

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF THE AGE OF CHAUCER**

**INTRODUCTION:** The age of Chaucer is the first significant period in the literary history of England. In every walk of life there were signs of change. The social, political, religious and literary changes were taking place. In short, it was an age of change.

**AN AGE OF TRANSITION:** The age of Chaucer was a transitional age. The medievalism was departing and modernism was developing slowly. Wycliffe and his followers were sowing the seeds of Reformation. They were making attack upon the church. Individualism was being emphasized. Military events were contributing to the growth of patriotism and national consciousness. The industrial development was giving rise to the middle and working classes. It led to the end of feudal system. In this way we find that the age of Chaucer was an era of transition.

**GROWTH OF NATIONAL SENTIMENT:** The age of Chaucer witnessed the beginning of the Hundred Years War. England was at war with Scotland and France. This war brought great victories in the battles of Crecy and Poitiers. The consciousness of national unity was strengthened. The war gave a feeling of national pride and self respect to the people of England. The national life got purified and powerful national sentiments grew.

**BLACK DEATH, FAMINE AND SOCIAL UNREST:** The age of Chaucer faced natural calamities and social unrest. Plagues and pestilences, constitutional conflicts and unorthodoxy came to the forefront. In 1348-49 came the terrible Black Death. It shook the social fabric violently. A large number of people died. It reappeared in 1362, 1367 and 1370. Famine followed plague. Vagrants and thieves multiplied. Labour became scarce. Heavy taxation was imposed. The Toll Tax brought about the peasants' revolt. This revolt was a clear sign of social tension and unrest.

**THE CORRUPTION OF THE CHURCH:** In the age of Chaucer the church was the seat of power and prestige. It was infected with corruption. The churchmen were fond of wealth and luxury. They indulged themselves in all sorts of vices. They lived in a Godless and worldly way. John Wycliff, the morning star of the Reformation, led an attack upon the growing corruption of the church.

**THE NEW LEARNING :** The age of Chaucer marked the dawn of new learning. It brought about a change in the general outlook of the age. Man's intellectual horizon expanded. He began to make efforts to liberate himself from the shackles of theological slavery. Two Italian writers Petrarch and Boccaccio were the pioneers of this great revival. But beneath the medievalism the heaven of Renaissance was already at work. The modern world was in the process of being born.

**CONCLUSION:** Thus in the age of Chaucer a curious modern note began to be apparent. There was a sharper spirit of criticism. The vogue of the romance was passing. In this age there was a spirit of revolt. The church was losing her great hold upon the masses of people. Reformation was in process. The light of new learning was shining. This age was given proper voice by Chaucer.