



## SPIRIT OF ENQUIRY AND SAGA OF RENAISSANCE IN FRANCIS BACON'S ESSAYS

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### ABSTRACT



Elizabethan age in England, fifteenth and sixteenth century in Europe experienced fervid zeal to investigate the veracity of each and every establishment. Reformation in religion, renaissance in literature and socio-political life fostered the spirit of enquiry. Sir Francis Bacon steered the movement of Renaissance into the direction of inductive reasoning which is the basis of modern day scientific enquiry system. His *Novum Organum*, *New Atlantis* laid a straight pathway to the establishment of Royal Society in 1660 during the Restoration. It worked as torch light for posterity in the darkness spread by middle ages.

Bacon published his essays in three editions in 1597, 1612 and in 1625 spanning across three decades of connecting Elizabethan and Jacobean ages. His essays reflect varied themes and abundant in practicality of life.

My paper deals with the elements of spirit of enquiry rooted in the Renaissance wisdom and understanding envisaging the birth of modern science. Bacon as a writer foresaw the world enriched with the flames of modern science and enlightening the zeal of enquiry.

**Keywords:** *Renaissance, Reformation, Wisdom, Protestantism, Unity in religion.*

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Francis Bacon's first publication of his essays came in 1597 thirty six years after his birth. First volume contains ten essays, with thirty eight essays he published the second volume in 1612 and finally third edition in 1625, one year before his death, and it came out with total fifty eight essays.

### THE SPECIALTY OF BACON'S ESSAYS

His essays are different from the prince of essayist 'Charles Lamb'. Lamb's essays fall under the category of personal essay, Lamb expresses his own personal life experiences dreams and visions. On the other hand Bacon's essays are aphoristic in nature. They are abounding with wisdom and living experience. An Aphoristic expression contains an observation with persisting truth in it. Bacon's essays are ripe with such observation. He stays apart from Montague, Lamb and William Hazlitt in his own way like a Renaissance man mesmerizing the word with his unique approach to understand temporal and spatial world. According to L C Knight, Bacon prose style is an index of the emergence of the modern word. Sainsbury praised his aphoristic style with the comment 'Dazzles and amuses'

### THE SEED OF ENQUIRY IN BACON'S ESSAYS

Katherine Ann Stardub in her doctoral thesis titled 'A Reconsideration of Bacon's Essays' submitted to the Mc Master University' highlighted the Stanley Fish's observation that inked Bacon's essays with inductive, scientific method and also he stated that Bacon wrote his essays in response to the social and political needs of the era. It is true that he even motivated by the Renaissance spirit of his age and it is also true that he propelled that spirit into attaining new heights.

"Of Simulation" is an essay rich with psychological facts cementing rationale thinking. He directly states that 'The best composition and temperature is to have openness in fame and opinion; secrecy is habit! Dissimulation in reasonable use, and power to feign, if there be no remedy'

Author gives importance to the right to express own views and thoughts irrespective of external sanctions. Openness in opinion is acceptable in 'New Learning'. Concealment of truth leads to the blinding of the eyes of wisdom. The spirit of enquiry rests its laurels on the openness of opinion. In 'Of Truth and of Goodness', Bacon

explains that turning upon the poles of Truth is like to have heaven upon earth. Radical elements of anti-establishment apparently present when Bacon supports the truth vehemently in his essays.

In the essay 'Of Great Place' Bacon directly states that great persons too had need to borrow other men's opinion', here it is crystal clear that democratic values made the essay fertile with its genuine ideas even in the time of stringent monarchical powers ruling the globe. We shall not limit ourselves to the four corners of our own understanding and knowledge of the issues. It is identical to the Indian philosophy which directly opens its doors saying 'Let the noble thoughts come to me from all direction' (aano bhadra krtavo yanto vishwatah, 1.89.1 Rigveda).

In 'Of Studies' Bacon prescribes the higher pursuit of studies because '....and studies themselves do give forth direction too much at large, except they be bounded in by experience'. Here the word experience notates that fact can be established by study and practical observation. Empiricism and pragmatism found their expression in Bacon's essays.

### RENAISSANCE- ITS FOCUS ON HUMAN NATURE

In the essay 'Of nature in Men', Bacon focuses on the study of man himself. Examining the nature of man and their temperance is the trait of Renaissance. It is identical to the modern day psychology. 'But let not a man trust his victory over his nature too far; for nature will lay buried a great time, and yet revives upon the occasion or temptation'

We give credit of discovering 'Unconscious' to Sigmund Freud when he explains in detail the presence of unconscious with the analogy 'Tip of the iceberg', yet in the above observation Bacon straightly stated that occasion and temptation are the two opportunities for the unconscious to find its expression.

'Of nature in Man is truly a study about man. It reminds us of Alexander Pope (1688-1744) poem 'Essay On Man' which is a study into the human nature written during Neo-classical age. Proceeding the age of Neoclassicism and Restoration is the Age of Bacon. He directed his coming generations of poets and intellectuals to study man which later culminated in Pope's saying 'The Proper Study of



Man is Man'. Man has become the centre during the Renaissance and study of man took its inspiration from Bacon when it is considered the period of English Renaissance.

#### **PROTESTANT – RENAISSANCE – A VENTURE TO BRING UNITY IN RELIGIOUS WARRING FACTIONS**

Protestantism is the fire which ignited religious reformation which found its place in the teachings and sacrifices of John Wycliffe, John Hus, Martin Luther, John Calvin etc. Renaissance fostered the endeavor to annihilate the differences and corruption in religious doctrines trying to resurface uniformity in Christ's body thus paving the way for holistic approach to religious indoctrination. In his essay 'Of Unity in religion' Bacon says 'Men ought to take heed of rendering God's church by two kinds of controversies. The one is, when the matter of the point controverted is too small and light, not worth the heat and strife about it, kindled only by contradiction'.

Bacon clearly says 'Ignorant men differ' and know within himself that those which so differ, and know within himself that those which so differ men are thing, and yet they themselves would never agree' Peace in religion is possible not by strengthening contrastive arguments but in brightening similarities existing in it. Renaissance was always ready to mitigate the trifle religious controversies so that people can live in amity and peace thereby investing energies on humanity's progress in general. Bacon's 'Of Unity in Religion' is striking example of energies working to unite various religious streams.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Francis Bacon's essays strengthened and imparted momentum to Renaissance spirit. His works led to the establishment of Royal society of London in November 1660 which aims at promoting science, its motto being improving natural knowledge'. Bacon's philosophy influenced John Locke and Thomas Hobbes in later ages. Bacon is considered father of empiricism and first of modern philosophers and theorists.

For an empiricist argument bacon wonderfully observes 'all superstition is much the same....in all of which the deluded believers observe

events which are fulfilled, but neglect and pass over their failure, though it be much more common'.

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