

THE ENLIGHTENMENT

The Enlightenment was the most important cultural movement of the 18th century. It joined the Renaissance tradition with the new scientific attitude so that humans could be free from religion and policy. The Enlightenment philosophy was firstly empirical with Locke or Hume but also rationalist with Descartes: from empiricism, other movements were born as the sensim, the materialism and the mechanism which tried to find the solutions for the natural phenomena with scientific laws and not in supernatural beings. But the rationalist philosophy also taught people how to use their own intellect in every decision and the faith into human brain brought to the development of optimism, trust in the human progress, cosmopolitanism and philanthropy but especially tolerance both in religion and politic in order to guarantee liberty and equality.

The Enlightenment ideas were spread in Europe very quickly in fact the intellectuals called Philosophes from the middle classes met in the coffee houses or in cultural gatherings where they discuss about different topics. Moreover, in England the newspapers, periodicals and chronicles were bought and read by bourgeois or intellectuals but also, they help the circulation of ideas among all the population. In the same time, in France several philosophers as Diderot, D' Alembert, Rousseau, Voltaire, Montesquieu realized a great volume, the Encyclopedia, which reassumed all the human knowledge in different fields from economy to religion, policy and education and it was characterized by a new faith in the science and technological progress.

During the Enlightenment, the ancient religions as Judaism, Christianity and Islam were criticized especially for their fanaticism and religious superstition so the most important intellectuals began to follow another movement called deism. It didn't deny the presence of God in human life but this Supreme Power had only created the world and didn't intervene in human decisions, moreover the Deism's God was a being created by the intellect and not by fanaticism. But a more radical movement was born in those years, the Atheism which denied each form of God or supernatural elements considered as superstitions. Both deism and atheism believed in a new and innovative spirit of tolerance because the human diversity was even freedom of worship.

In the political field the Enlightenment brought to the birth of the modern economic policy based on the principle of question and offer and of two different movements: the physiocracy in France and liberalism in the UK. Both of them affirmed that farming was the first source of wealth in a country so was necessary to improve it and increase new systems abolishing the constraints. Adam Smith also believed that the country wealth was the individual wealth so everyone had to have the right to develop their own productivity and the competition was fair in this economic system. This led to the freedom of the market and of exchange without direct intervention by the state: the liberalism

The Enlightenment philosophers and intellectuals were against absolutism and the Ancient regime in the name of human freedom and equality in fact especially in France among the nobles three literati proposed new politic models. Montesquieu theorized the separation of powers in three different agencies (legislative, executive and legal); Voltaire believed in an alliance between the monarchs and the intellectuals for the people wealth; finally, Rousseau was the most radical exponent because affirmed the popular supremacy in order to remove social disparities (he proposed a sort of communism political system which later will influence Karl Marx theory). In those years, even the women struggle for equal rights started to happen especially in London, UK.