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Notes for UG semester 4

The Enlightenment in Europe: Meaning and Major Ideas

Meaning of the Enlightenment

The Enlightenment was an important intellectual and cultural movement in Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries. It is also known as the Age of Reason. The main aim of the Enlightenment was to use reason, logic, and scientific thinking to understand society and improve human life.

Enlightenment thinkers opposed blind faith, superstition, absolutism, and the unquestioned authority of the Church and monarchy. They believed that human beings could achieve progress through education, rational thinking, and freedom of thought. This movement played a crucial role in the development of modern democratic ideas, individual rights, and scientific outlook.

Major Ideas of the Enlightenment

1. Supremacy of Reason

Reason was considered the most important source of knowledge. Enlightenment thinkers believed that truth should be tested by reason, not by tradition or religious authority. Human intellect was seen as capable of solving social, political, and economic problems.

2. Faith in Science and Scientific Method

The success of the Scientific Revolution influenced Enlightenment thinkers. They emphasized observation, experimentation, and natural laws. Science was believed to be the key to human progress and material improvement.

3. Criticism of Absolutism

Most Enlightenment philosophers opposed absolute monarchy. Thinkers like John Locke and Montesquieu argued that political power should not be concentrated in one ruler and must be limited by laws.

4. Natural Rights

The idea of natural rights was central to the Enlightenment. According to John Locke, every individual is born with natural rights such as life, liberty, and property. The purpose of government is to protect these rights.

5. Social Contract

Enlightenment thinkers believed that the state is based on a social contract between rulers and the people. Jean-Jacques Rousseau argued that sovereignty belongs to the people and government should reflect the general will.

6. Individual Freedom

Freedom of thought, speech, religion, and expression was strongly emphasized. Voltaire supported religious tolerance and opposed censorship and fanaticism.

7. Equality Before Law

Enlightenment thinkers believed that all individuals should be equal before the law. They opposed privileges based on birth and supported the idea of a just and fair legal system.

8. Education and Progress

Education was considered essential for human progress. Enlightenment thinkers believed that an educated society would be more rational, moral, and progressive.

Conclusion

The Enlightenment was a turning point in European history. It laid the foundation of modern democracy, human rights, secularism, and scientific thinking. The ideas of the Enlightenment greatly influenced the American and French Revolutions and shaped the modern world.

Reference:-

REVISED EDITION

HISTORY OF EUROPE

1450-1815



B.V. RAO



A HISTORY OF

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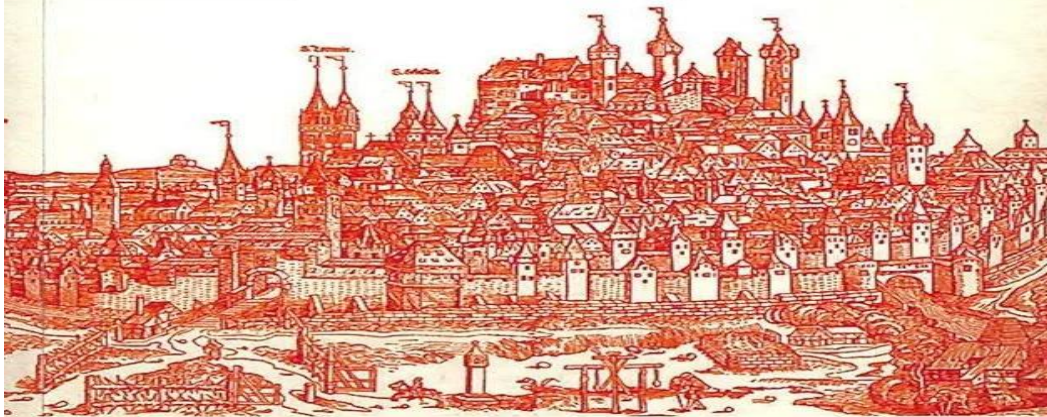
From the Renaissance to the Present

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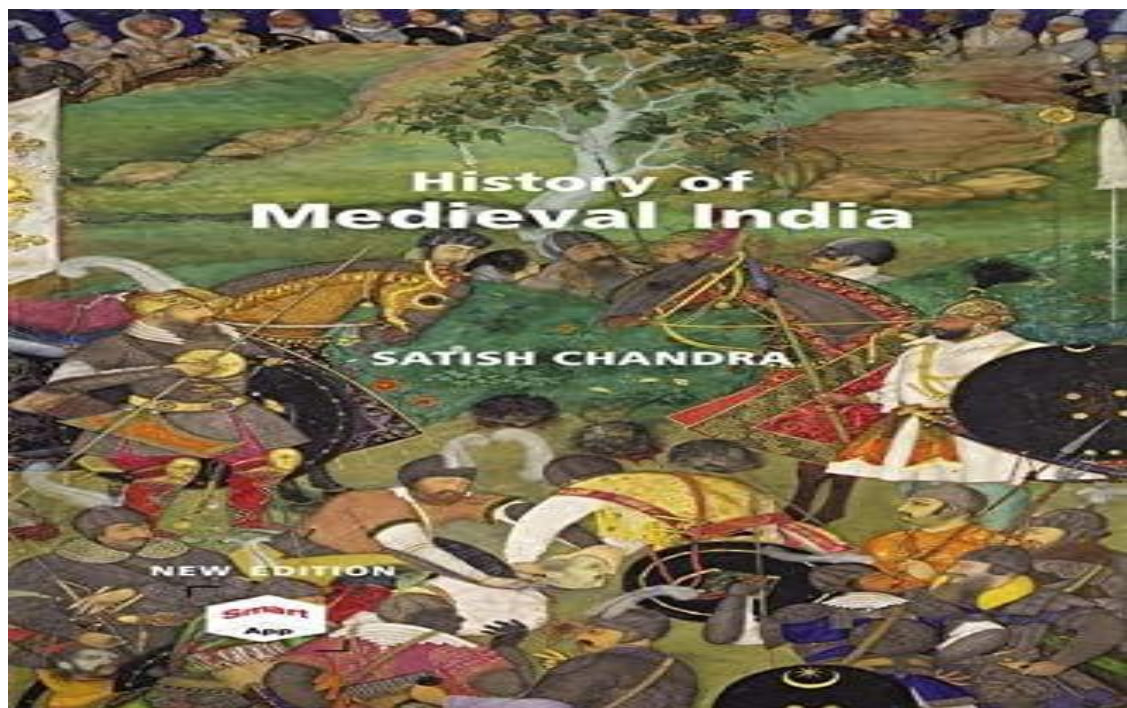
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