

# The Origin of Humanism

Presented by Oindrila Sen  
Assistant Professor, History  
Jhargram Raj College

## Humanism and its various connotations:-

- Humanism, the term itself owes its origin to the Latin *Humanitas* , used by Cicero and others in classical times to mark **a kind of cultural values that one would derive from liberal education.**
- The *Studia humanitatis* meant a compiled study of **language, literature, history and moral philosophy** in precise.

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- Years after, probably in 15<sup>th</sup> century Italy, the term ***Umanista*** was used to describe a teacher or student of classical literature and the arts associated with it, including that of rhetoric.
- The English equivalent ***Humanist*** came into existence in the nineteenth century with a very similar meaning. Only in the nineteenth century and probably for the first time in Germany in 1809, the term transformed into a new word – ***Humanism***. It also reflected the same inclination of one towards the subject of arts.

## Humanism and its concern for legacy of antiquity:-

- In particular, ***Humanism*** shows its concern towards the **legacy of antiquity**. Not only the literary legacy, this very term also tends to show an intense desire of one to preserve archaeological relicts of the past.
- Apart from that, ***post medieval culture, including theology, philosophy, political thought, jurisprudence, medicine, mathematics and creative arts***- all spectrums are included under the enclave of the term- ***Humanism***.

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If we highlight the origin of the term ***Studia Humanitatis*** in the context of 15<sup>th</sup> century Italy, we should note that, in ‘**late medieval period**’, especially in the writings of **John of Salisbury** it first got its primordial imagery. He may be regarded as an illustration of the embryonic state of humanism. **Yet he showed no sign of awareness towards the antiquity , he was still only an traveler in the terrain where the humanists of Renaissance Italy were later to explore with more inquisitiveness.**

## Hidden obstacles at the path of flourishing Humanism :-

However, the journey from that of classical reading done by **John Salisbury** towards a full-flared representation of ***Studia Humanitatis*** was not so easy. There were constraints.

**Canon law, new logic of Aristotle** (to be used as the base of the education of clerics), **scholastic theology and pagan literature**- the whole arena of **medieval scholasticism** stood as an obstacle for flourishing of the **philosophy of Renaissance Humanism**.

## Exclusiveness of Italy:-

The picture of contemporary Italy was quite different from that of countries situated at the north of the Alps . **Freed from any hindrance posed by medieval scholasticism, Italy witnessed a steady growth of urban civilization. In the city states of the north in particular, the needs of civic administration and commerce became stronger than the dictum of the Church. Educated laymen, Lawyers and Civil Servants emerged as the new literate class.**

## Ars Dictaminis and its relation with Studia Humanitatis:-

The term *Studia Humanitatis* and its manifestation in 15<sup>th</sup> century Italy had its intrinsic connection with that of the practice of twelfth century. *Ars Dictaminis* or the art of letter writing had sown the seed of multifarious study of *Humanism* in later times.

**Those who practiced the art of letter writing applied their knowledge to the needs of their Patrons. They were not classical scholars but rhetoricians who followed ancient models to attain eloquence in the writings of letters and speeches. Besides, they held positions of influence as teachers, secretaries or chancellors to rule over the communes.**



## Roman Law as an important factor for the growth of Humanism:-

Another main root of *Humanism* was the **study of Roman Law** which was observed in thirteenth century Italy. This very study was closely linked with the activities of the *dictatores* or the experts of letter writing. In the context of rapidly developing independent communes of the northern Italy the role of lawyers in economic and political affairs was crucial. **From twelfth century onwards and especially at the University of Bologna, there had been a revival in education.**

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The interpretation of the great texts of Roman Law had been compiled as the ***Code of Digest*** which was frequently used to address the current legal problems.

**This said compilation established a sense that the civilization of the past was still alive and needless to say, this consciousness led to curiosity about the civilization.**

## The lawyers of 15<sup>th</sup> century Northern Italy:-

The lawyers of 15<sup>th</sup> century Northern Italy who studied legal texts and tended to follow the precepts of Roman Law in order to mitigate current legal problems became interested in other aspects of their cultural heritage, in particular in **history** and **moral philosophy** . Apart from this, most of them even became ardent readers of the **recreational writings of Latin verse**.

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The example of transformation of a sole lawyer into an individual who in spite of continuing his legal activities, was very much attached with philological tradition and literary works of that time can clearly be shown in the deeds of *Lovato Lovarti, Rolando da Piazzola, Geremia da Montagnone* etc.

*Montagnone's* compilation of a medieval *florilegia* , *Compendium Moraliu Notabilium* ( *Anthology of Noteworthy Examples of Virtuous Behavior* ) in the 1505 edition reflects the appetite of classical texts , philological concern to correct them, ascertain their meanings among some of the contemporary lawyers.

## Cities of Northern Italy and their role for the expansion of Humanism:-

Cities of Northern Italy, like **Padua, Vicenza, Verona** and obviously **Florence** became the **cradle of the development of a common literary and aesthetic ideal**, i.e. the **rediscovery of classical text and find its link with Roman civilization and the restoration of classical genre and style of writing**. However, this very surge of classical revival was still limited to certain individuals. ( For example, **Giovanni del Virgilio**, professor of Latin poetry at the University of Bologna)

## Institutions as the center for practicing Studia Humanitatis:-

During the 14<sup>th</sup> century, there were two institutions which were utmost important centers of learning about **classical antiquities**.

First was *Angevin court of Naples* and the other was the *Papal Curia*, situated at *Avignon*.

The **papal library** gradually acquired an important **collection of classical literatures**. The *Curia* became a vibrant point of patronage which started to provide employment for **cultivated lawyers** and *dictatores*.

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Notable intellectual figure to emerge from the *Papal Curia* of Avignon was **Petrarch** (*Francesco Petrarca*). Literary works of Petrarch is now also being considered as the salient base for the spread of *Humanism* all over the western Europe. It has widely been acknowledged that various scholarly tendencies can be traced by going through the writings of him.

## Petrarch – a personification of the manifestation of Studia Humanitatis:-

It was at **Avignon**, where he started to be enthralled by plunge into the manuscripts of **Virgil** and also that of **Livy's**.

At first, around **1325**, he became involved to supervise the preparation of a manuscript penned by Virgil for his father .

then years after, he was able to piece together and restore the text of ***Livy's History of Rome***. By about **1330**, he had accomplished in assembling the most complete text of Livy then known and was able to recognize what the shape of the original must have been.



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His unquenchable thirst for new texts was first seen in a journey to the north in **1333**, when he found a manuscript of Cicero's forgotten ***Pro Archia in Lie`ge*** and one of the Propertius in Paris stemming from the thirteenth century scholar ***Richard of Fournival***.

**He studied both these texts ardently and transformed them as eternal art-form for years to come with the help of his annotations emendations.**

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What is worth to mention that, not only Petrarch (though he paved the way to restore classical texts) , but there was ***Landolfo Colonna*** who was very much involved with the endeavor to assemble and compile the works of ***Livy***.

On the other hand, Petrarch's disciple ***Giovanni Boccaccio*** was there to carry forward the tradition of restoring of ancient literary marvel following the pat shown by Petrarch.

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It has been acknowledged that, Petrarch's letter's had a close connection with the whole process of reviving ancient literary wonders. From his letters written between **1345-1350 C.E.** , one can get the information that, it was **1345**, when he found a manuscript of ***Cicero's Ad Atticum***. Apart from this, from his ***Rerum Familiarium Libri*** ( Letters between friends), one can know about Petrarch's admiration for the Roman statesman.

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Petrarch's philosophical account- *De Sui Ipsius Et Multorum Ignorantia* is important and ought to be mentioned for few reasons.

**Firstly**, with the help of this account, he questioned the comment of four Aristotelians that- " Petrarch was a good but uneducated man."

**Secondly**, through this account, **he countered the doctrines of scholastic philosophy which according to him, might teach you the truth but could not encourage you to love it.**

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**Thirdly**, in this writing, he defended the cause of the kind of learning, the ***Studia Humanitatis*** to which he had devoted his life. He claimed that the study of literature and in particular classical literature, could make a man good . Thus he tried to upheld the relevance of **rhetoric** and **moral philosophy**.

## Conclusion:-

At the end of our discussion, one can opine that, he was not entirely an innovator as he depended upon the efforts of earlier generations to prepare the ground for his pattern of scholarship at which he excelled.

Nevertheless, we also cannot deny the fact that, **he was the man who first tried hard to proclaim the importance and relevance of Studia humanitatis in front of newly emerged affluent class. The initiation of the classics which be both taught and practiced was more or less responsible for providing Renaissance Humanism its necessary impetus .**

# Torchbearers of the teaching and practicing of Studia Humanitatis-Petrarch and Boccaccio (from left to right):-



# Papal Curia of Avignon which had become a pre-cursor of spreading the newness of Humanism:-

