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turned over to the lord part of the produce from their own land. The lord reserved to himself the woodland for his hunting and the pond or stream for his fishing. The serfs were allowed to pasture their cattle and other livestock in the meadow, called the common.

The manor was almost self-supporting. The miller ground the grain, and the smith welded and fashioned iron. The women spun linen and wool, wove fabrics, sewed, baked, and brewed. The chief materials that had to be brought in were salt and iron. The main business of the lord and his knights was warfare. His sons were trained in horsemanship and handling weapons and also in social skills. Their code of behaviour was called chivalry.

DECLINE OF FEUDALISM

A vassal might take the oath of fealty to numerous overlords, who did not necessarily owe fealty to one another. Thus the system led to endless conflict. In spite of the incessant turmoil, there was progress in commerce and industry, and money came into increasing use. As towns grew in wealth and importance, the feudal system became intolerable. The new middle class, as well as the church, wanted law and order and supported the king. Larger revenues enabled kings to maintain national standing armies.

At the beginning of the Hundred Years' War (1337–1453) armoured knights on horseback yielded to foot soldiers armed with pikes and longbows. Then gunpowder came into general use, making the great stone castles conquerable. In the 14th century, before the Middle Ages ended, national states were taking the place of feudal governments. The military shifted from armies consisting of the nobility to professional fighters thus reducing the nobility's claim on power. Black Death reduced the nobility's hold over the lower classes.

Feudalism thus effectively ended by about 1500. Vestiges of the Feudal system hung on in France until the French Revolution, and the system lingered on in parts of Central and Eastern Europe as late as the 1850s. Russia finally abolished serfdom in 1861.

Black Death

Between 1347 and 1351 a great epidemic known as the Black Death ravaged Europe. This pandemic took a proportionately greater toll of life than any other known epidemic or war up to that time. The Black Death is widely believed to have been the result of plague. It was one of the most devastating pandemics in human history, resulting in the deaths of an estimated 75 to 200 million people. The Black Death is estimated to have killed 30% to 60% of Europe's population.

Modern Resurrection

In the 19th century Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels made "the feudal mode of production" one stage in their visionary reading of Western historical development; the feudal model followed "the ancient mode of production" and preceded capitalism, socialism, and communism. Marx and Engels rejected the traditional understanding of feudalism as consisting of fiefs and relations among the elite and emphasized the lords' exploitation of the peasants as the essence of the feudal mode of production. Marx and Engels did not try to establish that the feudal period had existed universally; but their followers came to view the feudal stage as a necessary prerequisite for the emergence of socialism, and socialist scholars and activists sought traces of it throughout the world.

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

1. What do you understand by Feudalism? Explain the features of feudal society?
2. What are the major factors responsible for decline of Feudalism?