

Humanism and the Renaissance Image of Man

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- **'Humanism'** is the word often used to describe Renaissance values and outlook.
- The word **'humanista'** emerged in the late Renaissance to describe Renaissance humanism mainly as a new university project.
- The word **'Humanism'** itself was not used until the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century to define the values shared by the group of men of fifteenth- sixteenth century Italy.

- The said group of people (teachers, politicians or artists) highlighted on the philosophy of Protagoras where he stressed upon the utmost **importance of every individual in every sphere of his life.**
- Sayings of Protagoras , like- “ ***man is the measure of all things***” or “***as for the gods, I know not whether they existed or not***” were the intellectual base of **Renaissance- Philosophy, i.e. Humanism.**

Importance of Education:-

- **Late fifteenth- early sixteenth century Italian scholars** who nurture **'humanista'** as a revered philosophy, gave importance to education in order to spread the **pro- human viewpoint of contemporary culture.**
- According to them, education tended to train all children to be able to argue both sides of a question and see the other point of view.
It would prepare them for further political life.

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- The contemporary propagators of the very notion, i.e. '**Humanism**', always opined for a kind of 'holistic' mode of education, where **art-architecture- literature and politics all would be revered in same importance.**
- According to them, contemporary education must build the base of **Republic Politics** and as well as **Artistic Revolution.**

The Image of Hercules and its influence in Renaissance- Humanism:-

The image (myth) of Hercules, the classical hero, who apart from being a man was immortalized by the gods for his seven Labors in slaying the monsters- became an epitome of human capability to combat with any kind of evil.

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- **The other myth related to Hercules, where he voluntarily took the harder and austere path by turning down the offer of the smooth path leading towards a beautiful woman was also praised by Petrarch (forerunner of Renaissance newness).**
- **In short, not only for his physical strength but for the mental integrity described in the mythical account related to him, he became the one and only image of 'humanista'.**

Christian View of Man v/s Classical View of Man:-

For Pious Christians, although created in God's image, was corrupted by Adam's sin, by eating the fruit from the forbidden tree of knowledge. As a result, he could only be saved by taking God's grace through baptism.

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On the other hand, **the classical view of man was very much confident about man's ability to design his own future through his hard work and also with his intellectual development.**

Greeks and Romans did not believe in **Original Sin** and used to say that the children's natures at the time of their birth were like wax, capable of being impressed with good or bad experiences until they acquire proper education. **Only education could help them to distinguish between good and bad experiences .**

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Emphasizing on the **importance of education to build up the character of a child, denying to accept God's grace as the only savior of man from drowning into danger and other unpleasant circumstances** and most importantly, **believing in man's capability to make a beautiful world-** these very features of the **classical theory of man** was highly acknowledged by Renaissance-thinkers.

Image of Renaissance Man and Oration on the Dignity of man:-

One can find another **image of Renaissance Man** in **Pico Della Mirandola's work- Origin on the Dignity of Man**. The very notion of this account, which puts **Man at the centre of the universe** and proclaims that **he is capable of rising to the level of angels r sinking to the depths of animal bestiality**- had influenced the Renaissance-philosophy immensely.

Marsilio Ficino , Leon Battista Alberti and the Image of Renaissance Man:-

Marsilio Ficino and Leon Battista Alberti both of them highlighted Man's freedom and creativity within various obstacles during late fifteenth – Sixteenth century Italy.

Literary account of **Marsilio** and architectural creation of **Alberti**- both were involved to establish an **optimistic man who did not want to give up against any constraint.**

Michelangelo's works and the manifestation of Divine Ideas:-

Michelangelo's creation in the Sistine Chapel in Rome and his unfinished statues of slaves for Pope Julius II's tomb depict the recurring theme of his sonnets about an artist's ability to release divine ideas through his intellect.

Acknowledging man as the medium of representing divine ideas however structured the base of Renaissance image of Man.

Another Image of Renaissance Man:-

Literatures of **Pico, Marsilio** and also architectural marvels of **Michelangelo** strongly believed that **Man's freedom, mobility and creativity were the pillars of the optimistic view of Man** and through their artistic forms, they released this notion.

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This was only the one side of the coin. In this context, **Man's freedom and mobility were not the positive qualities.** But it had many negative aspects. First of all, **they encouraged loss of identity and mystification.** If we examine the social structure of contemporary Florence, we can see that **this mobility often had resulted in disorientation.**

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Although most of the professionals were belonged to various **quasi- egalitarian mixed groups** which contained **politicians, craftsmen, artists, master- carpenters** – there remained **hidden base of hierarchy** in every group. Often, **the professional, who earned less than other highly- paid men in his group, he became butt of their cruel joke.**

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However, **classical literatures** were there to console the **lowly- paid professional** suffering from **disorientation** and **los of identity**.

From the examples of **Apuleius** and **story of Ulysses** , they got to know **that loss of identity and consequent dissatisfaction is a familiar theme in classical literature.**

Man's Animosity= Positive Strength:-

Renaissance culture stressed upon myths which were based on the tale of half – man and half beast. These myths were not only revived in the Renaissance period; they were given new importance. Man's animosity was started to be seen as a positive strength.

Aesop's Fables became very popular and were often told to praise animals for being braver and more compassionate than humans.

Renaissance view of Human Nature- in a nutshell:-

Renaissance view of human nature was richer and more multifaceted than depicted in Pico's writings. There was no sharp breach from medieval traditional belief. On the other hand, **rescuing ancient religious truth from superstition, irrational dependence on God's grace was one of the important objectives of Renaissance culture.**

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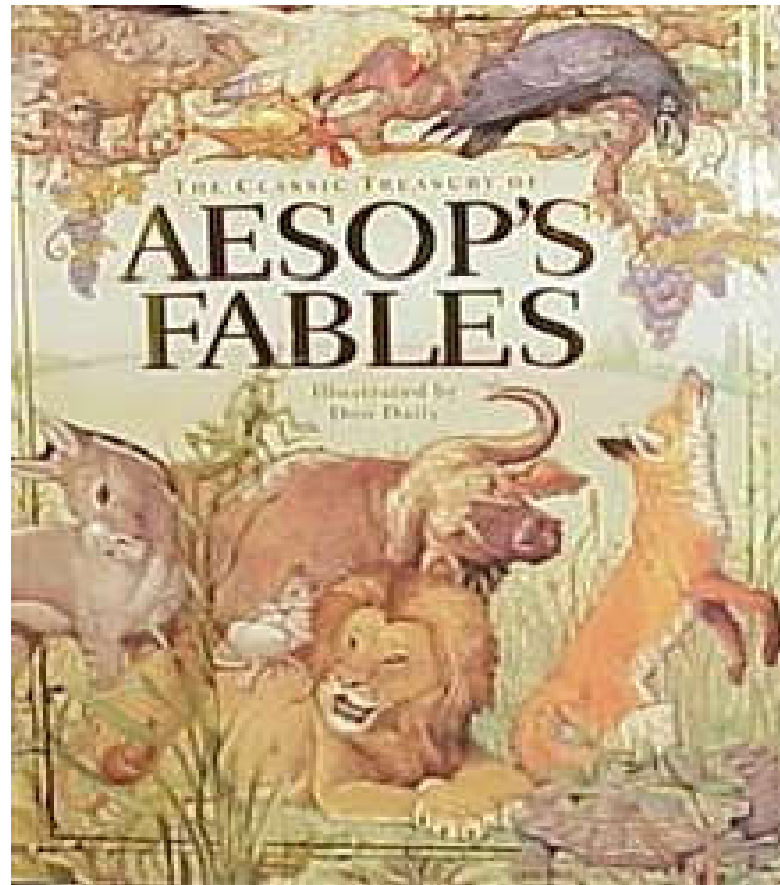
Hercules, Orpheus and Chiron became the images for new understanding of human nature- not cursed by **'original sin'** but a mixed version of **reason** and **animal passions**.

By the sixteenth century, medieval vices like **anger, sloth and love of pleasure** had been transformed into **creativity and genius**.

Works of Michelangelo:-



Aesop's Fables as the symbol of celebrating myth of half-man, half –beast



Hercules- image of Renaissance Man: Mixture of Reason and Animal Passion :-

