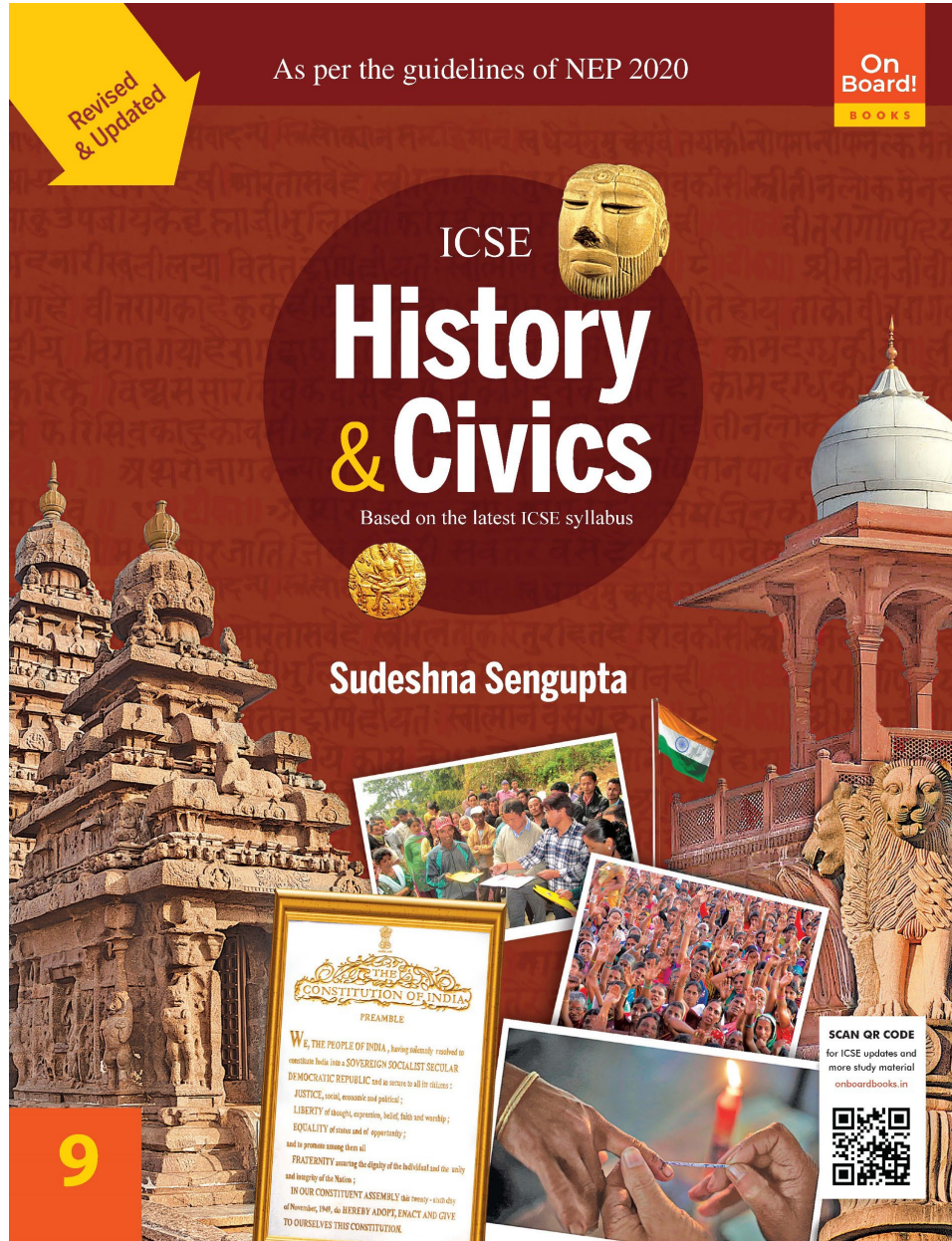


On Board!

BOOKS

History and Civics 9



History 9

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Chapter 12: The Reformation

The special position given to the Roman Catholic Church in the medieval period was being questioned due to the spirit of enquiry that was fostered during the Renaissance. This paved way for a movement that aimed at reforming the Church. This movement was called Reformation or Protestant Reformation.

The people who spoke in protest against the Church were called the Protestants. Thus the age of 'blind faith' was replaced by 'rationalism'.

CAUSES OF THE REFORMATION

There were numerous causes for the rise of Reformation.

The Renaissance

The scholars during this period helped in fostering a spirit of enquiry among its people. As a result, people were no longer ready to accept the dictates of the Church blindly. They questioned the practices and rulings of the clergy. The authority of the Pope was challenged. The people read The Bible, as it was then available in translations and were shocked at the falsities propagated by the Church.

Corruption in the Church

Earlier, the lives of the clergy were worthy of veneration. But it did not continue for long. Lack of proper education, personal indulgences, lavish tastes and the desire for material gain became a way of life for the clergy. In his book, In Praise of Folly, Erasmus exposed the moral degradation of the clergy and thus contributed towards the spread of the Reformation in Europe.

The Church versus the Monarchy

The Pope was regarded as the representative of God on the earth. He believed himself to be above the kings as well. The Pope also claimed the power to throne or dethrone the rulers. This growing power of the Pope was resented by the kings of the day. The Reformation was taken as a bold enterprise to weaken the Church and loosen its stranglehold over monarchy as well.

Economic Burden on the People

The Church had amassed a lot of wealth, which was used for erecting artistic buildings and cathedrals, while the common people lived frugally. The offices of the clergy were no longer given to men of credit but were sold for money. Further, confessions could be bought as certificates of Indulgences. Religion became a commercial proposition and the corrupt practices of the clergy angered the masses.

Pre-reformation movements

Even before the Reformation began, many reformers challenged the office of the priests and the practices of the Church. John Wycliffe was one such English. He made the people realize that pilgrimage and sacraments alone could never lead to salvation. He translated The Bible into English. His followers came to be called the Lollards. He was excommunicated for challenging the Church.

Immediate Cause

Protests against the unjust power of the Pope and the corrupt practices of the clergy led Martin Luther, a German priest, to raise the banner of revolt. He criticized the sale of Indulgences, the abuses of the clergy towards the purity of religion and the unlawful authority exercised by the Pope over the people. Martin Luther's protest proved to be the immediate cause of the Reformation.

MARTIN LUTHER (AD 1483–1546)

Martin Luther was born on 10 November AD 1483 in Germany. In AD 1514 Luther became a priest at Wittenberg's City Church. He observed that people in Wittenberg did not confess in the Church, instead they bought Indulgences from Johann Tetzel, who, in this way, was raising money to rebuild St Peter's basilica. This practice of buying Indulgences, which replaced confession and allowed people to buy salvation, was protested by Luther.

Luther nailed a statement of Ninety-Five Theses, objecting to the sale of Indulgences, on to the door of the Castle Church of Wittenberg—an act by which the Protestant Reformation is conventionally thought to have begun.

In it, Luther said that the Pope and clerics were mere fallible men and the highest authority was the 'truth of the Scripture' (The Bible). This led to Luther's excommunication. He was summoned to the Diet (a formal assembly of the princes of the Holy Roman Empire) convened in the city of Worms to seek apology from the Church.

When Luther and the princes who supported him left Worms, the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V declared Luther an outlaw. Frederick the Wise, the ruler of Saxony allowed Luther to be kidnapped. This was to ensure Luther's safety. Luther was taken to the secluded Wartburg while the Reformation had time to stabilize and strengthen itself.

OTHER LEADERS OF REFORMATION

Ulrich Zwingli (AD 1484–1531)

While Germany struggled under the political and religious consequences of Luther's reform movement, the movement itself also quickly spilled out of the German borders into neighbouring Switzerland. Of the cantons that adopted Luther's new movement, the most important and powerful was the city-state of Zurich under the leadership of Ulrich Zwingli.

Zwingli held that if the Old or New Testament did not say something explicitly and literally, then no Christian should believe or practise it. This formed the basis of his critique of Indulgences. He attacked the Church of corruption and criticized the indolent lifestyle of the clergy. In AD 1523, Zurich officially adopted Zwingli's ecclesiastical reforms and became the First Protestant State outside Germany.

John Calvin (AD 1509–1564)

Calvin was deeply influenced by Lutheranism. He urged people to live a simple and a pure life. He also insisted on the barest simplicity in Church services. In England, the reign of Henry VIII saw the beginning of the Reformation. Henry VIII tabled the Act of Innates to be passed by the Parliament, thereby forbidding priests to send their income to the Pope. By the Act of Supremacy, Henry VIII became the supreme head of the Church. Though no fundamental changes were made, yet Reformation was established in England.

IMPACT OF THE REFORMATION

Counter-Reformation

The rapid progress of the Protestant religion made the Catholic clergy realize that their religion needed to be protected. To give such protection arose a Counter-Reformation. Reforms against the corrupt practices of the Church were brought about. New Catholic orders like the Jesuits dedicated themselves to the service of the common people.

Division in the Church

With the break-up of the Church into Catholic and Protestant, the unity of Christendom was threatened. The uniformity in doctrines and dogmas also came to an end. There was a split in the Church which was further intensified by smaller groups that came up. Nation Churches with rulers at the helm were set up. The Bible became all-powerful and all-pervasive.

Religious Persecution

Cruel acts of crime and violence were perpetrated by one group against the other in the name of religion. The Catholic Inquisition led to the burning of Protestant believers to the stake. Mary, Queen of Scots, became unpopular because of the inhuman treatment meted out to the Protestants.

Religious Wars in Europe

The division in religious beliefs led to numerous confrontations between nations advocating either of the two religious precepts. King Philip II of Spain being a staunch Catholic was determined to overthrow Elizabeth, who had her leaning towards Protestantism. But Spain was defeated and the desire to promote Catholic faith in England was never realized.

Rise of nation-states

Reformation had eroded the powers of the Papacy greatly. Absolute monarchy became the order of the day. This, in turn encouraged nationalism. As the Church submitted to the authority of the kings, the State assumed a place of importance. The Act of Supremacy in England passed by Henry VIII is an example of the formation of nation churches and nation-states.

Growth of Individualism

Reformation encouraged freedom of thought. Intellectuals questioned not only the authority of the Pope, but also the concept of God and religion. Concepts like Capitalism, Socialism, and Communism came to the forefront. This led to the development in the different fields of science, philosophy, arts and learning.

To Remember

Background—The Renaissance paved the way for Reformation, those who protested against the Church were called the Protestants, Reformation spawned Counter-Reformation.

Causes—The Renaissance, corruption in the Church, the Church versus monarchy, economic burden on the people, pre-reformation movements, immediate cause.

Martin Luther—He became a monk in AD 1506, thereafter became a theology professor at Wittenberg University, protested against the sale of Indulgences, wrote down his objections in the Ninety-Five Theses, stressed on the importance of *The Bible*, journey to the Diet of Worms, declared an outlaw, protected in Wartburg, Reformation strengthened.

Other reformers—Ulrich Zwingli: He spearheaded the Reformation movement in Zurich, Switzerland, criticized the sale of Indulgences, Zurich First Protestant State outside Germany, John Calvin: Spearheaded the movement in France, wrote *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, urged people to lead an austere life, banned music, dancing, prohibited all rituals.

Impact of the Reformation—Counter-Reformation, division in the Church, religious persecution, religious wars in Europe, rise of nation-states, growth of individualism.

Thank You