

# The Elizabethan Period (1558 - 1603)

The Elizabethan age is one of the richest periods in the history of England. The Elizabethan age is also called 'The Age of Shakespeare,' 'Age of Queen Elizabeth' and 'The Era of Renaissance.' This age is also known as 'The Golden Age of Literature.' It extends from the accession of Queen Elizabeth in 1558 to the death of Queen Elizabeth in 1603.

It was an era of peace, of economic prosperity, of stability, of liberty, and of great explorations. It was an age of contemplation as well as action, an era which was productive to various genres of literature, especially drama.

This age witnessed the rise and growth of the feelings of patriotism and nationalism among the people of England and brought about an unprecedented progress in almost all the branches of its diversified life.

Let's now consider the salient features of this age.

## The Features of the Elizabethan Period

1. **Political Peace and Stability** :- Elizabeth, a wise and sagacious queen, followed the policy of balance and moderation, both inside and outside the country so that she could successfully establish peace in the traditionally disturbed border areas.
2. **Social Contentment** :- It was an age of great social contentment. The rapid rise of industrial towns gave employment to the thousands. Social contentment and improvement in living greatly contributed to the development of literary activities.
3. **Religious Tolerance** :- The queen followed the wise policy of religious tolerance. On her accession the whole country was divided into two religious sects.

The north was largely Catholic and the south was Protestant. Elizabeth followed both religious parties and they acted together as followers of queen.

4. **Queen's Popularity or Common Faith in Queen** :- Queen Elizabeth, a lady of noble qualities loved England ardently and she made her court one of the most brilliant courts in Europe.

The splendor of her court and her policies increased her popularity and prestige. The common people showed much faith in queen.

5. **Feeling of Patriotism** :- An unprecedented feeling of patriotism was seen everywhere.

“Under the administration of queen, the English national life progressed by gigantic leaps rather than slow historical process and English life and literature reached the very highest point of development,” said Long.

6. **Expansion** :- In English history, it was the most remarkable period for the expansion of mental and geographical horizons. It was an age of great thought, great actions and an age which appeals to the eyes, imagination and intellect.

New knowledge was pouring in from all directions. The spirit of action and exploration fired the imagination of the writers. The spirit of action and adventure paved the way for the unusual development of dramatic literature.

7. **Influence of Renaissance** :- The age of Elizabeth was the period when renaissance reached its climax and contributed to the extraordinary development in life as well as literature.

England had a great advantage since the influence of Italy and France coupled with the revival of Greek learning and new patriotic feelings entered the soil of England and this is quite perceptible in the writings of Marlowe, Shakespeare, Spenser etc.

8. **Foreign Travels and Fashion** :- Italy, ‘the home of renaissance’ fascinated the Elizabethan writers. They had a wish to visit Italy and stay there for some time. People were fond not only of Italian books and literature but of Italian morals and manners.

The Elizabethan literature was immensely influenced by contemporary activities.

9. **Backwardness of Age** :- It was an age of great diversity and contradiction. It was an age of light and darkness, an age of reasoning and unreasoning, an age of wisdom and folly and an age of hope and despair. The barbarity, backwardness, ignorance and superstitions of the middle ages (Dark Ages) were still persistent.

Despite the advancement of science and learning, people still believed in superstitions, ghosts, witches, fairies, charms and omens of all sorts and these things have been described in the writings of the Elizabethan writers.

In spite of the ignorance, superstition, violence and brutality, the Elizabethan age was a period of great splendor, courage and contentment, an age that pervaded by expansion of mind, spirit, hope and action.

**10. Conclusion :-** It was an era of peace, both internal and external. The general prosperity of the country was increasing. 'Intense patriotism' became the outstanding characteristic of the age.

The Elizabethans felt that the world was a great fish and they had a knife in their hand to open it.

And most importantly, it was an age in which 'men lived intensely, thought intensely and wrote intensely.'

Some major poets and writers of this age were Sidney, Marlowe, Spenser, Shakespeare, Raleigh, Bacon, Ben Jonson etc.



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