The Impact of Reformation on English Literature

Introduction

The Reformation which began in Germany but spread quickly throughout Europe was initiated in response to the growing sense of corruption and administrative abuse in the Church. It spread to the creation and rise of the Protestantism. This contributed to the rise of the Reformation in the 16th century. The Reformation movement was the result of the dissatisfaction with the beliefs of the Catholic Church.

The domination of Church was increasing day by day in sphere of life. The power of the Pope and priest had increased considerably. The Pope enjoyed his unlimited powers. Pope and the priest indulged in immoral activities and exerted money from the people. The hold of the Church over political institution was becoming unbearable. The movement started by people to evaluate the teaching of the Church came to be known as Reformation.

Meaning of The Reformation

Reformation means the movement for bringing about reforms in the Christian Church. From the historical point of view, Reformation is a very important revolution which led to the establishment of religions. The Reformation was a great 16th century religious revolution in the Christian Church which had political, social and literary effects.

Cause of The Reformation
Dissatisfaction with the Catholic Church; Henry VIII’s desire to obtain a divorce and Catholic Church’s refusal to grant him; the political ambitions of the members of Henry’s court – are the several factors which contribute in the rise of the Reformation.

One of the key policies of the Reformation was the dissolution of the monasteries from 1536 to 1540, supposedly to put an end to the corruption of the religious establishment.

**Martin Luther: The Leader**

American novelist Lydia M. Child said –

A Reformer is the one who sets forth cheerfully toward the sure defeat.

Though rooted in a broad dissatisfaction with the Church, the birth of the Reformation can be traced to the protest of one man, the German monk Martin Luther. Martin Luther created a shock wave throughout Europe. He entered the Church as a priest and exposed the weakness of it. He translated the Bible into the German language. He placed his ideology before the public in the form with 95 points on 31st October 1517 AD. So, the Pope dismisses him from the Church. In response to this, Martin put a new ideology which later came to be known as Protestantism. Thus, the Protestant Church was born and Christians were divided into two main sects – the Catholics and the Protestants.

A number of prominent leaders, priest and Christian scholars had joined in this movement for the religious reforms. This movement greatly influenced the religious, economic, social, political, cultural and literary aspects of the people of Europe. The movement of Reformation brought an end to the supremacy of Roman Catholic Church.

**Reformation in England**
The Reformation in England was once a political, religious and social event. The English Reformation was a series of the events in 16th century England by which the Church of England broke away from the authority of the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church. It associated with the wider process of the European Protestant Reformation.

The Reformation saw the breaking away of the English Church from the Greek in Rome and the emergence of King Henry VIII as its supreme head. During the reign of Henry people revolted against the Church. After the revolt, the supremacy of Cardinal Nolsy ended in England. Thereafter, National Church was established. The king was made supreme governing authority of the Church. The king dispersed the monks and priests from the Church. The action was welcomed by the people and the parliament. The National Church continued to exist in the reign of Edward VI and Queen Elizabeth I. Therefore, people were now free to practice religion according to their wishes.

**Impact of Reformation on Literature**

The Reformation was a great 16th century religious revolution in the Christian Church which had a notable literary effect. The Impact of Reformation was deeply felt in the literature of the 16th century. Sidney, Spenser and Bacon were the great supporters of the Reformation. Chaucer was the first great poet who discarded the Clergyman and exposed their evil deeds in his Canterbury Tales. Marlowe’s Doctor Faustus reveals true Reformation spirit. Milton combines the spirit of Reformation and Renaissance in his Paradise Lost. Bacon expressed Reformation in his prose.

All the forms of literature were grown during this age of Reformation. Drama attained better heights during this period. Other forms of literature like Songs, Sonnets, Poetry, Lyric poetry and etc were written during the Reformation. And therefore, England known as *The Nest of Singing Birds.*

**Conclusion**
The 16th century holds an important place in the history of England. There were two revolutions during this period that has changed the face of European History – The Renaissance and The Reformation which prepared the background for the emergence of the Modern Europe. Reformation ended with the separation of many European nations from the Church of Rome and became the basis for the founding of Protestantism. Yet George Gillespie remarks –

Reformation ends not in Contemplation, but in action.

In short, Reformation was the start of intellectual progress. It awoke sleeping man and filled the minds with pure Christianity. It abolished the corruption of the Clerics. And also, the political powers were given to the House of Commons.

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