
UNIT 6 PHASES OF FEUDALISM AND ITS DECLINE*

Structure

- 6.0 Objectives
- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 Two Main Phases
- 6.3 First Phase: 9th to 11th Century
 - 6.3.1 Agricultural Production: Means and Methods
 - 6.3.2 Organization of Agricultural Production
 - 6.3.3 Subsistence Economy
- 6.4 Second Phase: 11th to 14th Century
 - 6.4.1 Growth of Population
 - 6.4.2 Extension of Cultivation
 - 6.4.3 Changes in Organization of Agricultural Production
 - 6.4.4 Growth of Economy
 - 6.4.5 Social Stratification
- 6.5 General Debate on the Decline of Feudalism
- 6.6 Technology and Productivity of Land and Labour
- 6.7 Growth of Urban Centres
- 6.8 Transformation of Rural Scenario
- 6.9 Other Views on Decline
- 6.10 Summary
- 6.11 Keywords
- 6.12 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises
- 6.13 Suggested Readings
- 6.14 Instructional Video Recommendations

6.0 OBJECTIVES

The large empire built by Charlemagne (Charles the Great) began to disintegrate in the ninth century CE. The collapse of central authority was accompanied by external invasions and decline of trade, commerce and the towns. Many of the military commanders and chiefs became independent rulers of their regions. During this period a new social formation was emerging in Europe which is termed as Feudalism. After going through this Unit, you will be able to:

- distinguish between the two phases of feudalism,
- know the unique aspects related to both these phases,

* Prof. Harbans Mukhia and Dr. Bodhisattva Car, Centre for Historical Studies, JNU, New Delhi. The present Unit is adapted from IGNOU Course **MHI-01: *Ancient and Medieval Societies*, Block 6, Units 22-23.**

- understand the debate surrounding the process of decline of feudalism and views of scholars about it, and
- analyze the different factors responsible for the decline of feudalism.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The feudal social formation contained Roman as well as Germanic groups. Feudalism as a form of political, economic and social system dominated Europe from around 9th to 14th century CE. However, during this entire period the political, economic and social structures were not static and uniform. A number of changes were taking place and new relations were emerging. The previous Unit (5) must have provided you a fairly good understanding of the feudal system in Europe. You must have also noticed that in the 14th century gradual decline of feudalism began and in due course of time it came to an end as a dominant system in Europe.

In this Unit, we will analyze the varied views held by scholars about the dominant causes for the decline of feudalism. Our aim here is to put before you the entire range of debate pertaining to the question of decline of feudalism. It is not possible to include the views of all the scholars who have worked on this theme. To give a fair idea we have selected a few main views such as those of Henri Pirenne, Maurice Dobb, Kochuru Takahashi, Guy Bois, Marc Bloch, Georges Duby, Paul Sweezy and Robert Brenner.

6.2 TWO MAIN PHASES

In order to appreciate complexities of the social and economic life in medieval Europe, feudalism has to be treated more as an evolving process than as a static structure. The idea of two evolutionary phases in feudalism owes much to the pioneering research of Marc Bloch. According to him, the first phase, that began with the establishment of the barbarian successor states on the collapsed political system of the Roman Empire and lasted until the middle of the eleventh century. This substantially preserved the basic social relations which characterized the Late Empire. This phase corresponds to the organization of a fairly stable rural territory where trade was insignificant and uncommon, coins were rare, and a wage-earning class almost non-existent. Ties of vassalage between the greater and lesser elements hierarchically linked the territorial aristocracies who monopolized both the social means of coercion and the regulation of jurisdiction. Most of the peasants were either completely unfree in the eyes of the law or so dependent in various ways on their lords that, if they were free, their freedom was a mere formality. In this phase the agrarian economy was producing very little surplus beyond what was necessary to support the power and position of the landed aristocracy. Production for market was low; rents tended to be in labour or in kind; there was little money in circulation; and there was little effective demand for the luxury commodities of international trade since upper-class incomes were received in kind (produce) rather than in cash. Consequentially, western European life was predominantly rural and localized.

The second phase, from the mid-eleventh to the early fourteenth century, was the result of the substantial growth of population, large land clearances, considerable technical progress, revival of trade, diffusion of a monetary economy, and growing social superiority of the merchant over the producer. During this period, Bloch argues, the evolution of society and economy began to move in opposite directions: the former, which was slowing down, tended to hone the class structure into closed groups, while the latter, which was accelerating, eventually led to freedom from serfdom and the relaxation of restrictions on trade and commerce. In the specific context of Maconnais,

Georges Duby places the turning point a century later, about 1160 from when an increase in the agricultural surplus facilitated a greater involvement in the network of a monetary economy, an increasing differentiation between urban and rural conditions, and various forms of the general social upheaval. Jacques LeGoff points out that the shift from the first to the second feudal age was a remarkably slow and stretched-out process, and was not evenly or simultaneously accomplished across western Europe.

6.3 FIRST PHASE: 9TH TO 11TH CENTURY

Although technology never remains static, in this phase it was extremely labour intensive and yields were low. Trade though scanty was never completely absent, but it was not the economy's driving force. Production was largely for consumption rather than for the market.

6.3.1 Agricultural Production: Means and Methods

From the present-day point of view, the productivity of land remained highly restricted in this phase owing to the limited effectiveness and inadequacy of the tools and of farming techniques. As a result, very limited returns were achieved. The practice of ploughing three or four times was common since the heavy clay soil – the most fertile when properly worked – put up a stiff resistance. It was necessary to use hands, forks, sickles, spades and harrows for breaking clods, cutting thistles and weeds, and digging up the field deeply. Artificial chemical fertilizers were unknown and the available natural fertilizers were very limited. Soil exhaustion was a constant problem owing to the extensive practice of the slash and burn agriculture or the cultivation of burnt patches. The peasants lacked pesticides and used to keep pigeons and doves that would not only eat insects, but also provide a small but highly concentrated amount of fertilizer for use in the gardens. In the absence of herbicides, weeds often posed a serious difficulty since the system of letting land lie fallow was the most common measure to recover the fecundity of land. Technical shortcomings of subsistence agriculture kept it still highly vulnerable to bad weather. Wet springs could reduce ploughing time, rot seed in the ground, and thus diminish the harvest. Fall rains could wet the grain before harvesting and make it impossible to dry and thresh.

Ploughing did not go deep enough in the soil. The symmetrical (plough) share of the ancient swing-plough sometimes tipped with iron but usually made of wood hardened in fire, scratched rather than cut through the soil. In this respect, the introduction of the heavy plough with an **asymmetrical share** and a mould-board with a movable wheeled front pulled by a stronger team represented a definite, considerable advance. By the sixth century it was introduced into the Po valley of Northern Italy (most probably from the Slavic lands) and by the eighth it was in use in the Rhineland. The wheels allowed the ploughshare to be matched to the furrow being ploughed. The mould-board turned over the sod. The iron ploughshare could make deep furrows and thus made more soil minerals possible and the traditional criss-cross double ploughing of fields unnecessary. Furthermore, it exposed much of those root systems of weeds in arable land to the open air and thus inhibited their growth. It was essential in the efficient use of the rich, heavy, often wet soils of northwestern Europe. Its use allowed the area's forest and swamps to be brought under cultivation. Open fields ploughed in long furrows were able to absorb great amounts of water, and because of the shape of the furrow, drainage caused little erosion. This tended to protect the rich, heavy crop-lands of northern Europe from heavy rains.

The problem with using a heavy plough was that it involved a great deal of tractive power. Since it took from four to eight animals to pull a full-sized **mould-board plough**,

few individual farmers could own the necessary number of oxen to pull this heavy plough. Le Goff also calls attention to the fact that the size and strength of medieval work-animals were noticeably inferior to those of the modern animals. However, although horses were faster, had greater endurance than oxen and did not need an additional man in the plough team to guide it with a sharp pole (as was the case with oxen), ploughing with horses did not gain popularity because of the high nominal price of the animal and the difficulties of having to feed it on oats. As late as the thirteenth century the employment of oxen and donkeys remained unchallenged in many fields of southern France and the Mediterranean region.

6.3.2 Organization of Agricultural Production

The village operated as a ploughing cooperative because the cost of plough and draught animals was too high to be borne by a single household. In flat or gently undulating country with good soil there were **open fields**, surrounding the big nucleated village, in which the strips of land that made up individual family holdings were intermixed, and over which, once the grain was harvested, **village gleaners** could first work and subsequently village animals graze, with no distinction being observed between one person's land and the next. Beyond the arable fields usually lay the woodland and the waste, available to the village community for gathering timber, nuts and fruits, chasing rabbits and hare, and giving extra grazing to their animals. Each household had to observe a common routine of sowing and fallowing in the open field. It had to agree on the rules determining gleaning and concerning access to the commons.

Rodney Hilton identifies this as the practical basis of village common action which eventually underlay the manorial system. We must keep in mind that there were many variations of open-field agriculture and neither strict rotational schemes characterized all of them nor were peasants' holdings always distributed evenly over the main divisions of the arable. But generally, each household owned portions in both of the two fields into which the arable lands of the village were grouped. One of the fields was ploughed in the early spring and planted in grain. The other field was then ploughed, but left unplanted to let the air and sunshine restore some of its fertility. Weeds were allowed to grow. Just before the weeds in the fallow field were ready to seed, the field was ploughed a second time and the weeds turned under. Though effective to some extent in restoring fertility and holding back weeds, this system carried a heavy price. For practical purposes, the villagers could utilize only half of their land each year while expending the effort of ploughing fallow land.

Field utilization reached a new height in the ninth and tenth centuries when many villages began to divide their two fields into three, and plant them in a rotating sequence of beans, winter wheat, summer wheat, and fallow. With good planning, this could result in three annual harvests in place of the traditional one. The replacement of the biennial crop rotation with triennial rotation succeeded in leaving land infertile one year out of three rather than one year out of two, or rather in using two-thirds of the cultivable surface area instead of only half. The villages had been primarily organized for the growing of grain — wheat in most places, but also oats, rye, barley or whatever the soil and climate permitted. Peasants started using peas and beans as a complement to their grain crops. Legumes restored nitrogen to the soil and vines choked out weeds, provided a source of protein to the humans as well as an excellent fodder for the winter stock feed. Vines also kept the soil friable and thus made ploughing easier.

To the improved method of crop rotation and limited diversification of crops, one must add the increasing utilization of iron and the remarkable spread of wind mills. There were certain other related changes in agriculture as well. To escape the problem of

turning several teams and a rather cumbersome heavy plough around when the peasant got to the end of the field, the method of strip farming – or long-acre farming – came into vogue in the north. This distinguished the northern agriculture from the older Mediterranean variety that had always used smaller, square fields.

6.3.3 Subsistence Economy

In spite of several small innovations, the technical level of agricultural production, transport and distribution remained quite low and the amount of surplus tiny. Human portage remained an essential form of transport. Roads were in a poor state. Carts and wagons were very few and very expensive. Even though there was an increase in tonnage in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries particularly in the north, the number of ships was extremely limited. The use of the compass became common only after 1280. The quadrant and the nautical astrolabe were introduced not before the Renaissance.

Throughout the medieval period the human manual work remained the principal source of energy. And yet, the productivity of the working people was significantly constrained by their lack of access to appropriate food and proper conditions of living. Poor food and limited medical knowledge kept life expectancy remarkably low. Infant mortality was appallingly high. Malnutrition exposed the poor classes more gravely to the dangers of bad health and untimely death than the aristocracy. The conventionality and inadequacy of production techniques, endorsed by the governing ideology, condemned the medieval economy to stagnation, to the exclusive purpose of subsistence and of ‘prestige spending by a minority’. Coupled with the relatively small market for agricultural commodities, it also prevented the scale of production from growing beyond the limits of a holding which could be worked by a family with at the most one or two hired hands. As a result, the internal stratification of peasant society was strictly limited during the greater part of the medieval period.

Check Your Progress-1

- 1) List the main features of the first phase of feudalism.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

- 2) Give a brief account of the means and methods of agriculture in the first phase of feudalism.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

- 3) How was agricultural production organized during the first phase of feudalism?

.....

6.4 SECOND PHASE: 11TH TO 14TH CENTURY

The second phase witnessed a number of dynamic changes in the feudal structures. The most significant change that took place was phenomenal rise in agricultural productivity and growth in population. This growth led to the extension of cultivated area and increased agricultural production. The organization of production also underwent change and the community based production gave way to individual peasant production increasingly destined for the market. The non-agricultural production increased leading to the growth of economy. The social structures changed and especially growing stratification of the peasantry was a new element. Let us take account of these changes starting with the growth of population.

6.4.1 Growth of Population

The growth of population at a noticeable rate is evident from the 11th century onwards. This increase continued till the middle of 14th century. Before taking into account the quantum of overall growth of population it is important to understand the factors that gave rise to this phenomenon. The main reason can be traced to the sharp decline in tribal attacks in the tenth century. The creation of feudal institutions for providing peace and security was also a contributory factor. Relaxation of legal restraints on peasant households helped in the process. Another important reason was the gradual improvement in technology and organization of agricultural production without which it would not have been possible to meet the demand of food for growing numbers.

The quantum of growth was impressive. Between the end of the tenth and the middle of the fourteenth centuries the population in the West doubled. Western Europe, according to an estimate by J. C. Russell (*Population in Europe, 500-1500*), went from 22.5 million inhabitants in about 950 to 54.5 million on the eve of the **Black Death** in 1348 while Europe as a whole, according to another estimate by M.K. Bennett, had 42 million inhabitants in 1000 and 73 million in about 1300. The rise in population most probably steeped around 1200. The population of France, it would seem, rose from 12 to 21 million between 1200 and 1340, that of Germany from 8 to 14 million, and that of England from 2.2 to 4.5 million. This period of growth came between two periods of demographic recession when the population of Europe fell from about 67 million in about 200 CE to about 27 million around 700, and from the 73 million reached around 1300 to about 45 million around 1400.

6.4.2 Extension of Cultivation

This sharp rise in population was the main stimulus for the great economic venture of land clearance during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. In most of the regions the available food resources could not keep pace with the demographic expansion, and in spite of considerable emigration the pressure on land was not effectively reduced. According to Le Goff, the focus of the new agricultural concern was a quantitative increase in the cultivable area (largely through land clearances) rather than a qualitative shift in the methods of enhancing productivity or improving tools. Enormous stretches of wilderness began to be settled after the first millennium. A great number of deserted

tracts were irrigated and colonized in Spain and parts of southern France; large forests were cleared in Wales and eastern Germany, and a laborious reclamation of land from sea was successfully undertaken in Flanders. Duby chooses to see this wave of land clearance as both a pressure from below and a sanction from above: while the peasants found it necessary to bring new lands under the plough to provide for the additional population, the lords were equally alive to the necessity of increasing their resources. Land clearances also radically transformed the layout of the farmland by shifting the focus of extensive tillage from the central parcels of arable lands closer to houses to the 'assarted' or cleared area on the perimeter. Cattle farming was organized more methodically. Famines did not altogether disappear but considerably decreased in scale and frequency by the end of the twelfth century.

6.4.3 Changes in Organization of Agricultural Production

Large scale extension of land under the plough and availability of improved technology for cultivation and irrigation was bound to change the organization of agricultural production. Duby contends that improved equipment now enabled the farmers to gradually withdraw from collective organization of farming and promoted a rudimentary form of agrarian individualism. The creation of the free zones and 'sanctuaries' (where immigrants could be sure of enjoying clearly defined privileges, of being treated as 'burgesses', and of benefiting from the tax-relief by virtue of living there) forced lords of ancient estates to relax their grip to some extent and to curtail their demands. Hence freedom of a sort gradually percolated through the rural world. It was essential to make and respect large promises to those involved in the agricultural expansion. Except in certain regions such as the countryside of southern Gaul and northwestern Germany, the *manse* finally disintegrated and disappeared in the twelfth century. Two new types of tenure – for rent and for crop-sharing payments – were becoming more prevalent on plots of land newly brought under cultivation on the margins of the existing arable. The annual rental was either fixed or proportionate to the harvest respectively.

Precipitated by population growth, higher agricultural yields, and land clearances, the process was certainly helped by the relaxation of seigneurial burdens. During the second half of the twelfth century, the lords frequently agreed to codify customary usages, regularize their fiscal powers and thus loosen the strongest bonds of servitude because such concessions helped to increase the number of peasant families subject to their authority and enabled the rural population to accumulate more cash. On the one hand, demographic growth led to the fragmentation and multiplication of agricultural holdings, and on the other, to the increased mobility of the rural population. An abundance of unoccupied land and a remarkable shortage of agricultural labour had marked the early medieval economy. Since landed property was valueless without the labour of the peasantry, the propertied class took special care to impose heavy restrictions on the mobility of the workforce. During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, increased amounts of cultivable lands with higher productivity and an increased supply of labour accelerated the process of **manumission** and placed large areas of farmland into the hands of the non-nobles.

6.4.4 Growth of Economy

The areas of dense population saw the most rapid development of towns and of the political importance of their inhabitants. Technological innovations not only increased production, but also increased the peasants' productivity to such a degree that a smaller portion of the population had to be directly engaged in the production of food and a number of people could now devote themselves to the full-time pursuit of non-agricultural activities. As we have already mentioned, the towns in late medieval Europe were

sharply distinguished from those of the classical world in their emphasis on the non-agricultural functions. In these towns the merchants, craftsman, moneychangers, doctors, notaries, and the like did not have to acquiesce in an inferior social position when they acquired wealth. Over the course of time they emerged as the politically, socially and culturally dominant urban group. Many drew their income from banking and mortgaging land, which could raise considerable sums when the members of nobility and upper clergy were running into financial difficulties. Particularly the Jews, who were not bound by the Christian prohibitions on usury, played a central role in these activities.

There also developed large-scale manufacture and long-distance trade. The three major items of export for this trade were slaves (taken by the Germans on their eastern border or by the **Vikings**, and particularly in demand by the Cordoba Caliphate), Flemish cloths and woollens (increasingly manufactured from English wool in the towns of Bruges, Lille, Bergues, and Arras) and silver from Saxony. Through Italy and the inland water ways of Russia these goods were traded for luxuries from the east (particularly silks and spices) which were at once valuable and relatively easy to transport.

Loans for consumption were the main, if not the only, form of loan during most of the feudal period. Loans for production remained almost non-existent. Interest made on loans for consumption was forbidden between Christians and was considered as usury, which was strongly condemned by the Church. The strong economic pressures against credit opposed all accumulation indispensable for economic progress. The lay aristocracy usually squandered its surpluses in gifts and alms and in shows of munificence in the name of the Christian ideal of charity and of the chivalric ideal of largesse whose economic importance was considerable. The dignity of honour of lords consisted in spending without counting the cost; the consumption and waste used up almost all of their income. When there was any accumulation at all, it took the non-creative economic form of hoarding. Precious vessels and hoards of money, which were melted down or put into circulation in the hours of catastrophe or crisis, came to satisfy bare survival at difficult moments, and did not feed a regular, continuous productive activity. The higher clergy similarly used up its revenues on unproductive expenditure and in **liturgical pomp**. However, a sizeable part of the revenue of the church was also used for the subsistence of the poor who were reduced to the living minimum by seigneurial exactions.

Money, historians now agree, never entirely disappeared from use in medieval west. Apart from the Church and the nobles, who always had a certain supply of money at their disposal to acquire luxuries, even the peasants often had some little amount of money with which they bought things such as salt, which they could neither produce nor receive and only rarely buy by barter. But the monetary circulation, as a whole, was weak and inelastic. The existence of non-metallic currency, such as oxen, cows, pieces of cloth, and especially pepper was common. In the first feudal age, money was appreciated not because of its theoretical value, but for the real value of the precious metal which it contained. During the thirteenth century Le Goff notices a 'monetary renaissance', or a return to the striking of gold coins. This coincided with the striking of the silver groat in Venice, Florence, Flanders, England, France and Bohemia. The strong pull exerted by the Muslim centres of production in the south prolonged a phase of raised prices right up to the start of the eleventh century which coincided with the end of the period of monetary economy. The eleventh century and first half of the twelfth saw a fall in prices, indicative of a phase of natural economy, the preceding phase having accomplished demonetization of the Christian kingdoms.

From the middle of the twelfth century, on the other hand, a phase of monetary economy evolved again when the quickening circulation of money encouraged the lords to extend the role that money played in rent. The small fines imposed in the private courts where the master settled disputes between himself and his tenants over services, 'new rents' to replace '*champarts*', and cash payments to buy off labour services, drew into the manorial household a larger share of the cash which passed through the peasant hands. Nevertheless, the proportion of feudal money income remained small.

6.4.5 Social Stratification

The evolution of economy enhanced differentiation within the society, in general, and stratification within the peasantry, in particular. Most peasant *hospites* or settlers obtained exemptions and freedoms on the newly cleared land. A process of liberation occurred over all the landed estates of western Europe which improved the legal conditions of peasants if not their material welfare. Seigneurial exactions were restricted by replacing labour services with a due or *census* which was often fixed, and a fixed total (a quit-rent or *taille abonnée*) of the principal payments was determined by a charter. The lords were compelled to compound their rights into fixed dues and granted defined customs to their citizens which in turn accelerated further immigration. At this time began the commutation of labour services into lump sum cash payment to the lord. While this enabled the peasant to obtain complete freedom to pursue his own dream of either migrating or devoting his entire time to his own piece of land, it also ensured that the lord obtained liquid cash with which he could purchase labour in the growing labour market. These processes symbolized and brought about certain advancement for the higher segment of the peasant classes, especially for the labourers or ploughmen who owned their own teams and gear as opposed to the less skilled farm-workers. While among many of the lesser peasants the social dependence and economic inferiority was accentuated by the process, for many others in that echelon, the opportunities to rise high were opened up. The increasing gap within the class, itself growing out of the process of differentiation, redefined the social relations to a great degree.

Apart from the higher peasants, many burgesses, powerful lords and big town churches also grew rich at the expense of the poorer and middling members of the knightly class who had to sell much of their lands as they sank into debt. In fact, the growing stratification within the class of the lords became an important feature of the period. It was not simply the division between the *milites* and the *bellatores* – the knights and the lords they served – which was intensified within the aristocratic class, but also the increasing differentiation between the banal and the smaller lords. The former increasingly turned to feudal privileges as a source of their sustenance while the latter can be seen as attempting to adjust themselves to the demands of the market and producing for it. The process of differentiation at both the levels provided enormous dynamism to the latter phase of feudal economy and society.

In the late Middle Ages, the social classes underwent a period of fluidity. Economic conditions favoured the merchants and craftsmen, and even the peasantry could demand better circumstances. Feudal obligations between lord and vassal were being replaced by contractual agreements based on payments of money. The economy began expanding from an agricultural base to include commercial and manufacturing interests. Also, Europe was no longer in a constant state of warfare and even the Crusades had ceased to be a focus for the energies of the martial nobility.

Feudalism in Europe from the 7th to 14th Century



Map 6.1: Charlemagne's empire that included most of modern France, Germany, the Low Countries, Austria and northern Italy

Credit: Hel-hama – “The Public Schools Historical Atlas” by Charles Colbeck. Longmans, Green; New York; London; Bombay, 1905

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Early_Middle_Ages#/media/File:Europe_814.svg

Check Your Progress-2

- 1) Write a short note on growth of population and its effect on expansion of agriculture.

.....

.....

.....

.....

- 2) How did the extent of cultivation led to change in the organization of agricultural production during the second phase of feudalism?

.....

.....

.....

.....

- 3) How did changes in economy during the second phase of feudalism give rise to stratification within the society?

.....

6.5 GENERAL DEBATE ON THE DECLINE OF FEUDALISM

The centrality of trade in both the rise of feudalism and its decline was established by the Belgian historian Henri Pirenne in the 1920s and 30s in his books, *Medieval Cities: Their Origin and the Revival of Trade*, *Economic and Social History of Medieval Europe*; and *Mahomet and Charlemagne*. For Pirenne, long-distance trade, or ‘grand trade’ as he called it, was the driving force of all flourishing civilizations and its disruption, for whatever reason, brought the onward march of civilization to a halt.

It was thus that European civilization in Antiquity that had attained glorious heights owing to trade across the Mediterranean, for it was not only an economic motor of society, but became the conduit for the cross fertilization of ideas and cultures across long distances. Once trans-Mediterranean trade was disrupted by the Muslim-Arab invasions in the seventh century¹, and the Arab capture of crucial entry points to the Sea in both the East (Alexandria) and the West (Gibraltar) and the control of Sardinia in the middle, the European economy turned inwards and was ruralized. As a result, it became sluggish, even as petty trade continued in pockets. Pirenne called it ‘break-up of the economic equilibrium of the ancient world’. This also signalled the end of urban life, which could only be sustained by long distance trade, and the end of great ideas travelling long distances; life became dull. This was feudalism. However, the Crusades in the eleventh century pushed the Arabs back into the Middle East, their homelands, and Europe was thus liberated. ‘Grand trade’ was revived and urban centres came to life once again. This marked the beginning of the end of feudalism. He quotes the saying ‘city life makes a man free’ to emphasize the transformation.

Pirenne thus established a fundamental dichotomy between feudalism and trade, one was irreconcilable with the other. This was a watershed in conceptualizing European feudalism and it became the centre point of emulation and discussion among historians for a long time. Its influence spread far beyond Europe’s boundaries and feudalism/trade dichotomy formed the basis of the construction of the notion of Indian feudalism, for example, and the one in the Near East (developed by E. Ashtor); both follow its contours almost to the last detail.

In some fundamental ways Pirenne’s thesis altered history-writing altogether by widening its canvas so extensively as to encompass the whole society, whereas hitherto only small scale, particular causes were sought out to explain the rise and decline of feudalism. One theory in the nineteenth century even traced the origin of feudalism to the horse stirrup! The discussion of the Pirenne thesis understandably led to its questioning, and ultimately its complete rejection, especially its centre piece, the trade/feudalism dichotomy.

Among the most serious challenges to the thesis was the one posed by a Marxist economic historian of the rise of capitalism, Maurice Dobb at the University of Cambridge. In 1946 he published *Studies in the Development of Capitalism*, in which he began

¹ You shall read in detail about the role of Muslim-Arabs in the Mediterranean trade in **Unit 16** of this Course (**BHIC-104**).

by examining the decline of feudalism. The question of trade was crucial for his examination. As a Marxist he would not accept trade as the autonomous agent in the working of an economic system. Trade on its own, for him, did not have the force to alter any economic system, for it could subsist with any and all of these, be it slavery, feudalism, capitalism, or any other. It would remain subservient to what he called the system's 'internal articulation', i.e. inherent class struggle. To elaborate this view, he recalled Frederick Engels' nineteenth century observation that far from dissolving feudal relations, the revival of trade in Eastern Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries led to 'the second serfdom' there. Serfdom was for Marxists like Dobb the very hallmark of feudalism. Trade and feudalism were in his view thus quite compatible with each other.

What then in Dobb's perception caused the decline of West European feudalism was its 'internal crisis', a mode of analysis very dear to Marxists. The eleventh century Crusaders that pushed the Arabs back into the Near East went chasing them right into their home territories. There they were introduced to the hitherto unheard of Oriental luxuries, like perfumes, silks and spices, etc. Having performed their duties as religiously fired crusaders, they now turned traders and sold these luxurious items back home to European aristocrats at fabulous prices. The introduction of Oriental luxuries to the West gravely altered the cultural and economic scenario, for the aristocracy began to long for them and would pay any price. If this longing encouraged low volume high value trade between Western Europe and the Middle East, it created a crisis of resources at home. For, the incomes of the class of landlords became inelastic because of the productivity of land – the chief source of income – had reached a plateau because of the 'low level of technology'. Thus the demands, and therefore the expenditure, of this class were rising, but the incomes remained static. There was, however, one mode of raising resources: squeezing the peasant further. The peasant in the agricultural economy being the primary producer of wealth could still be squeezed an extra bit to yield that extra money.

Here Dobb introduces another factor, which he shares with Pirenne: the revival of the city. Yet, if Pirenne links this phenomenon with the revival of trade, Dobb does not establish any causal links. He just seems to assume that the city was rising in Western Europe of its own will. The city in turn provided alternative avenues of employment to the increasingly impoverished peasant; inevitably, the flight of the peasant from the countryside to the city to escape the rising demands of the landlord was the form that class struggle took in this case. Indeed, there was a three-way class struggle: between the lords and the serfs; and between the lords and the urban bourgeoisie which was increasingly occupying economic space that was alternative to the feudal mode of production. The flight of the impoverished peasant from the countryside left the landlords helpless, and thus feudalism collapsed. If trade had any role in it, it was entirely subordinate to class struggle between the serfs and the lord. The city and the urban bourgeoisie aided the process of this decline.

Basically then Dobb was questioning the Pirennean feudalism/trade dichotomy and instead establishing compatibility between the two.

The publication of *Studies in the Development of Capitalism* led to an international debate with resonances still not quite silenced. The book was reviewed by another eminent Marxist economist of the USA, Paul Sweezy. Sweezy by and large upheld the Pirennean thesis and the trade/feudalism incompatibility. Dobb responded to it. The debate was joined by other chiefly Marxist scholars from as far as Japan. Kochuru Takahashi, Japanese historian, was the one who introduced yet another facet to the

debate by pointing out that capitalism did not arise from the debris of feudalism through the agency of the rising bourgeoisie alone. He articulated that in the case of Japan after the Meiji restoration, the State, and not the Capitalist class, became the agency for creating capitalist economy there. This view was greatly appreciated by the other participants. The whole debate was published under the title *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism* in 1952. Later on others joined in and a new volume with the same title was edited by R.H. Hilton and published again in 1978. The central problem in the debate still remained the role of trade and town in the decline of feudalism. The new edition had an additional contribution from John Merrington which specifically dealt with the varying views about town and country in the transition to Capitalism. Merrington does not give a 'yes' or 'no' answer and traces the history of the 'yes' or 'no' answers given by others. He did not support the view that town and trade were the chief agency of the dissolution of feudalism. The extensive debate showed decisively that there was not one, single Marxist view and that Marxists were as capable of holding differences among themselves as with others.

If Dobb argued for the compatibility of trade and feudalism, another Marxist historian from France, Guy Bois, went a step further and established a causal link between the two, though he was not directly participating in the debate. In fact his book appeared first in his native French and then in English translation long after the debate had occurred. In his book, *The Transformation of the Year One Thousand: The Village of Lournand from Antiquity to Feudalism*, he examines one village in transition in France at the date that conventionally marks the break and notices that development of trade, far from weakening the feudal ties of lord and peasant there, was actually reinforcing them. Unlike Dobb, he does not take his lead from Engels and does not study Eastern Europe in the eighteenth century to make his point. On the contrary he concentrates on the land that formed the heart of feudalism and around the date when feudalism had reached its highest point.

However, even as the debate on the question of trade as the dissolvent of feudalism raged, and the participants often appeared divided on two sides of the fence, there was yet a considerable number of shared assumptions among them. Pirenne's low opinion of the level of technology and productivity of land and labour in medieval Europe, was shared by Dobb, Hilton and others. Also common between them was the view that the town was the critical element in the dissolution of feudalism and that town was external to the feudal system. If, as stated above, Pirenne gives us a reason for the revival of urbanization, Dobb does not do even that; he just assumes that urbanization must have occurred somehow, and having once occurred it acted as a magnet to the impoverished peasantry as a source of succor and shelter. It is time to examine both these propositions about 'low technology' and the town as the extraneous dissolvent of feudalism.

Check Your Progress-3

- 1) What was Henry Pirenne's view on the decline of feudalism in Europe?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

- 2) What was Morris Dobb's disagreement with Pirenne about the decline of feudalism?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

6.6 TECHNOLOGY AND PRODUCTIVITY OF LAND AND LABOUR

Whether technology is low or high is a purely relative question, relative to time and space. Technology in any sector, or even in general, might be high or low relative to an earlier or later epoch in another space; or else, it might be low or high in relation to the same region at another point of time. For instance, the level of technology in the twentieth century in general can be said to be much higher than say in the fifteenth century around the globe, just as the level of technology in the automobile or the pharmaceutical sector can be said to be high in the U.S. than in Africa. Secondly, technology is never static, though it might appear so in a short term context; it constantly keeps evolving in each and all sectors over time. By assuming the low level of technology in medieval Europe, both Pirenne and Dobb lost sight of the enormous changes taking place in the long period encompassed therein.

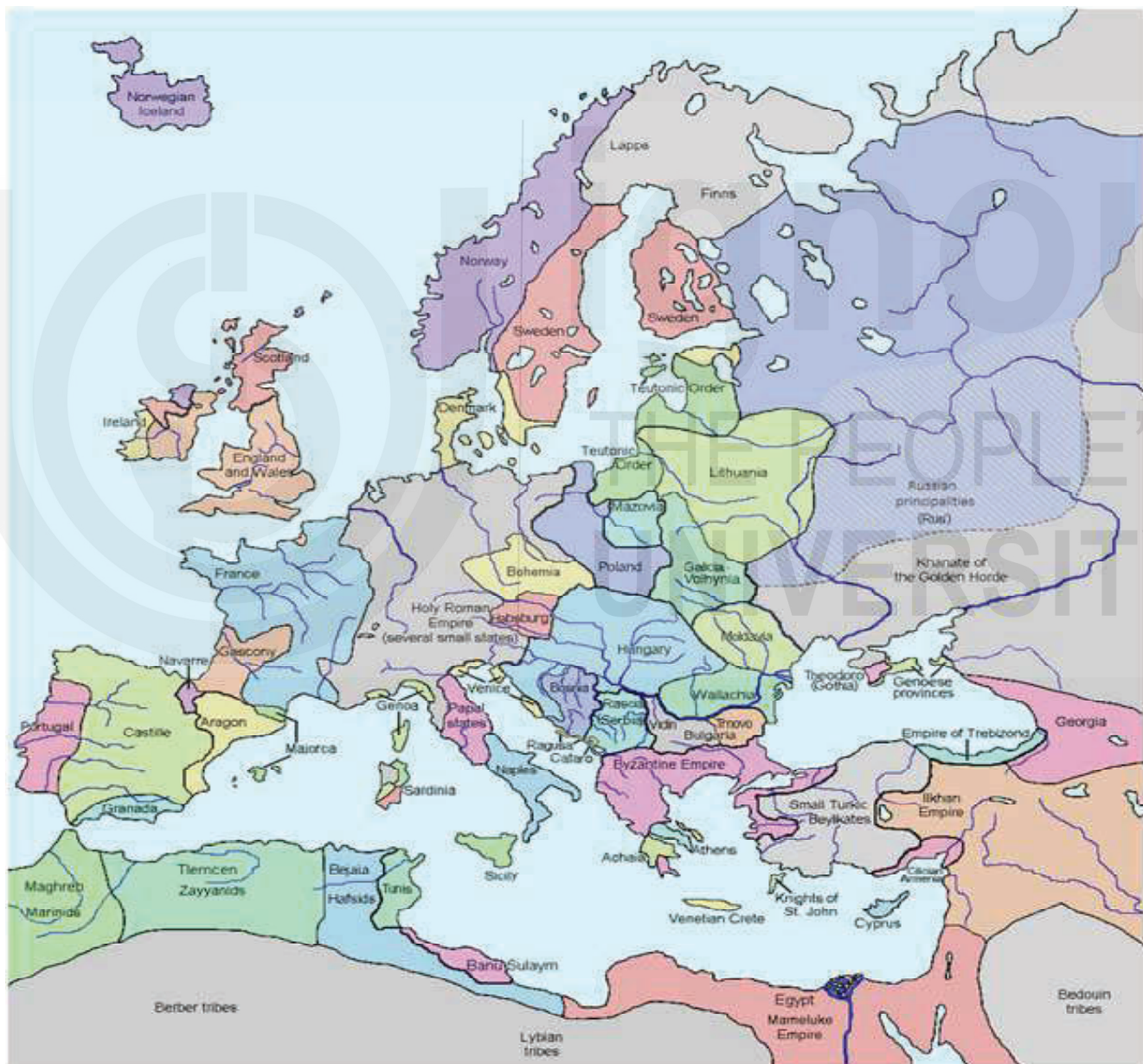
It is thus that production technology, which basically raises the productivity of labour – and in the sphere of agriculture, of land – was steadily evolving in medieval Europe, though the pace of its evolution stretched it out over what to us appear as very long durations, sometimes running into decades and even centuries. The long stretches of evolution leave us with the impression of changelessness. Since land was the primary means of creating wealth, and labour its chief instrument, an overview of changes in technology and productivity in this arena would demonstrate its enormous dynamism.

In what is termed as the early Middle Ages – fifth to eighth or ninth centuries – in most of Southern Europe and the region around the Mediterranean, which is the most fertile because of the prolonged sunshine, the seed: yield ratio was about 1:1.6 or at the most 1:2.5². The technology that was in use here was simple: a light plough scratched the surface of the soil, and was thus known as the scratch plough, or *araire*. This left the deeper fertility of the soil unutilized, for the soil there remained hard and would resist the spread of the roots of the seedling. This also necessitated large fields and a lot of manual labour input. On the other hand, the sunshine in the area lasted some four months in the year; hence all agricultural processes had to be carried out during this period. It was thus that there was constant tension at all levels in society over the demand for labour.

This was the setting for the evolution of agricultural technology. Heavy plough, the *charrue*, 3-field rotation in place of 2-field rotation, crop rotation, new crops like peas and beans which formed a better diet in that they provide vegetable proteins and whose roots left behind nitrogen fertilizer in the soil making it ready for another crop of a

² That is for a seed of 10 kilograms, the field returned at the most 25 kilograms of yield. Of this 10 kilograms had to be reserved as seed for the next year's crop, leaving just about 15 kilograms for consumption.

different kind, better harness of the plough yoke on the draught animal like the bull, increasing use of the horse for draught etc. all raised the fertility of land and labour substantially by the 12th century. By then the average seed: yield ratio stood at 1:4, which actually doubled the amount of surplus available for consumption³. There were other technological innovations too: the water mill and later the wind mill took over many manual tasks and spared human energy for agricultural production. With more food available and better quality of diet, population too rose very substantially even as the amount of land required for providing food for each family declined because of higher productivity. The rising populace migrated out of the old established villages in search of virgin land. The twelfth century is the century of both what Georges Duby has called 'agricultural progress' and massive migrations into the heavily forested eastern German lands which were brought under the plough. The first migrations thus occurred within the countryside and not from the village to the city. Equally significantly, the march to this agricultural expansion was led by the peasant.



Map 6.2: Europe and the Mediterranean region, c. 1328 Western/Central Europe

Credit: William R. Shepherd, *Historical Atlas*, New York, Henry Holt and Company, 1923 – [1]

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demesne#/media/File:Plan_mediaeval_manor.jpg

³ Thus to take our earlier example, with the new ratio, consumable amount available from a seed of 10 kilograms would be 30 kilograms.

But this technology was capital intensive. It gave great advantage to those strata of peasants who could afford to invest in the heavy plough etc.; it also gave them much higher returns on their investment. The gap within the class of peasantry, always present, began to grow. The very small peasant also began to invest his and his family labour and whatever savings he could manage in, say, growing a vegetable crop on his small field to sell it in the growing market and make some small gain. Sometimes he did manage to; at others, one crop failure and he lost the last resource and turned into a landless labourer. Of course the demand for labour, land and produce was also growing and the market was increasingly determining the patterns of production in the field. This was the process of differentiation within the peasantry that proved crucial for the decline of feudalism. Before we understand this point, let us consider the role of the city on the decline of feudalism.

6.7 GROWTH OF URBAN CENTRES

Where did the medieval city come from? For Pirenne, its origin lay in the revival of the grand trade across Europe. For Dobb, this is not a relevant question. But for both, the city remained extraneous to the feudal economy.

As we have briefly seen above, the face of the countryside was changing substantially, as the great historian of feudalism, Marc Bloch, had emphasized in his *Feudal Society*, and Georges Duby after him. The essence of this change lay in higher productivity and greater amount of production, availability of more and better food, growth of population at the lower rungs of society, growth of marketable surplus in the countryside and therefore growth of the market. All this allows sustenance of a higher level of urban population than was the case in the early medieval centuries. Thus the growth of cities is organically linked to developments in the countryside rather than in opposition to it.

Whether and to what extent did the rise of the urban centres contribute to the decline of feudalism remains debatable. While eminent historians like Pirenne, Dobb and Sweezy highlight the role, others have disputed it. The phenomenal growth of towns in the thirteenth to the fifteenth century was yet incapable of absorbing more than about 10 per cent of the total population. Even as centres of production, their share in the economy was far from preponderant or decisive. Several historians have questioned the significance of the town as an influential factor in providing subsistence to fleeing rural populace or the extent of this flight; according to them the countryside still remained 'overpopulated' and that the number of large cities even in Flanders (part of the modern Belgian-Netherlands-Luxemburg area), industrially and economically the most advanced in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, placed an unnatural economic burden on the countryside. Among several others, Robert Brenner, who initiated a major debate on the question of transition from feudalism to capitalism in the 1970s, questioned the extent of rural migration to urban areas.

Historians have also questioned the role of economic liberation of the peasant that is attributed to the town. First, if the urban income levels for the rural migrants were higher, so too was the cost of living. Urban employment was thus not always an economic advantage to them and did not always function as an effective 'pull factor'. More important, it was more advantageous for the urban bourgeoisie to exploit cheap rural labour in the countryside itself where the cost of living and wages were lower and workers' guilds were absent. Besides, in the village the labour of the entire family of the worker could be exploited through contractual labour, whereas in the town the worker laboured alone along with other similarly placed individuals. The fourteenth century thus saw the shifting of industrial production on behalf of urban merchants to rural areas

first in Flanders and then elsewhere in Western Europe. This phenomenon came to be designated as Proto-industrialization (Pi) in the 1970s and 1980s. There is evidence too that the peasants were also forced by the cities in Flanders to bring grains to them at cheap rates.

The flight of the peasants in later phase of feudalism in Europe was then largely confined to the countryside itself; peasants fled from one rural area to another in search of land with more favourable conditions. When the West European peasantry burst into rebellions of continental dimensions in the fourteenth century, one of their chief demands everywhere was the right to free mobility, and the cities by and large looked on passively when they were not helping the feudal lord in suppressing the uprisings. Italian towns did however give freedom to the peasants; but this freedom was 'neither general, nor always very lasting' in the words of historian Guy Fourquin. Historian L. Genicot observed that the cities also proved to be much more oppressive than the lords, using every means to lower the peasants' standards of living while at the same time granting them juridical freedom.

6.8 TRANSFORMATION OF RURAL SCENARIO

While we are still involved with discussing the role of trade and town in the dissolution of feudalism, we might take note of another perspective on the theme developed quietly, though emphatically, by a very distinguished French historian, Georges Duby, who bore no affinity with Marxism or with Pirenne. He took the debate away from the contours set by Henri Pirenne, Maurice Dobb and others. It is significant that Duby never participated in these discussions himself; yet his own work, published in two books of great importance, *Rural Economy and Country Life in the Medieval West*; and *Early Growth of European Economy*, decisively altered the paradigm. Duby concentrated on the internal development in the sphere of land and labour through the medieval centuries in Western Europe and brought forth a picture of enormous dynamism. He did not seek out this dynamism in dramatic upheavals, but in the slow alterations in the labour process in the field in daily toil. This slow alteration, accumulated over centuries, completely transformed the rural scenario. One of the major driving forces of this change was the process of differentiation within the peasantry at the lower end of society as well as within the class of lords at the upper end. Let us look at this process in little detail.

The estates of the lords in the countryside were huge establishments comprising on an average 4000 acres, often running into 10,000 acres and more. The management of the cultivation, storage and disposal of the produce of these estates was left by the lords in the hands of bailiffs, provosts etc. (who were themselves peasants of a slightly higher rank), for social values deterred the lords from engaging in these activities themselves. Gradually these bailiffs and provosts accumulated resources of their own through the operation of the lords' estates, for not all the grain collected from the *demesne* would go into the lord's hall and not all the money collected from the sale of these grains would be honestly passed onto the lord's treasury. By and by the bailiffs themselves started taking parts of the estate 'on farm' from the lord for a year, two years and longer. 'On farm' or 'farming' here meant taking the responsibility for the cultivation of land on oneself by contracting to pay a fixed amount of either grain or money to the lord. The profit or loss from this contract would accrue to the bailiff, now the contractor or 'farmer'. The lord's right to collect tolls and taxes from his estate could similarly be taken 'on farm' (see **Map 5.1**).

On these 'farms', the bailiffs would employ wage labour, because they were not entitled

to unpaid labour services of the serfs as the lords were, and they would cultivate the land with the sole purpose of selling the produce in the market for profit. Thus profit motive and wage labour – characteristics of capitalist economy whether in agriculture or industry – began to make inroads into the feudal economic system. This was the emerging class of capitalist farmers or *kulaks*, the much maligned *nouveau riche*, short on the finesse of feudal culture and long on showing off its newly acquired wealth, the butt of social ridicule, yet increasingly begin to dominate the sphere of the economy. This happened over very long periods of time, extending over a couple of centuries.

Two other segments of feudal society also helped in the process: the allods and the lower orders of the class of lords. The allods, whom we have encountered in **Unit 5**, by cultivating their own lands with their own family labour and often selling the produce in the market, were a divergent element within the feudal economy. With the market both in the rural and urban areas increasingly determining the patterns of production in the countryside, the allods were quick to attune production on their fields to crops that yielded the highest profits. This too turned them, especially the higher echelons among them into proto-capitalist producers, contrary to the feudal ethos.

So far we have spoken of the class of lords as if it were a homogenous group. Such however was not the case, for this class too was highly stratified, like the peasantry. While the higher levels were entitled to several rights of extraction of free services and goods from the peasants, the lower ones were not so endowed. They had the rights to their lands but not to the multifarious services. With labour becoming migrant and its wages rising, the smaller lords too were driven by resource crunch and were compelled by the developments to take to cultivation for the market by employing hired labour.

In this all encompassing flux, one could expect several movements up and down. ‘Commutation’ of labour services that the serfs owed to the lords, i.e. purchase of freedom in return for lump sum payment to the lord, went some distance in helping few peasants too, now free to move to greener pastures or to rise above their position through sheer hard work, a few sagacious decisions and a little bit of luck. Other peasants, given their very small surviving power, were rendered resourceless by one stroke of bad luck – a crop failure or the death of the draught animal or such other. Of course these small peasants still had their labour to sell in the expanding labour market. In the class of lords too, not everyone made good in the market, to which they had to adjust as to a new, unfamiliar situation.

This then was the general scenario of great dynamism, accumulated over slow developments stretched out in time in which everyone – or most – were progressing, but some rising higher and faster than others. Sharp social differentiation was the net result and no class, old or new, was immune to its effects. This is also the scenario here new forms of economy and new classes were emerging which were to strike at the very foundations of feudalism. The decline of feudalism came not through an external push of trade or pull of cities, but through a process internal to the feudal economy. The decline was the result not of the static nature of feudalism but the very opposite, i.e. its own internal dynamism. The growth of trade and town is not an autonomous variable, but is integral to this dynamism.

It was thus that Georges Duby quietly but decisively effected a paradigm shift in the discussion of this problem. There was also another shift that was effected in the way history is studied. Until about the 1950s or 60s, constituting binary opposites was the chief method of studying history and indeed social sciences in general. It was studied through the prism of lord vs peasant, capitalist vs worker, and slightly later women vs men etc. In the case of both Pirenne and Dobb, the binary categories were trade vs

feudalism, or town vs country. In the binary oppositions, change occurred as a dramatic consequence of a head on collision between the two, in the form of rebellions or clashes. The collapse of a system too was a dramatic event rather than a long drawn process.

If, however, one moves one's attention from the dramatic events to everyday forms of life, change acquires a different meaning altogether as in the historiography of Georges Duby and several others. Change in this perspective does not occur merely in a dramatic event like a rebellion or a revolution, a battle or an assassination; nor does it follow merely a catastrophic collision between two adversarial classes. It occurs too in everyday life, in everyday contacts between any two persons and it occurs at every level. Social differentiation was one such process which could not be compressed into any one day or a year or even a couple of decades; yet it decisively altered life in medieval Western Europe. It was this slow, almost imperceptible process of change that Duby sought to capture in his historiography.

6.9 OTHER VIEWS ON DECLINE

Somewhere along the line during the 1960s and 70s, a neo-Malthusian explanation of the decline of feudalism too was advanced. Malthus had propounded the notion in the nineteenth century that natural resources like land, forests, water, etc. could sustain a certain quantum of population. Whenever in history the total human population had exceeded this sustainable level, famines, pestilences, wars etc. have occurred that would bring the population figures down again to levels that corresponded to the resources. Some historians, like Emanuel Le Roy Ladurie, argued that the growing population in medieval Europe had similarly exceeded the sustainability level of agriculture. Therefore, the famines of 1314-15 and the devastating pestilence of 1348-51 that caused the Black Death which wiped out something like a quarter of the European population was such a manifestation of the Malthusian law. This upset the entire equilibrium in medieval Europe and brought about the transition to capitalism.

The Malthusian theory has always been a subject of great controversy; understandably therefore the explanation of the collapse of feudalism on this score found sharp critics. The basic flaw in the Malthusian theory is the assumption that resources are relatively inflexible and can sustain only a given level of population. Its critics assert that resources can always be enhanced through better technology and better management and the same amount of land, for example, can yield much higher output with a better method of cultivation. It is therefore fallacious to assume that population levels in medieval Europe had exceeded what agriculture could sustain. Such an explanation draws one's attention away from social factors arising from the social structure.

A yet another opening up of the debate on transition to Capitalism appeared first in the pages of the British journal, *Past and Present* in the 1970s and early 80s. The new debate was initiated by an American historian, Robert Brenner with an essay titled 'Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe' in 1976. Brenner essentially reiterated the superiority of the classical Marxist methodology of analyzing history in terms of class struggle. Although he was not directly engaged in discussing the decline of feudalism, but the debate nevertheless overlapped with this theme in as much as it was seeking explanation of the different paths followed by Britain and France into the world of capitalism. The formulation of the problem itself has classic Marxist frame of reference. The debate that followed the publication of the article did not remain confined to Marxist historians alone, nor did agreements and disagreements remain bound by one's ideological loyalties. In 1985, the whole set of papers were published under the title, *The Brenner Debate*.

Check Your Progress-4

- 1) Discuss the technological changes in agriculture which increased the productivity in Europe.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

- 2) Write a brief note on the growth of urban centres in medieval Europe.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

- 3) What according to Duby caused the transformation of rural scenario?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

- 4) How was Malthusian theory of population linked to the decline of feudalism?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

6.10 SUMMARY

The feudal system in Europe took roots and survived for almost five hundred years. In its initial phase it was not very well structured and was mostly confined to a sort of bond between the Lord and the Vassal. Over the years the bonds got defined and streamlined with various hierarchical levels. The feudal age also witnessed growth of new institutions. You must have noticed that the whole feudal period is not static and witnessed changes. In this Unit we have discussed them in two major phases – the first from 9th to 11th century and the second from 11th to 14th century CE. These phases are not identifiable distinctly in all regions at the same time. There were variations in developments in terms of periods and specific areas of change.

You must have noticed these changes in the area of agricultural production, technology,

pattern of cultivation and organization of production between the two phases since land was the main source of wealth in feudal system. The demographic changes during the period influenced the economic and social structures. During the second phase, the economic growth was significant and social stratification was pronounced. From the 14th century the process of decline of feudalism started.

In this Unit we familiarized you with a range of views on the decline of feudalism. Henri Pirenne established the centrality of trade in the rise and decline of feudalism. He believed that the revival of trade and urban centres marked the beginning of the decline of feudalism. Maurice Dobb challenged the position of Pirenne and said that trade on its own did not have the force to alter any economic system. He felt that the cause of decline was the internal crisis of feudalism. Dobb did concede that the urban centres were rising but he did not link it with the growth of trade. Dobb saw the collapse of feudalism a result of migration of peasantry to towns to escape feudal oppression which left landlords helpless. A form of class struggle ensued between the lords and serfs and between the lords and urban bourgeoisie. Kochuru Takahashi added another dimension to it and felt that capitalism did not rise on the ruins of feudalism through the agency of bourgeoisie but the state created capitalist economy; he referred to the case of Meiji Japan to make his point.

The improvement in technology increased the productivity with more surplus available, thereby giving rise to social stratification of peasantry. Many small peasants lost their lands and became labourers while richer peasants turned into contractors acquiring rights to collect rents. Capital intensive cultivation also crept in with large holdings of lords which were cultivated through hired labour. For Georges Duby, this transformation of rural scenario led to the decline of feudalism. Robert Brenner was of the opinion that expansion of trade does not fully explain the decline and reiterated the Marxian theory of class struggle between the lords and the peasants as the cause for decline.

This Unit then does not purport to answer the question whether or not trade and town had contributed to the decline of feudalism in Europe; instead it seeks to trace the ever changing contours of the question and its answers. In the end, it can be surmised that the significance of the discipline of history lies in restlessness and renewed energetic exploration of ever widening horizons. The debate that we have encapsulated here is an excellent testimony to it.

6.11 KEYWORDS

- | | |
|---------------------------|--|
| Asymmetrical Share | : A form of plough with mould-board etc. |
| Black Death | : Plague epidemic which struck Europe in the middle of the 14 th century it is estimated that it killed between one-fourth and one-third of Europe's inhabitants. |
| Burgess | : The town resident contributing towards the customary payments due to the king from boroughs; in the late medieval period, however, 'burgess' was frequently used to distinguish a group of privileged townsmen from a less privileged group. Burgesses grew in power during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, gradually building wealth based upon the commerce and production that took place in the borough. |

<i>Demesne</i>	: Land cultivated by serf with labour dues; its produce went to the lord's stores.
Liturgical Pomp	: Grand display of public celebrations of worship or rituals or ceremonies.
<i>Manse</i>	: A unit of land cultivated by one peasant family's labour, whether it belonged to the lord or the peasant himself. This was the unit of measurement of labour dues.
Manumission	: The freeing of a slave or serf from indentured service.
Mould-board plough	: See Asymmetrical share
Open Fields	: Arable land with common rights after harvest or while fallow; usually without internal divisions by hedges, walls or fences but made up of plough strips arranged by furlongs.
Rhine Land	: Region adjoining to Rhine river in Germany.
Vikings	: Scandinavian traders and pirates of 8 th to 10 th century
Village Gleaners	: Poor people in villages who used to collect ears of corn after the crop was harvested and taken away by cultivators.

6.12 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress-1

- 1) See Section 6.2
- 2) See Sub-section 6.3.1
- 3) See Sub-section 6.3.2

Check Your Progress-2

- 1) See Sub-section 6.4.1
- 2) See Sub-sections 6.4.2 and 6.4.3
- 3) See Sub-sections 6.4.4 and 6.4.5

Check Your Progress-3

- 1) See Section 6.5
- 2) See Section 6.5

Check Your Progress-4

- 1) See Section 6.6
- 2) See Section 6.7
- 3) See Section 6.8
- 4) See Section 6.9

6.13 SUGGESTED READINGS

- Bloch, Marc, (1961) *Feudal Society*, 2 Vols. (Chicago: Chicago University Press).
- Duby, Georges, (1974) *The Early Growth of the European Economy: Warriors and Peasants from the Seventh to the Twelfth Century* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press).
- Duby, Georges, (1980) *The Three Orders: Feudal Society Imagined* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).
- Duby, Georges, (1998) *Rural Economy and Country Life in the Medieval West* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press).
- Ganshof, F. L., (1964) *Feudalism* (New York: Harper).
- Lynn, White Jr., (1962) *Medieval Technology and Social Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Le Goff, Jacques, (1990) *Medieval Civilization* (Massachusetts: Cambridge University Press).
- Anderson, Perry, (1974) *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism* (London: Verso).
- Brown, E. A. R., (1974) 'The Tyranny of a Construct', *American Historical Review* (79).
- Hodgett, Gerald A. J., (2010) (Reprint) *A Social and Economic History of Medieval Europe* (Oxon: Routledge).
- Pirenne, Henri, (1969; First Published 1925) *Medieval Cities: Their Origins and the Revival of Trade* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).
- Pirenne, Henri, (2010) (Reprint) *Economic and Social History of Medieval Europe* (London and New York: Routledge).
- Dobb, Maurice, (2006) (Reprint) *Studies in the Development of Capitalism* (New York: International Publishers).
- Hilton, Rodney (ed.), (2006) (Reprint) *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism* (New Delhi: Aakar Books).
- Mukhia, Harbans, (1979-1980) 'Maurice Dobb's Explanation of the Decline of Feudalism in Western Europe – A Critique', *The Indian Historical Review*, vol.6, nos.1-2, Jul-Jan:154-184.

6.14 INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEO RECOMMENDATIONS

Medieval Europe: Feudalism | National Geographic Documentary
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ymb9k8Tk_fY