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KRISHNA KANTA HANDIQUI STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY

Patgaon, Rani Gate, Guwahati-781017

SEMESTER 1

MA IN ENGLISH

COURSE I: ENGLISH SOCIAL AND CULTURAL HISTORY

SECTION 1: ENGLISH SOCIAL HISTORY

BLOCK 1: MEDIEVAL TO RENIASSANCE

CONTENTS

Unit 1: The Norman Conquest and Feudalism

Unit 2: Growth of English Towns and Urbanisation in London

Unit 3: Christianity, Reformation and Growth of the Church

Unit 4: Renaissance Humanism

REFERENCES : For All Units

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SEMESTER 1

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BLOCK 1: MEDIEVAL TO RENIASSANCE

DETAILED SYLLABUS

Unit 1 : Norman Conquest and Feudalism **Page 7 - 26**

The Norman Conquest, Consequences of the Norman Conquest: Replacement of the English, English Emigration, The System of Government, Changes in Language and Society, Ideas of Feudalism: Feudalism and Literature, Decline of Feudalism: Black Death, Peasants' Revolt, Other Factors

Unit 2 : Growth of English Towns/Urbanisation in London **Page 27 - 36**

Growth of English Towns, Urbanisation in London

Unit 3 : Christianity, Reformation and Role of the Church **Page 37 - 52**

Idea of Christianity, Role of Medieval Church, The Church and Medieval Culture, Theology and Intellectual Activities

Unit 4 : Renaissance Humanism **Page 53 - 67**

History of the Renaissance, Humanism and Renaissance Thought, The Renaissance Literature, Renaissance and the Exploration of New Worlds

COURSE INTRODUCTION

This is the first Course of the Revised and updated MA English Programme. This Course introduces the learners to English Social, Cultural and Literary history. This Course is divided into Two Sections that comprise total 4 Blocks. Each Block contains four units. The two Sections will roughly cover the period after the Norman Conquest until our own times in the 20th century in English Social and Cultural history. Thus, this Course has to be understood in terms of the ideas, cultural formations and politics, as well as the literary practices, all of which shaped the large gamut of English literature.

Section A: English Social History introduces you to the larger social and historical issues related to the emergence of literature so that you can make connections between the works of the authors and their contexts. This section will thus give you an idea of the significant developments in English social and cultural history. The purpose is to familiarise you with the conditions under which the English authors were constrained to write and publish their works. You are strongly advised to familiarise yourself with the significant socio-historical and cultural events as well as concepts that became instrumental in bringing in certain marked changes in the intellectual pursuits of England.

Section B: English Literary History, in order to explore how every work has a proper historical context, seeks to discuss how writers at a given period tend to have certain similar concerns and attitudes. An awareness of the historical and social contexts of the writer tells us what we expect to encounter in a particular literary age. This section will help you to make a brief overview of the different periods of English literary history with references to the important authors and their works.

Section A comprises two Blocks—**Block 1**: **Medieval to Renaissance** and **Block 2**: **Enlightenment to Imperialism**. Similarly, **Section B** also comprises two Blocks—**Block 3**: **Literature: Medieval to Neo classical**, and **Block 4**: **Literature: Romantic to Modern**

Block 1: Medieval to Renaissance, contains four units, which are as the following:

Unit 1: Norman Conquest and Feudalism deals with the Norman Conquest of England in 1066, under William the Duke of Normandy at the Battle of Hastings, and the way this event foreshadowed significant changes in the social life, literature and language of the English people, Special mention has been made to Feudalism and its impact on early English literature.

Unit 2: Growth of English Towns and Urbanisation in London deals with the growth of English towns as well as the processes of urbanisation in the economic and cultural developments in England

in the medieval age following the decline of Feudalism. This unit shall particularly help the learners to understand how such developments contributed to the emergence of literary practices during that time and in future.

Unit 3: Christianity, Reformation and Role of the Church deals with the idea of Christianity, and the role of the Medieval Church. Christianity, through the Church, became organised and marked its dominance all over Europe by the time of the Norman Conquest of England in 1066. This unit intends to tell the learners about the importance of the church in the lives of the people of Medieval England as reflected in the literatures of that period.

Unit 4: Renaissance Humanism deals with the ideas of Renaissance and Humanism, which are perhaps the most important intellectual and cultural developments in the Western World that roughly dates from 1500 to 1660. The learners will read that being a trans-national phenomenon, the Renaissance profoundly affected life and thought in different parts of Europe. This unit shall also help to locate the connections between Renaissance and Humanism, which added great impetus to Renaissance scholarship.

While going through a unit, you may also notice some text boxes, which have been included to help you know some of the difficult terms and concepts. You will also read about some relevant ideas and concepts in “LET US KNOW” along with the text. We have kept “CHECK YOUR PROGRESS” questions in each unit. These have been designed to self-check your progress of study. The hints for the answers to these questions are given at the end of the unit. We advise that you answer the questions immediately after you finish reading the section in which these questions occur. We have also included a few books in the “FURTHER READING” list, which will be helpful for your further consultation. The books referred to in the preparation of the units have been added at the end of the block. As you know, the world of literature is too big and so we advise you not to take a unit to be an end in itself. Despite our attempts to make a unit self-contained, we advise that you should read the original texts of the writers as well as other additional materials for a thorough understanding of the contents of a particular unit.

UNIT 1: NORMAN CONQUEST AND FEUDALISM

UNIT STRUCTURE

1.1 Learning Objectives

1.2 Introduction

1.3 The Norman Conquest

1.4 Consequences of the Norman Conquest

1.5 What is Feudalism?

1.6 Decline of Feudalism

1.7 Let us Sum up

1.8 Further Reading

1.9 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

1.10 Possible Questions

1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

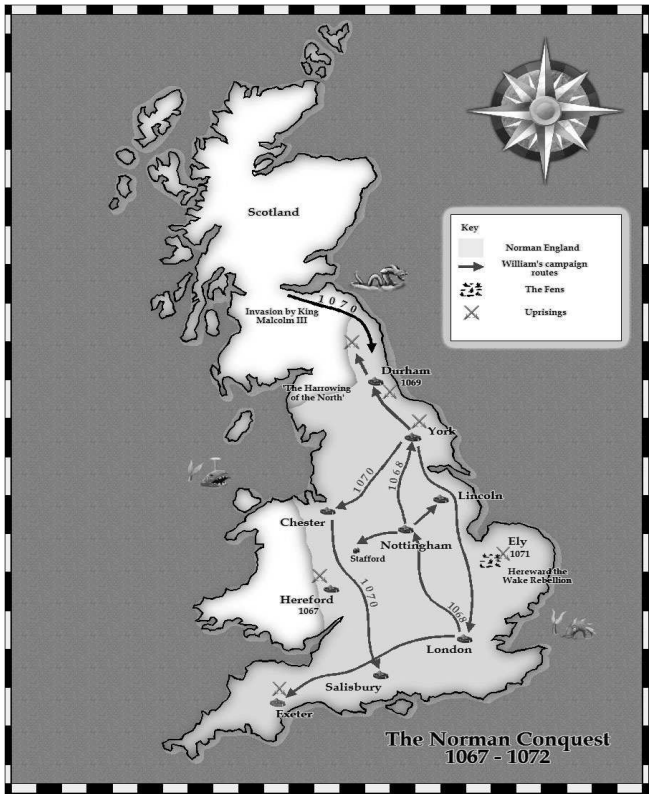
- have some ideas on the Norman Conquest of England
- explain the consequences of the Norman Conquest on the English life and society of the Medieval times
- gain some ideas on Feudalism that refers to a particular social structure in medieval England
- tell how Feudalism had taken a declining trend
- discuss the impact of Feudalism on literature

1.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the first unit of this course, and it will familiarise you with some of the important aspects of the Social and Cultural History of Medieval England. In this unit, you will also get to read about the **Norman Conquest of England in 1066,** under William the Duke of Normandy at the Battle of Hastings that foreshadowed not only a change of dynasty, but also a revolution in social life, literature and language of the English people. William's victory led to the fall of the Anglo-Saxon nobility and the

establishment of Feudalism in England of the Norman type. One significant aspect of this conquest is that the Normans brought to England the richness of the French language and literature, which the English absorbed so beautifully. Although, following the Battle of Hastings, French became the language of the upper classes, of courts as well as of schools; the common people adhered to English speech so persistently that finally English absorbed a whole range of French words and became the language of the land. In this unit, an attempt is made to describe the great changes in the life and society of the English people of the Medieval England following the Norman Conquest with special reference made to Feudalism. However, for our present purpose in this unit, we shall mostly stick to our discussion of The Norman Conquest and Feudalism, and their impact on English literature.

1.3 THE NORMAN CONQUEST



Source: http://www.timeref.com/episodes/norman_conquest.htm

The Norman conquest of England commonly refers to the 11th century invasion and occupation of England by a Norman army led by Duke William II of Normandy, who later became popular as the William the Conqueror. William was previously having a familial relationship with the childless Anglo Saxon King Edward or 'Edward the Confessor' and was dreaming to ruling England. However, when he died in January 1066, the succession of his brother-in-law Harold Godwinson might have encouraged William to invade England. Harold's army was defeated by that of William on 14th October in 1066 at the Battle of Hastings. Following this win, the lands of the resisting English elite were confiscated. Some even fled into exile. To control his new kingdom, William granted lands to his followers and built castles commanding military strong points throughout the land. Some of the important effects of the conquest included the establishment of the court and government, the introduction of Norman French as the language of the elites, and changes in the composition of the upper classes and so on. Subsequent changes affected the agricultural classes and village life, while the major change being the formal elimination of bonded slavery. There was little alteration in the structure of government, as the new Norman Government system took over many of the forms of Anglo-Saxon government. The following is a brief description of who the Normans were, what they did and how exactly the Norman Conquest took place.

In around 911, France was ruled by King Charles who as part of the treaty called "Treaty of Saint-Clair-sur-Epte" allowed a group of Vikings under the leadership of Rollo to settle in Normandy. In exchange for the land, the Norsemen under Rollo were expected to provide protection along the coast against other Viking invaders. Their settlement proved successful, and they came to be known as the "Northmen" from which the term "Normandy" and "Normans" are derived. The Normans quickly adopted the indigenous culture, renounced Paganism and converted to Christianity. They adopted the language of the land, and also added features from their own Norse language into that.

In 1002, King Alfred II of England married Emma, the sister of Richard II, Duke of Normandy. Their son Edward succeeded to the English throne

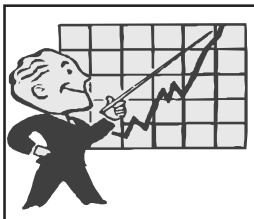
in 1042. This was the beginning of a powerful Norman interest in English politics, as Edward greatly depended on the Normans, brought Norman courtiers, soldiers, and clerics; appointed them to positions of power, particularly in the Church. But, Edward was childless and was often embroiled in conflict with the formidable Harold Godwinson, the Earl of Wessex over the throne of England. When Edward died at the beginning of 1066, the lack of a clear heir led to a disputed succession in which several contenders laying claim over the English throne. Edward's immediate successor was Harold Godwinson, the richest and most powerful of the English aristocrats. However, he was immediately challenged by two powerful neighbouring rulers. One of them was the Duke William who claimed that he had been promised the throne by King Edward and that Harold had sworn agreement to this; the other being King Harald III of Norway. King Herald's claim to the throne was based on an agreement between his predecessor Magnus I of Norway and an early English king, Harthacnut, whereby if either died without heir, the other would inherit both England and Norway. Both William and Harald finally set about assembling troops and ships to invade England.

King Harald of Norway invaded Northern England, leading a fleet of more than 300 ships carrying perhaps 15,000 men. Harald's army was further augmented by the forces of Tostig, the brother-in-law of Harold, who supported the Norwegian king's bid for the throne. In the Battle of Fulford, the Norwegians defeated a northern English army under Edwin and Morcar. The result was that their forces were devastated and unable to participate in the rest of the campaigns of 1066, although the two earls survived the battle. Harald moved on to York, which surrendered to him. King Harold Godwinson probably learned of the Norwegian invasion in mid-September and rushed north, gathering forces as he went. The English then marched onto the invaders and took them by surprise, defeating them in the Battle of Stamford Bridge. Both Harald of Norway and Tostig were killed. But, the English victory too was costly.

Meanwhile, William too assembled a large invasion fleet and an army gathered from Normandy and all over France. His army assembled

during the summer while an invasion fleet in Normandy was constructed. The Normans crossed to England a few days after Harold's victory over the Norwegians at Stamford Bridge on 25 September, following the dispersal of Harold's naval force. They landed in Sussex on 28 September and erected a wooden castle at Hastings from which they raided the surrounding area. This ensured supplies for the army, and as Harold and his family held many of the lands in the area, it weakened William's opponent and made him more likely to attack to put an end to the raiding. Harold, after defeating his brother Tostig and Harald in the north, marched the rest of his army south to deal with the threatened Norman invasion.

The battle between Harold and William began on 14th October 1066. William had both cavalry and infantry, including many archers, while Harold had only foot soldiers and few archers. Although at first the English soldiers succeed in defending, the Norman cavalry soon attacked and killed the pursuing troops. The most decisive event was the death of Harold, which finally inaugurated the Norman rule on the English soil.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What are the most noticeable effects of the Norman Conquest?

Q 2: Who were the Normans?

Q 3: Who was William the Conqueror? How did he invade England?

1.4 CONSEQUENCES OF THE NORMAN CONQUEST

The debate over the consequence of the Norman Conquest depends on how changes after 1066 are to be measured. Historians often tend to state that Anglo Saxon England was already evolving before the Norman invasion, with the introduction of Feudalism; castles or other changes in society, then the Conquest, did not represent a radical reform in the English soil. But, the changes were dramatic if measured by the elimination of the English nobility or the abolition of Old English as a literary language. Thus, the Normans seen either as the persecutors of the English or as the rescuers

of the country from a decadent Anglo-Saxon nobility. The following are some of the important consequences of the Norman Conquest.

Replacement of the English:

A direct consequence of the invasion was the almost total elimination of the old English aristocracy and the loss of English control over the Catholic Church in England. William systematically dispossessed the English landowners and conferred their property on his continental followers. ***The Domesday Book*** meticulously documents the impact of this colossal programme of expropriation, revealing that by 1086 only about 5 per cent of land in England was left in the English hands. Natives were also removed from high governmental and ecclesiastical office. After 1075, the Normans held all earldoms, and the Englishmen were only occasionally appointed as sheriffs. Likewise, in the Church, senior English office-holders were either expelled from their positions or kept in place for their lifetimes and replaced by foreigners when they died.

English Emigration:

Following the Conquest, many Anglo-Saxons, including groups of nobles, fled the country for Scotland, Ireland, or Scandinavia. Members of King Harold Godwinson's family sought refuge in Ireland and became involved with unsuccessful invasions of England. The largest single exodus occurred in the 1070s, when a group of Anglo-Saxons in a fleet of 235 ships sailed for the Byzantine Empire, which became a popular destination for many English nobles and soldiers, as the Byzantines were in need of mercenaries. Some of the English migrants settled in Byzantine frontier regions on the Black Sea coast, and established towns with names such as New London and New York.

The System of Government:

Before the Normans arrived, England was divided into administrative units called shires, with subdivisions; the royal court was the centre of government, and a justice system based on local and regional tribunals existed to secure the rights of free men. Officials known as reeves or sheriffs ran shires. Most medieval governments were always on the move, holding court wherever the weather and food or other matters were best at the

moment; England had a permanent treasury at Winchester before William's conquest. One major reason for the strength of the English monarchy was the wealth of the kingdom, built on the English system of taxation that included a land tax, or the gold. English coinage was also superior to most of the other currency in use in North Western Europe, and the ability to mint coins was a royal monopoly. The English kings had also developed the system of issuing writs to their officials, in addition to the normal medieval practice of issuing charters.



Writs were either instructions to an official or group of officials, or notifications of royal actions such as appointments to office or a grant of some sort.

This sophisticated medieval form of government was handed over to the Normans and was the foundation of further developments. By the end of William's reign, most of the officials of Government and the royal household were Normans. The language of official documents also changed from Old English to Latin. The forest laws were introduced, leading to the setting aside of large sections of England as the Royal Forests. The Domesday survey was an administrative catalogue of the landholdings of the kingdom, and was unique to medieval Europe. It is important to note that in the Feudal system, the central authority was the King. But, at the same time, Feudalism provided the local lords with a sense of independence and responsibility. Although feudalism in England was primarily based on the question of economic power, William the Conqueror succeeded in bringing political stability all over the country. Because, the medieval period in Europe, including England, was dominated by regular conflicts between the different warring groups. 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 had been an effective strategy in avoiding any threat of revolt against a new administration like his.

Language:

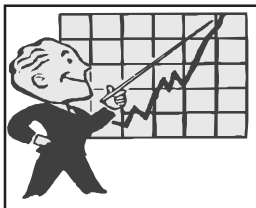
One of the most obvious consequences of the conquest was the introduction of Anglo Norman—a Northern dialect of Old French, as the language of the ruling classes in England that replaced Old English. French words entered the English language, and the names common in France replaced Anglo Saxon names. Male names such as William, Robert, and Richardson soon became common.

Immigration and Intermarriage:

An estimated 8000 Normans and other continentals settled in England because of the conquest, although the exact figures cannot be established. Some of these new residents intermarried with the native English women. However, most Normans continued to contract marriages with other Normans or other continental families rather than with the English. Within a century of the invasion, intermarriage between the native English and the Norman immigrants had become common.

Change in Society:

The major change that occurred following the Norman Conquest was the elimination of slavery in England which almost disappeared by the middle of the 12th century. There were about 28,000 slaves listed in *The Domesday Book* in 1086, fewer than had been enumerated for 1066. The main reasons for the decline in slaveholding appear to have been the disapproval of the Church and the cost of supporting slaves, who unlike the serfs, had to be maintained entirely by their owners. Many of the 'free' peasants of Anglo-Saxon society appear to have lost status and become indistinguishable from the non-free serfs. Whether this change was due entirely to the conquest is unclear, but the invasion and its after-effects probably accelerated a process already under way.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: How did the Norman Conquest 'replace' the English?

Q 5: Who were the people in New London?

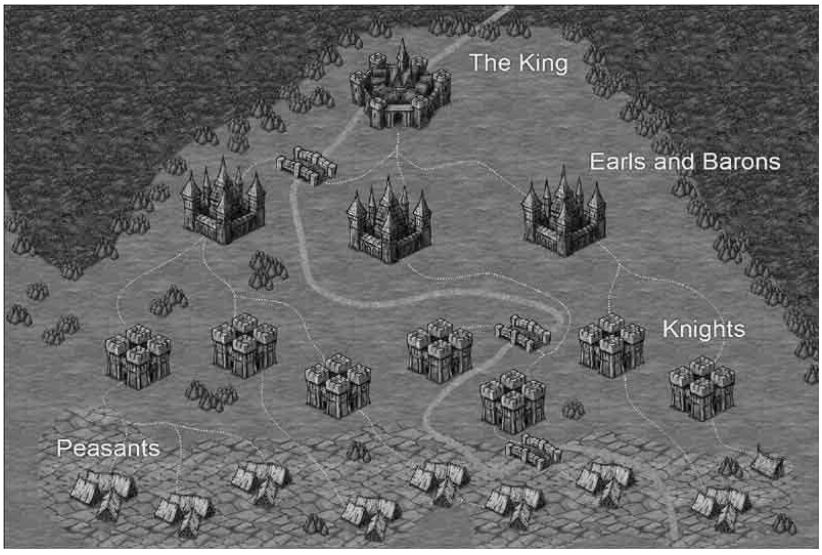
Q 6: How was the system of Government in England before and after the Conquest?

Q 7: Why did the custom of slave holding decline due to the Conquest?

1.5 WHAT IS FEUDALISM?

Feudalism has its origin in the Latin word 'feodum' meaning simply an 'Estate in land'. It is described as a political and economic system in

Europe from the 9th to about the 15th century, based on the holding of land in *fief* or *fee* and the resulting relation of lord to vassal characterised by homage, legal and military service of tenants, and forfeiture. It also meant a contract where two parties exchanged service for some form of material value. This material value could be land, or revenue collected in various ways through taxation, or an annual amount given in return for service rendered. However, Feudalism does not connote a single way of perceiving a definite structure of a society, but suggests a variety of social, political, cultural, and economic structures at work. During the early middle Ages, the tribes, which invaded the Roman Empire, seized a large part of its territory. Though, in the beginning, land was a common property, gradually the tribal chieftains acquired these properties and gave birth to a monarchical form of government. Large part of the land also went to the hands of the church, which became staunch supporters of monarchy. The King distributed the land among the retinue only on the ground that they would render military services to the King. Individual serfs, who became dependent on their new masters, cultivated the land. The land held on these conditions were called 'feuds' and their owners were called 'feudal', hence the name 'Feudalism'.



Source: http://www.timeref.com/life/socialrank.htm

Therefore, the feudal society was strictly divided into classes, i.e. nobility, clergy and peasantry. The King was the absolute 'owner' of land. Immediately below him were the vassals—nobles, knights and other tenants, a hierarchy of nobles, who held land directly from the king and were called the tenants-in-chief. Thus, the most important nobles used to hold land directly from the king, and the lesser lords from the vassals down to the seigneur who held a single manor. The Peasants or the Serfs were placed in the lowest rank in the feudal pyramid. They worked for the seigneur, who permitted them to use his land in return of which they had to secure his protection and provide necessary help on demand. Feudalism, thus, had brought a hierarchical order into existence in society.

Feudalism and feudal practice did not extend uniformly throughout Europe. Northern France and the Low Countries were the most thoroughly feudalised areas. Following the Norman Conquest in 1066, William's strategic devise to survey the land of England in the form of *Domesday Book* came handy to give him full details of the land, the people and the amount of taxes and dues to be paid to the Normans. William claimed all the land in England and divided the land between him (about 20%), the church (about 25%) and the remainder was given to Norman soldiers and nobles (barons). William's adoption of the feudal structure for the English society was meant to dissolve the potential rivalries among his own lords. The feudal structure rendered him a viable measure to make strategic deals with his compatriots through land resources that pacified the lords and gave him the power to distribute. Initially, the nobles' feudal relation with the king was based on military function. Under the Feudal system, the vassals who were awarded land swore an 'Oath of Fealty' to their lord, and provided fully equipped soldiers under the Feudal Levy. You should note that many of the nobles who came with William from Normandy were fully conversant with the functioning of the feudal system, as Feudalism was a flourishing social and political system in Normandy. Thus, you might very well understand that the people, who introduced the feudal system in England, were well aware of its functioning. The only difference was that in England they had to deal with a new people and culture.



LET US KNOW

Domes Day Book:

The Domes day Book is the name of the primary record of the English property conducted during William's reign in 1086. William commissioned surveys with seven panels of commissioners functioning in different counties to gather information about the estates of the nobility and property, which technically belonged to the king. The commissioners finally compiled and submitted the accounts to the king. The summary of these accounts, compiled by the royal clerks as a book of records, is known as the *Domesday Book*.

The Medieval Church also played prominent role in shaping the feudal structure. The church hierarchy paralleled the feudal hierarchy. The church owned much land, held by monasteries, church dignitaries and by the church themselves. Most of the land that was given by nobles as a bequest or gift carried feudal benefits. The English bishops and abbots, who possessed landed property, were allocated free knight service allowance for their assets. Thus, William involved all sections of society from whom he could have potential resistance towards his kingship. William and his lords felt the importance of securing the support of the church to gain the confidence and allegiance of the people. Hence, a huge portion of the land was given to the church as gifts. Though, as an institution, the church was free from the control of the monarchy, the officials of the clergy was connected to the King in the same way, as the vassals were if he had fief under him. This was extremely beneficial for the church also to grow, gain and have control over land property. In this way, King William very strategically devised the English version of Feudalism. The monarchical system for the next four centuries after the Norman Conquest was more or less based on Feudalism.

The feudal system in England, although had an underlying political motive, rendered heavy influence on the life and society of the English people. The first impact was that it brought a discernible order to a chaotic society. The feudal structure was such that all the stakeholders of the 'feudal-pyramid' like the serfs, villeins, vassals and their lords were contracted to

one another. The contract was based on the notion of return for the service rendered. A close relationship and bonding developed between them although this was not there in the original design. This bonding further helped the king to centrally control the land at a time when the administration was mostly controlled by independent lords. Most of the lords were extremely powerful, yet they held their allegiance to the king. Thus, you can understand that King William's Feudal system provided a feeling of independence to the nobles, while also maintaining the supremacy of the monarch.

Feudalism and Literature

The Feudal system had considerable impact on the literature of the time. It encouraged courtly writing that favoured the king and the feudal lords, which were reflected in many of the verses of the era. The Medieval romances idealise the hero-knight and his noble deeds. Medieval romances typically recount the marvellous adventures of a chivalrous, heroic knight often of super-human ability, who abides by the strict codes of honour and demeanour, embarks upon a quest and defeats monsters, thereby winning the favour of a woman. As you may note that, an important element of the medieval romance is the knight's love for his woman. Thus, the Medieval romances focus not on love and sentiment (as the term "romance" implies today), but on chivalry and adventure. Such literary endeavour valorised the feudal pyramid where the lord or knight always had a privileged status compared to that of the common masses.

You have read that the church too gained a respectable position in the feudal system. Therefore, devotional writing under the patronage of various religious groups also developed during this era. Thus, the literature of medieval England was occupied by both a religious concern and the need to deal with the contemporary developments. The religious lyrics, allegories with Christian undertones were written and made popular. The religious lyric was the commonest of all types of religious poems, which gained popularity in an age where clerics were in charge of preservation of the records. The Medieval religious lyric ranges from moral to the devotional and even mystical. However, the most celebrated among them were the ones dedicated to Virgin Mary. The other type of poetry was mainly allegorical.

Allegorical interpretations of parts of the Scripture were always integral to the Christian Biblical Commentaries. Gradually, Christianity also encouraged contemporary writers to objectify their mental and spiritual struggles by personifying their desires and aims, the appetites and qualities.

However, encouraged by the development of towns and a change in life style a third kind of writing also developed. This kind of writing often called 'The fabliau' that developed subsequently, protested against the nobles, and greedy tax collecting rulers. 'The fabliau' that came from France became popular side by side with the romances. It is associated with the new middle class who slowly grew in importance as the feudal system took a declining trend. The newly emerged town folk sponsored this kind of humorous and satirical verses that were the antitype of the idealising vision of courtly knight or pious churchmen. The best example of a writer's response to feudalism is evident in the writings of the poet Geoffrey Chaucer. His preference for the London dialect of English rather than Norman-French language is to be seen as a political act challenging Norman predominance. Many of the tales in *The Canterbury Tales* demonstrate Chaucer's recognition of the inherent social structuring that characterised the English Middle Ages. In this long poem, Chaucer makes use of this verse form in the stories of the Miller, Reeve, Merchant and the Shipman—classes of people that emerged. Several variations of this genre emerged in the Medieval England that dealt with indecent stories of town life, satirical account of contemporary life, and moralistically inclined exempla. The social structure that can be seen in "The Prologue" to *The Canterbury Tales,* exemplifies the influences of religion and social hierarchy on society. However, you will note that Chaucer was writing at a time when feudalism was declining.

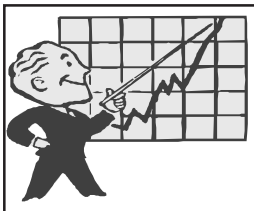
The feudal experience was not just evident in the works of Chaucer, Gower, and Langland but also in works such as John Mandeville's *Travels*. Mandeville referred to faraway lands, which had societies very different from the feudalised structure that the English people were familiar with. By offering such an account of cultural difference, Mandeville opened up a new world before the English people.



LET US KNOW

1. You should note that Feudalism did not occur in England suddenly. What is known as feudalism in England was largely influenced by similar social structures already a part of medieval life in different parts of Europe. Feudalism was a phenomenon that affected the life, society and culture in different parts of Europe, and its impact can be seen in various developments in arts and culture both inside and outside of England.

2. You will find that most of the literary compositions during the early years of the Norman reign are marked by imitations of models available in French or by the attempts to come to terms with the growing impact of Christianity. Therefore, one can find many versions of similar narratives in the Middle English period. One of the examples is Reynard the Fox, which appears in Chaucer's "The Nun Priest's Tale". Such examples were experimented across the Continent, including England.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 8: What do you mean by the term Feudalism?

Q 9: In what ways, did William tackle the rivalry among his own Lords?

Q 10: How did William maintain his good relationship with the Church?

Q 11: What was the impact of Feudalism on the social structure of England?

Q 12: Mention the types of Medieval literature that developed under the feudal system?

1.6 DECLINE OF FEUDALISM

The Medieval feudal system worked well for four centuries when finally it started to take a declining trend. The decline of Feudalism occurred due to a number of events and change that took place during the Medieval era as well as in the wake of the Renaissance. As you know, land was the

main source of economy and it was dependent on the peasant who worked on the land. However, gradually England started to move from land-based economy to a money-based economy. This transformation came due to the new trade options that became available. The 'Crusades' and travel during the Middle Age opened new avenues for trade and commerce in England. With the development of new trades, there could be found a mushroom growth of towns. The Peasants started moving from the country to the towns, and eventually were allowed to get their freedom from bondage. You might understand that Feudalism was rooted in 'natural economy', which was gradually thwarted by the growth of trade and financial dealings. These dealings caused labour services to be commuted to money rent. The same labour services encouraged commodity production for a wide market. Thus, there appeared a gradual shift from 'natural economy' to 'money economy'.

Black Death:

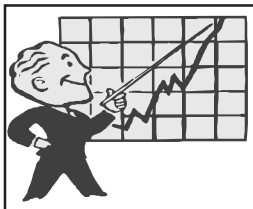
One of the main factors of the decline of Feudalism was 'Black Death', a bubonic plague that occurred in the middle of the 14th century at around 1348. The immediate consequence was depopulation. It reduced the population of England by one third. Labour became a valuable commodity. Because of 'Black Death' there was a change in the demographic pattern as well. The people had to leave their native villages or towns, as they were the worst affected areas. As the agricultural products were badly affected due to paucity of labourers, the market value increased manifold. They started demanding more wages. On the other hand, the villeins tried to set themselves free from the clutches of the feudal system. Villages were deserted and there was no one to work on the fields. Hence, the agricultural land turned to pasture lands, and the interest of the landowners too changed. They started using their land for sheep pasturing which gave them a boost to opt for trade of woollen materials. As a result, cloth and woollen industries flourished. But, in the process, the feudal structure got affected immensely. As peasants moved to look for better job opportunities, there developed the urban centres equipped with new economic possibilities. All these finally led to a loosening of the grip of the feudal structure.

Peasants' Revolt:

The other main factor was the emergence of the 'Peasants' Revolt' of 1381. The Peasants realised their worth and demanded changes. As there was a dearth of peasants, the landowners had to take resort to hired labourers. As the hired labourers were at a demanding position, there was a big hike in the wages. The landowners felt a threat, as they could not cope with this situation. Therefore, they sought the help of the Parliament to solve this crisis. As a result, the 'Statute of Labourers' was passed in 1351, which introduced oppressive measures to control the labourers. Many taxes were levied on the labourers and their condition worsened. As a reaction to this, 'Peasants' Revolt' for the abolition of the villeinage system started. The revolt had a far-reaching effect as the peasants became aware of their own worth and position and it was difficult for the landlords to re-install them in the folds of the feudal structure.

Other Factors:

Another factor for the decline of Feudalism was that the rich nobles were allowed to pay for soldiers rather than to fight themselves. This brought immense change as mercenaries were hired from all over Europe. These mercenaries had little loyalty, except to money, and these paid army men were feared throughout Europe. This threat of the mercenaries led to deploy professional, trained soldiers-the Standing Armies, and finally, it brought a decline to the feudal order. Again gradually, the Feudal Levy was getting unpopular, and as time went by, the nobles preferred to pay the king rather than to fight and raise troops. Armed men were paid a wage and Medieval warfare was financed by taxes and loans. Since the allegiance of the nobles to the king gradually waned off, and as they denied military service to the king, it affected the whole feudal structure. Land was rented and the rights of the lords over their labour also decreased. After the 'Black Death' and 'Peasants' Revolt', the nobles became weaker which made the king to reclaim their lands and power. You should note that in the process, a centralised government was established and this had resulted in weakening the feudal form of governance.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 13: State some of the main reasons for the decline of Feudalism. (50 words)

Q 14: How were 'Black Death' and 'Peasants' Revolt' responsible for the decline of Feudalism? (100 words)



1.7 LET US SUM UP

By now, you must have had a good idea about the Medieval society of England and how a marked change emerged following the William the Conqueror's invasion of England. But, the most significant aspect of the Medieval English society was the emergence of the feudal system into the English society. You have learnt that, because of Feudalism a hierarchical system came up where all the land was owned by the king. You must be aware that life lived under Feudalism demanded that everyone owed allegiance to the king and their immediate superior. However, gradually, Feudalism took a declining trend as the land economy was replaced by money economy. Moreover, the Black Death and the subsequent Peasants' Revolt had adverse affect on Feudalism. Further, we learnt about the growth of London as the significant urban centre of Medieval England. You will be able to have more ideas about social and cultural life of Medieval London when you will read the unit dealing with Medieval Literature in Block III of this course in the light of what we have learnt from this unit.



1.8 FURTHER READING

Brown, Peter. (ed). (2007). *A Companion to Medieval English Literature and Culture. 1350–1500.* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Choudhury, Bibhash. (2005). *English Social and Cultural History: An Introductory Guide and Glossary.* New Delhi: Prentice Hall of India.

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1.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q No 1: The establishment of court government… …introduction of Norman French as the language of the elites… …changes in agricultural class set-up and village life… …formal elimination of bonded slavery etc.

Ans to Q No 2: King Charles of France in around 911, allowed a group of Vikings under the leadership of Rollo to settle in Normandy… …in exchange for the land, these people were expected to provide protection along the coast against other Viking invaders… … they became known as the "Northmen" from which the term Normans are derived.

Ans to Q No 3: William the Conqueror was actually the Duke William who claimed that he had been promised the throne by King Edward as he was childless… …but King Harald of Norway invaded Northern England as part of his claim over the English throne… …both met with a battle on 14th October 1066… …the defeat of Harald finally inaugurated the Norman rule on the English soil.

Ans to Q No 4: William dispossessed the English landowners and conferred their property on his followers… …Natives were removed from high governmental and ecclesiastical office… …senior English office-holders in the Church were either expelled from their positions.

Ans to Q No 5: Following the Conquest, many Anglo-Saxons fled to other countries… …in the 1070s, a very large group of Anglo-Saxons sailed for the Byzantine Empire… …those English migrants who settled in Byzantine frontier regions on the Black Sea coast, came to be known as the New Londoners.

Ans to Q No 6: Before the Conquest, England was divided into administrative units called shires and the royal court was the centre of government… …by the end of William's reign, most of the officials of Government and the royal household were Normans… …the official language also changed from Old English to Latin.

Ans to Q No 7: As mentioned in *Domesday Book,* there were about 28,000 slaves… …but slave trade declined due to the disapproval of the Church and the cost of supporting slave.

Ans to Q No 8: A political and economic system in Europe from the 9th to about the 15th century… … mainly based on the holding of land in *fief… …*also based on the resulting relation of lords and vassals characterised by homage, legal and military service of tenants, and forfeiture… … The king is the absolute owner of land… Nobles, Knights, Tenants held land from the king.

Ans to Q No 9: William's feudal structure enabled him to make strategic deals with his compatriots through land resources that pacified the lords and gave him the power to distribute… …the nobles' feudal relation with the king was based on military function… … the vassals had to swear an 'Oath of Fealty' to their lord to avoid any sort of feuds or rivalry.

Ans to Q No 10: The church hierarchy paralleled the feudal hierarchy… …The church owned much land, held by monasteries, church dignitaries and by the church themselves… …William gave a huge portion of the land to the church as gifts, maintained good relationship and avoided any potential resistance towards his kingship.

Ans to Q No 11: Feudalism brought a discernible order to a chaotic society… … the 'feudal-pyramid' was based on the notion of return for the service rendered… …A close relationship and bonding, previously unavailable, developed among them which helped the king to centrally control the land… …Feudalism provided a feeling of independence to the nobles, while also maintaining the supremacy of the monarch.

Ans to Q No 12: Medieval romances idealising the Knights and Barons… …courtly writings favouring the king and the feudal lords… …devotional writing in the form of religious lyrics and allegories under the patronage

of the church… …fabliau written against the nobles, greedy tax collecting rulers etc.

Ans to Q No 13: A shift from 'land-based' economy to 'money economy'… …the Crusades and travels during the Middle Ages… …the growth of towns… …peasants migrating from countries to towns… …the consequent scarcity of man power… …The Black Death… …The Peasants' Revolt.

Ans to Q No 14: Because of Black Death English country sides were depopulated… …changes occurred in demographic patterns… …peasants moved to look for better earning opportunities… …there was a change in the social structure… …peasants revolted realising their worth and demanded change against unwanted taxes.



1.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q 1: How did the Norman Conquest take place? What was the effect of the Norman Conquest on the life and society of Medieval England?

Q 2: Trace the consequences of the Norman Conquest in light of the social and political changes started by William.

Q 3: Why is feudalism also considered a system determined by relationships of power? In what ways, did King William devise the English version of Feudalism?

Q 4: Why did feudalism succeed as an economic and social structure in medieval English society?

Q 5: What do you understand by the term Feudalism? Describe the feudal system in England during the medieval period.

Q 6: Discuss the causes of the decline of Feudalism.

Q 7: Trace the development of literature under the feudal set up in England.

Q 8: How did feudalism and religion dominate literary activities of that time?

Q 9: How did the feudal system contribute to the maintenance of balance in medieval English society? In what ways, was the King the absolute ruler of the land?

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UNIT 2: GROWTH OF ENGLISH TOWNS/ URBANISATION IN LONDON

UNIT STRUCTURE

2.1 Objectives

2.2 Introduction

2.3 Growth of English Towns

2.4 Urbanisation in London

2.5 Let us Sum up

2.6 Further Reading

2.7 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

2.8 Possible Questions

2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- describe the nature of an English town in the early stages of its development.
- explain the reasons behind the growth of the English towns
- have some ideas on the processes of urbanisation in London
- describe how an urbanised London brought in noticeable changes in socio-cultural parameters of the society

2.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the second unit of this Block. We hope that from this unit, which should be read along with previous unit on Feudalism, you will be able to understand the significance of the growth of English towns as well as the processes of urbanisation in the economic and cultural developments in England in the medieval age. You will find that such developments were gradually contributing to the emergence of literary practices during that time and in future.

2.3 GROWTH OF ENGLISH TOWNS

The English society of the Medieval era was mainly agrarian. Hence, the English townsmen were still rural communities. However, during the middle Ages, a new class called-the middle class emerged. Following the Norman Conquest, there could be seen a surge of towns as the new King encouraged an urbanised life style. Besides, with the establishment of monarchy, a stable condition prevailed which helped the rise of English towns. The towns in turn helped to create condition that is even more peaceful in the social set up with far-reaching effects. There was a commercial hub at the centre of the town, which was usually a market place, and where common people could make economic and political transaction. Towns were built on trade-transactions, and the elites of the towns were the usually the merchants. A successful town attracted many merchants who dominated the commercial activities in the towns. They even influenced the popular and administrative opinions. You will be surprised to know that a lord owned many towns, and he ensured that his town was popular among the merchants as they were the ones who used to pay taxes. The increased order would encourage more towns, which would generate more taxes for the king, and upper nobles, who could impose even more law and order. The merchant guilds were responsible for the trade and commerce of a town. However, these merchant guilds faced stiff competition from the craft guilds. As the towns generated taxes in the form of money, a new and more fluid kind of wealth, vastly superior to land, came into being. All these led to two things: the rise of a class of townsmen and a money-based economy, both of which would indirectly help lead to the rise of kings.

From the discussion done above, it must be clear to you that medieval towns developed around areas where people could easily come and meet, such as crossroads or riverbanks. Thus, towns sprang up along the sides of the roads on the trading routes. These towns needed water, and hence, the towns grew near the rivers as they provided them water for drinking, washing and to dispose of all the sewage. Village people used to come to the towns for trade, and hence the people who were in charge of a

town had to ensure safety to all those people who came to their towns. Many towns had large fences built around them, and usually the gates were locked at night. Inside the walls, there were many narrow zigzag roads and horse drawn carts loaded with goods to trade. There were small shops alongside the narrow roads. In the early days, the towns used to be less congested as there could be seen more of groupings of traders, each with a permanent shop or traders who came together to protect themselves from the outside attackers. Inns for the travellers and stables for the horses were also set up. Although initially, the towns used to be small, with more and more people thronging the towns, they grew bigger in size; gradually they began to stink with the garbage and sewage. Much of the garbage was strewn in the streets until it got rotten. People got sick every now and then, which had finally culminated into the 'Black Death'.

An important aspect of the medieval towns was the boroughs (administrative divisions of a large city), which were sites where burgage tenures (Tenure by which houses or lands were held of the king or lord of a borough or city, at a certain yearly rent, or by services relating to trade or handicraft) determined the holding of lands. This land holding was free as it involved a fixed money rent and the tenants had the right to deal with it in the way that suited them best. This transactional system was conducive for the development of trade and commerce. You must know that all the newly emerged towns were not equally advanced in its trade and commerce as well. Towns like Birmingham were hardly larger than a village, though it was important for its cloth industry, tanned leather, and fish trade. Thus, around seven hundred towns flourished during 14th century. On the other hand, urbanisation in England can be traced to centuries prior to Medieval period, though the emergence of the mercantile class was significant during the Medieval era for the growth of towns. Towns gained prominence and its widespread growth was natural fallout of the changes that occurred during that time. Towards the later part of the middle Ages, there emerged different types of towns based on the extent, population, trade and cultural prominence. At the top of the hierarchy was London town, which was followed by towns like Bristol, York, Norwich, Exeter and Shrewsbury.

After conquering England in the battle of Hastings, William and his army turned to London. However, they could not cross the London Bridge at Southwark. William's army made a clockwise march around London and waited at Berkhamsted for the opportunity to penetrate. However, realising that a resistance would be futile, a delegation from London arrived to surrender the city and recognised William as the King. William soon granted a charter for London, which upheld previous Saxon rights, privileges and laws. Thus, London gained a special place in the history of England. It was also one of the prominent cities of Medieval Europe, and was regarded as a hub for trade and commerce. London exhibits the rapid expansion of the towns that the King William proposed after the Norman Conquest. William was crowned King at Westminster Abbey. Then he brought unprecedented development to London by erecting new constructions. The most remarkable construction was the castle built in the Southeast which was later transformed to 'The Tower of London'. This 'Tower of London' served as the residence of the king. The importance of the Tower lies in the fact that it was a multipurpose building housing the royal mint, treasury and even a zoo in its early stage.

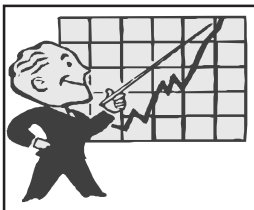
Another important feature of the Medieval London was the prevalence of monasteries, which had bequeathed a legacy of place names such as Grey Friars, White Friars and Black Friars. A new passageway developed with the construction of the London Bridge in 1176. The houses in Medieval London were made of half-timber or wattle and daub. A lime white wash was common for the houses. The Lord Mayor and a Council elected from the members of the Merchant Guilds, which became highly powerful administrative and economic bodies, did policy making in the town. Their own halls and coat of arms distinguished the guilds from one another. The Guildhall functioned as the meeting place of the representative of the different merchant guilds. However, one serious problem of the Medieval London was its lack of sanitation facilities. There were as many as 16 plague attacks upon London since the Black Death of 1348 to the Great Plague of 1665.

Guilds:

During the Medieval era, merchants, artists, bankers, artisan and other professionals grouped themselves together in some business association. They were called Guilds. The bankers belonged to the Bankers Guild, the merchants to the Merchants Guild, and so on.

Merchant Guilds: They controlled and determined the policies of the trade in a town. Merchant guilds regulated prices, quality, weights and measures, and business practices. The power of the guilds was absolute in their domain, and to be expelled from a guild made it impossible to earn a living. Each guild had a patron saint; celebrated religious festivals together, put on religious plays, and looked after the health and welfare of the members and their families.

Craft Guilds: Separate from the Merchant Guilds were the Craft Guilds, which regulated the quality, working hours and conditions of its members. There were three levels of craftsmen; masters, journeymen, and apprentices. Parents paid a fee to place a boy with a master craftsman as an apprentice. There he received food, lodging (often sleeping under the counter in the shop itself), clothes, and instruction in the craft.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: How did the towns emerge in the medieval age?

Q 2: Where were the towns usually spring up?

Q 3: Why did the towns gain prominence? Which are some of the important towns that sprang up?

Q 4: Briefly describe the significance of London as a medieval town.

2.4 URBANISATION IN LONDON

Usually the term Urbanisation refers to the population shift from the rural to urban areas. It also means the “the gradual increase in the proportion of people living in urban areas”, and the ways in which each society adapts to the change. It is predominantly the process by which towns and cities are formed and become larger as more people start living and working in central areas.

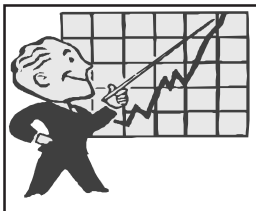
Along with the growth of towns, urbanisation is considered one of the most important aspects of the life and society in medieval England. You will note that urbanisation was the result of economic growth and development of the cities, which was broadly evident in the movement of people from one trade-centre like London to the other. Thus, apart from London, the other towns also functioned as key 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. 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 also became a major city where urban culture developed rapidly. This city was greatly instrumental in the rise of a new individualism and social freedom. It is important to note that the city dwellers learnt to regulate time by clocks, space by precise measurements and value by money – all that can be seen as the direct rise of the new economy.

However, you should pay heed to the fact that the rapid urbanisation of London can be partly attributed to William the Conqueror, known for his urbane lifestyle. Westminster was situated on one side of London, and the Tower of London on the other. The Westminster Hall, the Abbey and the Tower were recognised centres of royal administration and political activities during the Medieval Age. By the end of the 15th century, London had a population of 60,000, while Paris had a population of nearly 200,000. Norwich in England had a meagre population of 12,000 and Bristol only 10,000. However, in the field of textile industry, the English towns, particularly the cloth centres of East Anglia and Yorkshire, achieved a great success. By the 15th century, England had become an exporter of manufactured woollen cloth rather than of raw wool.

The medieval towns and cities of England witnessed frequent civic strife, both internal and external. The disputes of the big merchants with

small ones, 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 stonewalls or earth mounds. The roofing of the houses was 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, which also marks the beginning of English drama. The market places were the centres for the community's festive celebrations. 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'. You will learn about them in detail when we discuss growth and development of English drama later.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: What is urbanisation? What caused urbanisation in London?

Q 6: Explain briefly William's contributions to urbanisation in London.

Q 7: Mention some of the common problems of urbanisation in London?

Q 8: What was the position of London in the medieval period?



2.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, you have learnt that the English society of the medieval era was previously an agrarian society. However, there emerged a new middle class people following the Norman Conquest, which could be seen in the rise of the towns as the new rulers encouraged an urbanised life style. Soon, the towns became commercial hubs, where common people had economic and political transaction. Towns were built on trade, and the elites of the towns were the merchants. Usually, a successful town attracted many merchants who dominated the commercial activities in the towns. They even influenced the popular and administrative opinions of the towns. The merchant guilds were responsible for the trade and commerce of a town. Along the growing importance of the towns, there began the processes of urbanisation because more towns and cities meant a new economy for the people in Medieval England. Subsequently, many people started migrating to the cities from the countryside giving rise to urbanisation of London.



2.6 FURTHER READING

Brown, Peter. (ed). (2007). *A Companion to Medieval English Literature and Culture. 1350–1500.* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Choudhury, Bibhash. (2005). *English Social and Cultural History: An Introductory Guide and Glossary.* New Delhi: Prentice Hall of India.

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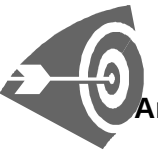
Trevelyan, G. M. (1994). English *Social History: A Survey of Six Centuries.* Hyderabad, Orient Longman.

2.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q No 1: The towns helped to create a peaceful condition in the social set up… …there was a commercial hub at the centre of the town… …towns were built on trade-transactions… …a successful town attracted many merchants… …such transactions even influenced the popular and administrative opinions.

Ans to Q No 2: Towns sprang up alongside the roads on the trading routes… …towns grew near the rivers… …towns had large fences built around them, and usually the gates were locked at night… …inns for the travellers and stables for the horses too sprang up.

Ans to Q No 3: Towns gained prominence and due to the social and economic changes that occurred during that time… …based on the extent, population, trade and cultural prominence, there emerged different types of towns… …London, Bristol, York, Norwich, Exeter, Shrewsbury etc. were the most important towns.



Ans to Q No 4: London gained a special place as a town… …it was considered a hub for trade and commerce… …London exhibits the rapid expansion of the towns that the King William proposed after the Norman Conquest.

Ans to Q No 5: Urbanisation refers to the population shift from the rural to urban areas… …urbanisation occurred due to economic growth and development of the cities… …it occurred in London mostly due to the movement of people from one trade-centre like London to the other.

Ans to Q No 6: William the Conqueror showcased an urbane lifestyle… …The Westminster Hall, situated in London and the London Tower became centre of William's administration.

Ans to Q No 7: Frequent civic strife… …disputes of the big merchants with small ones, the burghers with the outsiders, lord's or bishop's bailiff or the monks… …problem of sanitation in the absence of a proper garbage-disposal and drainage-system… …frequent occurrence of plagues and so on.

Ans to Q No 8: construction of Castle/The Tower of London… …importance of monasteries in London and their role… …the layout of the city, houses and living condition of the people were visibly different… …Merchant Guilds played important role in the economic and political life of London.



2.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: How did the emergence of the English towns lead to urbanisation in Medieval England?

Q 2: What role did London play as an important town in the Medieval period? Discuss with adequate references.

Q 3: Trace the growth of towns in Medieval England with special reference to London.

Q 4: Discuss the relationship of interdependence between the rise of a new economic order and the growth of cities and towns during medieval England.

Q 5: Give a brief outline of the nature of commercial activities and administration in the late Medieval English towns and cities.

Q 6: The towns and the cities played a major role in the collapse of the feudal order and the beginning of a capitalist economy. Substantiate.

Q 7: Narrate in your own words the position of London in the Medieval period.

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UNIT 3: CHRISTIANITY, REFORMATION AND ROLE OF THE CHURCH

UNIT STRUCTURE

3.1 Learning Objectives

3.2 Introduction

3.3 Idea of Christianity

3.4 Role of Medieval Church

3.5 The Church and Medieval Culture

3.6 Theology and Intellectual Activities

3.7 Let us Sum up

3.8 Further Reading

3.9 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

3.10 Possible Questions

3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- describe the society of the Medieval England
- trace the history of Christianity in Medieval times
- explain the role played by the Medieval Church
- trace the relationship between Church and Medieval culture
- grasp the socio-religious history of the Medieval England

3.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces you to another important aspect of the Social and Religious history of Medieval England i.e. the role of the Medieval Church. You might probably know that Christianity started about 2000 years ago in Judea (present-day Israel) with Jesus Christ and His faithful group of disciples. It is important that Christianity has its root in scriptures related to the life of Jesus and the teachings of His Apostles, which were later documented in the Bible. Initially, Christianity was considered a threat to

the Roman Empire as the Christians refused to worship the Roman Gods or follow the dictates of the Emperor. During the reign of Emperor Constantine (AD285-AD337), Christianity was legalised. Gradually, it became the official religion of the Roman Empire replacing the polytheism (the belief of multiple deities along with their own mythologies and rituals) of the earlier Roman religion. Christianity, through the Church, became organised and marked its dominance all over Europe by the time of the Norman Conquest of England in 1066. By taking into consideration the different aspects of the Medieval church, this unit intends to tell you the importance of the church in the lives of the people of Medieval England. In fact, the church had tremendous significance in the sense that the Medieval world offered very limited scope for individual and social development. Thus, in this unit, you will gain an overall knowledge of the Christian religion of the Medieval period, which will help you to understand the literature of that period better.

3.3 IDEA OF CHRISTIANITY

You are already informed that Christianity started about 2000 years ago in Judea with Jesus Christ and His faithful group of disciples. During this period, Judea was a cross-cultural hub of bustling cities and farms. The Emperor of Rome was the ruler. The Jews at that time hated the Roman rule as they faced oppression in the hands of the Roman Emperor. The polytheistic cultural beliefs of Rome were also pagan and intrusive to Jewish life. Some Jews saw that their only hope was to conform to this change. Others became religious extremists who resisted against the Roman oppression. Still, others withdrew themselves into the Judean wilderness to study the Jewish law and wait for the eventual coming of their promised Messiah (saviour). With this background, the religious journey of Jesus began.

Now read the interesting story related to the life of Jesus. Jesus was a Jew. He observed the Jewish faith and was well acquainted with the Jewish Law. In His early thirties, Jesus travelled from village to village, teaching in the synagogues and healing those who were suffering. Jesus' teaching was revolutionary. He challenged the established religious authorities to repent from their self-righteousness and hypocrisy and realise

that the Kingdom of God is rooted in service and love. Jesus' teachings stirred the hearts of people and created instability, something the Jewish religious authorities feared.

Soon, a faithful group of men began to follow Jesus and call him their teacher. These men began to be called His disciples. Jesus taught them about the will of God and about the "new covenant" God will bring to humanity through Him. Jesus helped them to see that humankind is bound to the pain and futility of life as a result of 'original' sin. Due to sin, mankind lost its relationship with God. The purpose of this "new covenant" was to restore those who accept it into a renewed fellowship of forgiveness and love with God. Jesus proclaimed that He himself would pay for the sins of all humanity by being crucified unjustly on a Roman cross. Three days later, He would rise to life, having conquered death, to give hope to a hopeless world. Well, it happened just as Jesus taught, and His disciples were witnesses to an amazing miracle. Their teacher, Jesus of Nazareth, died and three days later rose again to become their Messiah. Compelled by a great commission to share the love that the God of this universe had imparted upon them, the disciples began to proclaim this gospel of hope throughout the territory. Thus, from a small group of ordinary men that lived in a small province in Judea about 2000 years ago, the history of the Christian Church began, and the Christian Faith has since spread to the rest of the world.

Initially, Christianity was regarded as a threat to the Roman Empire as the Christians refused to worship the Roman Gods or follow the Emperor. This resulted in the persecution of the early Christians, many of whom were killed and thus they became the martyrs of Christian religion. This persecution came to an end during the reign of Emperor Constantine (285-337) who legalised Christianity. Constantine the Great had proclaimed himself as the "Emperor of the Christian People". However, most of the emperors who came after Constantine were also Christians. Gradually, Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire instead of the polytheism of earlier Roman religion.

In the post-Roman period, Christianity had transformed itself from a persecuted, unorganised group of believers into a hierarchical, dominating

religious order over the course of seven centuries. The development of the institution of the Catholic Church and the spread of Christianity throughout Europe during these seven centuries directly affected every aspect of late-antiquity and early-Medieval life, especially politics and the relationship between kings and religion. During this period, the Church rejected its domination by the Roman and Byzantine emperors, in turn exerting its own type of spiritual dominance over the rulers of post-Roman Europe. Christianity, through the Church, became organised and marked its dominance all over Europe by the time of the Norman Conquest of England in 1066.

The Crusades:

The 'Crusades' were a series of Holy Wars launched by the Christian states of Europe against the Saracens. The term "Saracen" was the word used to describe a Moslem during the time of Crusade. The Crusades started in 1095 when Pope Claremont preached the First Crusade at the Council of Claremont. The Pope's preaching led to thousands immediately affixing the cross to their garments. The name Crusade, given to the Holy Wars, came from old French word 'crois' meaning 'cross'. The 'Crusades' are thus great military expeditions undertaken by the Christian nations of Europe for the purpose of rescuing the holy places of Palestine from the hands of the Mohameddans. They were eight in number, the first four being sometimes called the Principal Crusades, and the remaining four the Minor Crusades.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: In what ways, were Jesus' teachings revolutionary?

Q 2: How did Christianity become the official religion of the Roman Empire?

Q 3: How would you explain the concept of Christianity? Briefly trace the history of Christianity.

Q 4: What did Jesus teach His disciple?

3.4 ROLE OF MEDIEVAL CHURCH

You have learnt that in the Medieval Period, the Church occupied an important place. The authority and order of the Church were regarded as final, and it was deemed necessary for an ordered society. The institution of the Church not only influenced everyday life, it also acquired importance amidst the intense and complicated power struggle that existed during the Medieval period. The need for establishing a proper structuring of the society heightened its significance as it provided a viable alternative for the establishment of a stable society. People had taken the authority of the church as a given reality. The church was an ever present factor of the average person's life. From Baptism to marriage and finally to death it supported, structured, and at times, even hurt every single person in the Medieval community life. The leaders of the church used to play a significant role in Medieval politics. The church was believed to have derived its power from God and hence the people were more inclined to follow its laws. You would like to know that, at some point of time, the Archbishop of Canterbury was also the Chancellor of England.

One important facet of the Medieval church organisation was the secular interests of the Clergy. In the days of the reign of Norman Kings, there was a close connection between the king and the Church. It provided opportunities to the learned priests who could become good ministers of the king to rule a chaotic nation. The best positions of the Church were rewarded to the favourites of the Pope, in turn of which, the king gained freedom to appoint the bishops. Bishops like Sudbury, and William of Wykeham occupied high posts in the Government. However, the bishops paid little heed to their diocese (The territorial jurisdiction of a bishop) and made unscrupulous bargains. Another important duty that the Ecclesiastical Courts performed was to punish the sinners of sexual incontinence.

But, the habit of pardoning such sinners on payment of money was also in practice. Many monetary scams were prevalent as the summoners, whose duty was to summon the offenders to the courts of the Bishop, made money by threatening the people of reporting their cases (both real

and imaginary) to the Archdeacon. The pardoners who used to bestow papal pardon to sinners had also made money similarly. Thus, the church officials had started neglecting their spiritual duty and got involved in more earthly matters. All these had played a significant role in the lives of the people who accepted the dictum and authority of the church without any question.

The Parish priest enjoyed a privileged status as he reigned in his Church. He used to address the congregation of the common villagers and give them knowledge about Christianity. The Parish priest would say the prayers in Latin, which the simple villagers would not understand. Yet they had to take part in the religious activities, which surrounded their lives. These villagers thus became blind followers of these priests who gave them the knowledge of religion and the way to a righteous life. Another important aspect of the medieval church was the emergence of the wandering priests called Friars. During the 13th century, there were all kinds of travelling priests. Of these, the friars were the most important. The Black Friars of St. Dominic and the Grey Friars of St. Frances had been the most important and true Christian force in the 13th century. In the 14th, they did most of the missionary works of the church. Apart from the beneficed priests who lived in the Church, there were a huge number of priests, deacons and clerks who were employed in different capacities. They were the 'clerks' who wrote papers and kept accounts for men of affairs, or private chaplains in castle or manor houses. They lived an intrigued life with full of sins. However, they could escape any punishment as they claimed the benefit of clergy.



LET US KNOW

One important development during the 14th century was the foundation of a grammar school at Winchester by William of Wykeham. This school meant for the education of clerks in reading and writing Latin. However, a certain proportion of the scholars were the sons of noble and powerful persons. Thus, the church authority had started the education of the common people also, although such scholars belonged to the upper strata of society.

Medieval monastic life consisted of a regular round of worship, reading and manual labour. Each day was divided into eight sacred offices, beginning and ending with services in the monastery church. The abbey was under the authority of an abbot. Abbeys often owed some form of feudal obligation to a lord or higher organisation. They are normally self-contained. However, the Medieval monastery had the same power structure like the feudal pyramid. In the time of Chaucer, the monks were worldly and well to do. They lived comfortably in the monasteries or roamed around disguised as laymen. The monasteries and abbeys had accumulated vast wealth. The abbots used the church as a means of social advancement. However, the monasteries played an important role in the general life of people who vowed to take a religious life as vocation.

Thus, you can see that the church played a very crucial role during the Medieval period in shaping the social order of the time. The control of the church over the people was total. It provided a sense of order through a belief system that encouraged people to work for its development. It gave the people a structure to work within an order. It exercised its power that attracted reverence as well as awe from the masses. The wide ranging influence of the church can be seen in its various functions where it involved activities like preaching and scriptural reading, group reading exercises in households and monasteries, story-telling and psalm reading activities during feast and festival days, enactment of chosen episodes from the Bible, permeation of saints' lives and so on. There was a stark difference that was shown in Medieval literatures regarding the worldly and heavenly issues where the privilege was always bestowed on heavenly considerations. A life of spirituality and virtuosity was always valorised.

You should mark that the Roman Church and the English rulers were always involved in conflicts. This was mainly because the English monarchy took Pope under its jurisdiction, while Pope saw the monarch as a member of the church, therefore subject to the rule of God through the Popes. On the other hand, the bishops too gained political privileges from the king, and consequently, they were interested less in the spiritual awakening of the masses. Gradually, there began movements in the 10th

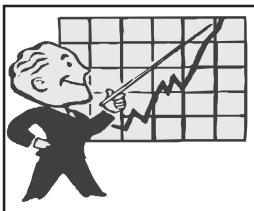
and 11th centuries proclaiming the freedom of the church from state control. However, the church could not enjoy full papal authority. It was mainly because the rise of the European nation-state, following the fall of the Holy Roman Empire posited great threats to the church authority. You will like to know that this conflict between the state and the church, on the other hand, remained unabated even until the 16th century. However, the Reformation compelled the church to stick to its purely spiritual tasks and placed the legal powers of the church leadership in the hands of the princes.

The Lollard Movement:

It was a political and religious movement existing between the mid-14th century to the English Reformation. The term "Lollard" refers to the followers of John Wycliffe who was a prominent theologian dismissed from the University of Oxford in 1381 for criticising the Church. Its demands were to bring noticeable reforms in Western Christianity and save the church ideals from degradation under the church authorities. A position in the church was a lucrative option. To be a part of the economically resourceful clergy was considered a profitable business and this led to such corrupt practices as obtaining a position in the church by bribing. You should note that Chaucer and Langland have occasionally referred to the rampant corruption in the church in their writings.

For centuries, the Monarchs ruled over their kingdom by the notion of 'divine right', which said that the king ruled both the Crown and the Church. On the Catholic Church, however, the belief was that the Pope was the representative of Christ on earth, and thus he should be the ultimate authority over the state and the crown. This relation between the church and the state during the Medieval period came to be based in terms of hierarchies between the kingship and the papal authority. Real power was not always in the hands of these figures, but the power they did exercise enjoyed a theoretical support, and therefore carried an aura of legitimacy. Let me tell you that the power of kings was not understood in secular terms as we understand it today, mainly because it had religious connotations. During

the 12th and 13th centuries, papal power greatly increased. In the 13th century, the great scholar Saint Thomas Aquinas, borrowing ideas from Aristotle, played a positive role in raising the dignity of the civil power by declaring that the state is also a perfect society, the other perfect society being the church. Though the conflict between the church and the state was continuing, yet it did not deter the importance of religious culture in England until the 14th century.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: Discuss the role of the Medieval Church in human life and society.

Q 6: Mention some of the ill practices of the Medieval Church organisation.

Q 7: What kind of relationship prevailed between the Roman Church and the English rulers?

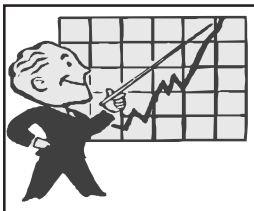
3.5 THE CHURCH AND MEDIEVAL CULTURE

By now, you must have realised that a God-centric perspective dominated the worldview of the Medieval period. Christianity reigned supreme in this regard, as the church was the single most influential and powerful institution of Medieval England. The church played a significant role in spreading a religious culture among the masses. The people were expected to maintain religious conduct which was crucial for their domestic life as well. Such religious conduct was marked by the performance of ceremonies in almost all the social as well as cultural institutions. The church made people believe that such conduct was of great importance for their social existence. The practice of such rituals proclaimed not only the importance of the church but also other religious agencies like the monasteries, nunneries, abbeys and so on. Conduct was very important and was associated with supernatural sanction and belief system. The church provided order, stability and a framework for the Medieval mindset. The most important foundation of Medieval life was salvation, and the ultimate goal of all people was to obtain salvation.

Thus, the church played a very important role in moulding the lives of the people and in spreading spirituality and religious preaching. The church used the Biblical stories and the legends based on the lives of saints, doctrines of the Trinity and other scriptural materials to attract the attention of the masses. Apart from the scriptural teachings, the faith and the daily conduct of the people were directed by the sacraments. The body of beliefs known as holy sacraments provided the direction to men in his domestic life. People believed in the authenticity of such sacraments. Thus, the church enforced discipline on the people through a well-regulated mechanism, which was controlled by the ecclesiastical courts. Let me tell you that the sacraments were an integral part of a Christian's life. Thus, you can understand that the Medieval religious culture pervaded through the church.

The Medieval theatrical performances played a crucial role to spread the doctrines of Christianity. You must know that the form of the Medieval drama was religious in its fervour. The three dominant forms were the Mystery Plays that dealt with the Biblical stories; the Miracle Plays that dealt with the dramatised accounts of the lives or the episodes from the life of saints, and the Morality Plays that were based on the dramatisation of abstract condition. The morality plays dramatised the conflict between Good and Evil, spirituality and corruption, salvation and damnation and were presented in an allegorical mode where the God, spirituality, salvation etc. gained victory over Evil, damnation, corruption and so on. Thus, you can see that even the theatrical forms indirectly helped in spreading Christian values and belief systems.

All these had pervaded the Medieval culture which in turn possessed the religious values of Christianity.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 8: What role did the Church play in promoting a religious culture in Medieval England?

Q 9: What are the three major dramatic forms that developed under the rubrics of the Church?

3.6 THEOLOGY AND INTELLECTUAL ACTIVITIES

No aspect of Medieval Christianity has been more influential than the Medieval thought, especially the philosophy and theology of Scholasticism, whose outstanding exponent was Sir Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274). The word Scholasticism came from the Latin word 'Schola' meaning 'school'. It refers to the methods of thinking and speaking which were the legacies of the Medieval schools. These schools taught three main subjects: grammar, logic and rhetoric. Grammar taught the students to speak and write correctly, logic taught them how to present a reasoned argument and rhetoric provided them with the techniques they needed to win their case. However, Scholasticism was more than simply a method of education. The Scholastics sought to integrate the philosophy of Aristotle with the theology of the church, so that the Christian faith could be systematised into a logical and rationally coherent body of thought. Their stress was scientific and objective. The theology of Scholasticism was an effort to harmonise the doctrinal tradition inherited from the Fathers of the early church and to relate these traditions to the intellectual achievements of classical antiquity.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

It was seen that many of the early Church Fathers, both in the East and the West, had developed their theologies under the influence of the Platonic modes of thought. The reinterpretation of these theologies by the Scholastics required that the doctrinal content of the tradition be disengaged from the metaphysical assumptions of Platonism. For this purpose, the recovery of Aristotle, first through the influence of Aristotelian philosophers and theologians and then through the translation and the study of the authentic texts of Aristotle himself seemed providential to the Scholastic theologians.

This shift towards the thought and philosophy of Aristotle helped the theologians manage to combine a fidelity to scripture and tradition with a positive, but critical, attitude towards the 'natural' mind. Thus, scholasticism

is regarded as a landmark both in the history of Christianity as well as of Western culture as a symbol of the Christianisation of the society and culture. Thus, you can see that the aim of the Scholastic theologians was to reconcile Christian doctrine and human reason and to arrange the teachings of the church in an orderly system.

There is no doubt about the fact that the Church shaped the worldview of the Medieval men. The monks and priests were the only literate people who imparted learning in the churches and monasteries. During that period, almost three to four hundred grammar schools were spread all over England for the education of the clerks. The subjects that they taught were grammar, arithmetic, logic and theology. Many universities were started in Italy and France. In England, philosophy and theology were taught in Latin in Cambridge and Oxford Universities. In Chaucer's times, Oxford was the intellectual centre of England. Wycliffe's influence was a prominent factor in Oxford, until he was driven out by the interference of the Bishops and King with the independent nature of University. In Oxford, there were two academic groups, The Regular Clergy and The Secular Clergy. The Regular were the monks and friars, whose convents were attached to the university. On the other hand, the Secular, who regarded themselves as part of the University proper, consisted of secular clergy, priests, deacons and clerks in lower order. This group was first organised by academicians and then by the clergies. Learning had been rendered by hand copied books and few libraries. However, the church had narrowed down the possibilities of advancement in learning. The church education made students narrow-minded and they were fit to become only monks. Scientific reasoning was discouraged and belief in magic, superstition and witch-craft became common. Any attempt to question the Church brought severe punishment. The university students had no access to laboratories or well stocked libraries. Subjects like History, Literature and Science were ignored. Studies of Classical Latin were available only to the Churchmen.

A common Medieval student had got very little opportunity to read books. Most of the time, they left education without acquiring a degree. A student lived a much undisciplined life. The authorities of the universities,

on the other hand, under the influence of the follies of Church authority and the State, forbade athletic exercises among the youths. However, these evils had got the much awaited remedy through the establishment of colleges. In the late 13th century, several colleges had been founded at Oxford and Cambridge. The college system gradually struck root in England and flourished in an unprecedented manner. The Medieval church played an important role in the evolution of European civilization. Thus, the Medieval church provided considerable provision for education in Latin. It created the base of the Western system of education through the schools, monasteries, cathedrals and convents. The church was also responsible for the system of schools even after the Reformation.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 10: Reflect on the term 'Scholasticism'? What role did it play in society?

Q 11: Discuss the conditions of learning prevalent during the Medieval period.

Q 12: What were the constraints faced by a common student?



3.7 LET US SUM UP

By now, you must have gained enough ideas about the history and role of the church in shaping the worldview of the Medieval society. You have read that Christianity emerged with the religious preaching of Jesus, the testimony of the scriptures as interpreted by the life of Jesus and the teachings of His Apostles, which were documented in the Bible. Through the Church system, Christianity got organised and marked its dominion all over Europe by the time of the Norman Conquest in 1066. Gradually, the church occupied the most important place as it was believed to have derived its power from God and hence, the people were more inclined to follow its power and authenticity. The church provided a sense of order through a

belief system that encouraged people to work for its development. It gave the people a structure to work from within. It exercised its power that attracted reverence as well as awe from the common mass. A religious culture was finally established through the institution of the church. The philosophy and theology of Scholasticism was very much influential during the Medieval period. The Scholastics sought to integrate the philosophy of Aristotle with the theology of the church, so that the Christian faith could be systematised into a logical and rationally coherent body of thought.



3.8 FURTHER READING

Brown, Peter. (ed). (2007). A *Companion to Medieval English Literature and Culture. 1350 1500.* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Choudhury, Bibhash. (2005). *English Social and Cultural History: An Introductory Guide and Glossary.* New Delhi: Prentice Hall of India.

Sanders, Andrew. (2000). *The Short Oxford History of English Literature.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Scanlon, Larry. (ed). (2009). The *Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Literature 1100–1500.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Trevelyan, G. M. (1994). English *Social History: A Survey of Six Centuries.* Hyderabad, Orient Longman.

3.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q No 1: Jesus challenged the established religious authorities to repent from their self-righteousness and hypocrisy… …the Kingdom of God is rooted in service and love… …His teachings stirred the hearts of people and created instability which the Jewish religious authorities feared.

Ans to Q No 2: Initially, Christianity was seen as a threat to the Roman Empire… …this resulted in the persecution of the early Christians…

…Emperor Constantine's legalisation of Christianity… …his successors too were Christians… …so Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire.

Ans to Q No 3: Jesus challenged strict religious doctrines with the service and love of men… …after him, His disciples spread his teachings… …early Christians were persecuted… …Constantine legalised Christianity… …it became organized by the time of the Norman Conquest of 1066.

Ans to Q No 4: Jesus taught about the will of God… ….the 'new covenant' of forgiveness and love… …to see that men suffer the pain and futility of life due to the sin… …he proclaimed his sacrifice for the humankind.

Ans to Q No 5: The Medieval church provided a sense of order through a belief system… …it was an important factor of the average man's life… …it was responsible for the spread of education during the Medieval period… …it spread the religious culture among the masses.

Ans to Q No 6: The secular interest of the clergy… …Neglect of the Spiritual Courts… …the supremacy of the Parish Priest… …The Wandering Friars… …corruption in the monasteries etc.

Ans to Q No 7: The Roman Church and the English rulers were always involved in conflicts… …this was mainly because the English monarchy took Pope under its jurisdiction, while Pope saw the monarch as a member of the church, therefore subject to the rule of God through the Popes…. … there emerged movements that proclaimed the freedom of the church from state control.

Ans to Q No 8: The Church made people maintain religious conduct crucial for domestic life… …the faith and the daily conduct of the people were directed by the sacraments… …Medieval dramatic performances led the common people towards the life of Jesus and saints.

Ans to Q No 9: Mystery Plays… …Miracle Plays… …Morality Plays.

Ans to Q No 10: The term is derived from the Latin word 'Schola'… …refers to the methods of thought by the Medieval schools… …grammar, logic and rhetoric were the three main areas… …Scholasticism

christianised contemporary society and culture… …it sought to reconcile Christian doctrines with human reason.

Ans to Q No 11: Monks and priests were the only literate people who imparted learning in churches and monasteries… …in Oxford, there were two academic groups—The Regular Clergy and The Secular Clergy… …however, the church had narrowed down the possibilities of advancement in learning.

Ans to Q No 12: They got little opportunity to read books… …university authorities under the influence of the Church authority and the State forbade athletic exercises among the youths… …most of the time, a students left his education without acquiring a degree.



3.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss the history of Christianity with special emphasis on its emergence in England during the Medieval period.

Q 2: Trace the role of the church on the life and faith of the Medieval men.

Q 3: Describe the intellectual activities that are found during the Medieval period.

Q 4: What do you mean by the term ‘Scholasticism’? How did it influence the theological and intellectual activities of Medieval England?

Q 5: Do you think that whatever the church did was good for the Medieval society? If not, mention some of the corrupt and ill practices under the system of the church.

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UNIT 4: RENAISSANCE HUMANISM

UNIT STRUCTURE

4.1 Learning Objectives

4.2 Introduction

4.3 History of the Renaissance

4.4 Humanism and Renaissance Thought

4.5 The Renaissance Literature

4.6 Renaissance and the Exploration of New Worlds

4.7 Let us Sum up

4.8 Further Reading

4.9 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

4.10 Possible Questions

4.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- deliberate on the idea of the Renaissance
- trace the beginning of the Renaissance in Italy
- discuss Humanism and its association with the Renaissance
- explain the spirit of the English Renaissance
- locate the elements of colonisation in the geographical discovery made during the Renaissance period

4.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the last unit of this Block. In this unit, you will be introduced to the concept of Renaissance and Renaissance Humanism. The term Renaissance (meaning rebirth) is broadly understood to denote a new era in the history of Western civilization at the end of the Medieval Ages. It is supposed to be characterised by a great "revival" of learning or of the arts. The concept of a new age derives mainly from the writings of 19th century writers like Jules Michelet, J.A. Symonds and above all Jacob Burckhardt whose classic essay "The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy" (1860)

continues to exercise a lot of influence in the subsequent discussions of the term Renaissance. The term Humanism, on the other hand, is derived from the 16th century phenomenon that emerged out of the word 'humanist' or 'humanities'—which included the study of grammar, rhetoric, history, poetry and moral philosophy. This study was sought to be distinguished from that of fields like mathematics, natural philosophy, and theology, which were less concerned about the moral and imaginative aspects, and activities of man. Humanism added a great impetus to Renaissance scholarship as the humanists scholars edited and expounded many ancient Greek and Latin texts, which intellectually contributed to the development of materials and ideas in European Renaissance. In this unit, we shall discuss some of the important issues related to the Renaissance and Humanism in general.

4.3 HISTORY OF THE RENAISSANCE

What is meant by the term "Renaissance"? The famous nineteenth-century historian of the Renaissance, Jacob Burckhardt in his book *The Discovery of the World and of Man* describes the essential spirit of the movement like the following:

"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 coloured by that influence. But, the power of conception and representation lay in the age and in the people."

However, the Renaissance is often described as the 'rebirth' of man from the darkness of the Middle Ages. It is believed to have emerged in Italy during the 14th century and it continued to exert its influence in Western Europe throughout the 15th and 16th centuries. The nature of the 'rebirth'

has been variously described. It is often said that Renaissance means 'rebirth' of man as an earthly being. The dominance of the church in the Middle Ages led to a denigration of man's earthly existence. There was more emphasis on the 'after-life', which a man has to prepare through a life of piety and devotion to the teachings of the scriptures. With the so-called rediscovery of the works of classical antiquity, there was a change in this attitude in the later Middle Ages. People began to believe, as did the ancient Greeks and Romans, that man's life on earth has an importance of its own, that he should fulfil himself on earth and let the hereafter take care of itself. Secular and worldly interests gradually began to predominate over religious and otherworldly preoccupations. The church in the preceding age had stressed the social obligations of man. However, following the Renaissance, the spirit of individualism also began to prevail.

Italy is often considered the birthplace of the Renaissance. There is much speculation as to why the Renaissance began in Italy and not elsewhere. The Renaissance was almost exclusively an urban phenomenon with its leaders springing from the bourgeoisie background with enough money to be able to afford a life of leisure and cultivate a taste for literature and the arts. Northern Italy, during the high Middle Ages, had developed numerous centres of urban life, which were self-governing. Several other European cities existed around the same time. However, at no time, did the sense of individualism run so high as in the Italian cities. Again, these European cities lacked the stimulus that was very strong in Italy—the desire to emulate the achievements of the Romans, their personal ancestors. From Italy, the Renaissance spread to other cities of Europe. When travellers from the North visited Italy, it was impossible for them not to be influenced by the culture of the Italian cities. The new learning made its way into the Universities, which were the main seats of learning in Germany and elsewhere. However, the Renaissance spirit was never the same elsewhere as in Italy. Everywhere the native genius of the people allowed the new culture to stimulate them to new efforts in keeping with their own culture and traditions. German and French painting for instance, retained their own distinctive characteristics while making use of Italian technical inventions. Thus, it is interesting to study, country by country, the use made by the

native writers and artists of the lead offered by Italy. You must remember that the period of the Renaissance is also one of great painters and sculptors.

The Renaissance in Europe is remembered for the great development in the sphere of the various arts and sciences. Architecture, sculpture, and painting flourished greatly contributing to the general celebration of life. Painting was particularly famous. The period saw the emergence of some of the greatest painters of all times like Giotto, Leonardo da Vinci, Michael Angelo, and Raphael. Da Vinci's 'The Last Supper' and 'Monalisa' are quite well known throughout the world. Raphael was known for his 'Madonna' paintings and the angels. Most of the painters chose their subjects from religion. They grappled with many problems, which concern painters of the modern age: how to create a painting, which is an artistic and satisfying whole as a picture, how, to give the illusion of three-dimension in a two-dimension medium. They created masterpieces, which, with the Medieval cathedral, constitute some of the chief artistic glories of the Western civilization.

So far as sculpture is concerned, there was a renewed interest in and appreciation of the human body whose inherent beauty could not be stressed in the Medieval age as it was the age of contempt for the body and all its attributes. The ancient taboos, which required the human form to be fully clothed, lost their urgency during the Renaissance. Many were the patrons who desired that their own form and features should be perpetuated in bronze or stone as a contribution to their eternal fame. There was also opportunity for sculpture in the great Renaissance churches, which had plenty of space available for all kinds of decoration. The greatest sculptor of the time was Michael Angelo, one of the universal geniuses of the Renaissance skilled in architecture, painting, poetry as well as sculpture. Angelo's magnificent sculptural paintings are seen in the Sistine Chapel. His great figures show his understanding of human life—its joys and sorrows, its exaltations and depressions. In the field of literature, the renewed interest in classical models stimulated the intellect and imagination of contemporary writers and scholars. Wonderful artistic works in poetry, drama and lyrics mark the significance of the Renaissance ideals.

The foundations of modern science were also laid during the Renaissance. The universities of Italy were far ahead of all other universities,

and it is from Italy that many of the great physicians and teachers of medicine and anatomy went out to the rest of Europe. Leonardo da Vinci is by far the greatest scientific name of the Renaissance. He was interested in everything pertaining to human beings and their world. He pondered over how the knowledge available could be put to use, and how certain remarkable theories could be practically useful. During this period, England made direct contributions to experimental science with Gilbert's work on magnetism in 1600 and William Harvey's work on the circulation of blood in 1618. It may be mentioned here that the impulse during the Renaissance was to master nature. Among the technological achievements of the period, the most important was the invention of printing, with movable types, around the mid-15th century by Johann Gutenberg in Germany. Soon this invention reached out to other countries of Europe including England. By 1500, the presses of Europe had produced some 6,000,000 books. It was the printing press, which gave wide circulation to the ideas, associated with the Renaissance, and prepared the ground for the Reformation. The Scientific Revolution, which was a collaborative effort of the international community, would never have happened at all without the printing press. The invention of printing ushered in a communication revolution and transformed the conditions of life.



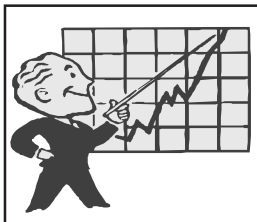
LET US KNOW

From the examples and references in this section, it is actually possible on our part to identify a number of events and discoveries, which visibly affected radical and distinctive changes in the beliefs, productions and manners of human life in Europe during the time of the Renaissance.

We should always feel indebted 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 1476. He was a merchant of repute of the London Mercers' company. However, 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. The first English book printed by Caxton in Bruges was

"The Raquel of the Histories of Troy" in 1475. Caxton also printed Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* in the initial years itself.

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.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What do you mean by the term 'Renaissance'?

Q 2: How did the Renaissance begin in Italy?

Q 3: What were the influences of the Renaissance on the arts?

Q 4: Name some of the scientific inventions of the Renaissance period.

Q 5: What kind of views did the Renaissance painters uphold?

Q 6: What role did Caxton's Printing Press play during the Renaissance?

4.4 HUMANISM AND RENAISSANCE THOUGHT

"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 15th and 16th 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. Humanism in a broader perspective means the cultivation of the human personality to the fullest sense possible, the regarding of humans as earthly creatures and not exclusively as candidates for salvation. The Greeks in this sense were humanists, and some of the better-educated Romans like Cicero who were influenced by the Greek culture. In a narrow perspective, it means cultivation of the classics or the humanities. Scholars

who studied the work of the Greek and Latin poets, dramatists, philosophers, historians, and rhetoricians were known as the humanists. The Greek texts contained the elements of spiritual freedom and intellectual culture, which the ancient Greeks and Romans believed in and which were revived during the Renaissance. Humanism instituted a new and distinctively modern notion of human individuality. Most of the humanists were travellers who went from place to place spreading their ideas. Printing helped them to give their ideas wider circulation.

The humanist curriculum laid a lot of stress on public speaking; it was believed that knowledge is inert unless it is shared. "Language shows a man. Speak that I may see thee" said Ben Jonson. The notion of a private self was alien to humanist thinking. Man was considered a speaking animal, existing in the commonality of linguistic exchange, not in the interiority of private thought. The humanist devotion to dialogue is seen in Thomas More's *Utopia* and Castiglione's *The Courtier* which weaves a fictional dialogue around actual people and events. Humanism is overall a secular and worldly philosophy. It sought to dignify and ennoble man. Pico della Mirandola's *Oration on the Dignity of Man* is a manifesto of Renaissance Humanism. Apart from Mirandola, some of the other outstanding humanists were Erasmus, Thomas More and Montaigne.



LET US KNOW

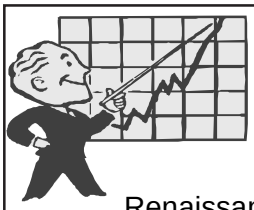
Pico della Mirandola in his *Oration* gave fine expression to the ideal of man's latent, powers and his ability to create himself in whatever mould he would: "Restrained by no narrow bounds, according to thy own free will…thou, thy own free maker and molder, mayest fashion thyself in whatever manner thou likest best…. To man, at his birth, the Father gave seeds of all variety and germs of every form of life."

In their more extreme forms, Humanism regarded man as the crown of creation, a sentiment voiced by Hamlet in Shakespeare's play *Hamlet: "*What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason! how infinite in faculties! in form and moving, how express and admirable! in action, how like an

angel! in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals!"

During the Renaissance, there was a challenge to Aristotle's authority and a desire to arrive at scientific truth through an exercise of human intellect on which the Renaissance scholars reposed supreme confidence. Besides the mathematical theorists of science, there emerged during the Renaissance numerous medical men, navigators, land surveyors, and mining engineers, whose learning mingled as in case of Dr. Faustus (in Marlowe's play) with his belief in astrology and alchemy, in magic and witchcraft. Belief in magic and witchcraft is amply borne out by the plays of Shakespeare. Francis Bacon during this period attempted to extricate science from its philosophical entanglements and elaborated a scientific method comprising of generalisations founded on experiment.

Therefore, Renaissance Humanism mostly assumed the central position of human beings in the universe, always emphasised the study of the morally rich classical, imaginative and speculative literature and often took side with human 'Reason' in place of passion and 'animal' instincts. Many so-called humanists even stressed the need for the developments of the individual's physical, mental, artistic and moral powers.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: Mention the common assumptions of Renaissance Humanism.

Q 8: Mention some of the humanist works of the Renaissance?

Q 9: What, according to you, was the main assumption of Humanism?

4.5 THE RENAISSANCE LITERATURE

The Renaissance in England coincided with the reign of Queen Elizabeth. You have already read that the humanist ideals reached England partly from the classics, partly from Italy. Roger Ascham's *Schoolmaster*

(1570) and Sir Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans* (1579) were two very formative books for Shakespeare's generation. Ascham despised scholasticism and urged that Englishmen should strive for 'praise unto themselves, and…profit to others' by joining action with learning like Julius Caesar and he proposed his programme of classical studies in *The Schoolmaster* to produce a learned preacher or a civil gentleman. North praised Plutarch for reproducing the lives of 'the best persons, of the famous nations of the world.' A new set of values began to enter the society with this veneration of classical antiquity. Other books, which influenced the Elizabethans, are Baldassare Castiglione's *The Courtier* and Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince* which tried to work out techniques for the individual to master fortune. Machiavelli's influence can be traced through Marlowe's play *Jew of Malta*, which opens with a prologue, put into the mouth of Machiavelli.

In the Medieval age, emphasis was laid on the group or the community as a whole. Assertion of the self, the seeking of wealth, worldly success, and love of women were frowned upon by the clerics. The titles of many of the plays written during the Medieval times emphasise the man in general or abstract attributes, for instance *Everyman* and *The Castle of Perseverance*. During the Renaissance, however, the individual became important. A number of handbooks on individual psychology came to be written culminating in Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621). The tragedies of Shakespeare are based on individuals—Macbeth, Hamlet, King Lear, Othello. Thus, the central theme of Elizabethan literature is derived from the clash between individuals and the traditional sense of a moral and social order. Human beings came to be viewed as creatures in which the 'bodily fluids' (humours) could break into disease and unruly passion if not tempered by the faculties of the soul. Ben Jonson's *Every Man in His Humour was* based on the theory of 'Humours'.

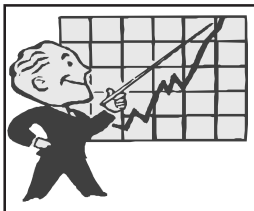
The Renaissance manifested itself in England mainly as the efflorescence of literature—drama, lyrics, prose. Drama is the chief glory of the period as the Elizabethan public was more accustomed to seeing and listening than to reading; more used to group-life than to privacy. The

Queen patronised the theatre and other arts, and the leading writers of the period dedicated their works to her. The new literature of the age was thus centred on the Crown. Drama became filled with pomp and pageantry. The Queen could, in spite of the factionalism and dissensions of the period, confer some stability on the nation. The defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 at the hands of the English forces filled the Englishmen with patriotic pride, which manifested itself in renewed interest in the history of the nation and the writing of a long series of national chronicle plays which embodied the strongest unifying sentiment for the London public. Shakespeare who wrote around nine history plays based on the patriotic chronicles of Holinshed was the greatest contributor to the genre.

The influence of Italy on England is seen in the writing of sonnets during the period after the great Italian humanist Petrarch. In his sonnets, Petrarch celebrated his love for Laura. Shakespeare, Philip Sidney, Sir Thomas Wyatt all became famous for their sonnets which were either written on the Petrarchan mould of eight lines (known as the octet) and six lines (the sestet) or on the English variation of three quatrains (three four lined stanzas) and a concluding couplet. This celebration of love for a woman was quite unthinkable in the preceding age. A number of other lyrics often based on the theme of love were also written during the period. These lyrics were set to music, and it has often been remarked that the Elizabethan age was a cage of singing birds. The national love for music found expression in Thomas Campion's songs, in stately poems of ceremony like Spenser's 'Spousal Verse', *Prothalamion*, and Davies' *Orchestra, A Poem of Dancing* (1596). Music also figures in Shakespearean drama, which has an opera-like quality.

You should also note that the classical influence is seen in all the major literary genres, which were popular during the period. For example, Seneca's tragedies were translated during the Elizabethan age. These tragedies of passion and bloodshed were to influence the tragedies of Shakespeare as well those of the Jacobean period. As far as prose was concerned, Seneca and Cicero became the models. Perhaps, following the Senecan style of writing, pithy and packed with meaning, Bacon wrote

essays on a variety of topics like truth, friendship, revenge etc. and are intended to give practical advice to men and women in the conduct of their day to day affairs. The Ciceronian style used by Hooker is verbose, full of subordinate clauses with the sense rounded off at the end. As I have already mentioned, the Elizabethan culture was greatly influenced by the pull of the active, public life. In the universities and in literature, it gave prominence to the study of public speaking, which became one of the primary aims in the education of a gentleman. The rhetorical training of humanism and the ideal of ordered display were woven into the texture of common life signs of which were seen in the lavish costume of the gentry and their elaborate country houses with chimneys and extensive panes of glass. Though the Elizabethans did not show much interest in paintings (apart from miniatures) they took great pains over their houses and gardens and their family monuments. Therefore, you will do well if you consider all such developments while studying the Renaissance period and the literary works produced during that time.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 10: How did the patronage of Queen Elizabeth mark an unprecedented development in Renaissance literature?

Q 11: Assess the importance of Roger Ascham's *Schoolmaster* and Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's *Lives.*

4.6 RENAISSANCE AND THE EXPLORATION OF NEW WORLDS

The Renaissance has also been described as the renascence of wonder. It was during the Renaissance that adventurous men from several nations like Spain and Portugal besides England felt the urge to explore the world. Their efforts led to the discovery of sea routes to different lands hitherto unknown to the Europeans. Perhaps, we can make the first reference to Christopher Columbus who in 1492 sailed towards the West to find a

new commercial route to the East and discovered a new continent called America. Such explorations of new continents, its native populations and subsequent settlement by Europeans gave new raw materials to literary imagination as displayed in Shakespearean play *The Tempest*. In 1498, Vasco da Gama discovered a new sea route to India. As far as England was concerned, Queen Elizabeth patronized explorers, those men who dared to venture out into the uncharted waters to discover new worlds and explore business avenues. Encouraged by the Queen, Drake, Magellan, Hawkins, and Raleigh opened a new era of England's commerce with many different parts of the world.



LET US KNOW

You will later learn that in the Renaissance zeal to explore new worlds lie the seeds of colonialism. The desire to have a share in the lucrative trade with the East finally led to the settlement and exploitation by European people in later times.

A number of companies were formed during Queen Elizabeth's reign namely—The Virginia Company, The Russia Company, The East India Company etc. to further England's trade with other parts of the world. The East India Company, for instance, became famous for its operations in India, which became a source for various raw materials for English industries and a market for its finished products. Though no colonies were set up during this period, yet the first seeds of colonisation were definitely sown. The companies, which were set up primarily for the purposes of trade, went on to interfere in the politics of the land thus jeopardising the sovereignty of different parts of the world. Hawkins in his trip to Africa brought back a few hundred slaves who worked as servants in English households. The period marked England's and Europe's contact with the non-Europeans who were seen as the 'other'. A number of books were written on the fascinating voyages made as well as the newly discovered lands, the principal being Hakluyt's *Principall Navigations, Voyages and Discoveries of the English Nation*. The imagination of the Gughman was fired by the reports of strange peoples and the fabulous wealth of the newly discovered lands. The fascination with new lands is testified by the foreign settings of many of Shakespeare's

plays like *Hamlet* which is set in Denmark. The protagonist of Shakespeare's *Othello* is a Moor. So, you find that the newly explored lands found mentioning in many of the great literary works of the Renaissance.



4.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, you have read that the Renaissance marks the beginning of the modern period in western civilization in a number of ways. The humanistic ideals, on the other hand, are mainly derived from the study of classical literature that revolutionised different aspects of the lives of the people throughout Europe and led to an unprecedented development in the arts and the sciences the impact of which is seen until this date. From the different sections of this unit, you have now learnt to discuss the idea of the Renaissance and Humanism. You have also traced the beginning of the Renaissance in Italy and should be by now able to discuss how the spirit associated with the Renaissance saw its manifestation in England in various ways. This is also the period in which you can locate elements of colonialism with the many voyages of geographical discovery that also enabled the spread of the ideas of the Renaissance across the whole of Europe.



4.8 FURTHER READING

Abrams, M. H. (2003). *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Singapore: Thomson Asia Pte Ltd.

Briggs, Asa. (1999). *A Social History of England.* Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Trevelyan, G. M. (1994). English *Social History: A Survey of Six Centuries.* Hyderabad, Orient Longman.

4.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q No 1: Mainly a 16th century phenomenon characterised by a 'rebirth' from darkness… …rediscovery of classical works… …predominance

of secular interests over religious matters… …birth of individual spirit… …birth of scientific temperament… …geographical exploration.

Ans to Q No 2: The Italians desired to emulate the achievements of the Great Romans… …it was an urbane phenomenon… …newly rich class had time and money to cultivate a taste for the arts and literature… …renaissance spirit was further enhanced by the concept of 'individualism.'

Ans to Q No 3: The Renaissance helped the developments in architecture, sculpture and painting…great painters grappled with the problems of 'modern' age… …sculptors emphasised the innermost beauty of the human body…classical models were revived in literature.

Ans to Q No 4: Gilbert's work on Magnetism… …Harvey's work on the Circulation of blood… …Gutenberg's invention of the Printing Press and so on…

Ans to Q No 5: Giotto, Leonardo da Vinci, Michael Angelo, and Raphael etc. were the greatest Renaissance painters… …they grappled with many problems like how to create an artistic painting… …how to give the illusion of three-dimension in a two dimension medium etc.

Ans to Q No 6: William Caxton, a merchant of repute, established the press in Westminster in 1476… …he understood the English culture well… …he had a missionary zeal for the dissemination of ideas and knowledge through the medium of good and useful books… …*The Raquel of the Histories of Troy* was the first English printed book.

Ans to Q No 7: Human beings are central in the universe… …emphasis on the study of the morally rich classical works… …human 'Reason' should replace passion and 'animal' instincts… …developments of the individual's physical, mental, artistic and moral powers.

Ans to Q No 8: Thomas More's *Utopia… ...* Shakespeare's *Hamlet… ...* Pico della Mirandola's *Oration on the Dignity of Man… …*Castiglione's *The Courtier etc.*

Ans to Q No 9: Humanism assumed the central position of human beings in the universe… …the humanists believed that 'Reason' purified human beings from 'animal' instincts… …many humanists stressed

the developments of the individual's physical, mental, artistic and moral powers.

Ans to Q No 10: The Queen had great liking for the theatre and other arts… …many leading writers dedicated their works to her… …drama became filled with pomp and pageantry… …the Queen conferred some stability on the nation… …the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588……patriotic pride manifested itself in renewed interest in the history of the nation… …writers like Shakespeare wrote a series of national chronicle plays.

Ans to Q No 11: These are two formative books… Ascham despised scholasticism… …he urged Englishmen to 'praise unto themselves, and…profit to others'… … North praised Plutarch for reproducing the lives of 'the best persons, of the famous nations of the world'… …a new set of values entered the minds of the reading public.



4.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: What factors, apart from the celebrated rediscovery of classical learning, constitute the Renaissance?

Q 2: How do the leading writers of the Elizabethan period embody the ideals of the Renaissance in their literary works?

Q 3: What is Humanism? Show your acquaintance with some of the leading Italian and English humanists.

Q 4: Write a note on the maritime successes of England during the Renaissance touching on their impact on literature.

Q 5: What effects did the new geographical exploration have on the Renaissance writers?

Q 6: How the Renaissance impact literary activities of the time. Write with reference to some of the important literary texts.

Q 7: Provide an account of the greatest achievements of the Renaissance.

Q 8: Explain how the exploration of New Worlds during the time of the Renaissance paved the way for colonial enterprise in later periods.

*** ***** ***



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