

## The transition from mediaeval to modern period

### Introduction

The transition from mediaeval to modern period was attended by a number of events that brought about significant changes. The earliest of these events was the intellectual and cultural movement which began in **Italy** and called the **Renaissance**. The study of Latin and Greek and classical literature was revived during the period.

**Reformation** was a religious movement of the sixteenth century that led to **Protestantism**. It had a tremendous impact on social, political and Economic life. As a result of the Reformation, Europe was divided between the Protestant countries of the north and the Catholic countries of the south. The movement back to the Roman Catholic Church is called the Counter Reformation.

Conditions in the later Middle Ages favoured the growth of royal power. Three different conditions developed in the later middle Ages which encouraged one man power in many parts of Europe

- (1) New methods of warfare
- (2) Town people willingly supported the man who could preserve law and order
- (3) Kings made unity possible.

The voyages of exploration and discovery in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries established new trade routes which linked Europe directly with the Whole world. Trade routes and colonial empires added to the wealth of Western Europe and made capitalism develop faster

### Renaissance- Rebirth of learning

- The **Renaissance** meaning rebirth of learning was a series of literary and cultural movements in the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries.
- These movements began in Italy and eventually expanded into Germany, France, England and other parts of Europe:
- **It marked the transition between mediaeval and modern Western Europe.**

The Renaissance began with the rediscovery of the Greco-Roman civilization, which had been generally neglected by the religious minded Christian mediaeval world.

- **It emphasised reason, a questioning attitude, and free inquiry, in contrast to the mediaeval concern with faith, authority, and tradition. The**
- The Renaissance viewed life not as a preparation for the hereafter, but as worthwhile for its own sake.
- It featured great achievements in literature, art and science. The Renaissance first started in Italy because the Italian cities were the centre of Greco-Roman culture. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Renaissance ideas began to spread from Italy to France, the German states, Holland, and England. The leaders of the Renaissance rejected many of the attitudes and ideas of the Middle Ages.

During the Middle Ages, for example, the most important branch of learning was **theology**. However, **Renaissance thinkers paid greater attention to the study of humanity**. They examined the great accomplishments of different cultures, particularly those of ancient Greece and Rome.

**Humanism** was the intellectual movement started in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and Humanism was the Renaissance spirit.

- Humanists are concerned not with religious matters but with everyday human problems. The humanist way of looking at life is marked by an interest in people.
- The new movement was closely tied to returning interest in classical learning of ancient Greece and Rome to use them as models.
- To understand the customs, laws and ideas of ancient Greece and Rome they studied the language of classical antiquity, i.e., ancient Greek and Latin and manuscripts.

### Renaissance scholars

#### The scholars from Italy

**Francesco Petrarch (1304-74)** - Petrarch became known for his poetry.

**Giovanni Boccaccio (1313 -75)** - Boccaccio for his collection of stories called the Decameron published in 1353.

- Both Petrarch and Boccaccio insisted that the duty of intellectuals was to concentrate on human problems. They sought that people could learn how to deal with their problems by studying the lives of individuals of the past.

#### Christian humanists

- Renaissance scholars in northern and western Europe were not as interested as the Italians in studying classical literature. Instead, they sought to apply humanistic methods to the study of Christianity. They were especially concerned with identifying and carefully editing Christian texts such as the Bible.
- These scholars became known as Christian humanists.
- Dutch humanist **Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536)** and An English **Sir Thomas More (1476-1538)** were the leading Christian humanists.

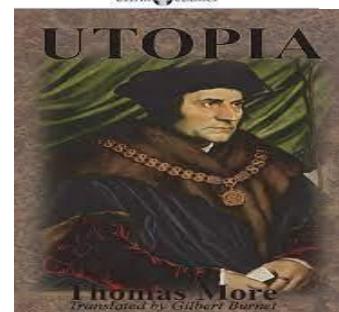
#### Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536)

Erasmus was born in the Netherlands, educated in Paris and travelled throughout Germany, England and Italy. He had a thorough knowledge of Latin and Greek. In his famous work called "**The Praise of Folly**" published in 1511,

He ridiculed **superstition, prejudice, upper privileges, and church abuses**. By exposing social evils, Erasmus encouraged people to think about reforms. He wrote **vigorously against narrow mindedness and intolerance and about the necessity of Justice and freedom**. He believed that these never could be gained by using violence but only by straight thinking and freedom to criticise ideas.



Collected Works of  
Desiderius Erasmus



UTOPIA  
Thomas More  
Translated by Gilbert Burnet

**Sir Thomas More** was born in England and devoted his life to serving his country. In his career, he dedicated himself to the principles that had inspired Erasmus. In his best known work, **Utopia** published in 1516, he portrayed an ideal state free from war, injustice, poverty and ignorance society.

## Revolution in Art, Literature and Drama

### Difference of Art between middle age and Renaissance

- During the Middle Ages painters and sculptors tried to give their works **spiritual quality**. They were not concerned with making their **subjects appear natural or life-like**. But Renaissance painters and sculptors wanted to portray people and nature realistically.
- Architects of the Middle Ages designed **huge cathedrals** to emphasise the majesty and grandeur of God. Renaissance architects designed **buildings on a smaller scale** to help make people aware of their own power and dignity.

During the early fourteenth century, the Florentine painter, **Giotto di Bondone** (1260 1337) portrayed nature realistically. Giotto attempted to create lifelike figures showing real emotions.

The sculptor **Donatello** (1386 - 1466) carved many figures of men on horseback. He is famous for his life-size statue of St. George in armour.

Arts of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries were dominated by three men. They were **Michelangelo, Raphael and Leonardo da Vinci**.

**Michelangelo** (1475 - 1564) was a many sided Renaissance man, excelled as painter, architect and poet.

- He has been called the **greatest sculptor in history**. Michelangelo was a master of portraying the human figure.
- For example his famous statue of the Israelite leader **Moses**, painted in 1516, gives an overwhelming impression of physical and spiritual power.



**Raphael** (1483 1520) painted a number of beautiful pictures. The Sistine Madonna is one of his greatest works.

**Leonardo da Vinci** (1452 1519) was the ideal Renaissance man. He was skilled as a painter, sculptor, architect, musician, engineer, and scientist.

- He painted **the Last Supper**, in 1497, and the portrait **Mona Lisa**, in 1503. Leonardo was one of the most searching minds in all history.
- Leonardo made careful drawings of human skeletons and muscles trying to discover how the body worked. Because of his inquiring mind, Leonardo has become a symbol of the Renaissance spirit of learning and intellectual curiosity.



**Dante Alighieri (1265 1321)** who wrote during the thirteenth century is often said to represent the transition in literature from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance.



- His great epic poem **La Divine Commedia (Divine Comedy)** written in 1308, reflects the powerful interest in all aspects of human life and behaviour.
- Dante established the use of contemporary Italian rather than Latin as the standard language of literature in Italy.
- During the sixteenth century, Italian literature produced a number of outstanding prose works. Among them is an Italian Nicolo Machiavelli's (1469 1527).
- In his book The '**Prince**', Machiavelli discussed ethics and government. The Prince" describes how rulers maintained their power by methods that ignored right or wrong; instead following the philosophy that "the end justifies the means."

**William Shakespeare** (1564 1616), an Englishman, is often considered as the greatest poet and playwright of all time. With sublime poetic insight and superb technique, Shakespeare probed deeply into human character. His best-known plays include Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, Julius Caesar and Macbeth.

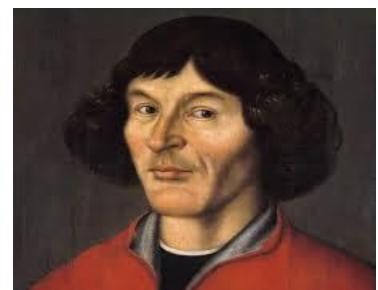


### Renaissance Scientific Achievements

The renaissance was built upon the existence of scientific writing of the Greeks and Romans. Renaissance scientists developed the scientific method for the existence of observation and experimentation.

- They challenged mediaeval superstition and the general acceptance of Aristotle's theories.
- They uncovered much knowledge of the physical world.
- Though it first encountered considerable opposition from those who favoured the continuation of the mediaeval religious beliefs, Renaissance science established a firm foundation for modern scientific progress.

Some of the famous Renaissance scientific writers were: A polish astronomer **Nicolas Copernicus (1473-1543)** disproved the Ptolemaic theory which claimed that the earth is the centre of the Universe.



Copernicus promulgated the now accepted theory that the sun is the centre of our solar system and the earth is merely one of the several planets revolving around the Sun.

An Italian astronomer and physicist Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) propounded the law of falling bodies and greatly improved the telescope. His observations confirmed the **Copernican theory**. An English physician **William Harvey (1578- 1657)** demonstrated that blood circulates through the body. His researches furthered the study of medicine. An English chemist and physicist Robert Boyle (1627 1691) discovered a law of gases that is fundamental to modern chemistry.



These Renaissance scholars challenged the old establishment rationalising their arguments on the basis of knowledge, which was based on **empirical evidence**. The works of literature, science, and arts of this time were the foundations for the future development of society and for the growth of **pursuit of wisdom**. The works of these intellectuals taught the importance of the pursuit of Wisdom as a means to engender and sustain the progress of human development.