**B A 2ND Semester**

**Sub-History (Honors)**

**Paper –Social Formation and Cultural Patterns of the Medieval Europe**

**Unit-III (Crisis in Feudalism)**

**Topic-Feudalism in Medieval Europe**

 Feudalism was a kind of socio-political organization where the subordinate subjects showed loyalty to their Lords and obtain from them a piece of land and thereby serving their masters in various ways and seeking protection from them for their life and property.
       From political point of view feudalism was a decentralization of power where powers spread from king to feudal lords. From economic point of view feudalism was a mode of production where the feudal lords and the farmers were connected.
         Feudalism was developed in Medieval Europe. It was started in France following the death of Emperor Charlamagne (814 AD) and spread to many parts of Europe. It was not established by any king or Emperor as such but grow as a response to the chaotic conditions created by barbarian invasions.
          After the death of Charlamagne, central Europe was torn by civil strife and frequent Invasions by the Northern of Scandinavia, the Magyars of east and Moors (Arabs settled in Spain) of the South. Lawlessness and disorder created insecurity of life and property led to the fall of central government. The emperor ruled only in name could not protect his subjects, so could not command the loyalty of his subjects. So there had emerged some lords who not only protect the country from barbarians but also brought the petty land holders under submission in exchange of protection who surrendered his land to the lord. These lords came to be known as feudal. Thus feudalism was started. Gradually feudalism expanded in other parts of Europe like, England, France, Germany, Italy and Portugal.

**Structure of Feudalism**
          There were three components of feudalism, the king, feudal lords and landless farmers. The real holder of land was the king who had handed over some portion of land known as fief to a feudal lord. The feudal lord had to sign the Act of Homage with the king and promised to show allegiance to the king and to give arm help to the king when necessary. Also the lord get the right to rule the people of that specific land. But if the lord failed in his duty or promise the king would return back his land. It was a hereditary system and after his death elder son could become a feudal.

**Knight**
          In feudal society there arose a class of professional soldiers called Knights, who distinguished themselves in tournaments and in arts of chivalry. He had to equip himself with his own horse and weapons and serve for at least forty days each year. They were the lowest rank mobility of Europe but formed the finest armies in Europe. The estate of a lord was indicated by the number of knights he could command for military service. The knights received land grants from the feudal lord and showed allegiance and arm help to the feudal lord.

**Manors**
          The country was divided into feudal units called manors or estate in which the feudal lord lived like a king. The size of the manor was not same everywhere. Some were small, some were like a township, some were size of district of twenty or thirty villages. Some manorial estates were worked by many families. It contained the lord's castles, manorial court, mill, store houses and workers quarters. The castle was constructed for security purposes. Each village in the manor had a church with a priest. The church was the centre of religious and social life.

**Church**

          As church came under the manor, in some cases the manorial lord was an archbishop, bishop or an abbot. He received land from the king, and like other tenant-in-chief pledged his loyalty to the king. The king conferred on the clergy titles like Duke and Count. The bishop presided over the church courts, minted coins and enjoyed other rights. ln Germany and France, bishops and abbots armed  themselves like nobles.
           The lords regarded themselves men of noble birth whose main duty was to rule over the manor and fight. The nobles were of different grades- Duke marquises, Counts, (or earls in England) and barons

**The Lord's Castle**
         The head of each manor was a lord. Often the lord was a king, but in some cases he was a bishop or abbot of a monastery or great feudal nobleman such as a count. The lord had his residence a manor house, or a castle if he was powerful. The castle was usually built in hills for dwelling and fortresses.

**The Tenants village**
          The other members of manor were the tenants lived in a cottages clustered near together in a village or villages. The village of the tenants was placed near the manor for convenience of safety.
          The tenant, holder of the bland was called "Vassal". The vassal, later in feudal times, was usually a nobleman, and often a vassal had other vassals under him.
 **Importance of agriculture**
            Agriculture was the main livelihood of mediaeval people. So social standing of most persons was determined by agriculture. Size of manor determined the wealth and power of lord.

**Fief**
            The piece of land or other property held by a vassal, was a fief where from the word Feudalism was derived. At first the piece of land held by a Vassal was termed a benefice, but after benefices became hereditary they were called fiefs.

**Freemen, Serfs and Slaves**
              The tenants were two categories, freemen and villeins (those belonging to a villa or a manor). Nobles, clergy people following different vocations, traders, artisans owing land or holding it on lease from lord called freemen. Freeholders were minority, and they were free to live on the manor or go away, if they liked. Serfs were bound to land though they were not slaves. Slaves were the chattels, they could be bought and sold. The church was against slavery, but it employed non-Christian slaves who were captured from Muslim countries. Italy dealt with slaves, as she was influenced by Muslim countries.
              Feudalism had both advantages and disadvantages. It had some advantages like it saved civilization, maintained social harmony, solved economic problems and protects Christianity.
            It had disadvantages as the king was weak, it was unfavorable for peace as the lords helped the king with armies, society became stagnant, the common people, Serfs suffered at the hands of lords. These led to poor progress of the country and hampered the national unity. Ultimately the crisis of feudalism was started. Series of events were happened in Europe during the 14th and 15th century which led to the downfall of Feudalism.

**Crisis in Feudalism**
            1. Feudalism contained in itself the seeds of destruction. As Harry Martin observed- "Feudalism concealed in its bosom the weapons with which it would be one day smitten". When the federal lords began to assert themselves too much, the king who headed the feudal hierarchy, thought of bringing them under control where the king received full support from the newly emerged middle class and freemen.
            The middle classes consisting of traders and businessmen provided the king with money by which they maintain armies to bring the feudal lords under control.
             2. Growth of trade and commerce led to the liberation of the Serfs. Number of new towns and cities grow which provide new opportunities of work to the serfs. This led to the decline of the feudalism as according to law a serf could become freemen if he stay away from work for more than one year.
            3. The crudes or holy wars greatly contributed to the decline of feudalism.
              i. Europe learnt about gunpowder from the Muslims after the crudes. So the king could use it against the feudal lords.
              ii. Large number of feudal lords died during crusades which led to the freedom of the Serfs.
              iii. Crusades open up trade between Europe and cities of Constantinople and Alexendria. It was the development of trade, commerce, and artisans and they get freedom from feudal lords.
              4. As a result of Hundred Years War fought between England and France from 1337-1453 the army swelled its rank with feudal laborers undermining the manorial system. It increased the value of commoners by teaching them much needed military skills.
              5. Ten years after the Hundred Years War the bubonic plague broke out in Europe spreading from Italy. The bacterial infection known as the Black death claimed to the death of 60 percent of population of Europe. It also affected the feudal system.
             6. For their deplorable conditions the Serfs and European peasantry revolted. During 1350s to 1390s uprising took place in England, Florida, France, Italy, Germany and Spain which led social unrest in Europe. It contributed in gradual end of serfdom.
             7. The end of serfdom meant the end of feudalism. European manors could no longer function without labor supply. As feudalism faded it was replaced by the early capitalist structure of Renaissance.
            8. Rise of towns was a great blow to feudalism. Many towns were able to have freedom from feudal control by paying money and securing charter of rights.
           9. Rise of middle class also weakened the feudal structure as middle class people were against the exploitation of feudal barons.
           10.  The rise of strong monarchy also led to feudalism. Strong monarch like Henry VII of England got support from middle class who used gunpowder against feudal lords.
            11. The impact of new ideas was against feudalism. In the Dark Age people headed protection against barbarian which no more needed. People were increasingly became conscious of their rights, were no more prepared to tolerate the tyranny of the feudal lords.

References

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