

Political Humanism in the time of Italian Renaissance

Presented By
Oindrila Sen
Assistant Professor, History
Jhargram Raj College

Introduction:-

It has been widely accepted that, **Secularization of Wisdom** and **Political Humanism** had become a salient feature of Italian Renaissance.

First of all, revelation and divine grace had been replaced by reason and man's natural powers.

Secondly, the experience which was needed to make a man 'wise' started to include 'human things' along with 'divine things' within its dictum.

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Thirdly, the 16th century Italian Renaissance had witnessed a distinct shift from a preference for the intellectual virtues to a preference for the human will and the *virtutes morales*, from solitary contemplation to action in the world and finally, from the *vita contemplativa* and *speculativa* to the *vita activa* and *politica*.

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Highlighting the works of Petrarch, historian Eugene rice states that there is no clear difference between secular wisdom and wisdom sought through piety. Rather Prof Rice talks about ***humilitas operosa*** which , according to Petrarch was a kind of transformed ideal. In Petrarch's words, in the world of ***humilitas operosa***, there was a 'humble beginning of wisdom's transformation fro an intellectual to a moral virtue. From a type o knowledge to an ethical category.

Fusion of active and contemplative ideal:-

Eugene Rice highlights the problem of 'active and contemplative ideals ' in the context of Florentine Humanism.

Coluccio Salutati , the Florentine chancellor who was the first decided advocate of the active, civil life publicized the contemplative-treatise ***De Saeculo et Religione*** and propounded the theory of the superiority of the will over the intellect.

But there always existed the relevance of a life of civic action with philosophical speculation followed by Aristotelian ideas.

Political Humanism through the lens of Secularism:-

According to Rice, there developed “an ethic distance from the chivalric code of the nobility and the monastic virtues of the clergy which the ruling class of Republican Florence could make their own. Besides, the quest for Wisdom no longer regarded as a separate spiritual estate.

Which is ought be noted that 16th century Florentine Renaissance witnessed a gradual shift from helpless dependence on spiritual grace to addressing human wisdom through a kind of secular lens . Proclaimed ideals of **Coluccio Salutati** and **Leonardo Bruni** substantiates this view.

Speculative Wisdom v/s Contemplative wisdom:-

Although there was a strong co-existence of speculative wisdom based on civic action and contemplative attitude and assimilation of wisdom with religious motivations, there was a difference of public acceptance in the context of 16th century Florentine Renaissance.

It has been noted that speculative wisdom based on civic action could not gain widened acceptance outside Italy. On the other hand the structure contemplative wisdom based on religious motivations created by Petrarch had got its widespread applaud than its previously mentioned counterpart.

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Eugene Rice stressed on *Eugenio Garin's* book *L'Umanesimo Italiano : Filosofia e Vita Civile nel Rinascimento* which can be regarded as a clear evidence of the influence of 16th century Italian Political Humanism on the humanist political discourse of contemporary France.

Eugene Rice analyzed the book and realized that Renaissance **Neo-Platonism** and **Platonism** had been uninquasly accepted by the contemporary French humanists. Further, he states that the salient features of *Salutati's* and *Bruni's* Humanism re-emerged not only in the philosophy of *Erasmus* but in the outlook of French Humanism.

Transformation in the nature of Political Humanism:

However, the scenario had been went into transition, where Wisdom, based on active life started to attain importance from the end of some contemporary intellectuals. Now, in many books, active life started to be addressed as more desired and suitable for man than isolated contemplation. But it has been believed that there was no possibility t combine action and contemplation adequately and for this reason only, man should make his choice between wisdom based on active life and attaining wisdom based on contemplation.

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It was *De la Sagesse*, penned by **Pierre Charron**, which first questioned the interchangeability of two terms 'Knowledge' and 'Wisdom' in the context of 16th century Florentine Renaissance. This very book opined that knowledge of any kind could no longer be considered as Wisdom, it might be its opposite. In his own words, Knowledge and Wisdom " are almost never found together. Usually they are mutually exclusive – the learned man is rarely wise, the wise man is generally unlearned."

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Further, **Charron** tried to establish the notion that, 'Knowledge and learning do not make man happier, no more virtuous; they only make him arrogant and opinionated . Wisdom depends on the will, and man's will alone is free and really in his power , while memory, imagination and every other intellectual faculty may be taken from him by a thousand accidents'. Wisdom, according to **Charron**, " just as **Salutati** and **Bruni** , Le Caron, and Ronsard had insisted is active."

Renaissance Platonism, Neo Platonism and the ideal of Political Humanism:-

It has been accepted that, Renaissance Platonism, Neo Platonism and Renaissance secularization was intensely connected to the discourse of Political Humanism. With the shift of emphasis from the intellectual to the moral virtues and from contemplation to the experience of the Vita Activa, Renaissance Platonism was however had been replaced by the newly emerged theory of Neo Platonism. This newly established theory changed the nature of Political Humanism to some extent.

Civic Humanism and its relation to Political

Humanism:-

The basic ideology of Civic Humanism was more or less accepted as an important tenet of Political Humanism. It cannot be denied that the decisive object of Civic Humanism .i.e. the creation of a group of intellectual interests and disciplines could be pursued by members of an active political citizenry –professionals, officials and merchants.

However the ideal of Political Humanism had the potentiality to help a man to attain his desired membership of his society and republic.

Conclusion:-

Before the emergence and popularization of the Political Humanism, the only political education available (apart from that of legal and administrative specialization) was a training in the ideals and occupations of the knight. Urban pattern of political education somehow leaned toward the preaching of chivalrous way of life.

But the 16th century Political humanism appeared as a fusion of introspective piety and self sufficiency of the sage.

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But, what we have discussed earlier, this newly emerged Political Humanism had been changed along with the advent of Neo-Platonism. As a result, in this context, 'the wise man' started to know the danger of becoming a "**senseless block**". He studied and realized the stimulation of active life by ambition and other strong passions. Apart from this Petrarch and other humanists became enthusiastic in order to preserve the right of the '**thirst for glory**'.

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Basically, the innate features of the said Political Humanism again had been changed at around 1500 C.E. In the princely circle presented in ***Castiglione's Cortegiano*** , for example, the ideal of the ***Vita Activa –Politica*** of the humanistic citizen had been partly replaced by the nobleman's role as a member of the courtly society and as a courtier in the service of his prince.

In addition to this, the salient ideal of Political Humanism had been being transformed in the contemporary countries such as France, England and so on.