

CHAPTER I

The Concept of Renaissance : An Introduction

The history of western political thought can be divided into three periods, viz. ancient, mediaeval, and modern. Each period has its unique feature. Ancient political thought centred round the city states. Plato and Aristotle were the greatest thinkers of this period. Political thought of this ancient period was primarily ethical. The political thought during mediaeval period was concerned with theological problems. Lastly it is to be noted that the political thought of modern period is determined by the nature of the nation-State. Hobbes and Locke are the political philosophers of this period. However, for the required purpose we like to give a birds eye view of Renaissance "The fall of Constantinople in 1453 and the identification at about the same time in Italy of a medium aevum separating the ancient from the Contemporary world

were in themselves sufficient to account for the subsequent adoption of the Renaissance as a turning point in the history of Western society"¹. The word 'Renaissance' is a French word. It is derived from the 'renascor' meaning 'rebirth'. Thus, Renaissance, we may say, means rebirth. In Europe during the period of 14th to 16th Centuries, we find a vital change and reformation in all spheres of life and social ideals. In the mediaeval period it is found that some things related to men were neglected but these things have been admitted during the period of Renaissance. During the period of Renaissance learning revived and remarkable flourishing in Commerce art, music, literature and science were found. Inventions and discoveries brought change the life-style of the people in Europe.

History says that before the Renaissance almost people lived on manors and at that time barter system was prevailed for marketing. Men could realize their inconvenience of manors life and they also felt the demerits of barter system. And as such in a natural way a change came to the mind of the then people. So during the period of Renaissance in Europe we find rapid growth of towns and cities. There was also remarkable change in commerce, trade and industry. During this changed situation we find introduction of coined money. The Princes could enforce laws through armies. Not only social changes were found

in this period but also mental change was illuminated. Man as a rational being could not remain satisfied if his reason does not satisfy him. Before Renaissance people were dogmatists and blind faith and beliefs in them were the barriers to understand the unknown things rationally. But the cloud of blind beliefs gradually disappeared and human beings raised questions and expressed their curiosity to know the hidden things and fact. They doubted the hitherto accepted views as the church announced.

After a long period and through gradual change in all respects Renaissance came in Europe. But regarding the date of Renaissance there is diverge views. However, it is said that the Renaissance began in 1453 when constantinople fell into the hands of the Turks. But according to some scholars, Renaissance began in 1440 when printing machine was invented. The members of Renaissance are st. Thomas Aquinas and Roger Bacon during the 13th Century. In the 14th Century we find Dante, Geoffrey Chaucer, Petrarch who showed new lights and brought a new era in the history. And during this period a group of eminent thinkers known as humanists came into force and they impressed the human beings showing their dignity as human beings. According to the European Historians, Renaissance describes the revival of Greceo-Roman spirit of scientific enquiry and Humanism.

History says that the Renaissance reached its highest peak first in Italy. After it, it spread to other countries

or nations. We find the immortal names of artists during the Renaissance, such as Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo Buonarroti, Raphael Sanzio, Titian etc. Similarly renowned figures in Italian literature are notable. Among them we find Torquato Tasso and Lodovico Ariosto and Niccolò Machiavelli. England also produced eminent literatures, such as Edmund Spenser, Christopher Marlowe, William Shakespeare.

In this period not only great artists and poets and dramatists were born but also a number of scientists were born who brought a revolution in thought which was not even in dream of the people. Be it noted that pure science could not develop until the advent of the 16th Century. Vasco da Gama, Columbus, Copernicus and some others changed the view of the world geography. The discovery of the new continent, new sea-routes etc. led to growth of Scientific geography. During Renaissance we also find the invention of scientific tools which enable the people to change their previous ideas and beliefs. Moreover, the popularity of the Church began to decline for innovation of new things. So this Renaissance brought changes in different spheres. Most notable point is that the Renaissance brought humanist movement to the forefront. Thus the new Scientific methods changed the traditional world-view i.e., traditional world-view took departure from the minds of the people. New inventions and discoveries during the Renaissance enable people to spread views and ideas all over the world. It is noteworthy that the

Renaissance moved northward from Italy through Europe and reached, England later. It is guessed that new light reflected in England after the death of Queen Elizabeth in 1603.

'Renaissance' is a French word. It brings a wave of intellectual awakening and of secular culture. Mathew Arnold gave the meaning of Renaissance. But it has not got wild currency. However, to be acquainted more perfectly as to the meaning of the term 'Renaissance', we like to quote a few definitions of it given by a number of eminent thinkers. Renaissance, Michelet says, is "The discovery of the world and of man". To Walter Pater, it is "A general excitement and enlightening of the human mind". To Symonds it is ; "The attainment of self-conscious freedom to the human spirit". However, we may say, in short that Renaissance is employed to designate a cultural movement. Winfred Earnest Garison writes : "Whether for better or for worse, the Renaissance certainly had the character of a revolution. Its keynote was a secular humanism implying recognition of human and mundane values as having validity unconditioned by theological considerations or ecclesiastical approval"². Now to have more clear understanding of the meaning of the term 'Renaissance', the salient features or characteristics of it are to be noted.

Renaissance is the revolt against the authority. Through the departure of mediaeval period, the spirit of reflection and criticism awoke. It revolted against the

notion of the church. We find that the philosophers of the mediaeval period largely centred on super-natural beings and things. New age refused to admit an institutional intermediary between man and God. New theory of the state is found during this period. The Renaissance and reformation in the 16th Century brought a change regarding the problems of knowledge based on reason and science. During this period, it was found that people gave up their faith in supernatural being. Men become much rational. Moreover, progress of civilization and perfection, was made possible. Again, we find the recognition of natural rights and politics, and humanitarian ideas also developed.

L.W.Lowie says :

"The main Contribution of Renaissance scholarship to the study of Latin itself was the preparation of better texts of the Roman writers and making available a greater number of authors to be studied. It also continued the spread of the study of Greek, which was becoming recognized as a University subject by the beginning of the Sixteenth Century, and gave some attention to Hebrew"³.

It is found that the thinkers like Roger Bacon, Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus Erigana, Albertus, Peter Abelard and William Ockham freed people from darkness of the Middle Ages. The significance of Renaissance has been mentioned by different

thinkers. Voltaire described Renaissance as the "bright light of liberated reason which show in Contrast with the era of priestly tyranny" According Michelct, renaissance is a reassertion of classical rationalism and it is against ecclesiastical orthodoxy. Again, to Burekhard Renaissance is a general awakening and rebirth of human personality. "The Renaissance was a humanist revival, it invoked the humanist tradition of the pagan culture of the Greco-Roman antiquity"⁴.

Renaissance came first in Italy. And it is often said that the Italian Renaissance is a revival of art and literature. The important centre of the Italian Renaissance during the 15th Century is the city of Florence. The greatest of the Florentines was Leonardo da vinci. His art influenced the then people. Will Durant holds, "with all his limitations and incompleteness he was fullest man of the Renaissance perhaps of all time". It is also to be noted that the Italian Renaissance produced many Sculptors. The Sculptural works of Michelangelo, Leonardoda vinci and Cellini are mentionable. Again, we find that Renaissance period gave birth of new era in literature. Dante Alighieri, Giovanni Boccacio, Lodovico, Ariosto and the like are the eminent writers of that time. It in found that from Italy Renaissance spread to Western Europe. We find eminent persons, namely, Francois Rebelais, Michel de Montaigne, Desiderius Erasmus, Thomas More and others. The names of Shakespeare, Milton are also deeply associated with the Renaissance thinkers. Renaissance also produced many, scientists. Thus eminent thinkers and

personalities of the Renaissance did much for spread of new light among the people. And their attempts were successful for removing the dark days of the Country.

Thus during Renaissance we find all round development and change. The Renaissance is often called the "age of adventure". At this period we find geographical change, change in social values, and change in learning. Renaissance drew inspiration from spiritual tradition. It represented the revolt of man against the tyranny of teleological reason and theological moral order. Through the scientific knowledge and intellectual development Renaissance gave birth of a new era in the history.

In nut shell it can be said that Renaissance developed in Europe specially in Italy. It developed at the time of decline of feudalism and emergence of bourgeois society. It is anti-scholastic. It is an intellectual movement. Renaissance art and literature were much influenced by ancient classical Civilizations. The most notable feature of Renaissance is humanism. During this period attention was paid on human interest and values. The humanists praise very highly the natural, the human, and sensual phenomena. They do not praise the ascetical supernatural and theological views. The invention of the printing press in the 15th century in Europe is regarded as the most momentum. Spread of Renaissance became possible for it. Renaissance is in

opposition to ecclesiastical authority and temporal power. Moreover, it exalts human conscience. It is the glorification of the intellect and reflective spirit. Optimism and joy of life was upheld by Renaissance. Lastly we are quoting a few lines from the Encyclopedia of Religion :

"Whether for better or for worse, the Renaissance certainly had the character of a revolution. Its keynot was a secular humanism implying recognition of human and mundane values as having validity unconditioned by theological consideration or ecclesiastical approval"⁵. We have discussed in short the European Renaissance, now in the subsequent discussion we like to take up Indian Renaissance. "The nineteenth century survives as a galaxy of illustrious names for the average educated Bengalee of today. Religious and social reformers, scholars, literary giants, journalists and patriotic orators, may be a couple of scientists—all merge to form an image of 'renaissance', nabajagaran (awakening) or naba-jug (new age), assured to mark the transition from mediaeval ' to modern"⁶.

The 19th Century is the brightest period in the history of India because of religious, social and political change of India by the active attempts of the eminent thinkers of the period whose relentless efforts could enable us to see the bright days of present India.

Dr. R.C. Mazumdar observed, "while the world outside had made rapid progress in different branches of secular learning

during the preceding two hundred years, India practically stood still where it was six hundred years ago"⁷. From the above observation of Dr. Mazumder it is palpable that India was backward in many respects from the rest of the advanced Countries of the world. Rabindranath Tagore looked the miserable condition of India and he described the situation of India as 'death-like sleep'.

It is acceptable to all that Raja Rammohan Roy arouse India from dogmatic slumber and he showed the new path for India of to-day. The seeds of the Renaissance in India was sown by Raja Rammohan Roy and he first spark of Indian liberalism. It is an undeniable fact that Western influence in India was of much help to see the present light of civilization. India came into contact with scientific and industrial change for the influence of the West. The contribution of the West for change of outlook in economic and scientific aspect has been explicitly admitted by many renowned thinkers of India. Atleast one European character of Renaissance viz humanism is found in the Bengal-Renaissance.

The Indian Renaissance did not discard her past. In the 18th and 19th century the Indian Renaissance ushered in revival of oriental learning, growth of Bengal language and increase of urge in English education. The Asiatic society was founded in 1784. This society gave birth of a new chapter for development of the national, cultural and scientific

research. Moreover, the Renaissance of India largely developed by the contribution of the Serampore Mission. Between 1800 and 1837 the Bible was translated in different Indian languages. During this period we find a change not only in literature but also in the other fields. We find social and educational reformation done by the Missionaries. Raja Rammohan Roy took attempt to abolish the satidaha pratha. In this connection, the name of Carey is to be mentioned. However, Indian Renaissance was possible due to some personalities, both Indian and Western. We have already discussed Western Renaissance in short earlier and as such we will confined our discussion to the Indian Renaissance at this stage.

The men of Indian Renaissance were : Raja Rammohan Roy, Keshab Chandra Sen, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya, Vivekananda, Rabindra Nath Tagore and others. They did evaluate religion and religious systems prevalent at that time and they tried to remove the evils of the society by means of religion. Their main thought was focussed on man and his welfare.

Rammohan Roy gave birth of a new India that is why he is called the inaugurator of the modern Age in India. Here I like to quote Prof. Nemai Sadhan Bose who says, "The first Indian to become keenly conscious of this degeneration, Rammohan attempted to put an end to this state of affairs that was leading the country to total disaster. His activities

embraced various spheres of life and everywhere he paved a new way for the future generation of Indians to follow"⁸.

Raja Rammohan Roy had intention to reestablish the glory of ancient Indian culture. He was a democrat and a humanist. He gave importance on reason for removing the blind faiths and beliefs, and superstitions present in the minds of Indians. He was deeply engaged in bringing socio-religious reforms.

However, Raja Rammohan set up of Brahma Samaj in 20th August, 1828. The aim of the Samaj was to remove the degradation and disabilities imposed by caste. Moreover, its aim was also realisation of God in every human being. This shows his humanistic attitude.

Rammohun Roy had desire to bring a panorama in different religions. He was thinking for a religion which would be accepted by the whole mankind. He wanted to bring ideological revolution and religious reforms through samaj.

A.R.Deshi says :

"The Brahma Samaj inaugurated a new era for the Indian people by proclaiming the principles of individuals freedom, national unity, solidarity and collaboration, and the democratization of all social institutions and social relations"⁹.

He tried to bring fraternity with all the cults. In him we find two features, first that, he was the cosmopolitan

rationalist thinker and humanist, and, secondly, he was the social reformer, the renovator of national scriptures. He is pioneer of Indian intellect. As a social reformer he tried to abolish caste system and tried to abolish the Satidaha pratha. He felt that the division and the sub-division of caste deprived the people of political feeling and religious rites and ceremonies. As a social reformer he welcomes British rule. He pointed out that human problems must be solved in human ways.

Here, I like to note the observation of Prof. Nemaï Sadhan Basu. He observes :

"All the principal movements of the nineteenth century - social, religious, political, educational or otherwise either originated from him or were deeply indebted to him. None of these movements can be studied without a reference to the part played by him"¹⁰.

To know Rammohan more clearly I like to quote again :

"Rammohan's zeal for social reform appeared in his active campaign against sati or widow-burning. He brought out three journals in English, Bengali, and Persian, and argued eloquently for English learning - principally as a vehicle for mathematical and scientific studies : As internationalist in politics, he would grieve or rejoice over events in Italy, France, Greece or Latin America"¹¹.

We find the name of Keshab Chandra who was also a social reformer. He sought a new religious knowledge. He thought that the West could teach India science and practical arts.

And India could teach the West religion. He thought of equal status of women and he was also interested to remove the caste system. The then India was under superstition and blind faith. At this stage Keshab Chandra Sen took attempt to spread light among people of India.

Keshab Chandra Sen formed a 'Sangat Sabha' with young Brahmas. It was not confined with the discussion of religion. Here, the movement was against the superstitions. By religions Keshab Chandra meant 'Energy' 'Philanthropy', meditation, 'work', 'self-sacrifice' intellectual culture. He advised to take the essence of all religions. He also realised that the origin of superstition is lack of education. He gave three proposals for education viz : a) reformation of education b) spread of education among the poorer sections, and c) Spread of Female education. He went to England and from there he returned on 16th October, 1870. Coming back from England he took fivefold of actions to remove the ignorance and want of his countrymen. The five-fold activities are :

- i) publication of newspaper in a cheap rate for the masses,
- ii) Training for handicrafts for the people of low income group,
- (iii) spread of education among women,
- (iv) rendering service and charity and
- (v) desisting to take wine.

His scheme of activities and thought gave Indians a new light and as such his name will remain immortal in the history of India.

The names Bankim Ch. and Vivekananda are associated with the Renaissance movement. Here, we like to take up the contribution of Bankim Chandra.

According to some thinkers, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838-1894) is the "greatest figure of second phase of Bengal Renaissance".

"Faith in human power and potentialities is one of the dominant features of Bankim's work. This was a reflection of the spirit of the age in which he lived. Humanism is the central theme of his writings and his Krishna Charitra, Sitaram, Debi-Choudhurani, all emphasize the same doctrine. Krishna is Divine because of his immanent and human potentialities. Bankim's humanism is the product of a synthesis of Comte's positivism, Mill's utilitarianism and the Gita's spiritualism fused into one great principle"¹².

Again, I like to quote Prof. Nimai Sadhan Basu :

"The Bengal Renaissance or indeed the Indian Awakening started with Raja Rammohan Roy, whom Tagore described as belonging to the lineage of India's great seers, and fittingly it reached its culmination in the Great Man who was the very symbol of a renascent century and the beacon light of a new one"¹³.

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The writings of Bankim Chandra gave birth of new Bengal out of her past tradition. He was not only a novelist and essayist but also a social thinker and nationalist.

Both Bankim and Vivekananda had intention to reevaluate of religion and to bring social consciousness among the people. Vivekananda gave an extreme form of national consciousness among the people. Vivekananda gave an extreme form of national consciousness by the help of Hinduism. He felt that it was necessary to remove the traditional views, superstition and prejudices to build a welfare state. He found socialistic humanism in vedanta.

He is basically a religious person.

"Religion is the idea which is raising the brute unto man, and man unto God"¹⁴.

According to him, religion teaches spiritual integration of mankind. He advised Indians to work for the welfare of humanity. According to Vivekananda, "If you want to find God, serve man"¹⁵.

He says that 'Jiva is Shiva'. It is found that Vivekananda is a lover of man as a whole and he is a great humanist. He criticized the materialistic outlook and said that material progress could not bring peace and happiness. He told several times that urgent need of India was regeneration and uplift of the masses. He said that there would be

no privilege for any person. Everyone should be treated equally.

He condemned the British rule in India. He said in 1895 in America that the three B's - Bible, Bayonet and Brandy were primarily characters of British rule in India. However, he had no faith in politics. He gave emphasis on education and education would bring social reform. In M.N.Roy's discussions we also find importance on education for development and emancipation of human beings. Be it noted that though Vivekananda admitted the importance of science and technology nevertheless he did not do away with the spirituality and its importance. But in this regard we find a difference between M.N.Roy and Vivekananda because Late Roy did not say of spiritual development but of moral development for the progress of the society.

Whatever the case may be, we can say explicitly that Vivekananda depicted the pavement for development of hearts and minds of the people of modern India. Present century in many respects is much indebted to Vivekananda.

Here, it seems that the following quotation will justify the contribution of Swami Vivekananda : "Through his voluminous works in Bengali and English, Vivekananda Spread - and continues to spread - a general message not only of religious devotion but of patriotism social reform and good works"¹⁶.

It is also to be noted that Vivekananda raised the slogan of socialism in India. He set up the Ramkrishna Math and Sri Ramkrishna Mission. He said that service of humanity was equal to the worship of god. So he showed new light to the age-old institution of Sanyas. He nicely told "I am a socialist not because it is a perfect system, but because I believe that half a loaf is better than no bread"¹⁷. It is also notable that Vivekananda realized the role of the working class in new India. He also used the term 'Proletariat'. He loved all human beings and he was a revolutionary socialist. He was opposed to fatalism. His new thought of man and new interpretation of religion and ethics ushered in a new era in the history of India.

Rammohan, Vidyasagar, Keshab Chandra and some other thinkers were influenced by European Renaissance. But Vivekananda gave opposite view. He is of opinion that it is only India which can give inspiration of the world. In this respect Rabindranath is at par with the view of Vivekananda. He put India in highest seat. He was a humanist basically. He thought of the happiness of the poor people and with this end in view he speaks of the rural development. He also found that the distress of the Indians are due to lack of education.

He had scientific outlook. Proper progress of the country, according to him, depends on education of both male and female. He had intention to remove the barrier of caste-system and his

writings e.g. 'Chandalika' depicts the then social condition regarding the caste-problem. He was most influenced by mediaeval religion and social philosophy.

Rabindranath's love of man is found in his writings. It is also seen when he made protest against the fatal incident done by the English at Jallianwala Bagh. In such act he felt an insultation to man. He was a humanist and as such he admitted of divinity in man. He revolted when he found that divinity in man is being ignored and insulted. Thus man has got a central place in the writings of Tagore. Rabindranath felt the necessity of social reconstruction by means of education, vocational training, agriculture, etc. for the progress of the country. Such thought was reflected in establishment of Viswabharati University at Santiniketan, and Sriniketan, the training centre. Rabindranath also marked the social inequalities and tyranny for which he was much grieved. Humanism is one of the aspects of Renaissance and this aspect has clearly been bloomed in the writings of Tagore and thereby he ushers in Renaissance in India.

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