

Magadh Mahila College

Patna University, Patna

HISTORY

B.A. – I

PAPER – II

The Renaissance

Unit – 5

**Topic: - Economics Effect of
Renaissance**

By:-

Dr. Amit Raj

Department of History

Magadh Mahila College

Patna University, Patna

Email : amitr286@gmail.com

Mob : 9472811500

Economic Effect

Peasant Revolt : Anabaptist Uprising :

To begin with, the economic interests played a crucial role in the Reformation. The rulers, princes and nobles of the states which got converted as Protestant states had ulterior economic motives, besides the religious and political ones. By breaking with the Papacy and Catholicism, they took control over the church lands and property all of which yielded considerable revenues to the states. Moreover, a lot of dues and fees which used be sent to the Papacy now went to the state treasury and the national church. Of course, there were other economic aspects of the Reformation.

A remarkable aspect of the Reformation was the peasant uprising against landlords. Popular secular movements were nothing new. Bread riots in towns, refusal to pay taxes and violence against landlords and tax collectors in the rural areas happened before several times. The peasant revolt in England in 1381, inspired by the teachings of John Wycliffe, created unprecedented social tension, and the King, Richard II, had to beg eventually to the rebel leaders to stop it. The followers of John Hus also unleashed a rebellion against the established order in the mid-15th century Europe.

The PEASANT REVOLT of 1523-25 in southern and central Germany was quite widespread and serious. It was inspired by the feeling of religious reformation, but it gained a secular character as peasants fought against the established church-monarchy order for the removal of the oppressive dues, fees and taxes responsible for their deplorable economic condition. In fact, Luther's teachings as well as his courageous struggle several men to get involved with similar reform endeavours, each claiming his way as the best to attain human salvation. The leaders of the German Peasant Revolt too claimed justification for the their movement in Luther's doctrine of Christian freedom. Luther himself was frightened to see his religious views distorted for purely secular ends. He was so horrified that he asked the German princes to crush the rebellion by any means. The result was the massacre of thousands of peasants involved in the Revolt.

Another lower class revolutionary uprising in the grab of religious reform was the ANABAPTIST MOVEMENT of 1534-37. Led by some radical Baptist leaders, the Anabaptists (the Greek word meaning 'baptizing again') held that the Catholic sacrament of baptism of infants have no validity, as the infant is too young to 'believe' or 'understand'. By getting baptized second time with proper belief and understanding, the Anabaptists felt, men could be shown the path of salvation. They stretched Luther's principle of salvation by faith to such an extent as to interpret that each individual had absolutely free conscience to communicate with God in his own way, not in the typical traditional manner. They did not believe in class distinction nor in owning private property. Thus, the movement had an important socio-economic aspect. What was the socio-economic aspect? Economic individualism in society (the breakdown of village community and guild, the fast growth of capitalism etc.) combined with individualism in religion to produce the idea of a new authority in man's mind. Luther and his reformation was promoting this individualism by advocating the right of every individual to read the Bible and have his own feeling of what Christ had said. Christopher Hill puts it nicely, "Men said they were appealing to the authority of Scripture, when in fact they were appealing to their own interpretation of Scripture." Added to this was the fast expansion of printing and the growing number of printing presses brought out religious texts and literature which included some radical Protestant writings too. These radical literature put emphasis upon the socio-economic problems at the grass-root level and how the Church should redress them.

But problem began when the Anabaptists, in their over-enthusiasm to put their ideas into practice, took to violence and militancy. For this reason they were feared, detested and persecuted by Catholic and Lutheran authorities alike. Luther regarded them as 'anti-social heretics'. Things reached an alarming point in 1534 when a militant group of Anabaptists forcibly took over the city council of the northern German city of MUNSTER. Here they organised a kind of 'communist society' and a revolutionary regime, headed by JAN OF LEIDEN, a Dutch tailor, who proclaimed himself as 'the King of Munster and of the whole world in the name of Christ'. Leiden's regime, like many revolutionary

regimes, used terror to maintain itself. It enjoyed popular support too. The real authorities of Munster, both secular and religious, led by the bishop of the city, decided to crush the Anabaptist uprising. As it often happens in history, the counter-terror of the authorities was even more bloody than the Anabaptists' original terror. After this catastrophe, the Anabaptists went onfleeing and hiding and those who remained gave up violence. But as Prof. Koenigsberger point out, it was they who provided "most of the fodder for the flaming pyres that were beginning to be lit all over Europe". (op. cit. p. 70)

Of course, the Anabaptist movement did not die after the Munster incident. Some Anabaptists found refuge in central-eastern Europe, particullary in Moravia and Poland. They made another attempt to capture power, this time in the mid 17th century England during the Puritan Revolution, through the radical Protestant groups like the Levellars, the Diggers and the Fifth Monarchy Men. But the attempt was expeditiously crushed. But we must note the fact that through their religious radicalism they hinted of the political redicalism that would dominate European thought in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Impetus to Trade and Commerce : Boost to Commercial Capitalism :

The Reformation gave a great impetus to trade and commerce. The traditional Catholic Church had imposed restriction on usury, i.e. the system of giving loans with interest, as they regarded it a sinful practice. But Luther did not see any sin in the practice of usury provided the loan taken was spent for humanitarian or constructive purpose. This gave a great boost to commercial activities. Loans could be taken openly in Protestant states and even in Catholic states restriction on usury was loosening up. The banking system formally came into being. It is not surprising that the first organised bank in history, BANK OF AMSTERDAM, was set up in a Protestant country, the Netherlands, in 1609. The second big bank, BANK OF ENGLAND, was set up on London in 1694 during the reign of William III, who was a staunch Protestant and many Stuart who too had a leaning towards Protestantism. These banks played vital role in the expansion of trade and commerce.

It is also said that Protestantism provided a significant impetus to the rise of capitalism. The eminent German scholar, MAX WEBER, who is regarded as the father of modern sociology, was the first to propound this thesis in his classic work, 'Protestant Ethics' and the Spirit of Capitalism', published in 1920. After exhaustive study and research, he found that there existed an intimate connection between the ascetic character of Calvinism and the rise of capitalist institutions. Calvinism urged upon its followers : not to spend money in wasteful and sinful activities; to practice thrift, which meant saving money as much as possible by leading a simple life; to spend the saved money in humanitarian and constructive works. By humanitarian work the Calvinist meant helping the poor, sick and suffering one, setting up of schools and dispensaries – the activities which would not bring any profit. The term 'constructive work' means the profit-making works like opening a shop, a market or any business enterprise. The individual would earn profit, but through hard work, devotion and honesty, as prescribed by the Protestant ethics. And this was the area responsible for the rise of capitalism. The Protestant regions of Europe definitely excelled more than the Catholic areas (except a few like France) in commercial and industrial activities, and consequently in the accumulation of capital.

Suggested Readings:-

1. Meenakshi Phukan : Rise of Modern West
2. G. Clark : Early Modern Europe
3. Raghubir Dayal : Modern European History
4. Jain and Mathur : World History (1500 – 1950)
5. G.M. Trevelyan : Social History of England
6. Parthsarathi Gupta (ed.) : आधुनिक पश्चिम का उदय
7. लाल बहादुर वर्मा : आधुनिक यूरोप का इतिहास
