

7

The Reformation and the Enlightenment (1300–1800 CE)

In the previous chapter we saw how new ideas and new thinking in the creative arts spread towards the end of the Middle Ages. We also saw how the cultural exchange between countries led to the spread of scientific knowledge. How could religion stay untouched by these developments? The way people looked at religion and their way of thinking changed by the end of the Middle Ages. In India and the Islamic countries, this change was seen in the Bhakti and Sufi movements. In Europe, another major movement accompanied the Renaissance and the Scientific Revolution – the Reformation of Christianity.

At the conclusion of these transformative processes came the Enlightenment which promoted reason, critical thinking and Science. Its influence was felt in India as well. We shall try to understand these developments in this chapter.

7.1 Religious Debates and Religious Reform

People during the Middle Ages were generally god-fearing and had blind faith in their religious leaders and religious texts. But in the Modern Age, scientific thinking and logic made them question their blind faith. We shall examine these two statements in this chapter.

7.1.1 Religious Diversity in India

If we look at India after the 4th century CE, we see many religions, sects and philosophies flourishing. Even within a single region, there was religious diversity, with people following different religious beliefs. But they were willing to listen to other people's beliefs and ideas and tried to understand them. They were also willing to change their own beliefs and accept new ideas.

Every region had its tribal societies that worshipped their own gods and goddesses according to their traditional customs and practices. There were also the followers of the Vedic religion led by the Brahmins. But there were different sects in the Vedic religion. Some Brahmins accepted the Vedas but worshipped idols of gods instead of observing the Vedic rites. They worshipped Shiva, Vishnu or other gods. Some renounced the world and meditated on Brahman.

All these religious people wrote treatises (books) about their religious beliefs and debated with each other. They taught their disciples their beliefs and religious practices. The most prominent sects were Vedantins (those who based their religious philosophy on the last section of the Vedas – the Upanishads),



*Figure 7.1 Discourse between two intellectuals.
(A sculpture in the Khajuraho temple about 1000 CE)*

Vaisheshikas and Mimansakas.

The influence of Vedic religion spread. But the number of sects and branches also increased. The most influential Vedic scholar and thinker was Adi Shankaracharya, who lived in the 8th century. He preached that there was only one final truth, which he called Brahman. To attain the truth, a person had to forsake the world and live a monastic life, contemplating unity with Brahman. Shankaracharya wrote many books to explain his beliefs.

But many Vedantins did not agree with what he said. One of them was Ramanujacharya, who lived in the 12th century. He believed the ultimate truth

was god Vishnu who is the creator, protector and destroyer of the world. In addition, there were humans (*jivas*) who eagerly sought to immerse themselves in god. Bhakti was the path for them to unify with god.

The disciples of these two Vedic philosophers debated the truth of their respective beliefs even as new thinking was taking place. This was the situation with one branch of Brahmins following the Vedic tradition. There were the Shaivites or worshippers of Shiva, the Shaktas or worshippers of Shakti and the Vaishnavas or worshippers of Vishnu and so on. Debates and conflicts continued among these devotees as to whose is the supreme god and what are the paths to reach god. Each of these branches had many sects.

How and why did so many different ways of worshipping the same god develop? Discuss in class.

Tell the class about the different sects in the religion you believe in.

There were also many other religions and communities that were not part of the Vedic tradition – like the Buddhists, Jains, and Ajivikas. Christianity established itself in Kerala and Tamil Nadu in the 1st century. After the 7th century, Islam spread from Gujarat to Kerala and in North India as well. These religions did not accept the primacy of the Vedas or the Brahmanas. Some of them, like the Jains and Buddhists, didn't even believe in god. Even among these religions, there were many sects and sub-sects. For example, there were sects in Islam, such as the Sunnis and Shias, that argued and fought with each other. They wrote books in support of their own beliefs.

In the 11th century, Turkish kings established their rule in North India. They were followers of Sunni Islam. During this time, the Mongol tribes invaded the Islamic countries of Central Asia. These tribes were pastoral herdsmen who lived in the plains between China and the Islamic countries. By the 13th century, they destroyed most of the Islamic kingdoms. Many Islamic scholars and Sufi saints fled and sought refuge in India.

Many people were influenced by these Islamic saints and Islamic rulers. They accepted the Islamic faith. But many of them who accepted Islam retained the practices and rituals of their earlier faiths.

One striking example is their devotion to *pirs* (Islamic saints). In Iraq and other Arab countries, the tombs of saints did not attract the kind of crowds one sees at Indian *dargahs* (memorial shrines of *pirs*). The *dargahs* of many prominent Sufi saints such as Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti and Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya have even become important places of pilgrimage.

Many Muslims believed that seeking the blessings of the Sufis would fulfil their wishes. Even non-Muslims came to worship at the Sufi *dargahs*. Many of them accepted the Sufi belief that god is one but who is formless and one can attain god through devotion and love.

Thus, there was vast diversity in the religious beliefs of the common people. The beliefs kept changing over time. Every community had its own gods and goddesses, and modes of worship. In communities living closely together, people would even accept each other's gods and goddesses.

We see the influence of many religions in the religious beliefs of the common people. Can you give some examples from your area?

The Middle Ages was, thus, a period of vast diversity in religion in India. There was debate, sharing and exchange between the followers of different sects. There were also controversies and even clashes. But the diversity flourished. One reason was that none of these religions or sects had a central authority – a centre, organisation or individual – to tell everyone what is right and wrong. Every individual or sect was free to decide what is right and wrong at their personal level. Individuals were free to choose their religion or sect according to their personal needs and interests.

But along with such liberalism, religions also had social conservative aspect. For example, the caste system had established itself across more or less the whole of India during the Middle Ages. Hence, entry and worship in temples as well as religious study were decided according to caste and birth. Dalits and women were usually prohibited from studying religious texts (like the Vedas), worshipping in temples, or conducting sacrificial rites. Those who attempted to cross these caste boundaries were punished.

Along with differences in caste, there were vast inequalities in the distribution of wealth and power in society during the Middle Ages. The Sultanate and Mughal administration tried to concentrate wealth and power in their hands. As a result, the *mansabdars* (royal officers) and *jagirdars* (those with authority to collect taxes from peasants) began to oppress and exploit the people.

At the same time, whether it was the Mughal emperors or the regional kings of



Figure 7.2 People seeking blessings at a dargah



*Figure 7.3 Kabir and other bhaktas.
(A miniature painting by Mir Miran, 16th century)*

Vijayanagara, all these rulers followed a policy of religious tolerance. They realised that they must respect the religious freedom of the people if they wished to rule a multi-religious country. They should not discriminate on the basis of religion.

It is this policy that Emperor Akbar and his advisor Abul Fazl called '*sulah kul*' or universal tolerance, peace and harmony. Akbar believed that the ruler was god's representative on earth and just as god showered his blessings on people of all religions, the ruler should not discriminate on the basis of religion. His responsibility was to ensure that all people in his realm lived in peace and prosperity. Hence, a ruler could not favour any particular religion but treat all religions equally. Akbar was a rationalist who didn't favour traditional, superstitious religion. He wanted people to use their reason to discriminate between good and bad aspects of all religions and accept what was right in

different religions and discard what was wrong.

A similar approach can be seen in the thinking of the Bhakti saints. Kabir, Raidas, Dadu Dayal, Mira, Tulsidas, Surdas, Guru Nanak, etc. who spread their message of peace and tolerance in a society divided by conflicts, religious differences and inequality. Many of these saints forsook traditional religious practices, telling people there is only one god and it doesn't need any temple or mosque or religious rites to reach god. All it needs is deep love and easing the pain and sufferings of fellow humans.

The new social classes emerging during those days – artisans, small traders, farmers, etc – enthusiastically embraced such ideas. They formed Kabirpanth, Nanakpanth and Dadupanth and spread these messages through songs. More people joined the *panths*, influenced by their teachings. They adopted the distinct behaviour and dress code to establish their sectarian identity.

One such panth was the Satnamis of what is Haryana state today. They tried to abolish religious rituals and the caste system that created social divisions. They also strongly resisted the oppression of the Mughal administrative officials. The panth was born in Narnaul in 1657 CE. The Satnamis believed in a universal creator and sang devotional songs (*bhajans*) together instead of worshipping idols in temples. It is said they sang Kabir and Nanak *bhajans*. Instead of forsaking their homes, they showed their devotion to god while carrying out their household duties and farming the land. The Kabirpanthis (Damakheda) and Satnamis (Guru Ghasidas, Girodhpuri) were active in reforming society in Chhattisgarh, too.

You may have read or heard about the teachings of Kabir and Guru Ghasidas. What was unique and new about their religious philosophy? Find out and discuss in class.

Three women devotees

The religious institutions of the Middle Ages were all headed by men. Women were prohibited from studying religious texts. Most religious teachers were all men and they took only males as disciples. They saw women as barriers in their religious path.

But even in those days, there were women who gave up their homes to pursue an independent religious life. There were also several communities that gave a prominent place to women saints. For example, the Veerashaivas, a religious sect in Karnataka, accepted Akkamahadevi (born 1130, died 1160 CE) as one of their prominent religious leaders. Her devotional verses are sung in homes in the state to this day.

Akkamahadevi left her husband and family and crossed the traditional boundaries of women's behaviour to live her life on her own terms. An independent thinker, she debated the god-devotee relationship with other bhaktas and composed devotional songs. She criticised idol worship, temple rituals, pomp and ostentation and swore eternal love to her god.

Similarly, in Kashmir, Lal Ded or Lalleshwari (born 1320, died 1390 CE), who belonged to the Shaivite sect, joined with the Sufi saints (called *Rishis*) to tell the world there is only one supreme god. A child bride, she left her family and home to become a *sanyasini*, going from village to village to preach. She carried her message of godly love and devotion without ritual and ceremony through her popular songs.

The most well-known of the women saints of the Middle Ages was Mira. She became a child widow after being married into a rich, royal Rajput family in Rajasthan. She devoted her love to Shri Krishna, becoming a disciple of Raidas, the bhakti saint. She danced and sang bhajans with other bhaktas. This angered the king who banished her from the palace and tried to have her killed. To this day, Mira's verses are sung across India. She was not just a bhakta but a symbol of the revolt against the paternalistic, caste-ridden, feudal social system.

7.1.2 Religious Diversity in Islamic Societies

We learned earlier that Islam was born and spread in the Arab countries. Prophet Muhammad united the warring Arab tribes under one god, preaching monotheism, brotherhood among all god's children and equality among all. He strongly opposed the worship of idols and symbols as well as the priests and their practices. Instead, he talked of reaching god through simple community prayers. These religious ideas led to the rapid spread of Islam across Central Asia, Iran, Iraq, Egypt, North Africa, Spain and Turkey. Simultaneously, these countries adopted Arabic as their literary and religious language. That's why the Islamic civilisation of that period is also called the Arab civilisation.

By 1300 CE, Islamic states spread from Bengal to Spain. Excluding India, Islam became the dominant religion in most countries of the region, with Christianity and Judaism becoming minority faiths. But there was diversity in Islam as well. All the Islamic sects accept the holy Koran as the word of god and Muhammad as the prophet who brought god's word to the people. However, many differences arose when questions such as the following were raised: What is the meaning of Islam? What is the



Figure 7.4 Adoration of god with song and music (Iranian painting)

true meaning of the Koran? What should we do? How should we lead our lives? What is the nature of god? etc.

A fundamental difference arose between the Shias and Sunnis on the following question: After the death of the prophet, does divine grace continue to rest with his descendents? The Shias accepted Prophet Muhammad's heirs as *Imams* or religious leaders of the Muslims. The Sunnis, however, didn't accept this and were not in favour of giving special status to any individual or family. Subsequently, there were many divisions within the Shias and Sunnis as well.

Islamic intellectuals studying the Greek classics also established a separate tradition. This community, called the Mutazila, believed that humans have free will to pursue their destiny, and are not fully directed by god's will. They said if there is no free will, people cannot be rewarded or punished for what they do. They also believed that god cannot do anything that is wrong or unjust so he cannot be omnipotent. They believed god gave humans the intelligence to tell the difference between good and evil.

The Mutazilites said the holy Koran cannot be co-eternal with god because it was created by god. Hence, humans should not accept everything that is written in the religious texts but use their reason and logic to guide their actions. They also believed that miracles are not possible because every substance in nature has its innate qualities that do not change. Such arguments and logic were so controversial that they were even considered to be anti-Islamic.

The Karami sect opposed the Mutazilites while the Ashariyyah sect tried to reconcile the two opposing beliefs. But there was no *maulvi* or *khalifa* or sultan who could declare what Islam really is. Islam did not have a final authority whose word could be accepted by all its followers. People were free to air their views and argue for them to be accepted as true Islamic thought. Others could either reject or accept their views.

Two influences had an important role in the development of Islamic thought: Greek philosophical and scientific texts and the spirituality of the Sufis. The scholars who studied the Greek classics did not want to be restricted by narrow religious thought. They emphasised logical thinking, reasoning and scientific investigation. Their investigations led to many new developments in human anatomy, medical sciences, mathematics, astronomy and alchemy (early chemistry, which focused on experiments to turn iron and other substances into gold). Apart from the Greek classics, they also studied Chinese science and Indian mathematics, translating many books into Arabic.

A prominent Islamic scholar was Al Biruni (born 973, died 1048 CE). He lived in India for several years around 1,000 years ago, studying the available mathematical texts and translating them into Arabic. Another was Ibn Sina (born 980, died 1037 CE) who was a leading philosopher and physician of his age. His medical and philosophical works were translated into European languages and were used to teach medicine until the beginning of the Modern Age.

Ibn Rushd's Thoughts on Women

Ibn Rushd was among the earliest world's thinkers to plead for equal status for women. He believed women were as capable as men but men kept them in servitude because of their selfish interests. This harmed society by robbing it of women's contributions. To prove his point, he cited the examples of many women rulers who were able administrators and successful generals in war.

Other Islamic philosophers who influenced European thought included the Iranian mathematician Al Khwarizmi (born 780, died 850 CE) and Ibn Rushd (1126- 1198 CE), a Spanish physician who wrote commentaries on the books of Aristotle and Plato. Ibn Rushd believed it was not against religion for people to investigate the world around them. He said people could understand god with the help of science and rational thought. His philosophy clashed with the thinking of traditional maulvis and Sufis.

The works of these Islamic philosophers were translated into European languages and were one of the factors that sparked the intellectual transformation in Europe. However, what they said was different from what the Sufis preached. The Sufis believed that the purpose of human life is to attain god and be with Him. They believed eternal love is the only way to attain god. They saw rational thought, philosophy and investigative activities as barriers in the path to god. The Sufis believed humans could reach god with step-by-step devotions such as meditation and incantations. Some even felt there was not much distance or difference between humans and god. Many of them studied Buddhist and Yoga literature and translated these works into Persian.

Traditional Muslims were opposed to the thinking of both the Islamic philosophers and the Sufis. They strongly opposed them, even subjecting them to torture. But they could not suppress such thinking, which only kept spreading.

What were the questions that created divisions in Islam?

What differences were there in the ideas and thinking of the Islamic philosophers and the Sufis?

7.1.3 The Catholic Church and Religious Reform in Europe

We know that Christianity began in the Palestinian region of West Asia in the 1st century CE. At that time, the region was part of the Roman Empire. The new religion spread across the Roman Empire by the 3rd century and almost the entire population of Europe accepted Christianity by the 8th century. The church in Rome became the central authority of the religion by the 14th century. It declared that all Christians should become members of the church and accept what it said on all religious matters. It was called the Roman Catholic Church (catholic means universal). It had a well-defined structure from the village or neighbourhood up to the regional and world level. Every region had a bishop and cardinals were nominated above them, with the Pope being the highest authority in the church.

In the political environment of that time, the kings had to accept the religious authority and power of the Pope. So, in a way, the administration of kingdoms was run by the combined power of the state and the religious authority. There was no scope for diversity in religious thought or religious tolerance. People were not free to choose the religious path they wished to follow. They had to follow the priests and their church practices and rituals if they wished to live a good Christian life and attain salvation.

The Bible was the foundation of the church. It was written in Latin, a language the common people did not understand. This established the authority of the priests in explaining all religious matters. The

church also acted as a court to dispense justice and resolve disputes, with the Pope as its supreme judge.

The church had acquired vast landed properties over the years that it managed like a feudal landowner. Apart from this, it collected a tenth of the income of every Christian as tithe (a religious tax). It accumulated unparalleled wealth and became very powerful, exercising control over kingdoms, religion and justice. Any one raising their voice against the church was declared a heretic and punished. All this made the priests powerful and they began living in comfort and pomp.



Figure 7.5 A pope looking at the architectural drawing of a large building

During the Renaissance, the church built many majestic buildings. The rising expenses led it to look for new ways to increase its income. It began selling certificates called ‘indulgences’ that pardoned people of their sins and saved them from punishment. What the church basically said was: if you have committed a sin, you can gain a pardon by paying an amount to the church. The Pope will then forgive you. When you stand before god in Heaven, you can present your pardon certificates for the final judgment.

We had read in the previous chapter how humanist philosophers like Erasmus criticised many of the church’s theories, actions and behaviour. They were called Christian humanists. They were not rebelling against the church but were pleading for internal reform. It was during this time that the poor, the farmers and the artisans joined the protests in large numbers. They opposed the church’s oppressive practices and called for internal faith and belief.

The kingdoms of Northern Europe began challenging the power of the Pope. The rulers of England, Germany and other countries wanted to free themselves from the Pope’s control. They also had their eyes on the church’s landed properties and wealth. In this situation, Martin Luther began a revolt against the Catholic Church.

7.1.4 Martin Luther and the Reformation

Martin Luther (born 1483, died 1543 CE) was a German priest who concluded that the external rituals could not be the path to salvation. He said only God’s grace and personal faith could lead to salvation. In 1517, he wrote ‘The 95 Theses’, which questioned the church’s claim that freedom from sin and punishment can be purchased with money or ‘indulgences’ and that external rituals could lead to salvation. His letter to the church was printed in large numbers and spread his thoughts far and wide. He found wide support from the common people and the ruling kings. The Pope declared Luther a heretic (anti-religious) and excommunicated him (banished him from the Catholic faith) in 1520.

Luther published three books that same year to spread his views about the church among the common people. His theological ideas formed the basis of the Protestant Reformation. Seeing the mass support for Luther, the kings did not dare take any action against him. Many small feudal states in Germany put pressure on their Catholic kings to protect their religious rights. In 1555, the king gave the people

the freedom to choose between Protestantism and Catholicism. At that time, the Protestants were not an organised religion but had many sects influenced by the thoughts of religious thinkers like Luther, Calvin, Zwingli etc.

Let us now examine the main features of Protestantism. Even though it contained many sects, it had some common features. First, the Protestants believed that salvation can only be achieved through personal faith in God's grace, not any rites or practices ordered by the church. This meant the people did not need a priest to perform these duties. They even believed that every Christian could become a priest to reach god.

The Protestants said people should practice their faith by reading the Bible themselves. To make this possible, they translated the Bible into the regional European languages and printed it in large numbers to distribute widely among the people. In 1522, Luther translated the Bible into German.

All this had a deep impact on the Catholic Church. It led to a reform movement within the church itself, which is called the Counter Reformation.

The Reformation did not just end some of the shortcomings of the Catholic religion. Its most epoch-changing result was to end the religious uniformity of Europe and the monopoly of the church over religious affairs. Countries like England did initially try to establish a state church but it was impossible to stop the multiplicity of sects that developed over time. Gradually, the link between the church and the state was snapped. This allowed people the freedom to choose their own religion and helped make the state more secular.



Figure 7.6 A contemporary portrait of Martin Luther

What similarities and differences can you see in the religious situation in India, the Arab countries and Europe during the Middle Ages?

Which aspects of the Catholic Church did the Protestants oppose?

St Francis of Assisi – bringing the ‘joy of poverty’ into the church

The Catholic Church was becoming a symbol of wealth, pomp and splendour during the Middle Ages. But there were also many religious friars who tried to live a life according to the teachings of Jesus Christ. St Francis (born 1181, died 1226 CE) was one such saint. He was born in a wealthy merchant's family in the town of Assisi in Italy. But, as a young man, he realised that the way to reach god was to embrace poverty. He distributed all his possessions among the poor. This angered his father, who threw him out of their home.

Francis went among the poor people in the town, begging for alms, eating whatever he received and living the life of a common labourer. That was not all. He said humans must love all god's creatures. It is said he could even talk to the birds and animals. He also tried to arrange a truce between the Christians and the Islamic sultan. With the permission of the Pope, he established orders of men and women who believed in living in poverty and serving the poor.

What similarities or differences can you see between the Bhakti and Sufi movements in India and the Reformation in Europe?

Do you think that religious texts should be in a language that is understood by the common people? Give reasons for your answer.

Do you think that every individual should define choose their religion for themselves?

7.2 The Enlightenment

The 18th century was the age when people began thinking that reason, science and enterprise could help them progress in life and take them from ignorance to knowledge. But this was only possible if science was not forced to bow before any power or authority. People could decide their actions on the basis of reason only if the social system was not dominated and controlled by a central authority. These ideas spread across Europe during what is called the Enlightenment. They were so powerful that they inspired the American and French revolutions. They influence human society even today in the Modern Age. But these ideas did face opposition from some people and were criticised. We shall also look at some of the criticisms of the Enlightenment.

The French philosophers played an important role in developing the ideas of the Enlightenment. The most prominent among them were Voltaire (born 1694, died 1778) and Diderot (born 1713, died 1784). Equally important were the Scottish philosophers David Hume (born 1711, died 1776) and Adam Smith (born 1723, died 1790) who is considered the father of Economics. In Germany, the dominant Enlightenment philosopher was Immanuel Kant (born 1724, died 1804).

The chief vehicle for spreading the Enlightenment ideas at the time was the ‘Encyclopedie’ in the French language edited by Diderot, which presented the new discoveries and thoughts in simple language. We shall now examine the main ideas of the Enlightenment.

7.2.1 The Concept of Progress

The Enlightenment thinkers believed the world progresses with the passage of time. The present is better than the past and humans will use science, reason and enterprise to ensure greater progress in the future. By progress they meant that humans would use science and technology to exercise greater control over nature. Immanuel Kant said the meaning of progress was not that humans will be more contented and happy, because contentedness and happiness are possible in any era in history. He said the true parameter of progress was growth in human freedom and the multiplicity of choices. The Modern Age is more advanced because humans enjoy more freedom than ever before and because they have more lifestyle choices.

Do you think humans today are more developed than 100 years ago? In what ways is human life better than it was 100 years ago and in what ways is it worse?

What is your understanding of progress? Wealth, happiness, comfort, freedom – which of these words do you think are closest to progress?

7.2.2 The Age of Reason

The Enlightenment thinkers believed that human decisions were gradually being based on rational thought rather than superstition, religion or the directions of a central authority. They felt reason helps humans to ask questions and investigate any authority, whether an individual or an institution. It also

helps humans to live a principled and comfortable life. It is human intelligence that reveals the true path. That is why the driving force of the Enlightenment was to awaken and strengthen people's trust in the power of reason. As the contemporary French thinker Baron Holbach observed, "We must instil courage in humans, make them trust their own intelligence, and awaken their thirst for the truth so that they can learn to take decisions on the basis of their experience and not be influenced by the false or misleading notions of others."

Why does it take courage to trust your own intelligence and reason instead of someone else's wisdom?

7.2.3 Science

The Enlightenment thinkers saw scientific knowledge as true knowledge. By science they meant the process of deriving conclusions on the basis of experiments, observations and rational thought and collecting sufficient evidence to back the conclusions. They did not accept divine or spiritual revelations. They believed the method of science was powerful enough to understand everything in the world. It did not require any religious texts or the advice of so-called experts but only experiments, observations and reason.

In ancient times and during the Middle Ages, knowledge was seen as systematically classifying things. The Enlightenment scientists said knowledge was not making lists based on certain characteristics of things. They gave greater importance to questions like why and how things were the way they were. They believed knowledge would help in developing new technologies that would make life more comfortable.

What were the main differences between science during the Enlightenment and science during earlier eras?

7.2.4 Science versus Religion

The supporters of the Enlightenment felt that religion enslaved humans and made them superstitious and scared. They said religion led to bloodshed and wars. They were mainly opposed to the monopoly of the Catholic Church. They said this authority of the church was what made humans believe in the miraculous stories told by priests and not in their own reasoning power. It made people the puppets of the priests. Most Enlightenment thinkers were not atheists. Their purpose was to find an independent and scientific basis for god. They feared that atheism would make people amoral and unethical. They said the knowledge of the world gained through science is evidence of the greatness of god, the creator. But they didn't want their god and religion to be taken over by priests or any other system or institution.

Is it possible to believe in god without accepting any religion?

In what situations does religion bring people together and in what situations does it make people fight among themselves?



Figure 7.7 Voltaire

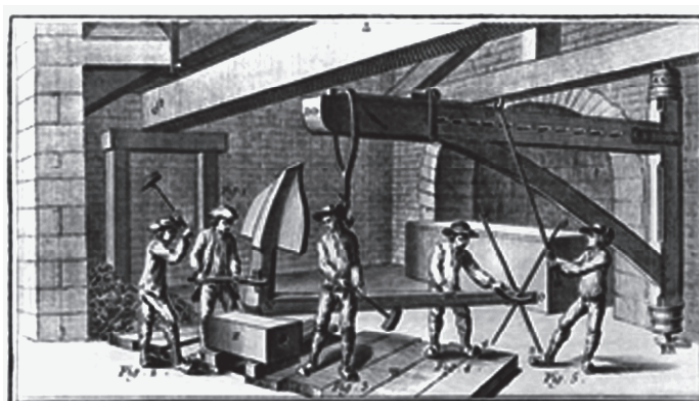
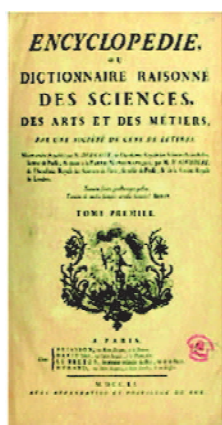


Figure 7.8 The cover page of the 'Encyclopédie' edited by Diderot (left), with the picture of a metal factory printed in it.

7.2.5 Freedom

The supporters of the Enlightenment had abiding faith in individual freedom. They said no law should be passed without the people's consent. That's why they were opposed to all kinds of slavery, undemocratic systems and anarchy. However, despite their beliefs, many Enlightenment thinkers became close friends and advisors of autocratic rulers. These rulers were influenced by their thinking and did attempt to reform their kingdoms.

Do you see any link between individual freedom and scientific progress? Explain.

7.2.6 Criticism of the Enlightenment

When the Enlightenment movement was at its peak, industrialisation in Europe was leading to the exploitation of nature, increased pollution and the exploitation of the labouring classes. The political upheavals disrupted traditional lifestyles. It was during this period that people came to know more about the tribal societies of America, Australia and India that lived a simple, communal life in tune with nature.

The people who were distressed by the impact of industrialisation began criticising the Modern Age. They raised their voice against science and reason. Prominent among them were the Romantic philosophers (Rousseau), poets (Lord Byron) and artists. In place of the modern industrial age, they lauded a idyllic rural life that would be in consonance with nature, not destroy it. They wanted to



preserve the fast-disappearing folk arts and culture.

While the Enlightenment thinkers sang the praises of the power of science to understand the world, the Romanticists drew attention to things that could be understood only through emotions and feelings. They focused on the culture

Figure 7.9 A painting by Delacroix dated 1825 depicting a horse startled by lightning. The artist attempts to show nature as an unconquerable force. Compare this painting with one from the Renaissance period

and literature of India, China and Japan as alternatives to the Enlightenment culture and began to study these societies. They translated the literary works of Sanskrit poets like Kalidasa into European languages. The Romanticists were highly impressed by Kalidasa's play 'Shakuntalam'.

Romantic artists abandoned the realism of the Renaissance period, creating indistinct and tempestuous images instead of realistic drawings. They reflected emotions like fear and wonder through their paintings. (see figure 7.9)

EXERCISES

1. How did people in India conceptualise the 'ultimate truth' during the Middle Ages?
2. What impact did religious diversity have on the life of people in India?
3. How did the caste system affect people's religious freedom?
4. Why did Akbar adopt a policy of religious tolerance?
5. Why did thinkers like Kabir reject all formal religions and what did they advocate?
6. What similarities and differences do you see in the lives of the women devotees?
7. What are the differences between traditional Muslims, the philosopher Muslims and the Sufis?
8. How did the Arabic philosophers of the Middle Ages reach the ancient Greek classics to the modern world?
9. What was the role of the church in Europe during the Middle Ages? What impact did the Reformation have on its role?
10. What aspects of the Catholic Church did Martin Luther criticise and oppose?
11. What link do you see between religious freedom and the Reformation?
12. What were the defining aspects of the Enlightenment? What relationship did it have with the Scientific Revolution?
13. What aspects the Enlightenment did the Romanticists oppose?

PROJECT WORK

1. What was the relationship between the Protestantism and the Industrial Revolution? Find out and write a short essay.
2. Read about Voltaire's life and thoughts and discuss in class.
