



**MASTER OF ARTS**

**ENGLISH**

**CENTRE FOR OPEN AND  
DISTANCE LEARNING**

**(CODL)**



# **MEG 101: BRITISH SOCIAL HISTORY**

## **BLOCK I**

**CENTRE FOR OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING**

**TEZPUR UNIVERSITY (A CENTRAL UNIVERSITY)**

**TEZPUR, ASSAM -784028**

**INDIA**

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### **Objective**

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- **To undertake various research and academic activities for furtherance of distance education in the region.**
- **To contribute to conserve and promote cultural heritage, literature, traditional knowledge and environment conducting short programmes, workshops, seminars and research in interdisciplinary field.**

# **MEG 101: BRITISH SOCIAL HISTORY**



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**TEZPUR UNIVERSITY (A CENTRAL UNIVERSITY)**  
**TEZPUR, ASSAM-784028**  
**INDIA**

## **MEG-101: BRITISH SOCIAL HISTORY**

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# BLOCK I

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UNIT 1: WAR WITH FRANCE, CONFLICT WITH THE IRISH AND SCOTS

UNIT 2: FEUDALISM- MANOR AND PEASANT REVOLT

UNIT 3: CHURCH- WYCLIFFE AND LOLLARDS

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## COURSE INTRODUCTION

This course is designed with an intention to introduce the learners to the social and cultural history of Britain from the medieval age to the contemporary times. Why do learners of literature need to study social history? This is because literature does not exist in a vacuum. It is produced, circulated and consumed in a certain set of circumstances. This includes the political, economic and social. G M Trevelyan sums up beautifully this complex set of circumstances called social history as that which “includes the human as well as the economic relation of different classes to one another, the character of family and household life, the conditions of labour and of leisure, the attitude of man to nature, the culture of each age as it arose out of these general conditions of life” (*Social History: A Survey of Six Centuries, Chaucer to Queen Victoria*, 10). All the texts included in the various courses would be accompanied by a brief discussion on the socio-cultural background. However, in this course we will try to give you a broad overview of the major political and economic changes that impacted the British social history. It is difficult to cover in detail almost one millennium of history in one course and so this paper does not aim to be a complete guide. Instead it will help you to organize your further readings in this area.

**Module I**, comprising 3 units, discusses the Medieval period which extended roughly up to 1450 AD. The module includes various wars England fought and the changing social structure in England during medieval period. **Unit 1** deals with the prolonged war with France over territorial disputes; annexation of Ireland and Scotland and the resultant strife. **Unit 2** focuses on the feudal socio-cultural conditions of that period including manor and church life, while **Unit 3** discusses religious conflicts within the Church, and consequent protest from the people, notably the protest of Wycliffe and the Lollards; and the Peasant Revolt resulting from economic dissatisfaction. Each of the units discusses these issues in detail. We have also incorporated assessment questions as frequently as possible to allow the learners to know their progress in a particular topic.

**Module II** is on English Renaissance and Reformation which includes the period from the middle of the fifteenth century to the last part of the seventeenth century. Since the idea of Renaissance is European in origin, in **Unit 4** we have started our discussion briefly tracing its continental origins. This unit has a detailed discussion of Renaissance in England. **Unit 5** elaborates the wide range of expeditions and voyages that had taken place during this period, chiefly during Elizabethan Age. English expeditions consequently led to the beginning of colonialism in England which we have explained in this unit. Likewise, the Reformation in England also had parallel movements in the continental countries too. **Unit 6** will examine the complex but interlinked issues of religious and political strife between England and Spain and Continental powers and subsequent wave of reformation that had taken place.

**Module III** is about the Age of Enlightenment which covers most of eighteenth century England. Like the idea of Renaissance the Enlightenment was influenced by European thinkers. **Unit 7** will highlight the social, intellectual and political contexts that have shaped the Age of Enlightenment. The sense of enlightenment is epitomised by John Locke, David Hume, Thomas Jefferson, Immanuel Kant, Voltaire, Sir Isaac Newton etc. In **Unit 8** we have included these and the rise of political parties, Whigs and Tories and their impact through coffee houses and pamphlet wars on English social life. **Unit 9** gives you the idea of the beginning of colonialism that was rooted in the previous age. In this unit we have dealt with the expansion and consolidation of the exploration and scientific revolution which chiefly aided colonialism.

**Module IV** entitled the Age of Revolution deals with the last quarter of the eighteenth century and nineteenth century. This momentous period covers English social history starting from the French Revolution and includes the impact of Imperialism, the working class movements, Chartism, Debates about slavery and Industrial Revolution etc. Divided into 3 Units, **Unit 10, 11 and 12**, each of the units deal with the issues in detail.

**Module V** discusses the Modern and Contemporary age. The term ‘modern’ in the twentieth century generally refers to the period encompassing the Edwardian and Georgian Age until the end of the World War-II in 1945; whereas

‘contemporary’ roughly denotes the timeframe that succeeds the World Wars and eventually covers up the present era as well. The period covered in **Unit 13** includes the two World Wars, the different anti-imperialist movements, and various socio-political movements. **Unit 14** will throw light on the rise of feminism and how Political, economic and social equality for women became the core issues as feminism begins to establish a strong ground. Through the various waves of Feminism, it becomes quite evident as to how women not only establish themselves but also succeed in acquiring their own separate space. **Unit 15** will explain the impact of Globalization with the rise of mass consumerism, and popular culture impacted by the rising digital and technological world.

For the convenience of the learners the course is divided into two blocks.

**Block I** will contain two Periods simultaneously; **Module I: The Medieval Age** and **Module II: Renaissance and Reformation**.

In **Block II** we have included **Module III: Age of Enlightenment**, **Module IV: Age of Revolution** and **Module V: Modern and Contemporary Period**.

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## **MODULE I: THE MEDIEVAL AGE**

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## **UNIT 1: WAR WITH FRANCE, CONFLICT WITH IRISH AND SCOTS**

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### **UNIT STRUCTURE**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 1.1 Learning Objectives
- 1.2 War with France: the Hundred years' War
- 1.3 Conflict with Ireland
- 1.4 War with Scotland
- 1.5 Summing up
- 1.6 Assessment Questions

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### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

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The Medieval period, roughly stretching from 9<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> century was a period of great political and social upheaval in England. The country was heavily burdened with war and plague. The frequency of wars from the 1290s onward and the subsequent cost and span of time it had taken had shaken the state and the society. England constantly engaged in war with France that lasted for around hundred and sixteen years to shake the base of the nation. The Black Death took the nation to major social and economic loss from 1348–49. It became endemic, lasted almost the whole second half of the century, and England witnessed profound economic and social changes that became exemplary for the whole of Europe. On the positive side we can witness the nation to grow up with greater nationalistic view. The 50-year reign of King Edward III brought significant changes. Specially, during the century the importance of the Commons in Parliament continued to grow.

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## **1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

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In this unit we shall discuss the England's involvement with the powerful nations and the extension of English power. After reading this unit you will be able to

In this unit we shall discuss the England's involvement with the powerful nations and the extension of English power. After reading this unit you will be able to

- Learn about the war of England with France known as Hundred years War
- England's occupation of the Scottish throne and Ireland
- The impact of wars in the socio-political and cultural structure of England (feudal system, peasants revolt etc)

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## **1.2 WAR WITH FRANCE**

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England and France engaged in a recurrent struggle during 14th–15th century over a series of disputes, where foremost was the question of the legitimate succession to the French throne. Several generations of English and French claimants to the crown brought both the nations to battle field which lasted for a period of more than 100 years. Historically it is said to have started in 1337 and ended in 1453, covering a period of 116 years.

French king Charles IV died in 1328 without an heir and Edward III of England being the son of Charles IV's sister, offered himself as the legitimate claimant to the French throne. Further, he was also duke of Guyenne(part of Aquitaine in south-western France) and count of Ponthieu (on the English Channel). The Count of Valois, a grandson of Philip III of France was the other major claimant.

A French assembly in charge of settling the dispute of succession favoured the Count of Valois as Philip VI. But when Philip VI, anticipating the interference of King Edward plotted to siege Guyenne in 1337, the King renewed his claim to the French crown and brought an army to Flanders and made the possession of Flanders a primary issue.

The initial phase of the war was indecisive. Edward won a naval victory at Sluys in 1340, but further war became difficult due to the lack of resources to follow up. War cost immensely and as Edward III's armies were no longer recruited by feudal means, it became difficult to maintain the expenses of the army. Thus, war and war expenses dominated the domestic affairs under Edward III. In reality neither side was in favour of reopening the war. Therefore, by dint of the Truce at Brétigny, and subsequent other negotiations, Edward agreed to withdraw his claim to the French crown. In return, English possessions in France would be held in full sovereignty. The terms, particularly those involving the exchange of territory, were still not very clear.

In spite of receiving generous grants from Parliament since 1336, the king found himself disastrously indebted and the situation remained unchanged till 1340–41. In the following years the country was well governed, under the service of William Edington and John Thoresby. Much of the legislation passed at this time was in the popular interest. In 1352 the king declared that soldiers for the war could be recruited by common consent in Parliament, and demands for purveyance were moderated.

After the war years were a period when much attention was given to the reorganization of the trade, specially the wool trade as it was large source of finance of war. In 1363

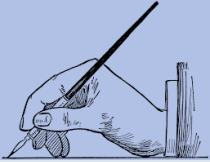
the Calais staple was set up, under which all English exports of raw wool were channeled through Calais. The Hundred Years' War, as considered by many historians, constituted a milestone in the development of national consciousness in western Europe. Many defeat of England finally plunged the country into a civil war which proved to be a new burden to the throne. In both the countries, the war helped to give rise to a sense of nationalism; a feeling of being unique and different from those of the other country.

The social structure of England became united one as every member was involved in the war or aware of its progress. Administrative skill replaced the noble birth in the emerging military power and the birth right of the nobles began to dissolve with the emergence of infantry with merit and skill. Consequently, it opened up opportunities to the commoners to serve the country and thus patriotism took a general form, without being exclusive right of the nobles. This also gradually removed the old social hierarchy where nobles took the highest place, the peasants being the lowest. Contrary to that, many peasantry section got promotion on the basis of their performance in battle. The mediaeval army that served under the obligation of feudal system was abandoned in favour of a paid and professional military.

After many successes and failures, waste and frustrations, the English nation turned away from their taste for continental intervention, and concentrated more on the problems of national development. The growing national consciousness among the general population of England shaped the nation towards an entity that brought the beginning of modern period following the end of the Middle Ages. France too, rising from the hard-fought success of the house of Valois to secure the French



crown, realised and internalised the importance of France as a nation undivided.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

1. What was the primary cause that led England to war with France?

2. Mention at least three changes in the social structure that was brought by war.

### **1.3 CONFLICT WITH IRELAND**

Anglo-Irish Wars have a long and fraught history. Given that old Ireland was mostly Catholic, the invasions by English or English-led forces led to large scale religious and social divisions. The English began their Irish conquest with the help of Norman forces in 1176, and the occupation continued in different degrees of levels.

Mac Murchada, the king of Leinster of Ireland solicited help from King Henry II of England in 1166 to win back his kingdom when he was defeated by Rory O'Connor, the High King of Ireland and was expelled from his kingdom. King Henry had just taken hold of the throne and was not sure about a help to Murchada. Moreover, he was not in favour of another war. At the consent of the Pope who had given Henry

permission to claim Ireland as part of his kingdom in order to reform the Church, Henry II authorised Mac Murchada to privately recruit anyone he could from the English populace. Mac Murchada recruited the Earl of Pembroke, Richard FitzGilbert de Clare or Strongbow from Bristol, the west coast of England and a small bunch of Anglo-French barons. Strongbow and King Henry were not in friendly terms. But he agreed to help Mac Murchada in lieu of his daughter Aoife's hand to him through marriage and the Kingdom of Leinster upon Mac Murchada's death. The barons were promised land, including the Viking city of Wexford. By 1169 Murchada regained most of his kingdom and also the allegiance of Dublin. A treaty with O'Connor also allowed him to be reinstated as King of Leinster, with the condition to recognise O'Connor as the High King. In 1171 Mac Murchada died and Strongbow was crowned King Richard of Leinster, the first non-native to be King of an Irish province. Other kings in Ireland were not at all happy with this.

King Henry II himself was not very happy with this development. He was on one hand angry for defying the English King by setting up a Norman kingdom separate from the English crown and on the other hand fearful that the Norman forces rivalled the king of England. By a decree he stopped Strongbow to go to Ireland, cut off assistance from England and in October 1171 himself set out for Ireland with large army arriving in Waterford. Realising that he could not win over the English King, Strongbow apologised and submitted before Henry.

Henry allowed Strongbow to remain Lord of Leinster, with the condition of submitting authority to the King of England. The less powerful Irish kings who were already upset, decided

to be on Henry's side to give a check against Strongbow's expansionism. Thus, the Irish Kings such as Munster, Bréifne, Airgialla and Ulaid accepted King Henry as their high king and agreed to pay him tribute. By 1172 other than Connacht and the northern Uí Néill, the provinces of Meath and Leinster were ruled by two Anglo-French Lords, with Irish kings loyal to King Henry. In 1175 The Treaty of Windsor between King Henry II and King Rory O'Connor recognised O'Connor as High King of all except Meath and Leinster. O'Connor was given power to collect tribute from those areas.

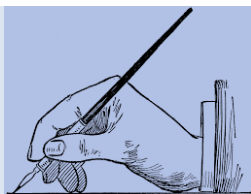
The Treaty of Windsor in 1175 legally brought Ireland into the English Empire, though due to the feudal nature of England and Ireland, several Norman knights expressed disagreement to the Irish lords. However, as these Norman knights were submitted to the English throne, their victory, though not approved by the King, effectively resulted in expanding English reign in Ireland, disadvantageously affecting the Irish people.

With the death of Strongbow in 1176 the liberty of Leinster went into the hands of King Henry. The King passed all his rights as Lord of Ireland to his youngest son Prince John. Prince John remained Lord of Ireland until in 1199 he was crowned as King of England. Though none of the Irish Lords was happy with Prince John as king, royal power was sufficient to prevent any unruly revolt and most of all to ensure that Ireland remained politically tied to England.

Henry II's reign ensured that from 1171, those who were associated with the royal court and belonged to military household would be the main beneficiaries of the conquests. Some of whom retained estates in England and Wales. Though many of them were very unruly in the Irish lands, they usually

considered themselves as the king's subjects, serving the king as their duty and never interfered with the King. It is interesting to observe that from this very power structure, what was emerged was Feudalism. Within two or three generations, northern and eastern Ireland had been totally transformed.

Manorial system replaced the Irish social system of herding and horses. Agricultural estates began to emerge and rural areas were transformed into market towns. The productions began to sell locally, nationally and to the rest of Europe. Settlers from English, Welsh, French and Belgian arrived to settle on the lands of the Anglo-French Lords. Consequently, Ireland witnessed an extensive process of colonisation in the areas that had been secured by the Anglo-French. Trade and commerce seemed to have brought drastic change to the lives of the Irish, although, the old Irish aristocracy was never retained again. Irish who remained in the land, lived as serfs working on the estates originally belonged to them. But practically none retained its status as a free Irish.



### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

1. What is The Treaty of Windsor?

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2. Between whom was the Treaty signed?

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## **1.4 WAR WITH SCOTLAND**

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Due to the marriage alliances with the royals of France, Brittany, Norway and Flanders, Scottish king and kingdom were not within jurisdiction of the English kings. Contrary to that, both geographically and politically Scotland was an independent realm. Thus, Before 1286 Scotland was an independent kingdom with its own sense of identity, rights, and laws.

England and Scotland shared a stable political relationship for most of the preceding century. Scotland had also marriage alliances as both Alexander II (1214-1249) and Alexander III (1249-1286) married from English royal families and this alliance through marriage was favoured by the large group of nobles as positive political growth who owned lands in both the kingdoms. Scotland recognised the English king's seniority without reducing the sovereignty of Scottish dynasty.

Alexander III died on March 19, 1286. It was his reign that was largely responsible for shaping a unified Scotland. His death started revealing the weakness behind Scotland's sovereignty and began to threaten Scotland's survival as a separate kingdom. After much disagreement the Scottish throne accepted Margaret, as their queen. Margaret was Alexander's only surviving descendant from his daughter by marriage to King Erik of Norway. Margaret was unmarried and the royals were in search of a king by dint of her marriage. In 1289 marriage took place between Margaret and an English prince, who became Edward II in later stage. The Treaty of Birgham in

1290 ended all prejudice of the commoners regarding peace and security of Scotland under the new English king who promised Scotland's continued separation from England. But crisis to Scottish freedom was brought by Margaret's sudden demise. Two nobles with estates in England and Scotland, John Balliol and Robert Bruce came out to be leading contenders of Scottish throne. While the Scots simply sought the king's arbitration to overcome the crisis, Edward demanded power of intervention as superior lord of Scotland.

The Scots had to accept Edward's demand and handed over the kingdom to the English king till he judged the case, known as the *Great Cause*, between Bruce, Balliol and thirteen other claimants. In November 1292, Edward decided in favour of John Balliol and Balliol in return paid homage to the English king. Paying Homage meant handing over more intervention of the English king in Scottish affairs- in legal disputes and landholding matters. England also started demanding the service of the Scottish king and his knights in war. Scottish king was also humiliatingly forced to renew the oath of homage which he failed to resist. This culminated in the officials seeking help of the Pope and subsequent war with English king. The Scots lost this war. Balliol lost the kingship with his surrender to the English king. And with this the independent monarchy in Scotland had an ultimate end.

In 1298, the English king led army into Scotland. This prolonged and destructive battle ended in the ruin of Wallace's army. Wallace was replaced by John Comyn and Robert Bruce who changed the war strategy and adopted an intriguing war, instead of fighting front battle. In that way they tried to exert diplomatic pressure on the enemy. It created a serious problem in England due to the frequent demands for army and money that Edward made on his subjects. But by 1304, when he laid

siege to Stirling Castle, Edward had forced the submission of almost all Scots including Robert Bruce, to make peace. In 1305 an ordinance for the government of Scotland was issued which rendered some measure of self-government to the Scots, without withdrawing the tag of a conquered community.

Edward I's death had brought drastic change to the Scenario. His heir, Edward II's weak coordination with his nobility led to civil war until 1313. Once again, Bruce exploited the opportunity and fought the decisive battle at Bannockburn in 1314 leading to Scottish victory and control over Scotland. But we must remember that it took 14 years more for Scotland to end the first war of independence and get full freedom.

### **LET US STOP AND THINK**



The Bannockburn Live event, which is staged near Stirling on 28 and 29 June, involves a “brutally realistic” reconstruction of the battle “choreographed” by members of the team who also made movies like *Gladiator* and *Thor II*. Alongside the battle there will be a host of musical, culinary and other celebrations of all things Scottish.  
(<http://theconversation.com>)

### ***The effect on England***

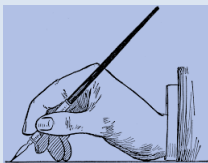
Edward I's imperial attitudes were not entirely in keeping with those of his predecessors. Though keen in territorial enlargement in the British islands and Ireland, English kings were by rule not antagonistic to their northern neighbours, but Edward I's attitude created a political situation from which it was difficult to retreat. Edward II made it even worse through

constant war with Scotland, while Edward III was a rectification of his predecessors after England's experience in Bannockburn.

Defeat in Bannockburn, for the English, was a hugely formative experience. The people of England who tolerated so long the personal ego of king Edward II, eventually overthrew him in 1327. It was the first time an English king was dethroned by his own people. The English nation rose to a new idea of kingship, based on the qualities of chivalry and prowess which found full form under Edward III in coming years. This led to a series of victories in 1330's following the experience of strategic battle in the Hundred Years War against France.

### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

1. What is the treaty of Birgham?



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2. Who was Robert Bruce?

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### **1.5 SUMMING UP**

In this unit we have learnt of the various wars England had fought to expand its territory and to save its crown. This point can never be overlooked that war leaves any country, whether victorious or defeated, in lots of devastations and with little social progress. England in medieval period was no exception to this. Consequently, it took the country to Civil war that lasted



for a long time. But it also resulted in a rise of nationalism and love for the country in later stages. We also notice drastic change in the social structure which we shall discuss elaborately in the next unit. Feudalism grew as the strongest social system that lasted long in England. At many times the king and his army was controlled by this system as they provided military strength to the king.



### **1.6 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

1. Enumerate the cause and effect of Hundred Years War.
2. What was the root cause of England's conflict with Ireland?
3. Evaluate the reasons of Scottish war with England.
4. 'War not only brings destruction, but also help in nation formation'---enumerate your answer with references from the wars discussed above and their aftermaths.

#### **JOT DOWN IMPORTANT POINTS**

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**JOT DOWN IMPORTANT POINTS**

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## ***UNIT 2: FEUDALISM-MANORIALISM&THE PEASANTS' REVOLT***

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### **UNIT STRUCTURE**

#### 2.0 Introduction

#### 2.1 Learning Objectives

#### 2.2The Medieval Period

#### 2.3 Feudalism

##### 2.3.1 Feudalism and England

##### 2.3.2 The Feudal system; cause and effect

##### 2.3.3 Decline of Feudalism

#### 2.4 Origin of Manorialism and the English Manorial system

##### 2.4.1 The Size of a Manor

##### 2.4.2 The system in the Manors

##### 2.4.3 The Lord of the Manor

##### 2.4.4 The lady of the Manor

##### 2.4.5 Decline of Manorialism

#### 2.5 The Peasants' Revolt

#### 2.6Summing up

#### 2.7 Assessment Questions

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### ***2.0 INTRODUCTION***

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The two most powerful social features of medieval period were the Church and the feudal system. While the Church worked as an institution that kept the society going in the middle of complicated power struggle, the other powerful social system was feudalism that prevailed over large parts of Europe spanning a period from 5<sup>th</sup> Century to 12<sup>th</sup> Century. 'In conventional usage, feudalism involved the functions of justice, taxation, defence, economic privilege and social

recognition in a system of power relations in medieval society' (Choudhury, 2005). It was feudal system that gave birth to a strong manorial social culture in England that had great socio-economic impact in medieval times. Literature of this age was also inspired by this to a major extent as we see in the works of Chaucer.

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## **2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

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In this unit we shall have a comprehensive discussion about the rise of feudal system in England and the vassals, serfs and the lords and ladies who lived in the manors as apart of this system. After reading this unit you will be able to know

- ✓ The cause and effect of the Feudalism
- ✓ The Feudal system in details
- ✓ The Decline of Feudalism in the Middle Ages
- ✓ English manorial system as part of feudalism
- ✓ The revolt of the peasants and its farflung impact on the society.

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## **2.3 FEUDALISM**

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### ***2.3.1 Feudalism and England***

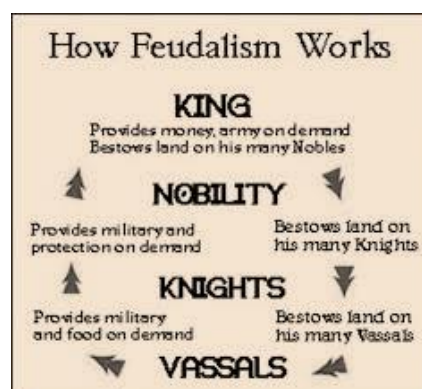
Feudalism, as practiced in Medieval England, was a social structure or a system in the society which structured and stratified the society on the basis of land tenure. Social hierarchy, thus, was determined by the land one possessed, in which landholdings are termed "fiefdoms, fiefs, or fees". The concept of Feudalism is based on a system of military service in exchange of land. King William the Conqueror was the first to develop the concept of feudalism through which he

rewarded his Norman supporters who helped him in the conquest of England.

By the twelfth and thirteenth centuries Feudalism emerged as one of the most dominant ideologies that shaped the social, political and economic lives of the people in medieval England. Feudalism in the Middle Ages can be compared with the structure of a pyramid, where the king is on the top of the hierarchy and the peasants at its base and the chain of authority flowing up.

Let us now see how the system works and what are the necessary obligations performed by the hierarchy under this system

- At the top of the Feudalism hierarchy is the King who holds ownership of the land
- The King grants the land to select and important Nobles such as Barons and they in return take pledge of loyalty to serve and protect the king
- The nobles can lease land to the next section called the Knights. The Knights not only protect the Barons and their Manor but also facilitate military assistance to the king during war and other emergency.



**The Feudal Pyramid**

- The Knights can rent lands to the Peasants or Serfs- the bottom dweller of the Feudalism pyramid. They belong to the land and cannot leave without permission

After knowing the hierarchy, let us now learn in details the responsibilities performed in different levels.

The feudal system is nominally in complete control of the King. He owns all the land in the country and decides whom to lease land. Tenants are generally selected from the section whom the King can trust. An oath of fealty to the King has to be sworn before they are given any land. Generally Barons, also known as Nobles, are given the charge of the lands by the King and have complete control of the land. These are most wealthy and powerful people during middle ages.

As you have been told earlier, feudalism is a system of providing military service to the King in exchange of money. As a payment to the land given by the King, the Barons have to serve on the royal council, pay rent and provide the King with Knights for military service as and when he demands for it. They also provide facilities for the King and his court when they travel around his realm. Barons are free to establish their own system of justice, set taxes and arrange their financial needs. They are free to keep as much land as they wish for their own use. *Nobles or Barons* lease their excess lands to the Knights. The land taken as lease by the nobles from the King is known as a *Manor*.

*Knights* come in the third of the hierarchy. These are the people who provide military service to the King in return for the lands given by the nobles. In return they provide protection to the Barons and their family, as well as the Manor, from attack. The Knights too possessed lots of land for their

personal use and used the Serfs to work in the rest of it. Although not as rich as the Barons, medieval Knights are quite wealthy and powerful.

*Serfs* serve in the land given by Knights. Serfs are treated as free labourers, who have to provide food and service whenever it is demanded by the Knights. Serfs have no rights of themselves. They cannot even leave the Manor and its service without permission. Serfs resemble a bonded laborer who needs their Lord's permission before they marry. Serfs are the poorest of all and the most vulnerable class in the Medieval Age.

There is a strict 'order' in the feudal system and everyone knows their place in that 'order'. Allegiance to the King and their immediate superior was what the Medieval Feudal System demanded to keep it going. But religion seemed to be above all as under Feudal system the King was answerable to the Pope only. King's obligation to the Church made Church one of the most powerful institutions in the middle ages and gradually it became an 'essential evil'. Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* depicts the sophistication and corruption that darkened this most powerful institution.

### ***2.3.2 The Feudal system; cause and effect***

Feudalism was a political strategy that was given the shape of necessity for a class of people. It had a never happening effect on Europe and England as well during the Middle Ages. The emergence of the Feudal System left its imprint in all spheres of the society: land-based economy, the judicial system and the rights of the feudal lords. But with the passage of time the feudal system became more complex, rigid and more prone to abuse and exploitation

and no more remained a natural submission to the lords. Fiefdom tended to become hereditary, reducing the personal link between vassal and lord. The voluntary obligation of the vassals for military service began to be replaced with service by payment. Even the religious institutions like monasteries, abbeys, bishoprics became very powerful and conscious of the hierarchy, being able to provide administrative and sometimes even military support for their feudal lords. They grew prosperous through the efficient administration of their manors. This condition of the religious people is very well depicted in Chaucer's works. Contrary to that, the lack of rights for the serfs and peasants caused great dissatisfaction amongst the peasantry class. Adding fuel to that devastation of Black Death that killed more than 50% people in England causing poverty and famine, contributed adversely to the sustainability of the feudal system.

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Let us now see the events that led to the decline of the feudal social and economic structure in England

### **LET US STOP AND THINK**



The word 'feud' derives from the Medieval Latin word 'feodum' meaning cattle i.e. moveable property. The word 'fee' is derived from the word 'fief' and means an inheritable freehold estate as used in feudal law.



### 2.3.3 *Decline of Feudalism*

The Medieval feudal system worked well for many hundreds of years. The Medieval age also witnessed the gradual decline of the feudal system. Among the factors contributing to its decline mention may be made of the Black Death (1348-49) which greatly reduced the population of England. With very few serfs left to cultivate the available land, they were in a better bargaining position compared to the feudal lords. Many serfs refused to offer the forced manual service they earlier offered in the land of the feudal lord and the latter was compelled to pay them wages for their services. The serfs' demand for higher and higher wages forced parliament to pass the *Statute of Labourers* to fix wages. A money economy came into being replacing the system of forced manual labour of earlier times.

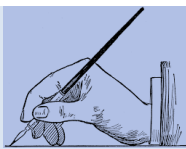
The *Peasants' Revolt* of 1381 also helped to clog the wheels of the feudal order. The peasants, who had been smarting under various levies, rose in revolt against an unjust poll tax and went to the extent of putting unpopular exploitative characters like the Archbishop of Canterbury to death. The spirit which prompted the revolt ultimately led to the collapse of the feudal system. Among other factors responsible for the decline of the feudal order, mention may be made of the influence of Christianity which preached the brotherhood of men and condemned exploitative behaviour. With the passage of time the power exercised by the feudal lords was lessened with a more centralized royal authority. Apart from the two major events contributing to the decline of Feudalism, there were other reasons too for which this great

social phenomenon had to face the ultimate down fall during the Medieval period

- The mediaeval time was a period of Crusades and travel and exploration of new lands. Due to the frequent invasions and expeditions by foreign traders, new trade options to England opened up.
- With the gradual increase in trade and commerce, a visible conversion from land based economy to trade based economy could be seen which led to the growth of more towns and subsequent decline in agrarian economic structure.
- Nobles were forced to pay for the armed forces rather than to fight themselves when Mercenaries (private armed force) were hired from all over Europe. These Mercenaries, in lieu of money did anything and soon became a cause of terror throughout Europe. The threat of the Mercenaries led on to the employment of professional, trained soldiers, called Standing Armies. Thus men were paid a wage for fighting in war and medieval warfare was financed by taxes and loans, which ultimately led to the end of Medieval Feudalism in England. The Feudal levy was unpopular and as time went by Nobles preferred to pay the King rather than to fight and raise troops. The decline in feudal hierarchy was visible. Nobles became less powerful as the Kings took back their lands and power as feudal lords.
- Land was rented and the rights of lords over the labourers decreased.
- Peasants moved away from the country side into towns for new opportunities through business and market which

eventually made them capable to buy them their freedom.

Under feudalism the King was answerable to the Pope which made Pope a very powerful position. King Henry VIII came into conflict with the Pope in the last part of the Middle Ages and England subsequently broke with the Catholic church of Rome and the power of the Pope. This resulted in the dissolution of the Monasteries and establishment of the Church in England. Historians mark it as the final 'nail in the coffin' of the Medieval Feudal System or feudalism, in England.



### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

1. Write three reasons of declination of medieval Feudalism in England.

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## ***2.4 ORIGIN OF MANORIALISM AND ENGLISH MANORIAL SYSTEM***

Manorialism had its origins in the late Roman Empire and its emergence was rather a necessity in the 5th and 6th centuries when civil disorders, weak governments, and continuous invasions wracked Europe. In such great political

and social upheavals, small landowners, poor farmers and the populace working in others' lands, but no land by themselves, pledged protection in exchange of their land or freedom and promised to render services. On the other hand, the powerful landowners who had the military strength promised to defend them. In this sense manorialism was a two way traffic where the poor, defenceless, and landless were not only given access to farming lands which provided livelihood to the poor and economic return to the owner, but also ensured social stability in a shaky society. Gradually, this arrangement in turn supported the feudal aristocracy of kings, lords, and vassals.

The manorial system was the most convenient and efficient mechanism for organizing the estates of the aristocracy and the clergy in the Middle Ages in Europe. Manorialism was found not only in France, England, Germany, Italy and Spain, although in varying names, but also in varying degrees in the Byzantine Empire, Russia, Japan, and elsewhere. Manorialism was like an institution and its importance was varied and widespread in different parts of Europe at different times. In western Europe it was flourishing by the 8th century and had begun to decline by the 13th century, while in eastern Europe it grew stronger to strongest after the 15<sup>th</sup> Century.

The English form was adopted from the French version which was already in existence since Normans visited England. Although both the systems had no major variations, there existed considerable flexibility in the way the new landowners negotiated land settlements with their English subjects. As you were told earlier that, while Feudalism encompassed primarily military services along with economic one, manorial system represented the economic portion of feudalism based on an agrarian social system where all aspects

of life, especially in rural England, including the village, church, farm land and mill, were under the control of the lord of the manor.

#### 2.4.1 *The Size of a Manor*

A manor varied in size, according to the richness of its lord. An average estate in England was recorded to be six hundred acres. "Usually a large landowner supported and patronized several hundred manors---the size of which varied from 350 to 5000 acres; a small landowner could, on the other hand, be in possession of just a single manor" (Chaudhury,2005).Of the arable lands of the manor, the lord reserved as much as he needed for his own use. The lord's land was called his "demesne," or domain. The rest of the land he allotted to the peasants who were his tenants. The land was split up into a large number of small strips (usually about half an acre each). Peasants also had rights to use the common land. and was allowed to take wood from the forest for fuel and building purposes. A peasant's holding, which also included a house in the village, thus formed a self-sufficient unit. Usually the land under a typical manor was structured in the following way

- Demesne: *Demesne*s are that land which the lord of a manor owes directly and keeps exclusively for his personal use. In medieval times the status and the strength of a lord was often measured by the size and the nature of the *demesne*. The land was rented to the peasants for cultivation and almost all the necessities of the manor were met by the *demesne*. Thus, the *demesne* was a sign of aristocracy and higher social position for the lords of the manors.

- **Dependent Land:** As the medieval lord of manor owned a huge number of lands, a major extent of them were given to the peasants on hire. In lieu of a cultivatable land, the peasants rendered labour and a share of the cultivation. Thus, the owner of a huge manor also owned a large number of labourers for his service.
- **Free peasant land:** These types of lands were not very frequent in manorial system, though they existed. Free peasant lands did not come directly under the manorial lord, but the legal and other rule and regulations applied to the lands under manor were also applicable to these land.

### ***2.4.2 The System in Manors***

You have already come to know about feudalism in details in the previous chapter and how this system functioned. Manorialism extended the concept of the feudal fief, or fiefdom, as a principal land owner who was called the lord of a Manor. The Lord was one of the most powerful agents of that time and the lordship gave him immense economic as well as legal power over his tenant.

Manorialism involved a hierarchy of reciprocal obligations that exchanged labor or rents for access to land. Manorialism also encompassed the political relations between the Lord of the Manor and his peasants. This allowed the Lord of the Manor governmental power which included the maintenance of a court. Manorialism is sometimes referred to as the seignorial system, or Seigneurialism. Following hierarchy can be roughly seen in a typical manor

Let us now see who is who in a manorial system

**Vassal** - A Vassal or Liege was a free man. He was rented land ( a fief ) by a lord to whom he swore fealty and thus, paid

homage. A vassal could be a Lord of the Manor but was also directly subservient to the King or his immediate followers

**Bailiff** - A Bailiff was a person whose responsibility was to look after the management of manors

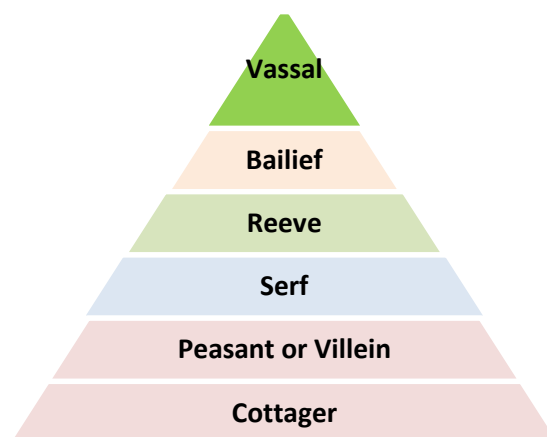
**Reeve** - A Reeve was a manor official appointed by the lord or elected by the peasants

**Serf** - A serf was a peasant or tenant who worked in the lands rented by the lord and paid him certain dues in return for the use of land. The dues were usually in the form of labour on the *demesne* which was approximately 3 days each week. The serf could never own a land, but the right to work in a particular land was a heritable right.

**Peasant or Villein** - A peasant or villein was a low status tenant who worked as an agricultural worker or labourer. A peasant or villein usually cultivated 20-40 acres of land. The condition of a villein was very poor in medieval times.

**Cottager**: A low class peasant with a cottage, but with little or no land who generally worked as a simple labourer.

Some manors in medieval period were under the supervision of the Church. While by value almost 17% manors in England in 1086 belonged directly to the king, even a greater proportions were held by bishoprics and monasteries. Ecclesiastical manors did not render service in terms of money or military services to the king.



**The Manorial Pyramid**

### 2.4.3 *The Lord of the Manor*

Medieval lord of the manor paid swore fealty and homage to the King and his immediate superior. As said above, he is a free man in ownership of lands given by the King. In return he has to provide the throne trained soldiers to fight for the King and clothes and weapons for the soldiers. Under Manorial system the Lord of the Manor was a very powerful person with a lot of power to impose. He imposed fees called *Banalities* on the subordinates for the use of the mill, the oven etc. of the lord. He had judicial power to handle settle and impose fines the cases arising in their domains. Offenses against the custom of the manor, such as bad plowing, improper taking of wood from the lord's woods, and the like were of course the staple criminal business of the court. As most of cases in manor could be settled through fine or penalties, these were one of the prime means of revenue earning in a manor. The lord of the manor could also disinherit a serf or peasant who died without an heir.

#### LET US STOP AND THINK



**Banalities:** Banalities were fees or customary charge that a Serf had to pay, either in terms of money or matter to the lord of the manor for the use of his mill, oven, wine press, or similar facilities. More often banalities were grain, eggs, honey or other such produces that are useful in everyday life



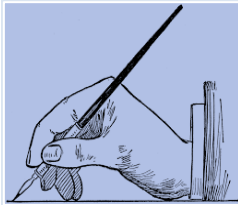
#### ***2.4.4 The lady of the Manor***

The lord of the manor was entitled to provide military service to the king in the time of unrest. In Medieval Times such service was a frequent phenomenon and the lord of the manor had to stay away from home for significant amounts of time during such unrests. It was the lady of the manor who took over the running of the manor when her husband was absent. During that period she was a figure of authority and her word was literally law and as commanding as the lord. In the absence of the lord of the manor, the lady looked after the finances of the manor including the collection of rents, supervising the farming and settling all disputes.

#### ***2.4.5 Decline of Manorial system***

By 11<sup>th</sup> Century the strong signal in the decline of the manorial system could be viewed. Almost similar causes that culminated in the decline of feudalism could be seen in extinction manorial system too. Drastic changes that economic and political factors brought during 11 and 12 century contributed to a change in the whole system. The spread of trade and a money economy in whole of Europe promised greater profit to capitalist production than to the subsistence manor. Wide development of towns and capitalistic commerce gradually broke down the small local economic unit, maintained by the manor. This change was also responsible for creating a market for the manorial lords' to sell their agricultural produces. On the other hand, invasion and trading opened up a lot of luxuries for them to purchase. As a result, lords increasingly encouraged their peasants to purchase their freedom in exchange of money. Further, the growth of new

centralized monarchies competed with the local administration of the lord. Owing to these and other economic reasons, the inefficient and coercive manorial system disintegrated in western Europe.



### **CHECK YOUR PROGRES**

1. Give the hierarchy of the Manorial Structure.

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2 .Mention two responsibilities of the Lord of the manor.

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3. Mention at least three reasons of declination of the manorial system in Medieval England.

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## ***2.5 PEASANTS' REVOLT***

We have already discussed the impact of Black Death in England. When the Black Death swept Europe in 1348-1351 it almost wiped out 30% of the population. Though the epidemic

affected all strata of the society, most affected social class was the English peasantry which constituted a large section of the society. Even some thirty years later, life had not returned to normal. The settled and structured country life of the Middle Ages under feudalism and manorial system was disrupted, and discontent was rife amongst the poor.

The reasons why peasants went on a revolt can be summed up in the following observations.

- Immediately after the Black Death, there was a crisis in labourer in many manors. To encourage the workers who stayed back in their manor, many lords had returned the peasants their freedom in their estates and paid them as well to work on their lands. Nearly 35 years after the Black Death, situations arose for which many peasants were afraid of losing their lands and facilities and they gathered to fight back.
- In 1351 The Statute of Labourers was passed in the Parliament which went largely in favour of the landlord who demanded an action from the king against the remaining labourers. According to the statute every free labourer, men or women must serve their lords. Those who tried to fly were marked as 'F' signifying falsity. The statute added fuel to the oppressive system culminating in the greatest revolt that England had ever faced.
- As you were told earlier, the feudal system was an exchange of military service for lands. Not only that, wars costs too usually came from the taxes paid by the peasants. The Hundred Years War with France put England in a divested form. To rescue the land from debt, In 1380, Richard II introduced a new tax called the Poll Tax. It was the third time in four years that a tax in terms of money or kind such seeds, tools etc., anything that could be vital to survival in the coming years, was imposed on

the poor peasants. They could not help but resisting it once more.

- Peasant revolt was also due to the Church- manor conflict. In those days many peasants had to work for free on church land, sometimes up to three days in the week. Consequently, they were incapable of cultivation in their fields and growing enough food for their families. Peasants observed that this system made the Church excessively rich but the peasants poor.

“The first outbreak of the revolt took place in Kent when one Wat Tyler murdered a tax collector and marched to Canterbury. He headed a large group of protestors who destroyed any manorial record that came their way. Simultaneous movement took place in Essex and Hertfordshire. Riot started all over England and the basis demands of the rioters were the abolition of the institution of villeinage, freedom to the peasants and access to markets” (Choudhury,2005)

On June 14th, the king met the rebels at Mile End. At this meeting, Richard II gave the peasants all that they asked for and asked that they go home in peace. Some did. Others returned to the city and murdered the archbishop and Treasurer – their heads were cut off on Tower Hill by the Tower of London. Richard II spent the night in hiding in fear of his life.

By the summer of 1381, the revolt was over. John Ball was hanged. Richard did not keep any of his promises claiming that they were made under threat and were therefore not valid in law. Other leaders from both Kent and Essex were hanged. The poll tax was withdrawn but the peasants were forced back into their old way of life – under the control of the lord of the manor.

However, the lords did not have it their own way. The Black Death had caused a shortage of labour and over the next 100 years many peasants found that they could earn more (by their standards) as the lords needed a harvest in and the only people who could do it were the peasants. They asked for more money and the lords had to give it.

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## **2.6 SUMMING UP**

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In this unit we have learnt one of the greatest phenomenon of Medieval England, that is manorial system, its rise and fall and consequent Peasants' Revolt, one of the greatest uprisings in history. Various social changes are interrelated and one has impact on the other. This unit has connection to the previous unit also so far the war and their impact is concerned. It was due to England's constant connection with Spain and Ireland that England witnessed a major social change with Feudalism. You may have noticed till now that the whole Module is interrelated so far political, social and religious happenings are concerned. As you are told earlier, literature does not exist in isolation. Gradually we will know how all these had great impact on the literature of the age.



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## **2.7 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

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1. Write a note on the rise and fall of Manorial system in England.
2. Describe in details the working system in the manors.
3. What was the cause and effect of Peasants' Revolt?

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**JOT DOWN IMPORTANT POINTS**

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## ***UNIT 3: CHURCH- WYCLIFFE AND THE LOLLARDS***

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### **UNIT STRUCTURE**

3.0 Introduction

3.1 Learning Objectives

3.2 Church and the Medieval England

3.3 John Wycliffe

3.1.1 Life and works of John Wycliffe

3.1.2 Wycliffe and the Reformatory Movement

3.4 The Lollards

3.5 Summing up

3.6 Assessment Questions

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### ***3.0 INTRODUCTION***

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As you have learnt in the previous units the Middle Ages were a period of uncertainties and pressures, grim reputation, terrible natural disaster, rebellion and resistance and of massive social change. The "Black Plague" swept across England and Europe and wiped out almost one-third of the population. The Hundred Years' War between England and France sapped energy and resources. The war trodden nation had created extreme social structures where rich were very wealthy, and the poor were locked into a marginal existence. This culminated in the violent Peasant's Revolt in England in 1381. In the middle of all these it was the Church that kept the society going. The Medieval Church was an important and powerful institution. It controlled almost all education and held unique moral authority. The Church was also a wealthy institution as it owned a great deal of land. Even English kings wanted to control the Church in their lands by having the last

word in the appointment of Bishops - the local leaders of the Church. This led to conflict between the king and the church culminated in the murder of Thomas Becket 1170 in the order of Henry II. Extreme power and control over the commoners, even the royals, intrusion in the secular domain made the Church corrupt in all aspects. It was its evil and corruption that led to a wide range of reformative agenda undertaken by Wycliffe and his followers, the Lollards.

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### ***3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES***

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In this unit we shall discuss one of the most powerful institutions of Medieval England, the Church and its evil and corruption that led to a wide range of reforms under Wycliffe and the Lollards. After reading this unit you will be able to learn

- Influence of Church in socio-cultural and religious life of the people.
- Wycliffe and his reformative steps against Church' corruption
- The Lollards and their agenda in Reformation.

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### ***3.2 THE CHURCH AND THE MEDIEVAL ENGLAND***

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Throughout medieval Europe, Christianity was a powerful institution and the people were profoundly religious. They followed the teachings of the church which laid more importance on life to come after death rather than on life in this world. People were enjoined to avoid sin, lead lives of austerity, penance, and charity. Apart from the secular courts there were ecclesiastical courts to try moral offences. There was unquestioned belief in the teachings of Christianity and anybody who dared to profess views antithetical to the



teachings of the church was dismissed as a heretic. Many heretics faced persecution throughout the Middle Ages. Friars went from place to place hearing confessions and prescribing penances like giving money for charitable purposes or going on a pilgrimage. The pilgrimage was very much a part of the religious life of the people in medieval times. One of the most famous works of medieval times- Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* is centred on a pilgrimage. *The Nun's Priest's Tale* that has been a part of your course and is discussed in the next course, is one of the stories of *The Canterbury Tales*.

Apart from the churches and cathedrals a large number of monasteries and nunneries were built. The monasteries were self-sufficient entities with dormitories, libraries, churches, refectories for communal eating etc. They were sustained from the income of some estates. Monks were supposed to live within the monasteries devoting themselves to religious and scholarly pursuits. Indeed many monasteries in medieval times were seats of great learning and kings consulted the learned monks on matters of state. The monks wrote the miracle and morality plays as well as the devotional songs and compiled chronicles. The high monastic ideals however began to decline as Chaucer's representation of the monk testifies. Instead of remaining confined within the monastery this monk loves outdoor life and good food and does not like to work with his hands in defiance of what the saints had bid.

Like the secular order, the church was also hierarchically arranged with the Pope at the highest rung of the hierarchy followed by dignitaries like the Archbishop, Bishop, Deacon, Abbot etc. Chaucer starts the representation of the ecclesiastical characters in the prologue with the knight who stood at the top of the hierarchy and moves down the ladder, ending with the poor parson.

## LET US STOP AND LEARN



*The Canterbury Tales*: One of the most famous works of medieval times- Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* is centred on a pilgrimage. Pilgrims from different walks of life gather at the Tabard Inn in Southwark with the intention of setting out on a pilgrimage to the shrine of Saint Thomas à Beckett at Canterbury. *The Canterbury Tales* is constituted by the tales the pilgrims narrating on their way to Canterbury and back. The pilgrims belong to different walks of life and tell stories in tune with the particular sphere of life he or she comes from. *The Tale* is a great critique of the socio-religious lives of the people, mostly the ecclesiastical people of the period.

### *Representation of Church in the great literature of its time*

Literature was influenced by the profound religiosity of the period. It was produced under the patronage of the church and was didactic in intent. It was during the medieval period that the Miracle, Morality, and Mystery plays were written by the monks and clerics. In them, stories from the Old and New Testaments or the miracles performed by saints were dramatized. The Morality plays like *Everyman* represented life as a struggle between good and evil which were personified with the good triumphing over the evil in the end. These plays were originally performed within the precincts of the church to enliven the church teachings but later moved out into the open squares outside the church and the elements of jest and ribaldry

entered into these plays. In many plays the devil became a comic character who entertained the audience with his antics.

Apart from drama, another literary form which gained popularity was the allegory which discovered hidden spiritual meanings in all things of this world. Allegory is said to be the established medieval method of visualizing the inner workings of the mind. Carols or devotional songs, sermons and treatises enjoyed popularity. Thus a great bulk of religious literature was produced during the Middle Ages

With the passage of time, the church began to depart from the ideals of austerity and piety enjoined by the saints. The wealth accumulating in the church was in a large measure responsible for this. People paid handsomely to get the church's pardon for their sins for it was believed that no man could get access to God without the intervention of the clergy. The clergy became materialistic and some of them sold pardons to people who did not do the requisite penance. The worldliness of the clergy is satirized by Chaucer in his prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*. The ecclesiastical characters in the prologue with the exception of the parson who is described as "poor" are more interested in leading lives devoted to material pursuits than in lives devoted to religion.

The monk, for instance, does not want to waste his time pouring over scriptures in the confines of the monastery. Showing utter disregard for the rules formulated by the saints, the monk loves to eat, drink and have a merry time.

The friars were required to lead lives of poverty and live by begging. They were itinerant and went from place to place preaching, hearing confessions, and prescribing penances and at the same time taking the latest news and thoughts to all corners of the nation. Chaucer's friar is however more intent on making money than on fulfilling the duties assigned to his

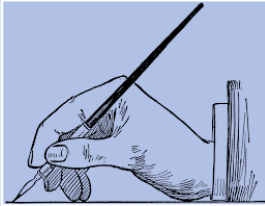
vocation. He gives absolution easily to people who can pay money.

The summoner and the pardoner represent the worst kind of corruption of the clergy. They are physically repulsive which symbolically points to their moral depravity. The summoner loves wine from which the clergy is supposed to abstain. The pardoner sells false relics and makes money. Some of the clergy were themselves outspoken critics of the church. Church dignitaries often exposed each other as in Chaucer's *Tales* where the friar and the summoner expose each other's tricks to the great merriment of the company. It is only the poor Parson who adheres to the ecclesiastical doctrines and goes from place to place attending to the sick and the needy.

In Chaucer's depiction of the characters from the clergy one can form an idea about the materialism of the times and how it was seeping into every section of the society. The other important writers of the period, Gower and Langland also show concern about the corruption in the church in their works. It is not as if the higher clergy like the bishops, who were men of great integrity and learning, were unaware of what was happening in the church, but they were so preoccupied with their involvement in their secular duties that they had no time to devote to checking ecclesiastical corruption. As bishops were men of great learning they were appointed by kings to high offices of the state like chancellors and some became ambassadors to foreign powers.

It is against the corruption that had crept into the church that a reform movement began all over Europe under the leadership of Martin Luther. In England, John Wycliffe and his followers, the Lollards spearheaded the reform movement which ultimately led to the dismantling of all the monasteries and nunneries and the reposing of faith in the Bible instead of

on church dignitaries. The Bible which was earlier in Latin got translated into English and other vernacular languages during this period. This facilitated people's interaction with the Holy Scriptures while earlier they had to rely on the interpretation provided by the clergy who manipulated the scriptures for their own benefit.



### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

1. Write at least two ways how Church as an Institution influenced medieval society.

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2. What representation of the Church you can see in the literature of the period?

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## **3.3 JOHN WYCLIFFE**

### ***3.1.1 Life and works of John Wycliffe***

John Wycliffe was born in Yorkshire, England in 1330, at a time when darkness dominated almost all aspects of fourteenth century England. Wycliffe attended Oxford University, where he learnt theology and philosophy under great professors of that period Thomas Bradwardine and William of Ockham accordingly and earned a doctorate in divinity. Eventually he himself became professor at Oxford. Later he was appointed the Master of Balliol College, where

Wycliffe lectured and wrote in the field of philosophy. Biblical studies were one of the passions that attracted Wycliffe to the world of Bible and the Church and he involved himself rigorously to the study of theology and Scripture.

This study led him to realize how much the church had veered off in so many wrong directions. In those days the Church owned over one-third of the land in England which led to the imposition of taxes on the commoners in the name of atonement and purgatory. High offices in the church were bought or used as political prize. Clergy were often illiterate and immoral to the root. Wycliffe, a learned scholar of the Bible, observed that the church had departed from Bible in many of the doctrines. Based on his study of the Scripture, John wrote and preached against the teachings about purgatory, the sale of indulgences, and the doctrine of transubstantiation. Wycliffe well understood that poor and common folk were cheated in the name of religion and it could be done only because of the fact that the Bible was written in Latin which was not the language of everyday use. Consequently, common people could not read the Bible and believed what the ecclesiastical people told them. He cared deeply for these people and railed against the abuses of the Church. But the problems went even deeper.

Wycliffe, himself being a priest, well understood corruption and heresy in the Catholic Church and used this position to speak out against what he saw. He felt ministers should be humble, lowly, pious, and not subject to pomp and veneration, contrary of which was witnessed in medieval church and its officials. He openly criticised the Pope and the whole system of ecclesiastical hierarchy and decided to carry forward his agenda till death. Wycliffe died in the year 1384,

almost exactly one hundred years before Martin Luther King was born.

The major works of Wycliffe consist of chiefly three books, all related to evil, corruption and misuse of power by the papacy. The first one, *On Divine Dominion* (1373–1374), aimed at papal authority. Wycliffe was at a loss to find biblical warrant for the papacy. In fact, he argued that the papacy conflicts with and obscures the church's true authority, Scripture. The second major work was *On Civil Dominion* (1375–1376). Here Wycliffe targeted the Roman Catholic Church's assertion of authority over the English crown and English nobility. He saw no reason for England to be obliged to support a corrupt church. In his third major work, *On the Truth of Sacred Scripture* (1378), he further developed the doctrine of the authority of Scripture.

These three works were crucial to setting the stage for the Reformation. Two faculty members visiting at Oxford returned with Wycliffe's writings to their home city of Prague, which in turn influenced Jan Hus. Wycliffe's works paved the way for Jan Hus to be a second "Morning Star" of the Reformation. Hundred years after Wycliffe's death Martin Luther carried out his doctrine further. But his most important contribution, *The Wycliffe Bible* comparatively fades all other works.

As a writer of English prose Wycliffe has twofold contribution

1. He was the first to translate the Bible into English. For translation he used the Latin version of the Bible. That was why the translation could supply the first elements of that Biblical language which became an integral part of the English everyday life. Though it was often awkward and had much stiffness, the translation had immense effect at that time for bringing revolution.

2. He was the first to use pamphlets and leaflets as direct means of appeal to the people at large. Hence his style is simple and forceful, has logic and vigour and is thus, effective.

### ***3.2.2 The need of a Reformation***

The period Wycliffe lived were politically and socially a period of great disturbance in England. England was devastated by the Hundred Years War that lasted for more a century. In addition, the Black Death, or the bubonic plague, ravaged Europe, killing the whole lot of the population on an unprecedented scale. Nearly thirty percent of Europe's population perished in the plague while in other areas, such as England the mortality rate exceeded fifty percent. Living conditions of the peasants were deplorable and social and economic discontent was rampant. These events cast a pall of doom over the entire country and people started to believe that the corruption and evil that had eaten the ecclesiastical system like a moth from inside was the cause of these disorders. At a time when people looked desperately for spiritual guidance and comfort from the Church, little was forthcoming and whatever came was only exploitation in the name of religion. The conflict between two rival Popes, one at Rome and one at Avignon in France, the wide ignorance of the Clergy, where the record said that very few even could recite prayer and tell the Ten Commandments, clearly indicated the rotten condition of the Church. The reason behind all these was understood as ecclesiastical people's disinterest for religion and interest for accusation of wealth in the name of religion. The feudal organization of the Church made it the largest landowner in England and extraordinarily wealthy. Many of the upper clergy were more interested in acquiring lands and wealth than they



were in meeting the spiritual needs of the people. Wycliffe was of the belief that God owns the whole world, and human being is accountable to God for his deeds. On the other hand, the common folk interpreted the whole cycle of action as God's way of chastising the Church because of its poor moral condition.

The crisis reached its height when a major doctrinal change took place in the church in 1215. The Fourth Lateran Council has given the Doctrine of Transubstantiation the status of an official doctrine. This doctrine taught that the elements of the Lord's Supper, the bread and the wine, were changed into the body and blood of Christ when sanctified by an ordained priest. This pronouncement was the climax of a prolonged theological controversy that had raged for two hundred years. Many, including John Wycliffe, vehemently reacted against this teaching, declaring it to be an innovation and interpolation, not found either in the Word of God or in Bible. Thus, he denied transubstantiation and believed in the spiritual Eucharist rather than the physical one.

During the Middle Ages, however, the official Bible of the Western Church, including the Church of England, was the Latin Vulgate. Apart from the clergy, few people knew Latin and, therefore, the majority could not understand the Vulgate. In addition, Latin was the language of the Church through which services were conducted. Consequently, people had to believe what their religious leaders delivered on spiritual knowledge and instruction. According to Roman Catholic law, translating the Bible into a common language, which was considered to be vulgar, was a heresy and profane act and thus punishable by burning to death. It was the killing of the soul, as believed by the people. No complete English translation of the Bible was available until the fourteenth century, although

selected portions of the Scriptures had been translated into English during the previous centuries

### **LET US STOP AND THINK**



#### **Doctrine of Transubstantiation**

The doctrine of transubstantiation, elaborated by scholastic theologians from the 13th to the 15th century. The faith in the Real Presence as brought about by a mysterious change (transubstantiation) of bread and wine into the flesh and blood of Christ during Eucharist (also called *Holi Communion* or *Lord's Supper*), according to the Roman Catholic Church.

Protestant conceptions of the Eucharist differ in one very important way from the Catholic conception of the sacrament. Catholics believe that through the words and actions of the priests transubstantiation occurs, and that the bread and wine that the priests hold become, in reality, the body and blood of Christ.

#### **Latin Vulgate**

Vulgate, (means common version) is the Latin Bible used by the Roman Catholic Church, primarily translated by St. Jerome. In 382 Pope Damasus I commissioned Jerome, the leading biblical scholar of his time, to produce an acceptable Latin version of the Bible from the various translations available at that time. His revised Latin translation of the Gospels appeared about 383 and many other books of Bible to prepare a standard form.

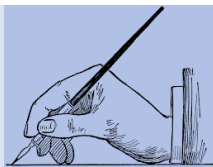
### 3.1.2 *Wycliffe and the Reformativè Movement*

Wycliffe believed in St Augustine's view of the doctrine of predestination, according to which some people are God chosen and others are not. In Wycliffe's view there was a strong need to replace church people with secular officials thus a shuffle was the call of the hour. In its initial stage the aristocratic class of his time supported Wycliffe as they found their entry in the ecclesiastical world having both power and wealth. Thus the cold war between the Church and the state received a new status during this period. But complications arose when Wycliffe started questioning some basic practices

Main observation of Wycliffe, as we have discussed above, in relation to Christianity and Church was chiefly on the manipulation of Bible in favour of the ecclesiastical people. In his book *On the Truth of Sacred Scripture*, Wycliffe called for the Bible to be translated into English. Due to the Roman Catholic law, no one dared to translate the Bible and make it available for public reading. It is almost easy to imagine why church wanted to keep people out of the reach of God's word; and Wycliffe and a group of colleagues committed themselves to making the word of God available to all strata of the society. The printing press was not invented till 1440 and for the purpose Wycliffe was set out, a large number of translated Bibles was required. Not only did the Bible need to be translated; it also had to be copied and distributed. Wycliffe did not step back and copies were made painstakingly by hand. Despite the challenges, hundreds of the Bibles were produced and distributed to Wycliffe's troop of pastors, who preached across England. It opened up the way of Church to common

people. These followers of Wycliffe came to be known as Lollards. We shall be discussing them later.

These efforts in translating, copying, and proclaiming the Bible in English were driven by a singular motive, expressed by Wycliffe this way: “It helps Christian men to study the Gospel in that tongue which they know best.” In his final years, Wycliffe endured falling out of favour with the church and nobility in England. Even then he relentlessly worked for the cause of the commons. John Wycliffe died on December 30, 1384.



### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

1. Name the important works of John Wycliffe.

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2. Mention at least three reasons for the need of reformation of the Church as thought by Wycliffe.

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### **3.4 THE LOLLARDS**

Wycliffe's mission of disseminating the Bible in common language to the nook and corner of England was executed by a large number of preachers who wandered from place to place

and distributed the translated Bible to people and explained it's gospels. After Wycliffe's death in 1384, the process did not end in England and Wycliffe's efforts were carried away by these preachers known as "Poor Priests". This job of reading the Scriptures and preaching throughout England took the shape of a movement popularly known as the Lollards. Though the Lollards did a tremendous job during that period, their efforts remained shrouded even after a period of nearly six hundred years.

### **LET US STOP AND THINK**



#### **Lollard or Lollardy**

Lollard, Lollardy, Lollardi or Loller was the popular derogatory nickname given to those followers of Wycliffe without being associated with any particular academic background or group. It most likely derives from Middle Dutch lollaerd ("mumbler, mutterer"). The alternative, "Wycliffite", is generally accepted to be a more neutral term covering those of similar opinions, but having an academic background. Different meanings have been assigned to the word "Lollard" but the most accepted meaning called it a "low murmur" referring to the secret spreading of the Word of God. The doctrine of the Lollards is called Lollardy.

Lollardy was a religion of vernacular scripture. Lollards opposed many practices of the Catholic Church. The Lollards insisted on regular preaching by the priests and advocated reading of Bible as mandatory. With regard to the Eucharist, Lollards such as William Thorpe, and John Oldcastle and many others, contrary to the view of transubstantiation, taught

about the consubstantiation, the real presence of Christ in Holy Communion. Contrary to the doctrine of the Catholic Church, Lollards believed "that material bread still existed there", that the bread and wine themselves were "materially unchanged by the consecration", but they also believed that the consecration added "the spiritual being of Christ" to the bread and wine.

For the Lollards Church' practices of baptism and confession were not necessary for salvation. They considered praying to saints and honouring of their images to be a form of idolatry and thus against the doctrine of Christ. They were nonbelievers of Oaths, fasting, and prayers for the dead as having any scriptural basis. Lollards were dead against the trappings of the Catholic Church, including holy bread, holy water, bells, organs, and the value of papal pardons and considered them as means of exploitation. Special vows were considered to be in conflict with the divine order established by Christ and were regarded as denunciation of Christ. Sixteenth Century martyrologist John Foxe described four main beliefs of Lollardy as opposition to pilgrimages and saint worship, denial of the doctrine of transubstantiation, and a demand for English translation of the Scriptures.

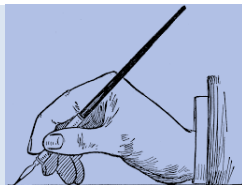
A petitioned known as *The Twelve Conclusions of the Lollards* was placed on the doors of Westminster Hall in February 1395. These Twelve Conclusions reveal certain basic Lollard ideas. Few of them are summarised below.

- Opposition of the acquisition of temporal wealth by Church leaders as accumulating wealth leads them away from religious concerns and toward greed.
- That the Sacrament of Eucharist is an act not clearly defined in the Bible. Whether the bread remains bread or

becomes the literal body of Christ is not logically defined.

- Church should not involve themselves with secular matters as this constitutes a conflict of interest between spiritual and State matters.
- Expensive church artwork was seen as an excess; they believed effort should be placed on helping the needy and preaching rather than working on expensive decorations. Icons were also seen as dangerous since many seemed to be worshipping the icons more than God.

However, there is no question that the reaction of the English clergy against it was both prompt and merciless. In 1401 law was enacted, according to which the burning of heretics at the stake was permitted. In the Middle Ages, heresy was considered as soul murder and thus a capital offense. Those convicted as relapsed heretics were burned at the stake. The exact number who died is unknown, but there are many accounts of Lollards who paid the ultimate price for their faith.



### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

1. What is the meaning of the term Lollards?

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2. Mention two main agenda of the Lollards.

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3. What is ‘*The Twelve Conclusions*’ of the Lollards?

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### 3.5 SUMMING UP

In this unit we have learnt one of the epoch making events of medieval England that is the Movement of Reformation against English Church. We must appreciate that in those days raising voice against Pope and the very powerful Church officials was really a tough job. For his endeavour, which was appreciated much later after his death, Wycliffe is honoured with the title “the morning star of Reformation”. A Hundred years after his death, Martin Luther King took the burden of carrying forward Wycliffe’s reformatory movement once again. We have also come to know about the large number of followers of Wycliffe in this movement known as Lollards. This unit also gives us an idea of the agenda of the reformers against Church.



### 3.6 ASSESSMENT QUESTION

1. Why did the reformers of the period find it necessary for a rigorous reformation of the Church? Critically analyse.
2. Write in detail the religious reformation movement started by John Wycliffe and his followers, the Lollards.





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**JOT DOWN IMPORTANT POINTS**

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## **MODULE II: RENAISSANCE AND REFORMATION**

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## ***Unit 4: IDEA OF RENAISSANCE***

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### **UNIT STRUCTURE**

#### 4.0 Introduction

#### 4.1 Learning Objectives

##### 4.1.1 Defining the Renaissance

##### 4.1.2 End of the Middle Ages

##### 4.1.3 Renaissance Humanism

##### 4.1.4 Great Names of the Italian Renaissance

#### 4.2 Transformations Conditioning the Renaissance

##### 4.2.1 The invention of printing

##### 4.2.2 Explorations on the earth

##### 4.2.3 Revolution in Astronomy

##### 4.2.4 Religious Reformation

#### 4.3 The Renaissance in England

##### 4.3.1 Revival of Learning in England

##### 4.3.2 The Elizabethan Age

##### 4.3.3 The Renaissance and the English Social Life

#### 4.4 Summing Up

#### 4.5 Assessment Questions

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### ***4.0 INTRODUCTION***

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The first to use the specific term "Renaissance" (*rinascita*) in print was Giorgio Vasari, an Italian painter, architect, writer, and historian in his *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters* (1550) to describe the achievements of recent artists. The term was, however, in vogue since the fifteenth century. The word *Renaissance* historically refers to that period in European

history which saw exceptional and unprecedented developments in the fields of art, science, literature and culture. Such progress, remarkable enough to usher the modern age, supposedly began in Italy in the late fourteenth century and soon spread to the other parts of Europe in the fifteenth century and afterwards<sup>1</sup>. In literary terms, the Renaissance may be seen as a new tradition running from Petrarch and Boccaccio in Italy to Jonson and Milton in England.

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#### **4.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

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In this unit we shall discuss the main features of the Renaissance both in continental Europe and later in England, particularly in the Elizabethan Age. After reading this unit you will be able to:

- Arrive at the historical context and a brief definition of the Renaissance, though realizing as well the problems of dating and defining the movement
- Recognize the people and the events chiefly influential in conditioning the Renaissance
- Acquire concise ideas on particular concepts relevant while appreciating the Renaissance
- Understand the ramifications of the Renaissance not only in arts and literature but also in religion and the prevailing world view.

##### ***4.1.1 Defining the Renaissance***

Widdowson tells us that the term Renaissance was introduced into English only in 1840, and its popularity was inspired by Jacob Burckhardt's work, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860)<sup>2</sup>. The term is taken from the French

word '*renascence*', which plainly means '*rebirth*'. As stated earlier, it denotes unprecedented progression made in several spheres. The Renaissance was indeed a *rebirth* in the sense of looking back and of rediscovery – for, during these years the glorious classical past of ancient Greece and Rome was revived by scholars, artists and writers in their learning and creations. There is sufficient reason to call the Renaissance anawakening of the intellect and a Revival of Learning.

The intellectual and cultural aspects of the Renaissance spanned many countries of Europe over many centuries. Hence, this complex phenomenon defies a single, concise definition. It has variously been recognized as the emergence of modernity at the close of the medieval period; or a revived growth of interest in classical literature, art and architecture; or more simply as the rediscovery of man and the world.

#### ***4.1.2 End of the Middle Ages***

Historians today state that the Renaissance was the period in European civilization which immediately followed the *Middle Ages*. They say that the Renaissance flowered from the residues of the Middle Ages. Many writers use this term to denote the whole transition from the Middle Ages to the modern world.

#### **LET US STOP AND THINK**



##### **The Middle Ages**

Also called the 'Medieval Period', what we refer to as the Middle Ages is the period from about 500 to 1500 CE in European history. The term was first used by fifteenth century scholars. It is marked to begin with the fall of the Western Roman Empire and merges with the Renaissance. The phrase Dark Ages is also synonymously used to mean the Middle Ages. It identifies the cultural backwardness in

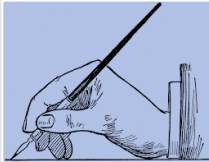
Europe during the medieval period. The world at that time was limited only to the Mediterranean, including the countries that bound it. Similarly, man's intellect was restricted by the prevailing deductive system of logic, which meant agreeing to established principles of truth set by the divine order without questioning or experimentation.

#### ***4.1.3 Renaissance Humanism***

The emphasis of the Renaissance was chiefly on *humanism*, which is a 19<sup>th</sup> century term for an intellectual movement. In away Humanism was a literary attitude indicating the humane studies, of the literature of Rome and Greece, the Classics par excellence. 'Litterae humaniores' ("more human writings") was a term used to refer to those classics. Their study was considered "the best means of promoting the largest human interests" (Long). Classical culture and values influenced to alter the old views on humanity, art and philosophy. Renaissance humanism entails some significant aspects, although they are not to be mistaken as discrete tendencies; for one stimulated and induced the other.

As already introduced, it signifies the renewed enthusiasm in the study of the literature and the art of classical antiquity. Renaissance scholars retrieved, taught in and explained several old works in Latin and Greek. Worthy writers and artists created brilliant pieces of literature and art in imitation of the classical ideals. Humanist writers chiefly followed Plato, Aristotle and Cicero and wrote on educational, moral and political subjects. Enthused by this, human aptitude was honoured and man was deemed capable of accomplishing excellence. In fact, humanism accorded to Man a primary place in the universe. In philosophical attitude, a neo-classical humanism was

encouraged by scholars like Erasmus who based their ideas on a harmonious universe with Man at its centre. 'Man' was a source of infinite possibilities, ideally developing towards a balance of physical, spiritual, moral, and intellectual faculties. Such exercises served to illuminate the darkest corners of the intellect.



### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. What is the meaning of Renaissance?

When and who did use the term for the first time?

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3 What is in the core of the concept of humanism?

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4 Write few important names of Italian Renaissance.

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#### 4.1.4 Great Names of the Italian Renaissance

Petrarch and Boccaccio initiated resurgence in literature in Italy of the fourteenth century. Petrarch was a Florentine scholar and poet, and one of the first humanists. In fact, he actively set up a revolution in reviving classical texts, for which he is sometimes hailed as the founder of *Humanism*, paving the way



for the Renaissance. Boccaccio, Italian author and poet, was another significant humanist. In painting we may name Giotto, the foremost Italian painter of the fourteenth century, notable for establishing a style of painting that was to develop a century later.

In the fifteenth-century, one of the greatest Italian artists was the painter Fra Angelico. Then, Andrea Mantegna, notable for his dedication to classical antiquity and his attention to detail, and Sandro Botticelli are the other outstanding names in art. Italian sculptor Donatello studied classical sculpture and inspired Michelangelo. Ghiberti is one more name in sculpture, best known for the bronze doors of the Florence Baptistery. Filippo Brunelleschi, the ‘first modern engineer’, is recognized in Renaissance architecture. In philosophical thought the attempt was to synthesize a range of human thought systems to find a universal philosophy. The greatest of these was made by the Neoplatonic philosopher, Pico della Mirandola, who attempted to synthesize Platonism, Aristotelianism and a host of others.

In the 16th Century, Italian High Renaissance had unmatched painters and sculptors in Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, Titian and Giovanni Bellini. In literature, the poet Tasso was one of the most widely read in Europe along with Ariosto. Machiavelli was distinguished as an outstanding political diplomat and philosopher; and in music, the composer Palestrina was highly acclaimed.

### **LET US STOP AND THINK**



#### **The Renaissance Man**

The Renaissance honoured individual uniqueness and gave rise to the notion of the Renaissance Man. Man was liberated by the

fresh attitude of probing and acquiring knowledge. As noted above, Man during Renaissance was attaining equilibrium in physical, spiritual, moral, and intellectual abilities. He was inspired by unlimited opportunities open before him, driven and shaped by the re-discovered culture of classical antiquity. Further, he was no longer bound by ecclesiastical authorities, thereby signifying a new culture of freedom and enquiry. The true Renaissance Man was the thinker, the seeker and the creator molded into one. He displayed outstanding genius in more than one area of proficiency, wonderfully illustrated, for example, by the multi-talented Michaelangelo – who was a painter of singular excellence, a remarkable poet, an architect and a sculptor, all at the same time – and Leonardo da Vinci, the great scientist who astounded the world also with his paintings too. As Widdowson elucidates, the Renaissance Man was “himself both an example and celebrant of that proud humanity, physical and mental, which characterises the Renaissance world-view”.

#### **4.2 TRANSFORMATIONS CONDITIONING THE RENAISSANCE**

The Renaissance is not an episode that came about abruptly at a point in history after the Middle Ages. It is ‘better thought of as a process of gradual change’ (Widdowson) following the outright conservatism in the Medieval times in most areas of life and thought. Trevelyan even opines that periods may not represent facts and, in fact, the transformation from the Middle Ages to the modern are seen as ‘retrospective conceptions’ formed from a view of past events. We may say that certain events initiated a sequence of transformations that conditioned the flowering of the Renaissance. When the Byzantine Empire (also called the Eastern Roman Empire)

ended with Constantinople falling to the Ottoman Turks in 1453, Greek scholars brought classical manuscripts to Italy. Adventurous voyages, to identify unmapped 'dark' regions on the earth, together with radical conjectures in science broadened the horizon of the human mind. Impelled by them, the behavior of the mind was generally conditioned to become more critical than it had been in the Middle Ages.

#### ***4.2.1 The invention of printing***

The new aspiration for knowledge mentioned above was indeed remarkable. Then, the invention of printing, attributed to the German Johannes Gutenberg, was a milestone event as it facilitated the spread of the new learning through Europe. A large number of recently found Greek manuscripts could, thereby, be propagated.

#### ***4.2.2 Explorations on the earth***

The inquiring spirit was equally notable in the discovery and exploration of new lands. The hitherto uncharted world of the Americas was located when Christopher Columbus unknowingly landed upon it in 1492. Thereafter, the Portuguese Vasco da Gama had successfully sailed around the Cape of Good Hope and into the Indian Ocean in 1497. In the sixteenth century, another Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan is believed to have led an expedition all around the world. He also discovered a passage from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean.

#### Conditions of Renaissance

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### ***4.2.3 Revolution in Astronomy***

The period had to come to terms with the Copernican system of astronomy replacing the Ptolemaic system which thought the Earth was at the center of the universe. Mathematician and astronomer Nicholas Copernicus revolutionized astronomy by placing the sun at the center. Human thought naturally underwent an upheaval. Thus, the mental horizon expanded even beyond the earth itself.

### ***4.2.4 Religious Reformation***

In religion, the old ideals and beliefs were altered. The Reformation was the sixteenth century movement led by Martin Luther, the priest and professor of theology in Germany towards religious change. With its view to reform the church, the Protestant Reformation led to a break with the Roman Catholic Church and the Pope's authority that previously claimed supremacy in Western Europe. The Protestant movement against the beliefs and practices of the Catholic Church was to extend throughout Europe. "...reason not religion" became the "principle governing human behavior" (Widdowson). (Refer to Unit 5 for details)

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## ***4.3 THE RENAISSANCE IN ENGLAND***

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The Renaissance set off transformations late in England, only in the sixteenth century, and did not have its emergence until the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods. The fifteenth century England had always adhered to traditional beliefs and notions. The culmination of the fifteenth century was the close of an era just as the beginning of the sixteenth century was like

a passage to another era, from the Middle Ages to modern times.

The technology for printing on paper, after Gutenberg's invention had flooded Europe with old and new publications, revolutionized the later fifteenth century England. William Caxton came up with his press in 1476 at Westminster. The first book printed in English was *Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye*. It was a translated work by Caxton himself. He went on to publish around eighty books in his press. It was only a few decades later that Columbus made his daring bid to chart a new sea-route to the east, though landing eventually upon the American continent. This audacious exploration was a vital cause for England's commercial prosperity in the years to come. England had truly opened her eyes after the medieval darkness.

Historians believe that in creative effusions the Renaissance in England reached its truly remarkable phases only in the later part of 1570s and early 1580s. Its greatest achievements were in literature, in lesser measure in music, architecture and art. In fact, in visual arts it hardly could match their supremacy in Italy of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The impact lasted till around the seventeenth century. This segment in England is particularly distinguished—from the pan-European developments detailed above -- as the *English Renaissance*.

#### ***4.3.1 Revival of Learning in England***

The Revival of Learning signifies an intellectual progress with the renewed interest of the human mind in arriving at knowledge and truth, after the obscurity in the medieval times. Greek was dedicatedly and passionately studied, perceiving the great beauty in the lately recovered Greek classics. The recently

uncovered storehouse of Greek poetry and philosophy, coupled with the explorative quest into strange regions, caused a setback to scholasticism. Authorities could no longer impose their version of 'truth'; the spirit of enquiry and discovery prevailed everywhere to verify and establish what was true.

Appreciation of the magnificence and brilliance of the Greek and Latin classics and an attitude of revolt against divine authorities was revealed in the English literature of the sixteenth century. The critical propensity of the human mind was evident when the teaching of Greek was initiated by Grocyn in 1491 followed by John Linacre and John Colet at Oxford. In fact, Oxford and Cambridge Universities were the grounds where the young humanists were prepared.

Following this, the enthusiasm for classical learning became comprehensive, spreading far and wide. A famous English scholar Roger Ascham in his *Toxophilus: The School of Shooting* (1545) laments about the native literature when he opines about the Latin or Greek language that everything was "so excellently done in them, that none can do better" while in the English tongue things were so meanly done both in matter and handling that no man could do worse than that. Ascham's grief is sufficiently indicative of the amazement and admiration which the Latin and Greek works could generate. Books written in early sixteenth century England mostly comprised translations of ancient and modern Latin and Greek literature. Many of the great Classics had been translated into English by the end of the sixteenth century. English writers next undertook to imitate those Classics.

The effects of the Renaissance were particularly noticeable in English literature from the later part of the sixteenth century and there was a great increase in the production of printed works in English. This resulted in the rapid rise in literacy. This

was the golden period of literary works. Notable writers were Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser, the University Wits, Francis Bacon, William Shakespeare and Ben Jonson. Thus the Renaissance endowed English literature with a rich heritage.

#### ***4.3.2 The Elizabethan Ages***

The reign of Queen Elizabeth I from 1558 to 1603 is popularly exalted as the golden age in English history. The 'English' Renaissance was prominently realized by the time of Queen Elizabeth and was celebrated with other writers by John Milton when he observed "a noble and puissant nation, rousing herself, like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks..." (Areopagitica). It was much to do with the accession of a well-liked monarch in the form of the queen, during whose time great progress was witnessed in the English national life. The following features of the Age are prominently noted:

*Political Peace and Stability:* The queen's reign saw an ideal government as it demonstrated political stability. English national life rapidly and steadily progressed with the peace that ensued. The time rightly favored imagination, exploration, experimentation and creative endeavors which characterized the Renaissance.

*Defeat of the Spanish Armada:* One of the greatest instances of England's military glory was her victory over the Spanish Armada in 1588. It is celebrated as an illustration of the might and spirit of the Renaissance in the Elizabethan period.

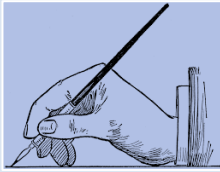
*Strong awareness of patriotism:* The nation prospered and the enthusiasm of the people rose to an unprecedented high point under Elizabeth's intelligent leadership. Nationalistic fervor charged up with the devotion of the queen towards the nation.

The developments further inspired an ardent patriotism in the people. This patriotic nationalism became an evocative element of the Renaissance.

*Religious reform:* During Elizabeth's period *Anglicanism* and the Church of England found its real form. Besides, a kind of settlement was reached between *Catholicism* and *Protestantism* (which asserted the independence of the individual judgment), inspired by her policy of religious tolerance. (This will be explicated in Unit 5). This atmosphere motivated a free development of every human faculty, which is at the core of the Renaissance.

*Abundant Literary output:* The Renaissance saw heights in literary achievements, marked by profusion in creative works of various kinds during Elizabeth's time-- including the recently flowered Sonnet. Along with other forms, drama became the dominant medium of expression, maturing with the University Wits, particularly Christopher Marlowe and attaining its peak in the hand of William Shakespeare. For the theater was consistent with the confident and analytical approach of the period, most relevant in an age of impatient endeavors. Further, dramatic blank verse found its bold articulation. We understand that the output in drama outshined poetry; though, there still had been poetic works of distinctive originality and beauty. The spirit of adventure and enthusiasm inspired a romantic exuberance. Edmund Spenser's *The Shepheard's Calendar* and *The Faerie Queene*, the sonnets of Sir Philip Sidney and William Shakespeare, and Sir Walter Raleigh's lyrics are salient poetic works. Many great writers undertook to celebrate Elizabeth as the Virgin Queen. English prose too made a secure and assertive advance over the hitherto dominating Latin.





### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Write down three reasons that helped in Renaissance during Elizabethan times.

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2. State one reason how invention of printing machine helped in bringing social change.

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#### *4.3.3 The Renaissance and the English Social Life*

The English social atmosphere underwent a series of religious, economic and political changes under the impact of the Renaissance. These changes were reflected in science, literature and philosophy.

The major representative literature of the Elizabethan period reflects the socio-political panorama. The great religious upheaval of the Protestant Reformation was prior to Shakespeare's birth. This movement began in 1517 with Martin Luther's declaring independence from the Catholic Church. In

1536 Henry VIII also disengaged England from the Catholic Church. William Shakespeare (1564-1616), in his plays, has maintained a sort of neutrality in religious issues because of the high sensitivity of the matter. However, his works are not completely devoid of the religious context. In his *Twelfth Night* (1602), he makes fun of the growing Puritan movement in England. In *Love's Labour's Lost* (1597) and *Measure for Measure* (1604) Shakespeare presents the newly reformed individuals in a humorous way. But his plays are much more concerned with the economic changes wrought by Renaissance. The Renaissance was marked by the decline of the feudal system and the growth of commerce. It introduced Capitalism in European trade. Capital holding companies were formed in England which began vast trade with Russia, the Far East and other regions. The resourceful individuals invested capital in trading companies like the Muscovy Company (set up in 1555), the East India Company, and the West India Company. The investor earned handsome profits regularly from these companies. Shakespeare also was an investor; however, his benefits from these companies came indirectly through his investments in the inland theatrical company named Globe Theatre. The Globe was a partnership business, still it earned profit from abroad through a joint investment in a business enterprise.

Economic development was one of the most remarkable aspects of the Renaissance. Cities like London, Venice, Florence, Burges, Toledo, etc. were growing and expending immensely. As a result they also generated newer opportunities for aspiring people. But the atmosphere of the cities was quite deplorable. They were crowded, dirty, and dangerous. Public hygiene became a matter of great concern.

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#### **4.4 SUMMING UP**

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The Renaissance has been the most significant period in the European history. It has been described as the era of birth of a new world out of the ashes of the dark ages. It was a period of the discovery of the world and the discovery of man, an era of the emergence of untrammelled individualism in life, thought, religion and art (Abrams). The Renaissance can be regarded as a force on the stagnant society and civilisation of the middle ages opening up new horizons for mankind. The Renaissance opened up new learning through the revival of Greek knowledge and widespread learning through printing. As we have discussed, the Renaissance brought radical changes to Christianity by striking the foundations of institutionalism of the Roman Catholic Church. This new spirit of Protestantism was based on humanism and individualism which upheld man above the society. The Renaissance was a period of explorations and experiments, laying the seeds of the later imperialism among the European nations. It was also the period of new scientific inventions and discoveries. In English literature it embraced the work of Sidney, Spenser, and Shakespeare; it is marked by a new self-confidence in vernacular literatures, a flourishing of lyric poetry, and a revival of such classical forms as epic and pastoral literature. English drama and poetry flourished in this period at the hands of the genius like the University Wits, William Shakespeare, etc. That is why the Renaissance can reasonably be called the golden period of the European history.



#### **4.5 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

1. Discuss various conditions that helped in bringing Renaissance to England.
2. 'Revival of learning due to printing press quickened Renaissance in England'. Enumerate.

#### **JOT DOWN IMPORTANT POINTS**

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***UNIT 5: EXPLORATION AND CONQUEST OF NEW  
LANDS, CONFLICT WITH SPAIN AND  
CONTINENTAL POWERS, CONFLICT  
BETWEEN CATHOLICS AND PROTESTANTS,  
CONQUEST OF IRELAND***

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**UNIT STRUCTURE**

5.0 Introduction

5.1 Learning Objectives

5.2 Exploration and Conquest of New Lands

5.2.1 Key English Explorers

5.3 England's Conflict with Spain and Continental Powers

5.3.1 Conflict with Spain

5.4 Conquest of Ireland

5.5 Conflicts between the Catholics and the Protestants

5.6 Summing Up

5.7 Assessment Questions

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***5.0 INTRODUCTION***

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In this Unit we shall discuss the factors which impelled a geographical quest for unknown territories during the Renaissance and the causes leading to the conquest of the new-found worlds. This is the period when England started the process of colonization which took a global shape in due course. This period is marked by great adventure and expeditions that also hugely impacted literature of its time. The Unit further deliberates on the aspects related to England's conflict with Continental Powers, particularly Spain, and then her conquest of Ireland. We shall also consider the reasons and impact of the

conflict between Catholics and Protestants in the Renaissance era.

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### ***5.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES***

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After reading this Unit you will be able to:

- Identify significant Renaissance explorers and appreciate their daring and momentous ventures into the unknown
- Realize the circumstances and objectives in the colonization of newly discovered lands
- Know what factors induced England's conflict with Continental Powers as well as the political and economic nuances of this issue
- Understand the various facets and implications of the religious conflict between the Catholics and the Protestants

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### ***5.2 EXPLORATION AND CONQUEST OF NEW LANDS***

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The Renaissance was marked by a curiosity and a spirit of search and inquiry. In the Age of Discovery search for New Worlds and their exploration were, thus, essential expressions of this attitude of the Renaissance period in Europe. The explorers were putting different bits of the picture in place, to form the world map as we know now. Immense courage and resilience were demanded of the explorers of the era who sailed into the unknown. The use of compass and astrolabe was an important development in this period, when another equally significant episode was the use of maps. Such factors provided a new impetus in the exploration of uncharted regions.

Portugal was located in the best geographical position to lead the way in exploring the western coast of Africa by sea.

Explorers from Portugal ventured down that path. Their mission was to find a course round Africa to finally reach Asia. Bartolomeu Dias was the first explorer round the southern tip of Africa; he could not continue to Asia as he was lost at sea near the Cape of Good Hope. Vasco da Gama accomplished this journey around the Cape of Good Hope, as he got inspired and informed by Dias' attempt. He made three successful expeditions to India starting in 1497. Explorers also endeavoured to investigate a western route across the Atlantic. They were led by Christopher Columbus, who was funded by Spain in his enterprise. When the Portuguese King John II refused him financial support, he turned to Spanish monarchs King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella. The Renaissance burning desire for knowledge and hunger for gold and glory were at work when they agreed. Also significant were Spain's clash with Islamic nations on religious grounds and her political strategies against Portugal. Further, land ways to Asia had been barred by Islamic heads of state and the discovery of sea routes around Africa was under the control of the Portuguese. Thus, a journey round the earth, to search for a course back into Asia, was vital for Spain's prosperity and defence. We have the story of Amerigo Vespucci's expeditions across the Atlantic, which ascertained the existence of the new continent named America. We must also regard the name of the Portuguese Ferdinand Magellan amongst the westward explorers, for proposing a circumnavigation of the earth on behalf of Spain. Although in attempting it Magellan lost his life, one of his ships achieved the feat of sailing around the globe.

As a pragmatic reason for the explorations, many European nations felt that trade relations with other countries could be an excellent process of amassing wealth. Most of the lands the explorers accosted held resources of good commercial

profit in Europe. Vasco da Gama's journeys helped firmly establish trade routes to the east by sea. The Italians played the role of major traders between the Eastern Mediterranean and the other parts of Europe. The motivation was also to colonize the New World. The Portuguese expeditions were able to assert first colonial rights on African territory in the fifteenth century. Colonization was initiated when Columbus robbed indigenous treasures and took human captives from newly discovered locations. He returned with more than a thousand men. Colonialism led to rivalry and antagonism between the European powers and envy of the leading power Spain. In their bid to accumulate wealth and assert their supremacy, some of the nations came into serious conflict with each other.

### ***5.3.2 Key English Explorers***

The English started their explorations of the new world in 1496. King Henry VIII (1491-1547) could claim success in this to a great extent. Anthony Jenkinson made his voyage from the White Sea and reached Bukhara via Moscow. In this mission he discovered the old east-west trade routes through a new path. Exploring to discover the North-west passage, Sir Martin Frobisher (?1535-1594) found the bay in 1576 which was later named after him as Frobisher Bay. He had soil samples from Canada's Kodlunarn Island examined for gold content. Other notable navigators of this period include John Davids (1550-1605), Henry Hudson (died 1611), Robert Bylot, Sir Thomas Button (died 1634) and William Baffin (died 1622). All these navigators ventured to discover the North-west Passage but failed. But in their effort they discovered many regions and islands, areas which assumed great commercial significance.



Sir Francis Drake, Sir Richard Hawkins, Sir Richard Grenville, Thomas Cavendish (1560-1592), and Richard Hakluyt are some names historically and politically very important. Among many others, they are associated with the beginnings of colonization. Hakluyt was a geographer who wrote books like *The Principal Navigations, Voyages and Discoveries of the English Nation* (1589)

The tide of discovery and exploration of new places during the Renaissance soon led towards colonization. The idea of acquiring a political and administrative control over the newly discovered lands emerged among the European nations. This ultimately led to a competition and conflict of power. England, Italy, Spain, Portugal and the Netherlands were the most conflicting nations.

The English colonialism started with the ambitious explorations by voyagers like Drake and Frobisher. Their attempts to acquire new territories involved them in military struggle with other European nations. The conquest of Spain in 1603 was the onset of the colonial venture of England. In 1607 they founded the settlements Jamestown and Virginia. Plymouth and Massachusetts were established in 1620. They were able to occupy a large part of the Americas, including parts of Hudson Bay, parts of the West Indies and Bermuda. The Spaniards were the major counterparts of the British in the Americas. However they could not stand as an obstacle. The British seized Jamaica from the Spaniards in 1655. With the acquisition of the Americas British people began to migrate there in large numbers. By the mid-seventeenth century the number of British inhabitants in the New World was sixty thousand.

Besides the Americas, the British expanded their colonial paws to other different portions of the world too. The historic East India Company was founded in 1600 with the goal of

exploring Asia, particularly India. Many similar bodies were set up for the process of colonising different parts of the world. (Choudhury,2005)

Colonialism brought remarkable changes to the way of life in England. It made the country rich with the resources derived from the colonies. The country imported a lot of new products from the colonies. Major imported products include coffee, tea, sugar, tobacco and timber.



### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

1. Name few prominent explorers of Renaissance England.

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2 How did exploration of new lands led to colonization? Give two reasons.

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## **5.3 ENGLAND'S CONFLICTS WITH SPAIN AND CONTINENTAL POWERS**

### **5.3.1 Conflict with Spain**

During the Renaissance England got involved in conflicts with several European countries. Among them, Spain was the

most remarkable. Craving for colonial power and wealth, and religious clashes were the motivating factors behind this conflict. Proposal for the marriage to Queen Mary I by Philip, the prince of Spain, was a cause for concern and anxiety. For the English people could foresee the authority Spain could impose on their nation, if this marriage happened. The queen, however, supported the prospect from her heart. The Emperor of Spain, Philip's father approved of the relation because the conjugal bond would help associate England in their mission against France. The Anglo-Spanish conflict practically occurred between 1585 and 1603 during the reign of Queen Elizabeth.

Protestantism was promoted in England under the reign of Elizabeth. The Pope excommunicated her. On the other hand Spain was a Catholic nation. This difference served as a mobilizing factor in the conflict between the two nations. The fanatic Spanish Catholics regarded this conflict as a religious crusade.

Italy had assumed a monopoly over the European trade. Among other European nations England and Spain attempted to throw this Italian monopoly over the trade between the Mediterranean areas and other portions of Europe. Enthusiastic explorers like Sir Francis Drake (1540-1596), Sir Richard Grenville (1542-1591), Thomas Cavendish (1560-1592) and Richard Hakluyt (1553-1616) are remarkable. Their contribution for power and hold over the international trade resulted in the outset of a struggle between England and Spain in 1585. It was Grenville who first got involved in the struggle. In August 1585, Queen Elizabeth declared to protect the Netherlands against the Spanish invasion. Robert Dudley (1574-1649) led the English army to the Netherlands and fought the Spanish forces. In April 1587, Francis Drake destroyed the Spanish military ships at Cadiz. The English naval force

comprising of 34 ships and 163 armed merchant ships led by Lord Howard (1536-1624), Sir Francis Drake and Sir John Hawkins (1532-1595) overcame the Spanish Armada in August 1588. Yet, struggling back, the Spanish forces were able to set foot in Cornwall of England and burnt down the town of Penzance in 1595. King Phillip II of Spain sent another troupe later, but his naval force was destroyed by a natural calamity.

Queen Elizabeth I died in March 1603. Her death can be marked as the end to the two decade-long Anglo-Spanish conflict. James I ascended the throne after Elizabeth's death. King James issued a declaration against all kinds of acts of piracy at the Anglo-Spanish marine boundaries. The violence of the English escapades of the seamen and the pirates on the Spanish vessels formed a major cause for the conflict between the two countries. The pirates robbed gold and silver from the Spanish vessels. On the other hand Queen Elizabeth did not make any attempt to take any action against the pirates or to chastise them. This caused great concern in the Spanish royal authorities.

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#### ***5.4 CONQUEST OF IRELAND***

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Like the conflict with Spain, England got involved in a severe conflict with Ireland. The Protestant English government wanted to establish military governors replacing the local Irish lords. With this purpose Henry Sidney (1529-1586) was appointed the Lord Deputy of Ireland and the English administrators tried to overpower the Irish. They challenged the Irish in terms of both power and religion. In reaction to this domination James Fitzmaurice Fitzgerald instigated a rebellion. He was the leader of the Desmond Dynasty and was a Catholic. Fitzgerald was joined by other Irish lords. Their rebellion

started in 1569 and continued up to 1573. Numerous Irish rebels were executed by the new Lord President of Munster Drury. A large number of Irish people escaped to Europe. The English banned private armies in Ireland and strict English laws were introduced. They replaced the Irish customs with the English ones and uprooted the Irish culture.

Later in 1579 Fitzgerald started a war in Munster. They were supported by the Pope with papal money and troops. It was planned that later on Ireland would be governed by King Philip of Spain, but the English badly defeated the six hundred troops along with the Irish rebel lords. The English burnt the crops in Irish fields which resulted in famine and submission. The Irish war then ended with a severe defeat for Ireland. In this struggle the Desmond dynasty was devastated.

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### ***5.5 CONFLICT BETWEEN CATHOLICS AND PROTESTANTS DURING THE RENAISSANCE***

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Europe witnessed the most intense conflict between Catholicism and Protestantism during the Renaissance. The emergence of Protestantism led to the movement towards reforming the church. The Protestant institutions stood against Catholicism and showed alternate paths of spirituality. Martin Luther was the key person behind this radical movement. However, many causes had been there for centuries at the root of such a revolt, which led to the disillusionment of people with the Catholic Church.

One of the remarkable factors was the ‘Babylonian Captivity’ of Avignon papacy (Choudhury,2005). This refers to the period of sixty-eight years between 1309 and 1377. During this period the seat of the Pope had been in Avignon in the Kingdom of Aries instead of Rome, the original abode of the

popes. Therefore, this has been called the period of Avignon Papacy. This happened because of strife between Pope Boniface VIII (1294-1303) and King Phillip IV (1285-1314) of France. After the death of Boniface's successor Benedict XI (1303-04), a Frenchman Clement V (1305-1314) was elected as Pope in 1305. Clement did not move to the papal seat in Rome and in 1309 he shifted his seat to Avignon. A total of seven popes continued to hold their office in Avignon for the subsequent 67 years. However, in the year 1376 Pope Gregory XI (1370-1378) left Avignon and restored papal court to its original place, Rome, in 1377. Thus the Avignon Papacy ended officially.

The Avignon Papacy obtained its other name – the 'Babylonian Captivity' – from its similarity to the historic event of the Jews being exiled from Babylon. The moving of the Pope's court from Rome to Avignon by French can be termed as an exile of the papacy. Clement V was the key person to carry out this move. There were self-interests with material purpose behind the shift of the papacy. In Avignon the papal authorities were subjected to ambitions of the French king. Religion lost its integrity and declined. During this period, Christianity was influenced by the French rulers in various ways. One remarkable incident was the suppression of the Knight Templars which escorted the Christian travellers to Jerusalem.

Other important factors that made people disillusioned with Catholicism include the Great Schism, lack of mechanism for any reform, and most importantly the Black Death. The Black Death is associated with the reorientation of the economy in many parts of Europe. After the collapse of the feudal structure commercialism grew up in the urban areas. This too formed a factor in the movement of Reformation. The church's grip over the people was thwarted. Such dilution of the church's power resulted in the development of a secular impulse. Immortality in

the hub of religion generated dissatisfaction among all the people. John Wycliffe was another figure to organise resistance to the corrupt authorities of spirituality. Due to the questionable ideology of religion there emerged contrast within the church itself. The humanists proclaimed change in the church through their emphasis on education. Humanists like Erasmus were against the institutional outlook of religion. They introduced devotion instead of rituals of the Catholic Church (Choudhury,2005).

One of the weak points of the church that triggered hostility was the irrelevance of the principles in the contemporary situation. Particularly the merchants could not adhere to the codes of morality preached by the Catholic Church. The humanists spoke against it. Another point was the gradual distancing of the priests from the common people. More importantly, many priests were not learned and had no concern for theological research. The priests had to bear responsibility more for the administration of the church premises and its wealth, rather than getting involved in spiritual discourses. All such facts converted the Catholic Church into a hollow structure of religion.

In England too the period of Renaissance was filled with struggles between the Catholics and the Protestants. The seed of religious strife in England sprouted and grew up in the Tudor reign. The reformist wave was first opposed in England. Henry VIII wrote against Martin Luther in his treatise *Defense of the Seven Sacraments* (1521). For this, the Pope honoured him as the 'Fidei Defensor' (Defender of the Faith). Later, however, because of his conflict with the Vatican papacy, Henry VIII shifted to Protestantism after his second marriage to Anne Boleyn. He attracted the parliament to organise the cessation from the Catholic Church of Rome. The Act of Supremacy

made the king authority of the Church of England. During the period 1536-1539 the dissolution of the monasteries was carried out. Pilgrimage came to a halt and shrines were attacked. By means of such an unacceptable severity, Henry Tudor established Protestantism on a strange ground by 1547. The royal patronage of Protestantism continued during the reign of his son Edward VI (1537-1553). The reformists wiped out every trace of the devastated Catholicism in England.

Succeeding Edward VI, Queen Mary I(1553-1558) ascended the throne in 1553. She was a devout Catholic. She got indulged in restoring of the principles and practices of the Catholic Church. Her attempt to revert to Catholicism was even more serious than the activities of Henry VIII. Her marriage to the Catholic King Phillip II of Spain was not favoured by the common people. She persecuted the Protestants including the burning of three hundred people at the stake. For such ferocity she earned the name 'Bloody Mary'. Her anti-Protestant drive was short-lived and Queen Elizabeth succeeded her.

Elizabeth I tried to establish a balance between the extreme poles. However, she believed in Protestantism; she believed in liberating people to practice Catholic religion unless it caused any disturbance in her administration of the kingdom. Some Catholics conspired to replace Elizabeth with Queen Mary of the Scots. But these uprisings were subdued and Queen Mary was prosecuted. Thus Queen Elizabeth was able to maintain Protestantism as the official religion of England. Although there was a major uprising of Catholicism in the North of England in 1569, it was suppressed. Protestantism rather gained more popularity in England as the official religion after the Catholic Church's declaring Elizabeth illegitimate because it created much resentment among the public against the Roman Catholic Church.



Protestantism emerged and developed as a revolt against the increasing hypocrisy and corruption in Catholicism. Catholicism urged on the observance of conventional and irrelevant practices. The Elizabethan Catholics believed that church services and the Bible should be in Latin. On the other hand, the Protestants urged on the Bible being in the language of the people for their convenience. Elizabethan Catholics had the firm faith in the priests as the mediator between man and God. They did not believe in the divine capacity of the papal authorities. The Catholics stressed on reforming the external magnificence of the religious houses while the Protestants laid emphasis on people's faith and devotion to the Scriptures.

In the period following the Elizabethan era too, the religious strife between the Catholics and the Protestants continued, although by this time Protestantism was strongly established in the empire. During the reign of Charles I, England faced Irish Catholic rebellions in the 1640s. During this period the Civil War between the Puritans and the state also occurred.

Despite these conflicts between the Catholics and the Protestants England was quiet after the European Reformation. The religious conflict could not go beyond the control of the monarchy and the state. Therefore the order and discipline of the state was less thwarted than the other European nations. Therefore, the uprising of Protestantism can better be considered a national effort and an official protest against the corrupt papacy.

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## ***5.6 SUMMING UP***

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The Renaissance was the time when the thirst for knowledge, glory and wealth charged the mind of man. The

Renaissance Man demonstrated unprecedented courage and resilience in the figures of daring explorers who endeavoured to discover unknown territories. The use of equipment like the compass, the astrolabe and maps was significant in such missions. Bartolomeu Dias exhibited a route round the southern tip of Africa which Vasco da Gama followed and successfully made to India thrice. Then, with Spanish support Christopher Columbus led an expedition to chart a western path across the Atlantic. Amerigo Vespucci spotted America by reaching across the Atlantic. Ferdinand Magellan of Portugal is known for conceiving the idea of a circumnavigation of the globe. Thus exploration of unmapped regions was an essential feature of the Renaissance.

The same zeal manifested in English explorers making serious efforts to discover a North-west Passage. In spite of failure in their original missions, their attempts bore fruit. Several of them – notably Sir Martin Frobisher, John Davids, Henry Hudson et al. – announced to the world the existence of areas and islands having immense commercial prospects. Exploration and discovery of such new regions practically shifted the direction to colonization, the scheme to politically subjugate them, which soon gave birth to a bitter conflict among nations. Eventually, England, Italy, Spain, Portugal and the Netherlands got into serious clash of power.

The English explorers had to face the military might of other European countries. Most significantly, England conquered Spain in 1603 and initiated the process of colonial expansion. England also occupied a greater portion of the Americas, parts of West Indies and Bermuda. Colonizing rule required the formation of administrative bodies, an instance of

which was the East India Company founded with the objective of getting a hold over Asia, particularly India. Products and raw materials from colonized areas proved a rich treasure that was to transform the lives in England.

A remarkable episode in English history was the Anglo-Spanish conflict during Elizabeth's time, which happened between 1585 and 1603. One instigating cause was the religious disagreement since the Catholics of Spain saw a vigorous religious campaign in the English advancement.

England and Spain attempted to overthrow Spain's monopoly in European trade. England realized a powerful hold in international trade, setting off a struggle between England and Spain in 1585. In the bid to defend the Netherlands against Spanish assault, the English Army under Robert Dudley fought Spain in 1585; and in 1587, Francis Drake destroyed the Spanish military ships at Cadiz. The historic defeat of the Spanish Armada was accomplished in 1588 by the English naval force led by Lord Howard, Sir Francis Drake and Sir John Hawkins. According to historical account Spain hit back, firmly turning up in Cornwall of England, and burnt down the town of Penzance in 1595. The death of Queen Elizabeth marked an end of the long Anglo-Spanish conflict.

Ireland also involved in a fight with England who attempted to overpower them. The Irish rebellion of 1569 launched by James Fitzmaurice Fitzgerald was doused, with a number of Irish rebels executed and more others escaping to Europe. In 1579 Fitzgerald begun a war supported by the Pope with papal money and troops. England powerfully overthrew the army and the revolting Irish lords. The Irish war ended with a severe defeat for Ireland.

Protestantism was a remarkable movement during the Renaissance exerting for a reformation of the Church. Protestantism developed as a revolt against the growing corruption in Catholicism and laid emphasis on faith and devotion. People had already been disillusioned with the Catholic Church. The Church gradually lost its sway over the general mass.

The Avignon Papacy was one factor; while there were several others too – such as the Great Schism, lack of mechanism for any reform, and the Black Death. Collapse of feudal structure and growth of commercialism further lessened the Church's hold on the people. Neither the merchants adhere to its codes nor did the Humanists accept them. The priests moved away from the people. Such facts reduced the Catholic Church to a mere empty institution. In England, King Henry VIII clashed with the Vatican Papacy and moved towards Protestantism after his second marriage to Anne Boleyn. He attracted the parliament to organize a cessation from the Catholic Church of Rome. The Act of Supremacy made the king authority of the Church of England. Mary I, ascending the throne in 1553, took measures to restore Catholicism. Her bloody anti-Protestant drive was transitory. Queen Elizabeth succeeded her, who sought to ascertain a compromise; though she succeeded in maintaining Protestantism as the official religion of England. The religious strife, however, continued beyond Elizabeth's time particularly in the reign of Charles I. By then Protestantism had been firmly established and the conflict was manageable for the Stat



### **5.7 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

1. Write a note on the chief navigators of Elizabethan age and their contribution in creating a way for colonisation.
2. The conflict between the Catholic and the Protestants emerged as a major clash during Renaissance...Elaborate.

#### **JOT DOWN IMPORTANT POINTS**

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## **UNIT 6: REFORMATION**

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### **UNIT STRUCTURE**

#### 6.0 Introduction

#### 6.1 Learning Objectives

##### 6.1.1 Defining the Protestant Reformation

#### 6.2 A Historical Perspective of the Reformation

##### 6.2.1 Great Leaders of the Reformation

#### 6.3 The Reformation in England

##### 6.3.1 Catalysts of the English Reformation: Tyndale and More

##### 6.3.2 Political Cause of the English Reformation during Henry VIII

##### 6.3.3 The Beginning

##### 6.3.4 Religious Reformation in England under different Monarchs

#### 6.4 Summing Up

#### 6.5 Assessment Questions

#### 6.6 References and Suggested Readings

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### **6.0 INTRODUCTION**

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The Reformation movement, also known as the *Protestant Reformation*, was already—though briefly—introduced in Unit 3. As Abrams identifies, the Reformation was “the new religion” of the Renaissance. He refers to the era of the Renaissance when Europe and the Western Church were facing great religious changes. As the attitude of exploration and enquiry had made Man’s mind more critical, the Renaissance Man questioned the doctrines, the rituals and even the

leadership of the Church. The Protestant Reformation at least brought to an end the hegemony of Roman Catholicism, which refers to the Christian Church that has been the vital spiritual power in the history of Western civilization. Before the Reformation all Christians of Western Europe were a part of the Catholic Church of Rome. This was called the universal church led by the Pope. This Church was extremely rich and powerful. The Reformation made a bold censure of the Roman Catholic Church in several parts of Europe and in England.

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### ***6.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVE***

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In this unit we shall discuss the key aspects of the Reformation in continental Europe and in England. After reading this unit you will be able to:

- Arrive at a comprehensive idea about the religious reform movements in their historical contexts
- Understand the factors that motivated and wrought changes in the concepts, beliefs and practices within Christianity
- Know the religious, social and political causes for reform in the structure and customs of the Church
- Identify the main leaders of the Reformation along with their major propositions and measures
- Recognize the inception and progress of the English Reformation during different rulers

#### ***6.1.2 Defining the Protestant Reformation***

The word *Reformation* literally means an act of change or improvement. More precisely we refer here to a radical rectification of religious practices or of the condition of the



Western Church. *The Reformation* is popularly known in history as the sixteenth century religious revolution which not only called into question the doctrine and authority of the Roman Catholic Church, but also succeeded in a gradual reform by preparing for Protestantism, one of the three major branches of Christianity. The word *Protestant* carries the sense drawn from the 'protest' against the Church that called for reform. Protestantism emphasized on the worth and freedom of personal reasoning. In essence, the Reformation entailed a religious, social and political change.

A segment of this movement in central and north-western Europe, in England too a religious and political transformation occurred during the period of King Henry VIII, who challenged and broke with the power of the Pope and the Catholic Church of Rome; and Edward VI severed all relations with them. A new state religious body, the Anglican Church was established, the head of which was the monarch.

### **LET US STOP AND THINK**



#### **The Pope**

Officially, the Pope is the Bishop of Rome, who is the head of the Roman Catholic Church. The Catholic Church venerates the Pope as the possessor of extraordinary qualities of capacity. It distinguishes the Pope as the singular human being with exceptional holiness and as the supreme leader surmounting the worldwide body of Christians.

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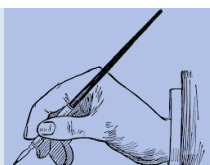
## **5.2 A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE REFORMATION**

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Reformers had long felt the need for an immediate reform of the church – to rid it of the prevalent abusive practices and to refine the moral standard of the clergy. You have already come to know in detail how humanists like John Wycliffe (1331-1384) led the revolt against such anarchy in the name of authority of the church in the previous module. Within the church too there were people who supported them. They showed the possibility of addressing the problems of the church. The ancient assumptions regarding religion were questioned. The humanists laid importance on non-institutional religiosity for devotion and morality. They laid emphasis on devotion as a better alternative to the rituals prescribed by the church. Their new moral conditions upheld the man above ritualistic practices. In this way the Reformation did not aim to destroy the church, rather it tried to reform it so that it performed its genuine humanistic duty by addressing the individual's concerns.

In Western Europe of the 1500s, Catholic Church of Rome was a powerful institution both spiritually and politically and was supposed to be the only means to man's salvation. It was known that the Church had become the house of immoral customs and corrupt practices, which had gone unchecked. Rather than being a centre of spiritual discourses the church became a matter of concern for materialistic aspects; and the church prospered in power and wealth. The Pope at that time claimed absolute temporal and spiritual power. In status, the Pope was seen comparable to a king. The prerogative of the church as the spiritual authority was, thus, uncertain.

Gutenberg's invention of the printing press around the middle of the fifteenth century had a crucial impact on the triumph of Protestant Reformation in Europe. Martin Luther (see below) also benefitted from this. Luther refused to acknowledge Pope's authority and was successful in establishing a movement for purification of Christianity. In the principal codes of belief, the Lutheran reformers only recognized the prime authority of the Scriptures in all concerns of faith. Simply speaking, common Europeans started seeing reason in the claim that God's grace could possibly be gained without intervention of Church authorities. This provided a fresh perspective on Man-God relations. Accordingly, 'faith' was considered the lone justification for God's grace. Luther, thus, sought a theological reform by going down to the root of the issue.



### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

1. What is Protestant Reformation?

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### ***5.2.1 Great Leaders of the Reformation***

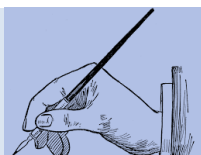
Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536), the scholar from Rotterdam, Netherlands was highly influential in applying his intellectual scholarship in the study of the *New Testament* and a quest for truth. He was more of a Renaissance humanist and not much a dissenter against the Catholic Church or the Pope. In fact, his goals were not revolutionary; rather, he aimed at

purifying and rationalizing Catholicism without damaging its original structure. In 1516, he offered the Scriptures in the Greek language to substitute the earlier ones in Latin. He had the passion to acquire the new classical knowledge of the Renaissance and, like a pious worker, sought to disseminate knowledge to cleanse religion of its errors and superstitions. He may, however, still be reckoned as one of the foundational forces behind the Reformation. This humanist advocated liberal Catholic reform. Scholars detect a bold voice of Erasmus which at times comes to the fore. Widdowson tells us that Erasmus realized and criticized the Church's abuses -- including the selling of pardons and religious relics -- and its pedantry as in *In Praise of Folly* (1509). Besides condemning the vice and cruelty of kings, the self-interest and ignorance of the clergy are denounced in the latter work. The greatest leaders of the Reformation were Martin Luther (1483-1546), a priest and monk and a German professor of theology at the University of Wittenberg; and John Calvin (1509-1564), a French theologian and reformer.

Martin Luther is particularly acknowledged for his *Ninety-five Theses*, a list of propositions for an academic debate on the power and efficacy of indulgences. Luther wrote in Latin and nailed them on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg on October 31, 1517, the eve of All Saints' Day. Scholars tend to date the Reformation as beginning on this day. The new printing technology facilitated him in spreading his ideas rapidly and extensively. The general mass was thereby informed of what was not acceptable. Luther specified that his protest was mainly "*Against the Sale of Papal Indulgences*", out of his 'love for the truth' and 'desire to elucidate it'. 'Indulgence' here refers to the grant by the Pope, which claimed to abate the temporal punishment for sin after death. The practice involved a payment

made against an exemption from the punishment due. The German priest questioned the power of the Pope to pardon an individual's guilt and to remit his punishment for sins. Luther underwent a spiritual evaluation of his self during his service at the Wittenberg University. It was during teaching that his own perspectives and feelings on several concepts, issues and beliefs within Christianity began to change. Ideas began emerging with new shape and meaning, which were to converge as his doctrine of *justification*. Although Luther was excommunicated following this in 1521, his spirited and ethical revolt helped spread Protestantism through many parts of Northern Europe.

John Calvin based himself in Geneva in the middle of the sixteenth century and laid out his severe form of Protestantism, accepted as Calvinism. Calvinism endowed a new form of Christian institutionalism. Alluding to Calvinism, Widdowson informs that Calvin “exported a widely influential, severe and doctrinaire brand of Protestant individualism”. The French reformer is best known for his doctrine of *predestination*. This doctrine dealt with the question of the control that God exercises over the world. This theology basically reminds that man is incapable of participation in the granting of salvation. Rather, it is in God's sovereignty to predestine some as to receive salvation and others as to receive condemnation for sins. Calvin's followers were radical Protestants, categorized as Puritans.



### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

1. Name few pioneers of religious reformation movement in England.

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2. What is the most important work of Martin Luther King?

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### ***5.3 THE REFORMATION IN ENGLAND***

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The church became more and more a defunct authority in terms of social and humanistic concerns. The institution became highly corrupt. The churchmen were involved in concerns about wealth and properties of the church. Besides, the clergies were appointed hierarchically. The wealth and resources of the church drew attention of the rulers. The priests of the church were gradually distancing themselves from the common people as well as from their actual duties. Due to the vast amount of properties of the churches, they had to be more concerned with the financial aspects. Besides, many priests were not properly educated and they had no contribution to spiritual matters at all. As a result they lost faith of the common people.

Unprecedented reform movements in Europe, particularly the powerful advance of the Lutherans and bolstered by the revolutionary zeal of Sir Thomas More and the Oxford Group, shook England quite evidently. John Wycliffe was a key person behind the English movement. He led the Lollards' Movement which was organized in demand of a reform of the Western Christianity. Etymologically 'Lollard' means those without academic background. It was used as a derogatory term for

those rebels against the conventional religious system of Christianity.

Thomas More's *Utopia* translated into English, and William Tyndale's version of the *New Testament* in Standard English were the other crucial milestones. Yet, there is another aspect to the English Reformation, for the religious upheaval there was chiefly conditioned by the personal and political work of King Henry VIII.

### ***5.3.1 Catalysts of the English Reformation: Tyndale and More***

William Tyndale (1494-1536) took out a translation of the *New Testament* in 1525 from the Greek original, which was to be read in all Parish Churches in England. Trevelyan says Tyndale translated the Bible into words of power and beauty which millions were to have daily on their lips. Tyndale made the original words of the Bible accessible and conceivable for all. The general public wasn't deprived of the rich treasure of Biblical wisdom and was no longer kept in the dark about any truth contained in the Bible. Previously, Thomas More (1478-1535) envisioned an ideal social condition just as Plato had earlier imagined in his *Republic*. More delineated his vision of that perfect society in *Utopia*, a significant speculative essay published in Latin in 1516 and translated by Ralph Robinson into English in 1551. In Greek *Utopia* means 'no-place' or 'nowhere land', and in More's *Utopia* fair dealing and rationality resolve all issues. It deals with his quest for the ultimate form of government, the issue of the State's relation with the individual, which also identified religious acceptance by emphasizing on the unreserved toleration of religion. Even the common mind was driven to think and realize that a

wonderful land of that kind was yet a distant dream. Without doubt, Tyndale and More had sown the seeds of the future reform.

### ***5.3.2 Reformation in England: Political Impact***

England underwent a series of gradual religious transformation under different monarchs. This is historically labelled the *English Reformation*. The second Tudor monarch King Henry VIII (reign 1509-1547) followed the habits and practices of a fine Catholic. He had reverence for the Church and he prayed and went to mass. He had struck against the Protestant heresy quite earnestly, because of which the papacy honoured him as the *Defender of the Faith*. Yet, a rift between the king and the Pope caused the real initiation of the Reformation into England, which was to have an extensive impact on the English Tudor history. The Anglican Church was instituted in Henry's period following the formal break with the Catholic Church; he thrust aside the papal authority while he made himself the head of the Church of England. By Henry VIII's death in 1547, the people of England had mostly become Protestant. Following Henry, Edward VI continued a similar religious policy. He brought in Calvinism by affecting the Church procedures to become simpler but stricter. Thereafter, Mary I briefly re-established Catholicism rather spitefully, though Queen Elizabeth came after Mary's death to reconcile the religious conflicts with her compromising policy.

### ***5.3.3 The Beginning***

The major factors behind the Reformation in England were political. It mainly started with the issue of securing a male heir for King Henry VIII to ensure the future of his dynasty, as he



and his queen Catherine of Aragon were unable to succeed in that. With his intention to divorce his queen on this ground, the King sought from Rome a *Papal Dispensation*, a special consent from Pope for the divorce solely on the ground that he was the king (without affecting how the Catholic principle applied for the ordinary mass). In reality, Henry had also, already, planned to marry Ann Boleyn right thereafter. A divorce was not permissible within the faith of Roman Catholicism, which only accorded the idea of an enduring marriage. Pope Clement VII of the Vatican was blatantly reluctant to agree to it and the king faced a threat of being excommunicated if he defied the authority and allowed himself a divorce.

In 1534 Henry passed the Act of Supremacy. This Act empowered the monarch, who pronounced himself ‘the only supreme head on earth of the Church of England’. The old relation of the Pope and the English Church was completely detached by 1535. In consequence, a separate national Church, labelled the ‘Anglican Church’ was established, a church that was self-regulating and not determined by Roman order.

### **LET US STOP AND THINK**



#### **The Anglican Church**

The Adjective Anglican comes from the concept of *Anglicanism* – a major form of Christianity born as a fallout of the Protestant movement. The designation *Anglican Church* is connected to the Church of England, which includes the institutions and the religious concepts developed by it. Mingling aspects of both the Protestant and the Catholic, the

Church of England “remained the central institution of faith among the English people” (Choudhury,2005). It further encompasses the churches in other nations that are in complete agreement with the ceremonial traditions and theological views of the Church of England.

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### *5.3.5 Religious Reformation in England under different Monarchs*

During Henry VIII's reign the absolute power of the king was to be legally imposed over the Church and for all religious matters, thereby uniting the Church and the State. At that time, the richest seats of Catholic Christians were the monasteries where the monks of England lived. Henry also felt a threat as these wealthy monks were not his supporters but of the Pope. So, he took steps to restrain the superiority of the clergy in the English Church by destroying monasteries -- though compensating the monks with jobs or pensions at the same location. As stated by Widdowson King Henry VIII “carried out the Dissolution of the Monasteries, whereby hundreds of religious houses in England were ransacked for their wealth, their abbeys often destroyed, and their lands confiscated and sold.” He utilized the wealth and resources of those institutions for military purpose as well as in increasing the revenue of the crown. The smaller monasteries were closed by 1536 and the larger and significant ones were shut down by 1540. He further passed laws applicable for the ecclesiastical authorities. At first, the laws were to abolish certain minor abusive practices of the Church. Then, he discontinued all financial proceedings of the Pope going from England, and ended his power and control in England. The separation from the Catholic Church brought a halt to holy pilgrimages. As proclaimed in one other law, the

Pope was to be elected by the clergy who were nominated by the King. This tumultuous process of reformation was not accepted by all. However, many of Henry's supporters were Protestants. By 1547 Protestantism was strongly established in England.

When Edward VI (1547-1553) came to power succeeding Henry, disengagement of the Church of England from the Catholic Church of Rome was final. Strict reform measures dictated by Calvinism were launched during his time. The Church services were simplified by doing away with its luxuries and decorations. One notable event was the introduction of an English prayer book for all practices of worship. In addition, doctrines were initiated to result in incorporating the Church of England to the Protestant churches of the time.

Mary I, also called Mary Tudor (1553 - 1558) ascended to the throne upon Edward's death and was instrumental in attempting to bring in Catholicism again as the common religion of England. She lost her support as she followed a cruel policy of persecuting Protestants which included, for instance, burning them at the stake. The intensity of her violent propensity may be perceived from her nickname "Bloody Mary". Her marriage to the king of Spain was also disfavoured partly because Spain was a Catholic nation.

In the midst of such religious discords came Queen Elizabeth (1558-1603) who was markedly successful in settling the issues by preparing for a moderate standpoint between Catholicism and Protestant faith. Although sure and steady, this process wasn't so pleasant. Roman Catholics remained against her and plotted for her downfall, the leaders of which were tortured and executed. She was even excommunicated by the

Pope in 1570. Against this background it is significant that the Church of England was legally re-established, imparting it with the form the period of Henry VIII had seen.

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#### **5.4 SUMMING UP**

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By the end of the Middle Ages the outlook of the people on life got transformed. Various factors stimulated by the Renaissance spirit of individualism came together in the beginning of the sixteenth century to result in a movement to reform the church. This happened initially in Central and North Western Europe and then in England. The absolute spiritual power of the Roman Catholic Church was suspected and reprimanded. Basically, a kind of disillusionment with the overall stand of the Catholic Church was at work behind the Reformation. The objective was to purge the Church of its immoral customs and abuses.

Luther and his followers embarked on a mission to purify Christianity. One serious stance was the refusal to recognize the rights and power of the Pope. Luther's *Ninety-Five Theses* was a powerful document proposing a debate against the Pope's indulgences. Then the revolution made way for Protestantism to establish its firm footing. The gradual development of Protestantism offered people an alternative spiritual path. 'Faith' was the only basis acceptable for God's grace and the Scriptures were to be venerated for faith. The Reformation further advanced to establish an institutional form of Christianity guided by the principles of John Calvin. Religious practices, ceremonies and rituals went through a scrupulous reform. The movement had a deep influence through succeeding history.

The Reformists were highly favoured by the section involved in business and industry. The newly acclaimed liberal principles of religion conformed to their needs. They could not conform to the outmoded conventional and impractical ideals prescribed by the Catholic Church. Martin Luther argued that every man could be his own priest. They established the *Bible* as the primary instrument of faith and gradually diluted the monopoly of the clergy as the medium of spiritual knowledge. They availed direct access to the classics for the common people.

The framework for the English Reformation attains meaning in the light of the European movement, but the original motivation for this phase wasn't similar. King Henry VIII's declaration of himself as the supreme head of the Church of England and the establishment of the Anglican Church, which was restored in Elizabeth's reign, are remarkable turning points. This form of the Church assimilated fundamental assumptions and beliefs within Protestantism though keeping several features of the Catholic Church. Henry initiated the dissolution of the monasteries which was completed by 1540. It was one of the most revolutionary events in the history of England. He disbanded Catholic monasteries, priories, convents and friaries in his kingdom. Although the wave of reversion to Catholicism arose during the reign of Queen Mary, it was short-lived. During the reign of Elizabeth Protestantism and Anglican Church were restored. In spite of intrigues and rebellions by the Catholics, she sincerely worked to find a 'middle way' acceptable for both the Catholics and Protestants. The Church services and the Bible were all in English and the English prayer book was brought back.



### 5.5 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Briefly narrate the process of reformation under various kings in England
2. Write a short note on Thomas Moore's *Utopia*.



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**JOT DOWN IMPORTANT POINTS**

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