Mains Practice Quesstions

Q. Discuss the features of feudalism in India during the post-Mauryan period. How was it different from feudalism in Europe? (250 words)

27 Jul, 2020 GS Paper 1 History

Approach

- Introduce by defining feudalism.
- Explain the rise origin of feudalism in the post-Mauryan period.
- Discuss the features of feudalism in India during the post-Mauryan period.
- Differentiate between feudalism in India and post Mauryan feudalism.
- Conclude by summarizing your answer.

Introduction

Feudalism was a dominant social system in the medieval times. In this system the nobility held lands from the Crown in exchange for military service, and vassals were in turn tenants of the nobles, while the peasants were obliged to live on their lord's land and give him homage, labour, and a share of the produce, in exchange for military protection.

Body

- **Origin of feudalism in the post-Mauryan period**
  - From the Post Mauryan period and especially from Gupta times, certain political and administrative developments tended to feudalise the state apparatus.
  - The most striking development was the practice of making land grants to Brahmanas and Buddhist monks and later to officials for their military and administrative services.
  - These grants meant the transfer of all sources of revenue and surrender of police and administrative functions thus giving rise to feudalism.

- **Features of Feudalism in the post-Mauryan period**
    - **Vassalage**: Vassalage expressed the relation of personal dependence and loyalty between the lord and his vassals.
    - **Hierarchy of feudal lords:** Different titles signified the position and powers within the rank of feudal lords.
    - **Hereditary administrative positions:** Weak enforcement of power led to the resumption of independence and some high administrative positions became hereditary.
    - **Decentralisation of Power:** Samantas were granted lands instead of salary and proceeded to seize ownership of the area while continuing to refer to themselves as vassals of their rulers.
    - **Oppressive tax system:** Imposition of proper and improper taxes, fixed and unfixed taxes along with rent exploited the labour class.
    - **Prosperity was not shared equally:** It was believed that some people were meant for cultivation of land and some for enjoying the fruits of production and hence, prosperity was not shared equally.
    - **Fragmentation of social formation:** Castes were split up into thousands of other castes and subcastes.
    - **Manorial system:** Under the manorial system, the landlord granted lands to persons who would render different services including labour on the lands of the lords in exchange of land.
- **Difference between post-Mauryan feudalism and European feudalism**
    - The post-Mauryan feudalism was based on a caste system which divided the society into 4 parts- Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras, whereas the European feudalism divided the society into church, nobility and the commoners.
    - Unlike the European system, most of the power structures within the state did not have to pay taxes
    - Western European Feudal lords granted lands to their serfs in order to get their own land cultivated but Indian Kings made grants to collect taxes and surplus.

Conclusion

- Feudalism in India was characterized by a class of landlords and by a class of subject peasantry, both living in a predominantly agrarian economy marked by a decline in trade and urbanism and by a drastic reduction in metal currency.
- Different ecological factors contributed to the nature of social structure and dynamics and hence the difference in European and post-Mauryan feudalism.