

## Indian Feudalism

Feudalism is one of the significant features Early medieval age in India. First of all it flourished in Kayasth family after the death of Harsha and later on it spread in various part of country. Before that Feudalism is also prevailed in Society but in narrow sense in Gupta Period. After the death of Harsha and collapse of Central government administration and linkage with people ended. During this period there was no affection and harmony in the relation between ruler and ruled. As a result of it a new class called Nobles emerged which served as a linkage medium between king and the people. The power of Nobles enhance tremendously on account of the <sup>absence of</sup> Central government. Thus we may define Feudalism as "Feudalism was a complete organisation of Society through the medium of land tenure in which from the king down to the lowest land owner. All are bound together by obligation and defence." Thus the king provides security to the Nobles and Nobles pay the taxes as well as army during the period of external invasion on king.

According to A-S Altekar, There are numerous character of feudal lords :-

- ① The feudatories were not permitted to issue coins and they had to mention the name of the over lords in Epigraphs.

- ② Attend the Imperial Court on ceremonial occasions.
- ③ Pay a regular tribute.
- ④ make present on festive occasions when daughter of the king were married.
- ⑤ Send a certain number of troops.

But during the period of early medieval age these obligations were neglected, while the power of the feudal lords raised and they maintained their own army and imposed direct taxes upon the people. Even most of the big feudatories had their own Vasals like Samantas, Thakuras, Kanaks, and Rautas, etc. The Rashtrakuta had their feudatories like Gurjar Rashtrakuta and the Silharas. Similarly in Kashmir, Samras (feudal lords) were the most effective feudals. They lived in small castles, maintained their contingent and defied the authority of central government when it not suited their interest.

Nomenclature. → Samant, Mahasamanta, Kanak, Thakur, Nayak, Prabhu etc all the name indicates the feudal status of society. Mahamandaleshwar, Mandaleshwar and Raja were also the feudal status. Aprajit Prichha and Harshcharita gives us detail about the name of feudal lords accordance with owner of villages.

Aprajit Prichha.

Harshcharit. - Banhatt

- ① Mahamandaleshwar - 1 lac Villages
- ② Mandlik - 50,000 Villages
- ③ Mahasamanta → 20,000 Villages
- ④ Samanta → 10,000 Villages
- ⑤ Raghunamanta → 5,000 Villages
- ⑥ Chaturansuka → 4,000 Villages

- ① Samanta → Low land owner
- ② Maha Samanta → Big land owner
- ③ Apt Samanta → Accepting the suzerainty of Paramount.
- ④ Pradhan Samanta → Believer or Advisor of Paramount
- ⑤ Shatru Samanta → Defeated Enemy who were under the <sup>paramount</sup> - direct
- ⑥ Prati Samanta → against Samanta who were not favour in Paramount

Thus we see that these names provides us information about the status of feudal lords and their relation to the Paramount.

## Reason for the development of feudalism

- ①. Conception of Dharmrajaya and Digvijaya → Samudra  
- Gupta Concept of Digvijay and his victory included various boundaries within a Paramount. Later Gupta were not able to maintain these vast and extended Empire. So, The small king who were under the suzerainty of Gupta Empire became independent and strengthened their position with own Army. These were became big landowner till Harsha Period. Harsha also started land as a service grant so it also paved the way for the feudalism.
- ②. Brahmdeya → According to Prof. R.S Sharma Brahmdeya were also a reason for the feudalism. Brahmdeya was the land donation to the Brahmins for the maintenance of temple and Architect work. Thus a process started 'Land shifted from Kshatriya varna to Brahmins and they struggled to control the surplus production of land.' This process also strengthened the condition of Brahmins and they emerged as feudal lords.
- ③. Economic Reason → Communist historians like R.S Sharma who wrote "Indian Feudalism" advocated that feudalism occurred in Indian context only due to Economic reason. He laid stress that various Economic activities were responsible such as:
  - ①. Decline of foreign trade → During that period, due to lack of central administration and security, foreign traders <sup>were</sup> not so prosperous. So the Economic condition declined and it paved the way to become dependent on the nobles. So it became a chief reason.
  - ②. Close Economic system in country → Apart from foreign trade regional trade were also in bad

Conditions due various regional power. Each regional power set more taxes to other regional powers which put hurdles in regional trade. So the local people have faith upon their feudal lords and these conditions strengthen them and paved the way to emerge as a feudal lords.

- ③ Lack of coins: → Coins were not so abundant or not available, the state started handing out land in payment to its employees and grantees. The state distributed land in intermediaries and they become master of land in comparison to the peasant, i.e. it also become a chief reason for the feudalism.

Thus we see that various reasons are responsible for the feudalism.

Effect of Feudalism: → With the advent of feudal lords the position of Paramount become weaker and weaker. The relationship between king, people and peasant are in deteriorating phase. The life of common people like peasant and traders became problematic due to aggressive policy of Samanta. Various Paramounts emerged so the Samanta have an opportunity to go with another Paramount.

Loyalty towards Paramount disappeared like the Kachwaha of Dabkund gone with Chola Paramo after the decline of Chandela. Similarly Malay Singh who was the feudal lord of Vijay Singh left him and meet with Chandela king Pratlok Naresch.

When power of feudal lords increased they became authority to issue the coins thus the quantity of coins increased and quality decreased. It means various types of coins existed which prevent the intend

and foreign trade. So it was the time of Economic decline.

Being a feudal lords became a symbol of Power. Thus the position of Samanta increased in Social hierarchy and they maintained their position like Paramount and started to make a class to belongs to the Kshatrya class. They set up their regional temples, tanks, and various talabs for the enhancement of their power and prestige. They built various edifices or palaces to show their status. The life of feudal and merchant class became luxurious and corruption prevail in every where. Putting servant, Das, Dasi became the indicatory of social prestige.

In Economic field, we see that. Feudal structure transform into "depend economic structure". trade and commerce decline due to regionalism. But Intra regional trade flourished in some region. Position of farmer was very poor during that period.

Feudal lords care those villages which come under their direct control thus localised tradition came in to existence. Various local language used by common people for expression of ideas and divided whole India with diversified culture, localised custom and traditions. Thus Uniformity ended and we again started to fight with each other for the upliftment of local powers.

Conclusion → Thus we conclude that, Feudalism were chief reasons for the weakening of Paramount, and poor condition of the farmers, centralised currency system declined.

Loyalty decreased but it also paved the way for the development of local temples, dialects, culture and inter regional trade. Feudalism is fully different in comparison to Europe and various historians questioned ~~made~~ the concept of Feudalism in Ancient Indian History. According to them there is no connection of European Feudalism to India like manor, slavery and serfdoms did not exist in ancient India. They opines that it's an historical imposition by a group of historians to fulfill their objective or political motif.