

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL HISTORY OF BRITAIN:II

MODULE I-AGE OF TRANSITIONS

ABSOLUTISM IN ENGLAND

IV SEMESTER

BA ENGLISH COMPLEMENTARY PAPER

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- The Stuarts were Absolute rulers.
- In 1603 James I (1566-1625) became the king of England after Queen Elizabeth.
- He ruled England for 22 years (1603-1625).
- James was the only son of Mary, Queen of Scots and her second husband Henry Stuarts, Lord of Darnley.
- Eight month after James's birth, his father died. He became king of Scotland at age of 13 months on July 24,1567.
- When James succeeded to the English throne on the death of Elizabeth I on March 24,1603, he was already an experienced king



- Stuart period of British history lasted from 1603 to 1714.
- The period ended with the death of queen Ann and the accession of king George I from the German House of Hanover.
- The Ist four rulers of the dynasty, James I, Charles I, Charles II, James II ruled as absolute monarchs

- The autocratic rule of the Stuarts set the stage for conflicts between the King and Parliament in England.
- James was a strong advocate of royal absolutism.
- Stuarts upheld the theory of the “ Divine Right of Kings”.
- The doctrine that kings are appointed by God and that for their actions they are responsible to Him alone and not to Parliament.
- The early Stuarts tried to develop their Privy Council into a strong executive agency composed of ministers and officials personally devoted to the King.
- They tried to monopolise the power to make laws.
- Also used highest royal courts to punish the opponents of their policies.

- They tried to impose taxes without consulting the parliament.
- They tried to maintain a standing army to enforce royal will.
- On other hand, the English parliament had become an independent and assertive body during Stuart period.
- It was dominated by Puritans, the champions of Liberty.
- Parliament claimed supreme sovereignty and held the king was subordinate to it



- It rejected the Divine right theory held by the Stuarts.
- The Parliament asserted that the king had no right either to impose new taxes or to make laws.
- The conflicting interests of Stuarts and their parliament thus prepared the ground for the English Revolution.
- In the period between 1603-1688 England witnessed internal and religious strife, a great civil war, the execution of king Charles I, an interregnum period under Oliver Cromwell, Restoration of monarchy and glorious revolution of 1688, which marked end of royal absolutism.



- Though an educated man, James I never realized that England never needed the type of government envisaged by him.
- He ruled absolutely with an amount of rashness and stubbornness which earned for the Stuarts huge unpopularity.
- He is often called the “Wisest fool in Christendom”

Struggle between King and Parliament

- There were frequent struggle between the kings and the parliament.
- **Feudalism Vs Anti- Feudal**
- Stuarts- feudalism
- Parliament – will of middle class
- **Divine Right**
- Stuarts believed that kings are appointed by God. Hence only answerable to God.

- In 1610 James I told to the members of Parliament that “ *the state of monarchy is the most supreme thing on the earth. As to dispute what God may do is Blasphemy*”.
- **Conflicts between king and parliament on various power.**
- Disputed over election
- Stuarts appointed their own men as ministers.
- They tried to monopolise the right to make laws and punish opponents

- Imposed taxes without discussing the Parliament.

➤ **Religious Issues**

- the great question of the day, when James I came to throne was religion.
- The Anglican Settlement of Queen Elizabeth had endured for her life time.
- James underestimated the strength of the Puritans and by taking side against them, alienated a powerful section of community.
- He feared that spread of Puritanism in England would lead to the growth of democratic temper and endanger monarchy envisaged by him.
- Stuart kings were tolerant and sympathetic towards Roman Catholics.
- Elizabethan laws against Catholics were extremely harsh.
- Stuarts relaxed laws against Catholics.

- The Parliament was dominated by Puritans.
- They were the representatives of middle class and rejected the Divine Right Theory.
- Stood for democracy and political liberty and wanted more reforms.

➤ **Financial Issues**

- When the Stuarts imposed illegal taxes and punished those who refused to pay it, the parliament vehemently opposed it.
- The burden of taxes was fallen upon the middle class and parliament represented the interest of middle class.



- This new gentry was the main social group that was the cause of the revolution of 1688.
- James I in his reign of 25 years summoned the parliament four times and quarreled with them all.
- Religion and taxation – major matters of contention.

➤ **Foreign Policy**

- Parliament wanted to join hand with protestant countries like Holland and Protestant German states.
- But Stuarts wanted to join with Catholic states like France and Spain.
- James I immediately ended Elizabethan war with Spain.