

CHAPTER 6: THE THREE ORDER

Due to socio-economic and political changes, Western Europe society was divided into three orders between the ninth and sixteenth centuries. After the fall of the Roman Empire, many groups of Germanic People occupied the regions of Italy, Spain and France.

The three orders are three social categories: Christian priests, landowning nobles and peasants. The term 'feudalism' have been used by historians to describe the economic, legal, political and social relationships that existed in Europe in the medieval era.

The Three order

First Order

Priests (The Clergy)

- The Catholic Church
- Europe guided by bishops and clerics.
- Pope lived in Rome
- Women could not be become priests
- Monks – The church and Society

Second Order

Nobles

- Vassals of the king
- They enjoyed a privileged status
- Absolute control over property
- Could raise troops
- Even coin his own money

Third Order

- Peasants
- Free peasants and serfs

– Serfs cultivated plots of land, but these belonged to the lord.

A Manorial Estate: refer to page No. 136. of the textbook.

Explanation:

1. THE CLERGY

- Church was a powerful institution. The Pope, the head of the Catholic Church, lived in Rome. Bishops were religious nobility.
- The church played a major role in influencing the Medieval European society.
- They collected the **tithe**, a tax from the peasants.
- Church ceremonies copied several formal feudal customs.
- Some Christians chose to live in isolation in **abbeys**. ('Abbey' is derived from the Syriac *abba*, meaning father. An abbey was governed by an abbot or an abbess)

2. NOBILITY

- The word 'Feudalism' is derived from the German word 'feud' which means 'a piece of land'. Feudalism was a division of society that initially developed in medieval France, then in England and southern Italy.
- It was a kind of agricultural production relationship between lords and peasants.
- The nobility had a privileged role in the social process with absolute control over his land. They raised troops that were called '**Feudal Levies**'. The King of France was linked to his people through the system of '**vassalage**'. The King was accepted as **Seigneur**, i.e. lord. The nobility lived in manor houses.
- The cavalry and peasant soldiers were called **knights**. Minstrels and bards toured France, singing tales of brave kings and knights.

3. THE PEASANTRY

- Peasants and Serfs were two kinds of cultivators in medieval Europe.
- Free peasants laboured for cultivating the lord's fields to provide labour rent. They paid a direct tax, called **taille**, to the king. European monarchs were called New Monarchs.

The Anglo-Saxons had a Great Council, which the king consulted before imposing any tax. This developed into the Parliament, with the House of Lords (its members – the lords and the clergy), and the House of Commons. The English monarch, Charles the First, ruled England from 1629 till 1640 without calling the Parliament.

Factors affecting Social and Economic Relations.

i. The Environment

ii. Land use

iii. New Agricultural Technology

iv. Urbanisation

.Cathedral – Towns:

From the twelfth century, large churches – called cathedrals – were being built in France. These belonged to the monasteries. Cathedrals were built of stone. The area around the cathedrals became more populated and they became centres of pilgrimage. Small towns developed around them. Stained glass was used for windows of the Cathedrals. During the day the sunlight would make them radiant and after sunset the light of candles would make them visible to people outside. The stained glass narrated the stories in the Bible through pictures.

Two of the more well-known monasteries were those established by St Benedict in Italy in 529 and of Cluny in Burgundy in 910.

The Crisis of the Fourteenth Century

In Europe economic expansion slowed down. This was due to three factors:

1. In Northern Europe, by the end of the thirteenth century the warm summers of the previous 300 years had given way to bitterly cold summers. Seasons for growing crops were reduced by a month.
2. Trade was hit by a severe shortage of metal money because of a shortfall in the output of silver mines in Austria and Serbia. This forced government to reduce the silver content of the currency and to mix it with cheaper metals.
3. Ships carrying goods from distant countries had started arriving in European ports. The ships came with rats carrying deadly bubonic plague infection (the Black Death).

Political Changes:

- In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, European kings strengthened their military and financial power. The new monarchs, Louis XI in France, Maximilian in Austria, Henry VII in England and Isabelle and Ferdinand in Spain were absolutist rulers, who started the process of organising standing armies.
- Decline of feudalism and lordship in the sixteenth century paved the way for the rise of nation-state in Europe.

- French, German and Russian Revolutions took place in 1789, 1848 and 1917 CE respectively. These revolutions inspired the people across the world and gave a rich legacy of liberty and equality to reconstruct the society in a new way.

Rise of 'Fourth Order' – New Towns and Townspeople

- Expansion in agriculture was accompanied by growth in three related areas: population, trade and towns.
- The towns of the Roman Empire had become deserted and ruined after its fall. But from the eleventh century, as agriculture increased and became able to sustain higher levels of population, towns began to grow again
- Towns offered the prospect of paid work and freedom from the lord's control, for young people from peasant families.
- The bigger towns had populations of about 30,000. They could be said to have formed a **'fourth' order**.

GUILD: The basis of economic organisation was the guild. Each craft or industry was organised into a guild, an association which controlled the quality of the product, its price and its sale. The 'guild-hall' was a feature of every town; it was a building for ceremonial functions, and where the heads of all the guilds met formally.

Sources:

Hever Castle in England, Salisbury Cathedral in England, Nemours Castle in France, Canterbury Tales written by Chaucer.

Timeline:

i. Early History of France: refer to Page No. 134 of the text book.

ii. Eleventh to Fourteenth Centuries – refer to Page No. 149 of the text book

iii. The New Monarchy: refer to Page No. 150

Key Words

Feudalism, Abbey

Doon de Mayence: A thirteenth century French poem to be sung recounting the adventures of Knights.

Monastery: The word 'monastery' is derived from the Greek word 'monos', meaning someone who lives alone.

The Black Death: Ships with rats carrying the deadly bubonic plague infection in Western Europe between 1347 and 1350.

Fourth Order: The bigger towns had populations of about 30,000. They could be said to have formed a 'fourth order'.