

The feudalism and manorialism unraveled



Peasants were lower class people that agreed to work the vassals land in exchange for a small part of the crops and other harvested resources. They were given their own crops to tend as well as tending to the lords crops. Serfs were one step below peasants. Serfs were essentially slaves to the land. If the land changed hands, the serfs went with it to the new owner. This land was known as a fief. The fief consisted of a manor house, church, village of peasant shacks (where the workers lived), several fields a mill and anything else the vassal needed. This concept was known as Manorialism. Manorialism is basically the social system used to regulate the relationship between the vassals and the peasants or serfs that worked on their fiefs. In return they got to live on the land, grown their own crops and had protection from the lord.

Feudalism was based on the exchange of land for military service. King William the Conqueror used the concept of feudalism to reward his Norman supporters for their help in the conquest of England. Life lived under the Medieval Feudal System, or Feudalism, demanded that everyone owed allegiance to the King and their immediate superior. Feudalism had a dramatic effect on England and Europe during the Middle Ages. The pyramid of power which was the Feudal system ran to a strict 'pecking' order – during the Medieval period of the Middle Ages everyone knew their place. The emergence of the Medieval Feudal System of the Middle Ages affected all spheres of Medieval society: a land-based economy, the judicial system and the rights of the feudal lords under the feudal system and the lack of rights for the serfs and peasants.

At its core, feudalism was simply a system of rights and responsibilities between land owners and those who looked after it. The goal of feudalism was to protect the land from invasion and to provide the landowners with a stream of income (harvested crops). During the Middle Ages, the real measure of wealth was land ownership. Feudalism was a system designed to protect that wealth.

Under feudalism, the king or noble that owned the land divided it into smaller, more manageable chunks called fiefs. The fiefs were then given to nobles of lower rank called vassals. As payment for the land, the vassal pledged his loyalty to the king or noble above him. If the king should ask, the vassal also had to pay taxes to him and provide armies in the event of war.

Sometimes, the fief was still too large to be maintained by one vassal. In that case, the vassal would divide his land into smaller fiefs and distribute it to other nobles. These sub-vassals then had to pledge their loyalty, taxes, and armies to the noble that granted the fief and also to the king.

In some ways, the systems of feudalism and manorialism are kind of like the structure of modern businesses. Today, a large company generally has a president. The president has vice presidents in charge of smaller departments, and the vice presidents have managers heading up various parts of those departments.

In other ways, feudalism and manorialism are like modern pyramid schemes. In a pyramid scheme, those at the top, the kings, simply sit around and collect the income generated by those at the bottom of the pyramid. The

further down the pyramid you are, the harder you work. Those at the bottom also almost always make the least money.

The beginning of the end for feudalism in Europe came with the Black Plague. After the Plague claimed about 1/3 of the populated of Europe, nobles were in dire need of peasants to work their land. To meet this demand, peasants demanded better pay, more rights, and better living conditions.

While many people generally associate feudalism/manorialism with Medieval Europe, it existed in other parts of the world as well such as Japan, India, and other areas. In some parts of the world, feudalism is still in existence.

The medieval society was a hierarchical system, where the king or the monarch was the supreme authority, the independent clergy served by a powerful nobility and followed by the vassals. These consisted of the peasants, laborers and the soldiers forming the lowest strata of the medieval society. Feudalism and manorialism, are in fact, deeply inter-related concepts. The social structure, in which the king allots a gift in the form of a land and complete authority to a lord, to govern and rule an area, in exchange for the services such as defense, agriculture and allied services is the feudal system. These services are provided by the general population of the region consisting of the peasants, knights and the poor people, whose lives are dictated by the feudal lords and the clergy.

Manorialism refers to the social interaction system that existed between these lords and the dependent population like the soldiers, serfs and laborers, with regards to their daily life and survival. The term was coined

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from the service and allegiance of these vassals to the manors or the palatial houses owned by the feudal lords

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Feudalism vs manorialism, is analogous to the difference between the practice of a system and the economic and commercial aspects of that system. Simply put, manorialism can be considered as a subset of feudalism . Both these aspects are specifically understood as a mutual give-and-take relation between social classes, starting from the lowest class to the king.

The serfs worked on the fields and did all the hard labor like working for the upkeep of the manors and allied activities. In return, they were offered certain wages and protection by knights or the lords. The knights, who served the lords militarily for defending and gaining territories, in turn got rewards and titles from the feudal lords, who got that from the king. As mentioned before, they protected the serfdom too, which ensured the lords, loyalty and taxes from them. The vassals formed the slightly higher class, between the lords and the knights, who enlisted the services of the knights and provided them perks accordingly.

The lords provided lands to the knights and ensured their support to the kingdom. This was the most powerful and privileged class of the society, more dominant in Europe, than elsewhere. They received services and taxes from all the lower classes, in return for their confidence and rewards. The king, on whose behalf the lords provided lands and privileges, was the final

authority, but became a mere titular head with all the prerogatives, in the later years of feudalism.

The economic aspect of feudalism in Europe, was more in focus for the relation between the lords and the vassals, which was the majority class. The life of a serf or a labor was tied to the manor or revolved around the manor. They were entitled to very few privileges, which were discretion of the lord or the manorial house, they served. In return for their services, the lord offered them a 'chance' to lead independent lives, but at their mercy. They were also offered protection from invading powers and the right to earn their livelihood, by serving the manor and its occupants. This economic dependency was deeply ingrained in the rural society all over Europe. Thus, manorialism was a 'systematic hardship' imposed on the poor, helpless and the downtrodden people, who were subjected to frequent land grabbing by foreign invasion, slavery and other forms of economic hardship in the middle ages in Europe.

England, France, Germany, Italy and Spain were the major countries, where feudalism and manorialism was imposed and later, quite rampant. It led to future revolutions, armed struggle and also laid the foundation of the evolution of modern values in human history.

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