

Chapter II

Feudalism: A Conceptual Analysis

(A). Feudalism: A Debate:

Humans experienced inextricable hardships during their onward march to civilization. They traversed different historical periods to touch the civilizational heights, and each period had specific denominations to explain production relations.¹ While the ancient period characterized predominance of city states and slavery, the medieval period, institutionally speaking, was known for feudal organization of state and society.² According to Karl Marx, human history passed through five successive formations/modes: primitive (primitive Communism), slavery, in which land belonged to rich and labour was extracted from slaves, feudal in which land belonged to feudal lords and labour was done by the serfs, capitalism in which bourgeoisie controlled the industries and labour was provided by the proletariat, and Socialism/Communism where means and forces of production would be controlled commonly by the working class. All these stages characterized progressive epochs of economic formations of society.³

Feudalism formed a dominant institution of medieval society. The scholars attach different meanings to it. During the 17th century, it described all unfair and outdated laws or customs associated with the administration of the fiefs and traditional rights enjoyed by the warrior aristocracy. The word gained currency with Montesquieu's definition about it in his classical work *De L'Esprit des Lois* (*The Spirit of Laws*) in 1748. Since then, it remained the subject matter of debate among

¹ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 13, New York: International Publishers, 1961, p.9.

² Paul Vinogradoff, "Feudalism," *Cambridge Medieval History*, London, Vol. 3, New York/Boston: The Macmillian Company, 1922, p. 458.

³ *Collected Works*, Vol. 13, p. 9.

the medievalists especially on the issues related to feudal obligations and rights in the then social, political, economic, legal and administrative framework.⁴ Under the circumstances, some scholars termed the feudalism or lord-vassal personal relationship as the core of medieval mode of production.⁵ However, others recognized it as a fief and the seigniorial-manorial system,⁶ whereas many others explained it in terms of a method of the government, which devolved powers and authority to the landed aristocracy under what Perry Anderson designates as “scalar sovereignty” or “parcelized sovereignty.”⁷ Still many others defined it as a military system.⁸ To be precise, feudalism symbolized a blend of several elements together as per different versions.⁹ However, it reached to its heights during the 10th-13th century under what is termed as the period of the “Classical Age of Feudalism” in Europe,¹⁰ and spread to other parts of Europe, Africa, and Asia in sequence of socio-economic and political crises.¹¹

⁴ Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society*, Vol. 2, p. 446; Francis Lious Ganshoff, *Feudalism*, Eng. tr. by Philip Grierson Brussels, London: Longmans, 1950, p. xv.

⁵ Max Weber, *Witchcraft and Gesellschaft, Grundriss der verstehende Soziologie*, Vol. 2, Cologne, 1964, pp. 189-192: Cf. R. J. Barandse, “The Feudalism Mutation: Military and Economic Transformations of the Ethnosphere in the Tenth to Thirteenth Centuries,” *Journal of World History*, p. 525: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20079242> (accessed: 27/04/2010).

⁶ Cf. Josef Matuz, “The Nature and Stages of Ottoman Feudalism,” *Asian and African Studies*, Vol. 16, Universität Freiburg, 1982, p. 282: http://www.freidok.uni-freiburg.de/volltexte/4555/pdf/Matuz_The_nature_and_stages.pdf

⁷ Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, New York: New Left Books, 1974/reprint 1977, pp. 407-408.

⁸ “The Feudalism Mutation: Military and Economic Transformations of the Ethnosphere in the Tenth to Thirteenth Centuries,” *Journal of World History*, p. 511.

⁹ *Feudal Society*, Vol. 2, p. 446.

¹⁰ R. J. Barandse, “The Feudalism Mutation: Military and Economic Transformations of the Ethnosphere in the Tenth to Thirteenth Centuries,” *Journal of World History*, University of Hawaii Press, Vol. 14, No. 4, 2003, pp. 503-506, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20079242> (accessed: 27/02/2011).

¹¹ Besides Europe, feudalism existed in China, Iran, Arabia, Turkey, etc. However, among the non-European countries, Japan from the 14th century till the demise of Tokugawa state in 1867 AD., represented an archetypal example of developed feudalism having strong resemblance with European feudalism: Chris Wickham, “The Uniqueness of the East,” *The Feudalism Debate*, Harbans Mukhia (ed.), New Delhi: Monahar Publishers and Distributors, 1999, p. 112; T.J.Byres, “Modes of Production and Non-European Pre-Colonial Societies: Nature and Significance of the Debate,” *The Feudalism Debate*, Harbans Mukhia (ed.), New Delhi: Monahar Publishers and Distributors, 1999, p. 16; Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society*, Eng. tr. from French by L.A. Manyon, London: Routledge, 1989, Vol. I, pp. 211, 213, 228.

Generally, feudalism signified an institution based on tied labour of the un-free workers (serfs) to the lords. Its social pattern was hierarchical in organization with rulers, personnel, clerics, and literates at the top and the merchants, craftsmen, townsmen, and the peasants at the bottom. The serfs depended very largely on family labour to meet their feudal and other obligations. Consequently, a direct relationship existed between agricultural production and biological reproduction. Precisely, if a peasant family swelled in size, it was considered beneficial both to the serf and the lord.

Such a debate resurfaced with the emergence of the French Annals School of Thought during the 19th-20th century though Montesquieu had made its beginning long back in his classical work *The Spirit of Laws*. In their “stage theory” of the 20th century, the European radicals, Frederic Engels and Karl Marx, widened the scope of the debate while declaring feudalism as an important rather a basic stage for socialism. As per them, the societies are required to go through three transitional stages, feudalism, capitalism, and socialism to reach communism.¹² Marx explained feudalism in terms of a specific form of production having two exploitative methods, economic and extra-economic.¹³ Under the one, the feudal lords approximated the whole lot of economic benefits accruing from serf’s hard labour on the demesne, and under the other, they extracted from them unpaid additional services, the forced labour, for constructing roads and castles, tending herds, and other unpaid domestic services. Maurice Dobb added one more dimension of “serfdom” in the feudal

Even feudalism obtained among the nomadic societies of Mongolia and Central Asia: Academician Sh. Natsadorj, “The Economic Basis of Feudalism in Mongolia,” *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 3, London: Cambridge University Press, 1967, p. 268: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/311836> (accessed: 30/06/2008); Lawrance Krader, “Feudalism and the Tatar Polity of Middle Ages,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol.1, No. 1, London: Cambridge University Press, Oct. 1958, p. 77: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/177860?origin=JSTOR-pdf> (accessed: 30/06/2008).

¹² Their concept raised serious concerns in the non-European states which did not experience capitalism in real sense: “Feudal Mutation: Military and Economic Transformation of the Ethnosphere in the Tenth to Thirteen Centuries,” *Journal of World History*, p. 505.

¹³ Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. II, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1894/1967, p.772.

debate,¹⁴ which tied the serfs to the land of the lord.¹⁵ Under this “petty mode of production,” the feudatories systematically and unethically siphoned off surplus produce of the poor producer through various methods of “extra-economic compulsions.”¹⁶ Naturally, it forged a lord-serf conflict without affecting, at the same time, urban bourgeoisie and the feudal lord relationship.¹⁷ While Henry Pirenne meant by feudalism a closed estate economy, where production was largely for consumption, and where trade was practically absent,¹⁸ Immanuel Wallerstein understood it as a “redistributive world system based on the extraction of the surplus produce of the agricultural producers in the form of tribute to an imperial or state bureaucracy at a given level.”¹⁹ To Guy Bois, “Feudalism is the hegemony of a small scale individual production (hence the level of productive forces that this hegemony presupposes), and the seigniorial levy secured by constraint of political (extra economic) origin.”²⁰ Frank Perlin explained feudalism as a “system wherein surplus was generated through the non-economic forces, the political and military power, backed by juridical institutions representing the permanent institutionality of the forces of repression.”²¹

The given theories on feudalism had other contributors too. To Rushton Coulbourn, feudalism was “a method of government not an economic and social order/system, though it obviously modifies and is modified by the social and

¹⁴ Maurice Dobb, *Studies in the Development of Capitalism*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1946/ reprint 1972, pp. 35-36.

¹⁵ R. S. Sharma, “How Feudal was Indian Feudalism?,” *The Feudalism Debate*, Harbans Mukhia (ed.), New Delhi: Monahar Publishers and Distributors, 1999, pp. 96-97.

¹⁶ Maurice Dobb, “A Further Comment,” *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism*, Rodney Hitton, (ed.), London: New Craft Books, 1978, p.165.

¹⁷ *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism*, p.165.

¹⁸ Henri Pirenne, *Economic and Social History of Medieval Europe*, tr. I. E. Clogg, London: Routledge, 1936/1958, pp. 7-12.

¹⁹ Immanuel Wallerstein, “From Feudalism to Capitalism—Transition or Transitions?” *Social Forces*, Vol. 55, No. 2, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, December, 1976, p. 281.

²⁰ Guy Bois, *The Crises of Feudalism: Economy and Society in Eastern Normandy, 1300-1550*, London: Cambridge University Press, 1984, p. 398.

²¹ Frank Perlin, “Concepts of Order and Comparison with Diversion on the Counter Ideologies and the Corporate Institutions in the late Pre-Colonial India,” *Journal of Peasant Studies*, London: Taylor and Francis Group, Vol. 12, No. 2 and 3, Jan. and April, 1985, p. 90.

economic environment”,²² and to Perry Anderson, it sounded a “specific organization in which large land ownership (of the feudal lords) with small peasant (who worked on it) extracted the surplus from the immediate producer by customary forms of extra-economic coercion—labour services, deliveries in kind, or rents in cash and where commodity exchange and labour mobility was correspondingly restricted.”²³ However, feudalism was profiled by F. W. Maitland a half-century ago in regard to the constitutional history of England. To quote him, “We may describe feudalism as a state of society in which all or a great part of public rights and duties are inextricably interwoven with the tenure of land, in which the whole government system - financial, military, judicial - is part of the law of private property.”²⁴

Indian scholars and scientists like Nurul Hasan, R. S. Sharma, Irfan Habib, Harbans Mukhia, D. D. Kosambi, etc. also engaged in the above debate. According to Nurul Hasan, feudalism was primarily “agrarian economy where the surplus is expropriated by a ‘fairly closed’ ruling class through both non-economic coercion and the role played by it in agriculture as well as the subsidiary handicrafts production.”²⁵ Harbans Mukhia sees it as “a specific form of socio-economic organization of production in which the producer was neither an independent economic being nor was he completely separated from the means of production, and so was made economically dependent on the sale of his labour to lord to supplement their income for sustenance.”²⁶ Irfan Habib recognized fief and serfdom as very

²² R. Coulbourn, “The Idea of Feudalism,” R. Coulbourn (ed.) *Feudalism in History*, Princeton, 1956, p. 4.

²³ *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, p. 408.

²⁴ F. W. Maitland, *The Constitutional History of England*, London: Cambridge University Press, 1950, pp. 22-23.

²⁵ S.Nurul Hasan, *Thoughts on Agrarian Relations in Mughal India*, New Delhi: People’s Publishing House, 1973, p. 2. She declares Mughal India feudal even if it does not have medieval European characteristics.

²⁶ Harbans Mukhia, “Was There Feudalism in Indian History?,” *The Feudalism Debate*, Harbans Mukhia (ed.), New Delhi: Manohar Publishers and Distributors, 1999, pp. 36-37. Moreover, Mukhia took a different stand by saying that feudalism was “a non-universal, specific to time and region,” and discarded the Indian feudalism theory of R. S. Sharma on the grounds that peasantry was economically independent rather dependent on the lords for their sustenance.

important to feudalism.²⁷ Similarly, according to R. S. Sharma and B. N. S. Yadava, control over the peasant's process of production by the landlords (serfdom) and decline of trade and urbanization were the core features of Indian feudalism.²⁸

(B). Feudalism in Central Asia: A Debate:

Russian, Central Asian and Mongolian scholars and social scientists entered into the above debate in the 20th century. It was initiated by the Soviet anthropologists Boris Ya, Velidimirtsov and Sergey Tolstov in 1934. The former designated the 12th-20th century as the feudal age in Central Asia for it was characteristic of a class of feudal lords thriving on the surplus labour of the subjected peasantry.²⁹ In fact, the debate had originally started from the 1920s and certain pluralist approaches were put forward. Some supported primitive-tribal nature of nomadic societies while others dwelt on their state-like characteristics. Since the mid-1930s, with Joseph Stalin's dictatorship, discussion on nomadic feudalism occupied a considerable space in historical literature. While officials defined nomadic feudalism in terms of land ownership, the revisionists linked it to cattle ownership. However, after Joseph Stalin's (1930-1954) demise, the debate was given different dimension(s) by Zimanov, Potapov and S. E. Tolybekov. Accordingly, debate of feudalism in Central Asia revolved round pre-feudal and post-feudal issues of nomadic organization and

²⁷ Tapan Raychoudary and Irfan Habib, *The Cambridge Economic History of India* (ed.), Vol. I, New Delhi: Orient Lagman, 1982, pp. 2-3.

²⁸ R. S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism*, New Delhi: Macmillan, 1965, pp. 53-59, 74, 271, 238-4; Harbans Mukhia, "Was there Feudalism in Indian History?," *The Feudalism Debate*, Harbans Mukhia (ed.), New Delhi: Manohar Publishers and Distributors, 1999, pp. 49-50.

²⁹ Boris Ya. Vladimirtsov, *Obshchestvennyi Stroy Mongolov. Kochevoy Feodalizm*. Leningrad, 1934, p. 2, French translation, M. Carsow, *Le regime social des Mongols. Le feodalisme nomade*. Paris, Adrien- Maisonneuve, 1948: Cf. Lawrence Krader, "Feudalism and the Tatar Polity of the Middle Ages," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 81; Bat-Ochir Bold, *Mongolian Nomadic Society: A Construction of the 'Medieval' History of Mongolia*, Richmond/Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001, pp. 21-22; *The Peoples of Central Asia*, p. 155; Academician Sh. Natsagdorj "The Economic Basis of Feudalism in Mongolia," *Modern Asian Studies*, p. 267; Nikolay N. Kradin, "Ernest Gellner and Debates on Nomadic Feudalism," *Social Evolution & History*, Vol. 2 No. 2, Russia: Uchitel' Publishing House, September 2003, p. 163

its relevance to the Asiatic Mode of Production (AMP).³⁰ The debate assumed heat with Velidimirtsov's article in Soviet journal *Voprosy Istorii* on "Concerning the Essence of Patriarchal-Feudal Conditions of the Nomadic Peoples." It led to the reinterpretation of historical literature on feudalism in Mongolia and Kazakhstan, and the rejection of the earlier theories, if not all. This was followed by a debate of S. N. Wainstain, Yu I. Semenov and G. M. Markov in 1970s on a "Non-Feudal" form or more precisely of a "Proto-Class" form of production in the development of nomadic societies.³¹ Influenced by the debate, the Mongolian historians like Sh. Nacadory, A. Minis, G. Sughbatoar, and N. Seradjav, established feudal traces in Central Asia and Mongolian societies for the presence of feudal class, subjected tenants and production relations based on extra-economic exploitation of the serfs by the privileged feudal class.³²

After Soviet disintegration (1991), feudal debate continued. While Central Asian scholars did not subscribe to the earlier definition (pre-Soviet definitions),³³ they brought to fore new dimensions of pastoral economy in nomadic organization from the perspective of an evolutionary approach to explain a specific nomadic civilization in the history of Central Asia.³⁴ The debate though complex and varied in expression, time and space, does not under-estimate the significance of core characteristics of feudalism: "exploitative relationship between land owner and the subordinate peasants, in which the surplus beyond subsistence of the later, whether in

³⁰ Nikolay N. Kradin, "Ernest Gellner and Debates on Nomadic Feudalism," *Social Evolution & History*, Vol. 2 No. 2, pp. 163-164,168.

³¹ *Mongolian Nomadic Society: A Construction of the 'Medieval' History of Mongolia*, p. 22.

³² *Mongolian Nomadic Society: A Construction of the 'Medieval' History of Mongolia*, p. 23; Lawrence Krader, "Feudalism and the Tatar Polity of the Middle Ages," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 81.

³³ The discussions and viewpoints put forward in favour and against were mostly in Russian language.

³⁴ N. N. Kradin, A. V. Korotayev, D. M. Bondarenko, V. de Munck, and P. K. Wason, *Alternatives of Social Evolution*, Vladivostok: Far Eastern Division of the Russian Academy of Sciences. 2000, Cf: Nikolay N. Kradin, "Ernest Gellner and Debates on Nomadic Feudalism", *Social Evolution and History*, Vol. 2 No. 2, p. 164.

the form of direct labour, rent in kind or cash, is transferred under coercive sanction to the former.”³⁵ Similar features are authenticated in etymological terms.

Etymologically, the term derived from word ‘*feodum*’ in Latin, ‘*feodalite*’ in French and ‘*feudalismus*’ in Germany, defines a ‘fief’- a strip of land or territorial assignment granted by the lord (king) to persons (vassals) in lieu of their services to the state.³⁶ Such a pre-capitalist relationship³⁷ explained a systematic lord-vassals contract: the former granted fiefs to officials in lieu of civil and military services to be delivered by them in the event of war from within or outside King’s domain. Such kind of contract forged a land tenure pattern that recognized the vassal as the absolute owner of whatever was above and under land.³⁸ However, a microscopic minority of landlords/nobles owned such large landed estates that symbolized self-sufficient economic units, wherein production was possible through hard agricultural labour of the serf.³⁹ The landlord extracted the surplus through direct and extra-economic exploitation of the serfs.⁴⁰ This is perhaps why Withold Kula writes:

“The term feudalism refers to socio-economic system which was predominantly agrarian ... It referred to a corporate system in which the basic unit of production was a large estate surrounded by the small plots of the peasants who were dependent on the former both

³⁵ Robney H. Hilton, “Introduction,” *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism* (ed.) Robney Hilton, p. 30.

³⁶ It was simple and effective system, where the king owned all land. He kept for his disposal one quarter as his personal property, and some part was given to the church and the rest was leased out: *Feudalism*, p. xxi.

³⁷ Feudalism, as a social formation, stood mid-way in the transition between slave-based mode of agricultural production and capitalism.

³⁸ *Feudal Society*, p. 446; *Feudalism*, p. xvi.

³⁹ According to the Marxist philosophy, if the serf was forced to render labour on the lord’s personal land, the manse (fields where peasants had non-proprietary rights), and that too without wages, it was called direct - economic exploitation. If his family was forced to perform domestic works of the lord with no wages whatsoever, it was called extra-economic exploitation; hence, a case of double servility.

⁴⁰ *Indian Feudalism*, p. 81.

economically and juridically, and who had to furnish various services to the lord and submit to his authority.”⁴¹

To Perry Anderson, feudalism constituted large land ownership with small peasant production, where exploiting class extracted the surplus from the immediate producer by customary forms of extra-economic coercion, labour, deliveries in kind or rents in cash, and where commodity and labour mobility was correspondingly restricted.⁴² Thus, feudalism was an alternative to societies based primarily either on the personal ties of kinship or on the impersonal bureaucratic structures of centralized politics. To be precise, it embodied a relationship between lord (patron) and vassal (client), and servile peasantry,⁴³ and lord-tenant relationship was central to the land tenure structure, and so was the exploitation of the estate by its owner, controller, enjoyer or beneficiary to it.⁴⁴ However, feudalism had divergent applications in distinct regions.⁴⁵ To quote Marx, “it assumes different aspects and runs through its various phases in different orders of succession,”⁴⁶ though the broad characteristics had universal applications. In that, the class of landlords and the servile peasantry and their relationship remained two most important constituents which Maurice Dobb calls bi-polar division of the society.⁴⁷

(C). Feudalism: Genesis and Functioning:

The divergent opinions of the scholars should not presuppose that feudalism was an accidental development. It evolved in Europe under specific circumstances following

⁴¹ Withold Kula, *Economic Theory of Feudal System*, London: New Left Books, 1976, p. 55

⁴² *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism*, p. 61.

⁴³ The relation was often perpetuated through family structures and, in some cases, on kinship basis: Candice Goucher, Charles LeGuin, and Linda Walton, *In the Balance: Themes in Global History*, Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1998, selection from Chapter 7, “Ties that Bind: Lineage, Clientage, and Caste.”

⁴⁴ R. S. Sharma, “How Feudal was Indian Feudalism,” *The Feudalism Debate*, pp. 83-84.

⁴⁵ As per one version, the size of noble or clerical domain in Europe were extended between the range of 2,000 to 4,000 acres. These large estates, therefore, required huge labour force to supervise it: *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism*, p. 140.

⁴⁶ Karl Marx and Fedrich Engels, *Pre-capitalist Socio-Economic Formations*, Moscow, 1979, p. 23.

⁴⁷ Maurice Dobb, *Studies in the Development of Capitalism*, London: Routledge, 1972, p.35.

the failure of the state system to protect its citizens from the onslaught of the marauders, barbarians, and other tribal and savageous groups. Not being specific to any particular period, event,⁴⁸ time or space,⁴⁹ it evolved gradually within the existing institutional framework and reached to climax during the 10th-13th centuries. The scholars like Marc Bloch, Joseph R. Strayer, R. Coulborn, Perry Anderson etc. have done a stupendous work to trace the feudal origin in Europe. By and large, they agree that feudalism was the natural concomitant of social and political chaos emanating from the breakdown of centralized government of Roman King, Merovingian Franks in the 6th-7th century.⁵⁰ With that, law and order broke down and the peasantry denied paying the taxes without which it was difficult for the state to run administration and pay wages to army and bureaucracy.⁵¹ As an alternative thereof, the Roman King distributed fiefs among the powerful chiefs on the basis of give and take relationship, whereby the King (overlord) and the powerful chieftains (lords) agreed to the following effect:

“In as much as it is known to all and sundry that I lack the withdrawal to feed and clothe myself, I have asked of your piety, and your good will has granted to me permission to deliver and commend myself into your authority and protection ... in return you have undertaken to aid and sustain me in food and clothing, while I have undertaken to serve you and deserve well of you as far as lies in my power. And far as long as I shall live, I am bound to serve you and respect you as a free man

⁴⁸ *Feudal Society*, pp. 249-252: Cf. Lawrence Krader, “Feudalism and the Tatar Polity of Middle Ages”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol.1, No. 1, Oct. 1958, p. 76.

⁴⁹ In the nineteenth century G. V. Below was the chief advocate of the view, which has its adherents today, that feudalism is a specific historical phenomenon, localized in time and space: Lawrence Krader, “Feudalism and the Tatar Polity of Middle Ages,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol.1, No. 1, p. 76.

⁵⁰ It developed in Roman Empire during the Homeric age when the weak lords associated themselves with powerful lords and provided them food, shelter and weapons. But during 10th-13th century it assumed a definite shape in the European society.

⁵¹ In India to cope with the social crises, two alternatives were suggested by *Mani Smriti* and *Sauti Puranas*. First, was the use of force (*danda*) and second was the restoration of *varnasramdharm* that was a class based society on the bases of demarcation of professions: R. S. Sharma, “How Feudal was Indian Feudalism?”, *The Feudalism Debate*, pp. 98-100.

ought, and during my lifetime I have not the right to withdraw from your authority and protection, but must, on the contrary, for the remainder of my days remain under it. And in virtue of this action, if one of us wishes to alter the terms of agreement, he can do so after paying a fine solidi to the other man. But the agreement itself shall remain in force. Whence it has seemed good to us that we should both draw up and confirm two documents of the same tenor, and this they have done.”⁵²

The above act of homage by the lord reciprocated by the overlord through the ‘investiture’ of a flag, staff, chatter or some other symbol of the prosperity. Its record was kept in the rolls of the manorial court.⁵³ The overlord-lord mutual agreement is further attested by the French jurist Beaumanoir. To quote him, “the lord is quite as much bound to be faithful to his man as the latter is bound in regard to the lord.”⁵⁴ The similar type of fealty and faithfulness governed the lord-tenant relationship, which could sever only in the event of the non-fulfillment of the agreement by either of the parties: overlord, lord or tenant.⁵⁵ However, land served as the core component of such a hierarchical relationship whereby a certain lord granted land to his vassal as tenement, for instance, in the Frankish kingdom. Such tenements were those fractions of great estates which were cultivated not by the owners themselves but by *coloni/laeti* or slaves for their own profit, in return for certain fixed rents and duties. The contemporary term for these tenements was *beneficium*-benefice or benefit.⁵⁶

⁵² Paul Vinogradoff, “Feudalism”, *Cambridge Medieval History*, Vol. 3, p. 459.

⁵³ The acts of investiture varied from region to region. Even a villain received his yard land or ox-gang from the steward of a lord after swearing an oath of fealty: *Cambridge Medieval History*, Vol. 3, pp. 462-63.

⁵⁴ *Coutumes de Beauvaisis*, p. 58, Cf. Paul Vinogradoff, “Feudalism,” *Cambridge Medieval History*, Vol. 3, pp. 458-484.

⁵⁵ The barons of Aragon swore to their king that that they would obey and serve him if he maintained the rights, customs and laws of the kingdom: Paul Vinogradoff, “Feudalism,” *Cambridge Medieval History*, Vol. 3, pp. 458-484. The peers of the kings of Jerusalem, according to the Assizes, lawfully refused allegiance and offered resistance in case of infringement of their rights. This all indicated that kings were not above law.

⁵⁶ F. L. Ganshoff, *Feudalism*, pp. xvi-xviii.

However, during the Carolingian phase of feudalism (8th-10th century A.D), the otherwise two independent institutions, the vassalage and the benefice, were merged into a single institution. More so, the extent of fief widened with the inclusion of the state and church lands.⁵⁷ Further change occurred with Charlemagne (768 A.D) under whom, the other segments of ruling elite, dukes, counts, potentates, bishops and abbots sub-infeudated their estates among smaller vassals. In this way, the institution of vassalage percolated down to the lowest rung of the society during the 10th and 13th century. The feudal institutions spread beyond the boundaries of Frankish monarchy, where the system was generalized and codified to a degree never known before. However, in this whole process of evolution of feudalism, appropriation of surplus labour and labour-intensive nature of agriculture formed the dominant features. The latter was characteristic of the lack of manure,⁵⁸ primitive implements,⁵⁹ and the defective methods of harnessing the draught power of the animals;⁶⁰ extensive nature of agriculture amounted to the wastage of labour on the field⁶¹ which caused great labour demand, unaffordable, at times, to less resourceful vassalage.⁶²

As a whole, feudalism was functional through several interdependent institutions as a pre-requisite of a well-defined overlord-lord-tenant relationship on hierarchical lines. In rank, the king was at the top of all vassals. Each vassal was in

⁵⁷ The church could not hold the landed property beyond limits and surplus property was, therefore, given as benefices to the vassals in lieu of the payments of tithes by all inhabitants of the estate: *Feudalism*, p. xvii.

⁵⁸ Charles Parain, "The Evolution of Agricultural Techniques," *Cambridge Economic History*, Vol. I, London: Oxford University Press, 1966, pp. 133-3; Marc Bloch, *French Rural History*, tr. Janet Sondheimer, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966/reprint 1976, p. 25.

⁵⁹ The agricultural implements were axe, hoe, sickle and other outdated implements: Lynn White, *Medieval Technology and Social Change*, London: Oxford University Press, 1964/1973, p.41.

⁶⁰ Charles Parain, "The Evolution of Agricultural Techniques," *Cambridge Economic History*, pp. 144-45.

⁶¹ Another factor of the wastage of the labour was the distant location and access of the serfs to the lord's fields. It crated the wastage of labour in traversing the lands from the village: George Duby, *Rural Economy and Country Life in the Medieval West*, tr. Cnythia Postan, Pennsylvania: Edward Arnold (Ltd.) Press, 1968/reprint University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998, p.6; *Feudal Society*, p.60.

⁶² *French Rural History*, pp. 73-74

return, lord over lesser vassals, who too were the suzerain of those knights who had no vassals at the bottom. Both lord and vassal owed certain obligations to each other. The vassal pledged to render certain services to his lord, and, in return, the lord granted him a fief,⁶³ piece of land inhabited by the hoards of traditional peasants. Notionally, the king owned these fiefs. But, in actual practice their proprietorship vested with the vassal at least until he rendered necessary services to his overlord.⁶⁴ The entire kingdom was divided into fiefs, except for the land held by the King personally.

Since feudal tenure was hereditary, on the death of a vassal, his fief passed on to his next heir provided that he too demonstrated loyalty to his overlord and rendered him military services in the event of an external war.⁶⁵ Whereas a knight was expected to furnish only his horse and armor, the vassal was required to supply hundreds of knights and men-at-arms. When summoned, they had to present themselves in the lord's court for investiture and clarification regarding intra-vassal disputes or for assisting the lords amid bankruptcy.

The social and economic organization of a fief was based upon the manor or a certain part of a fief held personally by the lord comprising villages, fields, mills, granaries and water irrigation channels. The earning there from supported the lord's family. However, the manors were inhabited both by the freeman and serfs who together were called *villeins*. Freeman were tenants of the manor who paid rent in produce besides performed various forms of labour for the lord. However, they were free to leave the manor at will, which was unlike the serfs who were tied to the lord's land.⁶⁶ With extra hours labour on the field of his lord, they earned extra revenue with which they accounted for the rent in cash or kind. Their extra services were

⁶³ These services mainly included rendering military service to lord in times of emergency, collecting revenue and maintaining law and order in the assigned region.

⁶⁴ This method of holding another's land is called feudal tenure.

⁶⁵ When a vassal died, his heir paid homage to the overlord in the same manner as that of his deceased father.

⁶⁶ In Indian feudalism, the resources of the peasants, artisans, traders and other village men were transferred to the beneficiaries as per the orders of the lord: *Indian Feudalism*, p.188.

employed in building forts, roads, temples, massive and impressive structures. However, the personal enslavement of the serfs was such that they could not marry or leave the manor without the lord's consent, and were sold like slaves, exceptions apart. They had no “free peasant production” and were bound to raise the crops as per the lord’s choice.⁶⁷ This rendered the manor a self-sufficient unit, embodying lord’s personal strip of land, the demesne, constituting between one-third and one-half of the total extent of fief. Rendering three days labour per- week on the demesne was almost mandatory for the serfs. Apart from manor, was the fief that the serfs ploughed for themselves with a certain obligation of rent and share from the forest produce, the hay, fire wood, dairy, meet etc. to the lord. In addition to the grazing fee, the serfs were bound to grind their grain in the lord's mills and bake their bread in his ovens in lieu of a fee in grain or bread. It is amid these hard conditions that the serfs made a tough living for themselves: their houses damp, dirty and poorly heated with little or no windows. In the event of crop failure, they were strangled, which subjected them to occasional crimes. Being punishable, the crimes, at times, earned death penalty, say in France though in England, only royal court awarded death penalty to a serf.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ “How Feudal was Indian Feudalism?” *The Feudalism Debate*, pp. 87, 95-97.

⁶⁸ <http://science.howstuffworks.com/feudalism1.htm>
