribution to printing in England. William Caxton (?1422-1491), who had understood the significance of vernacular culture, established the press in Westminster in 1477. He was a merchant of repute of the London Mercers' company. But he was known to the world for his missionary zeal for the dissemination of ideas and knowledge through the medium of good and useful books. As the governor of Merchant Adventurers at Bruges during the period of 1463-5 and working under the Duchess of Burgundy till 1477, Caxton was involved in acquiring proficiency in foreign languages and in translation of books into English. Caxton learnt the technique of printing during his short stay in Cologne in 1471 and this resulted in the printing of "Bartholomeus de Proprietatibus Return", a Latin work by Caxton himself.

The first English book—his own translation— printed by Caxton in Bruges was "The Recvyell of the Historyes of Troye" in 1475. Returning to England with his knowledge of the printing industry he settled in Westminster and set up a press there in 1476. The first English print on the soil of England was "Dictes or Sayengis of the Philosophres" — a work by Earl Rivers. The writings of John Lydgate were the first major works printed in Caxton's press. He also printed Chaucer's "The Canterbury Tales" in the initial years itself. Caxton was not merely a printer, his versatile genius was manifested in edition, translation and correction of many important works. He was also instrumental in introducing illustrations in his books. Caxton's edition of "Aesop's Tales" was marked by the inclusion of illustrations corresponding to almost every fable.

Space for Learner

SAQ

What do we understand from Caxton's history ? Mention your inferences. (20 words)

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In addition to Chaucer's works, a major contribution of Caxton was the publication of the English versions of the Medieval Literature on the knights of Troy, Greece, Rome, Charlemagne and King Arthur. This is indicative of the fact that even in the fifteenth century tales of knightly exploits retained a position of privilege among readers. Although Caxton was the successful representative of English commercial interest in the Low Countries, in his translation and publication of a French book "The Order of Chivalry or Knighthood", he expressed his intention to remind forgetful England of the past when English Knights were known for true Chivalry. Even the "Chronicles of England" published in the final form in 1480, retained the aura of fantasy associated with the exploits of Brutus, King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. Thus, the print revolution did not bring in a complete break with the chivalrous tradition of the past the fascination for which continued till the rise of new learning under the Italian influence at the end of the fifteenth century.

Check Your Progress

1. Briefly trace the history of book-production.
2. Evaluate the significance of the book in Western Christian culture.
3. Write a short note on Cassiodorus.
4. What was Caxton's contribution to English literature ?

Stop to Consider

As Caxton began his printing, in mid-1476, he was aware that the English language consisted of many variations. His prologues and epilogues give us interesting insights into this problem; he gives an account of the problems he faced as editor and translator. Sentence-structures were not uniform and were open to modifications. Also, non-professional scribes, some of them women, were writing at length.

- (a) William Caxton did the pioneering work in the field of printing in England.
- (b) Caxton's work was as multi-faceted as printing, editing and translating.
- © Caxton's example was followed by many other printers resulting in the enrichment of vernacular literature.

The rise of Caxton as the printer and editor of books was not without any major setbacks since, from 1480 onwards, he had to face competition from other printers who joined in the new revolution. The techniques of printing however, gained a lot from the competition because new developments and sophistication in the design of letters took place in Caxton's press in response to smaller print with neat letters in other presses. Caxton as a printer had nearly one hundred publications to his credit and the major works among those were – *The Chronicles of England, The Mirror of the World, Le Morte d' Arthur, Confessio Amantis, The Canterbury Tales* and *The Golden Legend*. Caxton died in 1491 and was succeeded by Wynkyn de Worde who reprinted many publications of Caxton such as 'The Canterbury Tales' and 'The Morte d' Arthur'. Worde was the most prolific among the early English printers with about five hundred prints to his credit.

While Caxton will always be remembered as the pioneer in the field of English printing, other printing-presses also started functioning. Notable among the newly-established presses were the Oxford press and the St. Albans Press. While the former was primarily involved in the publication of scholarly books, the latter published books of popular interest.

7.6 Printing as Agent of Transformation

We must grasp the significance of printing as a process which transformed society. The development of printing was not simply another milestone in the development of technology. Printing helped to change the whole world of letters and thus of human thought. While printing, by itself, does not strike a major note, it is the capacity to produce books and documents on a large-scale which has to be seen as a greatly shaping force behind new thought. We also have to understand how printing changes the social functions of languages and how such a change affects the way the world is conceived.

7.6.1 Printing and Language

Let us also recall how the Renaissance was the time of the emerging importance of the vernacular languages. Latin had always been, especially in the medieval period, the language of the sacred. The Roman Catholic world had an investment in Church Latin so that only the clerisy was comfortable with it. In the Renaissance, there had been a return to Ciceronian Latin (from the ancient Greek

rhetorician, Cicero) which was again an elite language, complex and difficult. When Martin Luther nailed his famous theses on the church-door in Wittenberg in 1517, they were translated into German and quickly spread all over the country. We could even speculate that had printing not been possible by this time, the Reformation may not have taken place ! Between 1518 and 1525, Luther's works made up one-third of all books printed in German. We can now understand how printing was central to the Reformation.

We have to keep in view the connection between language and mass-production. Can you think of a publishing-house likely to print in a language whose speakers are limited in number? If printing is to be profitable then mass-production must take up a language which is read, written and spoken by the greatest number of people. Before the advent of printing in Europe, for example, the languages in use by the people in their daily lives was vast in number. If a printer had tried to print in any one of these languages, he would have surely gone out of business ! Over time, these diverse idiolects, were assembled into a fewer number of print-languages. How did this happen ?

This happened with the progress of capitalism which helped in the creation of languages with standardized grammars and syntaxes. Again, this was possible by assembling related vernaculars. Thus language came to be 'fixed' and it was by the 17th century that European languages had become 'modernized'. You can understand this if you compare with the pre-print ages, as in the medieval period, when the monk had to copy valuable ancient manuscripts by hand and would thus unconsciously allow changes to creep in by his own relatively modern habits of writing. Once printing comes in, the rate of change in language decreases.

What happened when European printers realised the potential they had in hand ? Between 1500 -1550 European printers who had established their branches all over Europe, partook of the great economic prosperity which swept over the entire continent. To make the profit they desired these book-sellers sought out the works which would sell most of all. The immediate market was the literate section of society: the literati, or those who literate and could read Latin. Since Latin was used for a special

level of learning and knowledge, these readers were also people who used the vernacular in daily existence. The people who were not literate used only one language, the vernacular. But Latin was already under by the fact of the Reformation. The purer Latin revived by the humanists was too arcane and textual. We can add here the fact that there was a thrust towards the vernacular. This combination of factors made it possible for the book-sellers to think of printing cheap editions in the vernacular. What happens after this is easier to surmise: there occurs the spread of standardized languages, the printed word reaches the common people, new modes of imagination by which vast communities like 'nations' are thought of and begin to take shape.

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Stop to Consider

Benedict Anderson, the well-known marxist scholar, writes in his book, *Imagined Communities*, on ideas of nation, nationality and nationalism. He proposes that nation can be defined as "an imagined political community". Why does he call it "imagined"? He states, "It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion."

In this seminal study of ideas of nations and nationalism, Anderson points to the fundamental role played by language in the actual imagining of a community or group like a nation. He points to the immense communities of Islam, Christendom, and Buddhism. These communities are imaginable only because of the presence of "a sacred language and written script".

The imagined communities of modern nations are different from the "classical communities linked by sacred languages". These sacred languages were known only to a tiny fraction of society. Applying this concept to our observation of Christendom, we must point to the power of the papacy which was sustained by the use of Church Latin. Church Latin was not the Latin of ancient times and was conceivably a product of the clergy's social interactions with the laity. It was this Church Latin which might be called the meeting-ground of Latin and the vernacular. But the existence of this Latin helped to mediate and disseminate a

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particular conception of the world which virtually everyone in that community shared.

With the modern nation, we have to move to a different concept. Firstly, after the late Middle Ages, there was a gradual decline in the very imagining of the community of Christendom. One reason was the discovery of the non-European world. The other reason was that Latin lost its place as the language of a pan-European intellectual world. Simultaneously, rather than a 'Christendom', sacred communities were gradually dissolving into territorialized communities. The reason for this was print-capitalism.

SAQ

How should we connect the Renaissance with the advent of printing? (50 words)

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7.6.2 Capitalism, Printing and Nationalism

You will be able to grasp the connections between the three terms here—capitalism, printing, nationalism— if you first of all observe the fact that as early as 1480 there were printing-presses all over Europe : 50 of them in (modern) Italy, 30 in Germany, 9 in France, 8 in Holland as in Spain, 5 in Belgium as in Switzerland, 4 in England, 2 in Bohemia, and 1 in Poland. Indeed the book was in universal use. In the world of capitalist mass-production, the book was “the first modern-style mass-produced industrial commodity”. By 1500, more than 20,000,000 books had already been printed.

Book-publishing was one of the earliest forms of capitalist production. Between 1500 and 1550, there was great economic prosperity all over Europe thus book-publishing at the time was also profitable. Naturally enough, book-publishing was a great and profitable industry controlled by rich industrialists. From all of the above we can grasp the successful potential of printing in Europe around the 15th and 16th centuries.

In another sense, print-capitalism is important in having fostered the spirit of nationalism. In a later unit in Block 2 of this course (Paper 1), you will learn about how the people of any

country gradually began to think about themselves as a ‘nation’. Many scholars have debated —are even now discussing — the topic of ‘nationalism’. You will be able to understand this if you think how reading a daily newspaper makes you realize that there are millions of readers like you sharing the same news. When we read of something happening in another part of our country we may not feel it with immediacy. The words in the newspaper, however, make us imagine that event and help us to connect through an imaginative process with the people who are immediately affected by that event. We may even ‘recognize’ some of the features of that event —the police, the railway carriages, if it is a train accident. The very words make us feel that we are a part of the same huge community even if we do not know all its members. Also, even while we may read of a rail accident, we will simultaneously read in the adjoining column, about a meeting of high government officials. The date and the place at the head of the two columns before us show us that these are simultaneous though unconnected events. But we link ourselves to them even while we may not have a direct connection to them both. We embrace their significance because we have imagined a linkage to these events and the people. This shows how important the book and then the newspaper becomes in the idea of the nation. Perhaps not in the same way, but as something similar, the book induces us to connect to a larger community.

By following the part played by the newspaper in promoting the abstract concept of ‘nation’ you can appreciate what happened when it first became possible to print a commodity like the book. The words in print allowed and enabled people in Europe in the 15th century to relate to each other in new ways. You must recall that by this time the earlier beliefs and ideas which had held feudal society together— the church, medieval cosmology, among others— had given gradually weakened. The mass-production of words in print helped to forge new links.

SAQ

How do we ‘imagine’ ourselves to be part of any community?
(30 words)

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Walter Benjamin, a twentieth-century German thinker, used the phrase “the age of mechanical reproduction” to describe the onset of radically new technology. The coming of print can be described thus if we remember what happened by the end of the 15th century. Between 1500 and 1600 the number of printed volumes had reached between 150 and 200 million. Whereas the knowledge transmitted through the copying of manuscripts would have necessarily been scarce and difficult, the knowledge to be transmitted through print would be of a kind which could be reproduced and disseminated. If we apply the processes described above to the societies in the 15th and the 16th centuries we can see the extent to which people would have taken to new ways of thought. Certainly any member of that society could not think of a ‘community of the realm’ in the old ways of medieval Christendom.

Think of this situation in terms of numbers then the change becomes clearer. Some scholars believe that by 1600, two hundred million volumes had been manufactured in print. It has been said that Francis Bacon believed print to have changed the very appearance and the state of the world.

Stop to Consider

The early evidence of newspapers

In medieval Europe, after the breakup of the Roman Empire, there was no publication of news. (Do not take this to mean that there were newspapers in the Roman Empire ! ‘Publication’ also means to bring into common or public knowledge.) If we define ‘newspapers’ by our terms, the development of the printing press in the 16th century did not mean the beginning of newspapers. Closest to this was the newssheet, not printed but written by hand by official scribes and read aloud by town criers. What flourished in the 16th century was the newsbook or the news pamphlet which gave information on particular topics.

In Roman times existed the ‘newsletter’ as a form of correspondence between officials or even friends. In the Middle Ages, newsletters were exchanged across frontiers between important traders. In 1609 comes the first newsletter closest to our own newspaper, the *Relation* printed by Johann Carolus, in Strasbourg. Evidence suggests that there was a sudden demand for newspapers at the beginning of the 17th century.

7.7 Printing and Its Impact on Social Life

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The setting up of the press and the publications of many books on both sacred and secular subjects went together with radical changes in social and intellectual circles. Printing made books cheaper and readily accessible. This resulted in the formation of a class of reading public who played a major role in the transition of the English society from the Dark Age of Medievalism to the Renaissance of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The benefits of printing were utilized by the Renaissance humanists for cultivation of the individualistic ethics and ideal of nationalism.

The printing of numerous books of English writers naturally strengthened the nationalistic sentiments of the reading public. At the same time, print made reading an individualistic exercise. Earlier, reading activity was not private as the manuscripts were usually read to group audience in public halls. Reading to oneself in solitude was largely the effect of print evolution. The print revolution accelerated the pace of secularisation of the English society through the circulation of books on secular subjects. These books fostered the ideals of secularism and the atmosphere was utilized by the reformists to consolidate the demand for reformation in all walks of life. The press also made the Bible and prayer book accessible to the Christian readers. This was of particular of importance at the time when the Protestants emphasized the need for following the Bible rather than paying blind tributes to the Roman Church.

Stop to Consider

Printing and the English Language

Caxton's contribution to the English language is significant because, with his limited printing capacities, he published in English from the very beginning and not in Latin. Thus he helped to give shape to the language when it was not yet settled. He printed about more than 90 books of which 70-odd were in English, of which 22 were his own translations. A major contribution of the press to English culture was the standardization of the English language. When Caxton was actively engaged in the act of printing he had to face various problems like the prevalence of many dialects in different parts of England. Caxton's press was greatly instrumental in driving the West-Midland dialect out of the field among the educated class. Consequently the educated people of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries got the taste of a common dialect which was later accepted as the standard literary language of the land. The emergence of a common dialect and the availability of books on non-religious subjects brought in significant development in the literacy level in the society of the fifteenth and sixteenth century England.

The benefits of printing, however, were not enjoyed by all particularly in view of the fact that most of the printing presses were confined only to the urban places. Moreover, the printer did not readily subscribe to the demands of the reading public while bringing out subsequent editions of books. Despite these shortcomings there is no denying the fact that the printing-press inaugurated a new era of socio-cultural revolution in the English soil.

Check Your Progress

1. Show how printing helped in promoting the vernacular languages. (150 words)

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2. Explain the process by which ‘standardization’ of language took place.(150 words)

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3. How did the printed word help in promoting the idea of ‘nation’? (150 words)

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4. Make an assessment of Caxton’s contribution to the transitional phase in English society from the late medieval period to the early Renaissance.(150 words)

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7.8 Printing and Renaissance Culture

Humanism is intricately involved with the book and the increased use of vernacular languages. Humanism is remembered with reference to the preservation of knowledge in books. In the early 14th century the texts of classical authors were sought out. This kind of search was carried out in the libraries of western Europe. Once such texts were found, they were restored commentaries were added and then the book would be acquired by anybody who could afford such a prized collection. The important collections in the Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana Library in Florence, the modern Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, and in the Bibliothèque Nationale were built in this manner. Most of the Latin classics had been recovered by 1450 and even before the fall of Constantinople in 1453 humanist scholars had turned their attention to Greek authors.

At the same time came the production of books in the vernacular. This kind of literature had long been growing but the compositions of the anonymous medieval authors had been transmitted orally. Vernacular books made their appearance in the 14th and 15th centuries. The medieval compositions of sterling quality were then put into writing while works by Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Chaucer, and Villon appeared.

A larger audience now appeared to the expanded literary production. Aristocrats and royalty as much as churchmen helped to promote learning just as they promoted humanism. Yet, most of the humanists were themselves ecclesiastics. More books came to be written in the vernacular and it is found that in the cities tradesmen and artisans were acquiring literacy. John Wycliffe is held to have directed his English translation of the Bible to them. With the humanists, books expanded their contents to include wider areas of interest. The language of the people came to be more in use with authors just as more people were growing literate.

You will find it interesting to note that the proliferation of printed books, pamphlets and journals contributed in a big way to the dissemination of the ideas that made up what we now know as the 'Renaissance.' Take the instance of someone like Shakespeare or Marlowe, who came into contact with classical texts, historical documents and other literature because these were circulating across Europe. This is an important aspect of Renaissance culture as printing facilitated the movement of both books and ideas: here we can go back to examples of Shakespeare and Marlowe again as in *Doctor Faustus* and *Romeo and Juliet* (just to cite two random instances) we find characters and cultural representation that come from different parts of Europe.

Printing also affected life in other significant ways. It gave birth to secularism as it made it possible for secular, non-religious writers to emerge in a growing climate of experimentation. The University Wits stand out on the Renaissance scene in just such a context.

We must also recognise the importance of printing as it made it possible for the poets and sonneteers of the sixteenth century to have access to manuscripts in translation and sometimes in the original, which would have otherwise remained out of reach. At the same time, printing was not ubiquitous and for many people in the sixteenth century, the printed book was out of reach. Publications were not easily available in all circles and the circulation of hand-written manuscripts was quite common among poets and writers.

7.9 Summing Up

By the end of this unit you should be able to grasp the importance of the printed text. Normally, in our own world we are so familiar with the idea of the book and other printed matter that we do not stop to consider what life may mean to be without a printed page. The newspaper, the sign-board giving us directions, the bill of payment, the printed letters or characters on the clock-face are such integral features of modern life that in order to grasp the numerous ways of thinking related to the printed character we have to return to that moment in history when it all began. Our own history has come to be bound up with European events after the fact of colonial rule so we gain a fuller understanding of European culture only as we trace those events which gave it its familiar form. As we have looked at 'The Print Revolution', we have also brought into our view some events and processes which do not normally figure in conventional history, such as the standardization of language, the nature of commercial enterprise in sixteenth-century Europe, the world of letters in the context of social hierarchy, the connection of Christianity with the idea of printing, the items of knowledge currently prevalent and so on.

You should, as necessary at every step of your course, make use of a good library in order to complete your survey of this part of social history. There is no substitute for learning from your own motivation.

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