

# Renaissance

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The term 'Renaissance' literally means rebirth or revival. It was a complex transitional movement which took place in Europe between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. It stressed on rational thinking and humanism. During the Renaissance, many developments took place in literature, art, architecture, science and technology. It marked the beginning of the modern era in Europe.

## Causes Leading to the Beginning of the Renaissance

### Fall of Constantinople

- In 1453 CE, Constantinople was occupied by the Ottoman Turks. Many Greek scholars residing in Constantinople fled to Italy and to other European countries with rare manuscripts related to the Roman and Greek empires.
- Rome became the centre of Greek culture. As a result, people began to study about the Greek and Roman philosophy, science, art and literature. This paved the way to the beginning of the Renaissance.

### Decline of Feudalism

- Feudalism was a political system where the kings granted lands to the nobles in return for their military services in case of wars. The king gave estates to the nobles known as the dukes and the earls. The earls distributed a part of their land to the lesser lords known as barons.
- While the dukes and earls owed allegiance directly to the king, the barons owed allegiance to the dukes and earls. The feudal lords did not cultivate their lands and instead gave it to the peasants for cultivation.
- This structure of society hindered social mobility and progress. The decline in feudalism in the 13th and 14th centuries gave impetus to free thinking and favoured the growth of new learning.

### New Trade Routes

- Portugal and Spain played an important part in leading geographical explorations and discovered new routes.
- The capture of Constantinople by the Turks led to the closing of land routes between the West and the East. The European traders thus embarked on finding new sea routes to Asia and Africa.
- Bartholomew Diaz reached the Cape of Good Hope. Columbus discovered America in 1492, and Vasco da Gama sailed to Calicut and discovered the route to India in 1498. Ferdinand Magellan made a voyage around the world.
- The discovery of these sea routes not only encouraged trade but also created the spirit of adventure.

### Spirit of Enquiry

- The Church was the most powerful institution in the mediaeval period. People had to accept all the theories and principles which were formulated by the Church. People were not allowed to think independently. However, several scholars began to discard the ideas of the mediaeval period. They began to question the authority of the Church. Factors which were responsible for the development of the spirit of enquiry were
  - Thinkers such as Roger Bacon and Thomas Aquinas laid great stress on reasoning and asked the people to develop their own thinking and not to accept the dogmas of the Church blindly.
  - The Crusades were the religious wars which were fought between the Christians and the Muslims for controlling the Holy Land in and near Jerusalem. When the Europeans went to fight wars against the Muslims, they came into contact with the Arabs who had made great advancement in science, mathematics and art. This led to the beginning of the Renaissance in Europe.
  - Inventions and discoveries were made in science and technology during the period. Galileo invented the telescope and observed the movement of the stars and planets. Copernicus proved

that it is the Earth which moves around the Sun and not *vice versa*. These discoveries broadened the outlook of the people and put an end to the old beliefs and traditions which were enforced upon them by the Church.

## Invention of the Printing Press

- Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press in the 15th century. This helped in the publication of many books and the translation of the Bible into many languages.
- After reading these books, people began to question the authority and the beliefs of the Church. The spread of the spirit of scientific inquiry marked the beginning of the Renaissance in Europe.



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## Principles of the Renaissance

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Main principles of the Renaissance were:

**Humanism:** It is a rational outlook which gives prime importance to humans rather than religious or supernatural matters. Humanists were the Renaissance thinkers who were concerned with secular and human subjects rather than religious subjects. They shifted the focus of study and attention from religion to humans and nature. They believed that all human beings should have the right to express their opinion freely, to develop their goals and to find happiness in life.

**Glorification of Human Form:** The Renaissance artists and scholars glorified the human body. Although the artists selected their subjects from the Bible, they portrayed the human form in all its earthly beauty and vigour.

**Spirit of Enquiry:** The Renaissance scholars questioned the dogmas which were propagated by the Catholic Church. The spirit of inquiry drove the people to discover new knowledge based on rationalism. It also inspired the people to discover new lands.

## Beginning of the Renaissance

The Renaissance first began in Italy and then spread to other parts of the world. It began in Italy because of the following reasons:

- After the Fall of Constantinople in 1453 AD, many Greek and Roman scholars fled to Italy with their rare manuscripts. This led to the beginning of the Renaissance in Italy.
- Italy was the seat of the glorious Roman Empire where scholars could find remains and traits of the Roman Empire. Thus, they were attracted to the country. Further research into this field instilled a spirit of enquiry and enthusiasm among the people of Italy.
- The wealth accumulated by Italy as a result of trade with the East also led to the beginning of the Renaissance. The wealthy merchants patronised artists and litterateurs which resulted in the revival of classical culture and literature.
- The Crusades and the discovery of distant lands brought the Italians into contact with the East. This instilled the spirit of adventurism among them, marking the beginning of the Renaissance.

# Impact of the Renaissance

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The Renaissance impacted almost every aspect of life. It influenced art, literature, philosophy, science and religion.

## Art

The Renaissance led to the rebirth of art, architecture and sculpture. The Renaissance artists adopted new methods such as oil colours, fresco wall paintings and wood cuts. They also studied human anatomy to understand human gestures and expressions.

### Painting

The Renaissance painters produced some of the greatest masterpieces of art during this period. They adopted a humanistic and secular approach in their paintings. Some of the greatest painters of the period were

#### Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519)

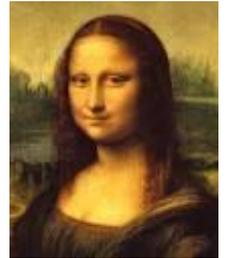
He was not only a great painter but also an accomplished musician and scientist. Some of his famous paintings are the 'Virgin of the Rocks', 'The Last Supper' and 'Mona Lisa'.

#### Michelangelo (1475–1564)

He was considered the most outstanding Renaissance artist because he was a painter, exceptional sculptor, architect and poet. He painted the fresco paintings on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. He was also the architect of St Peter's Cathedral. His 'Last Judgement' and 'The Fall of Man' are among the most famous works of art in the world.

#### Raphael (1483–1520)

One of his most famous paintings was 'Sistine Madonna'. He designed the St Peter's Cathedral.



Mona Lisa

## Sculpture

- Donatello was the first great sculpture of the Renaissance period. He made the bronze statue of David.
- Lorenzo Ghiberti was a famous Italian sculptor. He made two pairs of bronze doors for the Baptistry at Florence.
- Michelangelo sculpted the statue of David in Florence and the statue of Moses in Rome. He also sculpted the 'Pieta', a famous statue in Rome.

Many sculptors in Italy worked for the Popes and wealthy merchants to decorate churches and their homes. Later, these sculptors were invited to England, France and Spain. They took Renaissance art to these cities.

## Literature

One of the most important aspects of literature in the Renaissance was the use of local languages. Writers now began to focus on humanist themes in literature.

**Literature in Italy:** Machiavelli was a great political writer of Italy. He wrote 'The Prince'. Dante wrote 'Divine Comedy' which deals with the human soul. Petrarch wrote many sonnets and lyrics. He is called 'the Father of Humanism'.

**Literature in England:** Geoffrey Chaucer heralded the Renaissance literature in England. He is regarded as the 'Father of English Poetry'. 'Canterbury Tales' is his important piece of work. 'Utopia' was written by Thomas More. Other famous writers of the period were Francis Bacon, William Shakespeare, Ben Johnson and Marlow.

Martin Luther made important contributions to German literature. He translated the Bible into the German language. Cervantes was a Spanish writer who wrote Don Quixote. Michael De Montaigne and Francis Rabelais ushered a golden age in French literature.

## **Science**

The Renaissance marked the beginning of modern sciences. Earlier, the theories upheld by the Church were alone considered true. The scientists of the Renaissance period believed that all views on science should be based on observation and experimentation.

### **Astronomy**

- John Kepler proved that the Earth and other planets move round the Sun in elliptical orbits.
- Galileo invented the telescope and observed the movement of planets and stars.
- Sir Isaac Newton discovered gravity and propounded the law of gravitation.

### **Medical Sciences**

- Great discoveries were made in medical sciences. William Harvey was an English physician who discovered the circulation of blood from the heart to all parts of the body and back to the heart.
- Paracelsus proved a close connection between medicine and chemistry.
- Cordus prepared ether from alcohol and sulphuric acid. Helmont discovered carbon dioxide.

### **Mathematics**

- The Arabs spread the knowledge of Algebra and Indian numerals to the West.
- Stevin advocated the system of coins, weights and measures.

## **Consequences of the Renaissance**

- The Renaissance paved the way for the beginning of Reformation in England and Europe. People began to question the dogmas propagated by the Roman Catholic Church. They became critical of the rituals practised by the Church and insisted on its reformation. Later, the Roman Catholic Church was divided into Catholics and Protestants.
- In the mediaeval times, attention was paid to subjects which dealt with spirituality and theology. The Renaissance made man the centre of studies. Humanism became important during this period.
- The Renaissance led to the development of scientific outlook and rational spirit among the people. People now began to follow only those theories and principles which were based on observation, experimentation and rationalism.
- The Renaissance led to the evolution of the monarchical form of government in Europe. The powers of the Church declined during the Renaissance period as people began to discard the dogmas propagated by the Church. The feudal system also declined. This led to the rise of strong central monarchy.
- The Renaissance led to the development of new forms of paintings, art, sculpture and architecture.
- The decline in feudalism and the beginning of the Renaissance marked the rise of the middle class in Europe. The merchants, traders and rich peasants constituted the new middle class.
- The Renaissance led to the emergence of nationalism among the people and led to the progress of national literature. This led to the rise of nation states in Europe.
- After the fall of Constantinople, sailors and adventurers began to look for new sea routes to trade with Asia and Africa. Discovery of new sea and trade routes led to increased trade activities between the East and the West. This brought prosperity to Europe.