

MEDIEVAL WORLD

**Notes**

We have just finished reading about the different civilisations of the ancient world. Have you wondered what happened to these civilisations when the Ancient Period came to an end? Did civilisations also come to an end? Or were the ancient civilisations succeeded by equally significant ones during the Medieval Period? Let us look for answers to such queries here. In this lesson we shall read about the transformation of European society after the downfall of the Roman Empire. We shall also see how the birth of a new religion called Islam led to the founding of a vast empire that originated in West Asia and spread out over a large part of the world. We shall also take a look at India's medieval past to see what happened after the decline of Harsha's rule.



OBJECTIVES

After studying this lesson, you will be able to:

- identify the Medieval Period as an important stage in the evolution of human society;
- describe the changes in political organization that took place after the collapse of the Roman Empire;
- explain the political, military and socio-economic aspects of Feudalism as it existed in Western Europe;
- describe the evolution of Islamic religion, society and polity in West Asia;
- recognise the features of political organization during the Medieval Period in India
- describe the main features of Medieval Indian economy; and
- analyse how cultural and religious life during the Medieval Period in India represented a unique tradition of synthesis.

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2.1 EUROPE IN MEDIEVAL TIMES

The Medieval Period is also called the Middle Ages. As the name suggests, it refers to the period which succeeded the Ancient Period and came before the Modern Period. But was it only a 'Middle' age caught in between two great ages with no significance of its own? Not really since the Medieval Period constitutes an important stage in the evolution of human society that needs to be studied for its own interest. What is more, the achievements and glories of the Medieval Period were also important steps towards the Modern Period.

You may find it interesting to know that the term 'Middle Ages' was coined by Europeans in the 17th century because they saw it as a long and dark period of interruption between the Classical Period of Ancient Greek and Roman Civilisations and their own Modern Age. However, the Medieval Period was not necessarily a dark period or an interruption. For the Islamic world, it was a period when a civilisation flowered and reached the height of its glory. In India, the Medieval Period was an age of synthesis. It saw a fusion of old and new political, economic and social systems. Out of this fusion emerged a unique cultural pattern of co-existence and acceptance that became the hallmark of the Medieval Period of India. Even in Europe, the picture does not appear as gloomy as it is sometimes thought. In the early part of the Medieval Period the level of material and cultural accomplishment was no doubt somewhat low. However, during the later part the Europeans greatly improved their standard of living. They also developed new institutions of learning and new modes of thought and reached very high standards in literature and art. In fact, the new ideas that emerged during this time not only transformed Europe but also had a deep impact on the rest of the world in the times to come. Let us then find out what was happening in the different parts of the world during the medieval ages.

2.1.1 Decline of the Roman Empire

We have read in the previous lesson about the strength and greatness of the Roman Civilisation. We also read how the Roman Empire had come to be divided into Western and Eastern territories. The Western provinces had their capital in Rome while the Eastern provinces had their capital in Constantinople. The Roman Emperor Constantine had set up the new capital of the Eastern territories in the ancient Greek city of Byzantine in 330AD. It came to be known as Constantinople after his name. The Roman Empire continued to exist in the east for almost a thousand years after it had collapsed in the west. It was known as the Eastern Roman or the Byzantine Empire. This Eastern Civilisation of Greek speaking people reached very high standards of economic and cultural life at a time when Western Europe was in a relatively backward condition. The Roman Empire in the west came to an end following attacks by various Germanic tribes like the Goths, Vandals, Visigoths and

Franks. After overthrowing the Roman Emperor in the West in 476 AD, these invaders established separate successor states.

Did all this political upheaval result in a complete change? Did the political and economic systems built by the Romans disappear? Well, the new Germanic rulers did not completely replace the earlier systems with their own. In fact, Roman and Germanic societies came into close contact and merged with each other. As a result of this and the prevailing political and economic conditions, a new type of society was born in Europe, with institutions and systems that were quite different from either Roman or Germanic ones. The most important institution of this new society was Feudalism. It completely transformed the existing social, political and economic organizations. Let us see how this system evolved and what its characteristics were.



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2.2 FEUDALISM: POLITICAL, MILITARY AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC ASPECTS

The successor states of the Germanic peoples in the West managed to restore political stability after the collapse of the Roman Empire. In fact, one of these states managed to create a sizeable empire under the famous king Charlemagne, which began to collapse after about mid-9th century under the impact of fresh waves of invasions. The resulting political chaos led to the emergence of a new kind of political order called Feudalism. It was a hierarchical or graded organization of political sovereignty. This hierarchical structure can be understood easily if we visualize a ladder or a flight of steps. At the top of the ladder stood the King, below him stood the big lords known as the Dukes and Earls. Below these lords were a number of lesser lords known as the Barons. Below these were the Knights, who were perhaps the lowest category of lords. The lords derived their authority from and owned their loyalty to the lord just above them and were known as the vassals of their lord. This pattern of relationship between lords and vassals, that is, between bigger lords and lesser lords was the same from the top of the ladder to the bottom. These lords were all powerful in their respective local areas. Thus political power was widely dispersed unlike in the Roman Empire where it was concentrated mainly in the hands of the king. This was the political aspect of Feudalism.

A unique feature of the new feudal political structure was the personal nature of the bond that linked a lord and his vassal. An elaborate ceremony would be organized to establish this bond. In this ceremony, a vassal would take a vow to serve the lord all his life. Simultaneously, he also accepted the protection of the lord. Protection was important since these were politically unstable times. In return for the protection that a vassal received he was bound to perform various services for his lord. This mainly included military services which meant that the vassal had to provide a certain number of troops whenever required by the lord. In his turn the lord was expected to make a grant usually in the form of land for the sustenance of the 'fief' or 'fiefdom'

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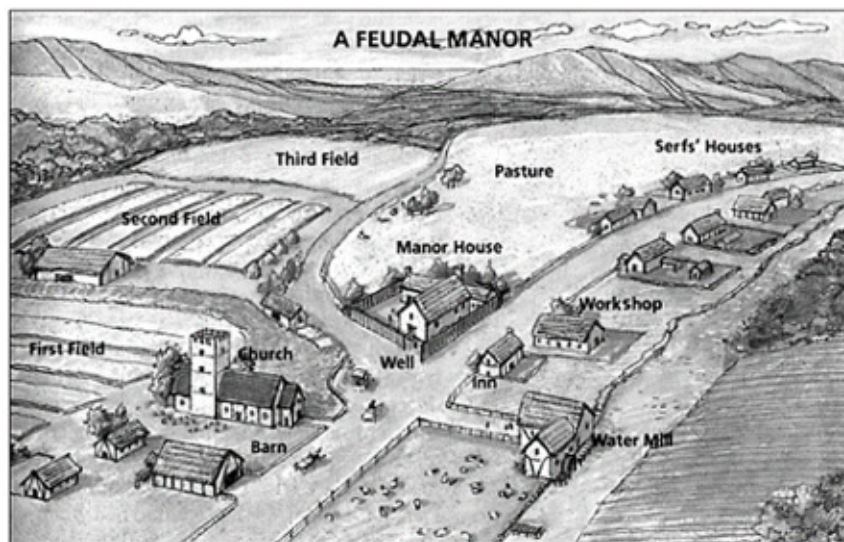
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from which the word Feudalism is derived. The lords used to mobilize armed supporters in their own areas who had personal loyalty directly to him. With this armed strength, he would provide military support to the lord whenever required. With this military power, the lords also became complete masters of their own area and could not be challenged even by the state.

In a period of political turmoil, just as the lords sought protection, so did the peasant. These peasants had no land of their own, no implements and could not afford to buy seeds. For these well as for protection the free peasants now turned to the lords. These dependent peasants of Medieval Europe, tied to the soil and completely subject to the authority of the lord were called serfs. A major portion of the wealth generated during this period was through their exploitation. To understand how this happened, let us see how agriculture was organised during this period.

The entire landed estate over which a feudal lord had control was known as the manor. The land surrounding the manor house was divided into three parts - land for the use of the lord, the arable land granted in parcels to the peasants and the meadowlands used by everyone as grazing land for livestock. The serfs who occupied these parcels or holdings were regarded tenants of the lord of the manor. Being tenants, they had to give something to the lord as rent. This rent was paid by peasants in the form of labour services to the lord. They also worked on the lands of the lords for a certain number of days in the week. The serfs had to put in extra labour during agricultural seasons when plugging, harvesting or threshing was required. Such unpaid labor services also included other heavy tasks such as construction work, hewing and cutting of fire wood. In the later phase of Feudalism, these labor services were gradually substituted by those payable in money.



Source: Michael B. Petrovich et al., *People in Time and Place: World Cultures*, Silver, Burdett & Ginn, 1991

Figure 2.1 Feudal Manor

The serfs also had to pay some dues or taxes in kind which came from the share of their own produce. These were often introduced arbitrarily whenever the lord wanted more resources. The lords also extracted from the peasants in an indirect manner. The manor was a self-sufficient economic unit. This means that almost all articles of everyday use were produced and consumed on it. For this there were various facilities like smithies for turning out iron object, flour mills for grinding wheat or corn, ovens for baking bread, wine presses for making wine from grapes and various workshops for making products of everyday use. All of these were owned by the lord. The peasants were forced to use these facilities and the charges for these would of course be fixed by the lord according to his own will.



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**ACTIVITY 2.1**

You have already read about the Roman slaves in the previous lesson. Find out the conditions of present day Indian farmers who don't own lands and work in other people fields through newspaper or by speaking to your elders. Now compare the lives of the feudal serfs with the Roman slaves and the present day Indian farmers. What conclusions can you draw? Write a brief report about your findings.

2.2.1 Changes in Feudal Economy: Prosperity and Crisis in Medieval Europe

We have just finished reading about the various aspects of the feudal system. But did this system remain the same throughout the Medieval Period? Not at all! Indeed, the feudal system was not a static system. It witnessed several changes and the feudal economy underwent a pattern of prosperity and crisis. Let us trace this pattern from the beginning.

The few centuries after the collapse of the Roman Empire were marked by a low level of economic life. As we already know, this was also a period of political change and turmoil. There was a decline in town life, trade and monetary exchange. Some cities did survive from Roman days but these were only empty shells which had no real economic role. Roads deteriorated. Barter widely replaced the use of money. European economy was based almost entirely on agriculture and very limited local trade. The main economic unit was the self-sufficient landed estate, or the feudal manor that we have read about. Technology used in agriculture was backward and agricultural yields were low. These conditions lasted till about the 10th century AD.

After the 10th century, the feudal system of production underwent significant changes. There was an increase in agricultural fields as the system became more and more stable. Another factor that helped in increasing agricultural productivity at this time was a significant improvement in agricultural techniques. A new plough was introduced which was heavier, had wheels and was drawn by a team of oxen. This helped in

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cultivating the heavy and sticky soil of Northern Europe more effectively. Agriculture was later replaced by the Three Field System in which $\frac{1}{3}$ rd of the land was left fallow; $\frac{1}{3}$ rd was used for cultivating autumn crop and $\frac{1}{3}$ rd for a spring crop. By leaving only a third part of the land fallow, the Three Field System helped greatly in increasing the cropped area. The new plough, Three Field System and other innovations in agricultural techniques helped in increasing the agricultural yield by several times.

Along with the expansion in agriculture the period from the 10th to the 12th century also witnessed the revival of trade and the growth of town life. Trade ranged from the small trade at local markets where peasants sold their excess grain or eggs and bought long distance trade products like wine or cotton. Improvements in road building helped road transport. Rivers and sea routes were also used for trade. The revival in trade made necessary new patterns of payment since barter was inadequate for this purpose. As a result, money economy made a tremendous advance. This led to agricultural prosperity of the surrounding rural areas. The towns soon began to specialize in certain enterprises. One of these was cloth making which became one of the most important industries of these towns. Guilds became important. Both merchant activities and craft production came to be organized around guilds. These medieval towns continued to grow in importance and ultimately became an important factor in the breakdown of feudal relations of the countryside.

The tendency towards growth reached its limits by the end of the 12th century. Significant changes could be noticed in the feudal system by the 13th century which witnessed a reversal of the process of growth. The period of economic growth and prosperity resulted in a rise of population. This meant an increase in the supply of labour for the landlords. They, therefore, no longer found it necessary to retain their demesnes. Also due to abundant labor, labor-serving technology found few investors. As demesne lands were gone, the need to extract labor services from the peasants also went. The reduction in labor services and technological stagnation in agriculture together with other factors brought down agricultural yield very sharply. Food shortage and famines began to occur. Epidemics of plague broke out. All this resulted in an overall decline in the agricultural economy whereas there was growth of a money economy, urban centers and trade. However, European society was able to overcome this crisis more easily than the pre-10th century crisis and by around 1450 the economy started moving towards recovery.



Do you know

The portion of the entire landed estate of the lord which was managed directly by him was called the DEMESNE.

We now have some idea about the conditions in which people in Medieval Europe lived. We have also been able to trace the pattern of change in these conditions over a period of several centuries. How did these changes in the material conditions affect the society and culture of medieval Europe? Let us see for ourselves.

Given the relatively low level of economic life in the period before the 10th century, we should not be surprised to know that it was not a prosperous time for learning or the arts. During this period learning remained a privilege of the few. The masses received no formal education. In fact, the language of learning was Latin which was known only to the priestly class. However, even this little bit of education was of a very narrow kind. It consisted mostly of memorization, without any reasoning or questioning. All learning was dominated by blind faith. In such conditions, naturally, there was hardly any development in the sciences. There was some attempt at a revival, but even this did not result in any real intellectual creativity. However, the educated members of the priestly and monastic orders did try to recopy and preserve some major works of Roman literature. This, at least, served as the basis of a revival of learning that began in the 11th and 12th centuries. This period saw very little significant production in the area of literature because of the low level of literacy. The same is the case with artistic productions in this period. However, a unique style that developed in this field was that of manuscript illustrations. On the whole it may be said that in this period cultural attainment was minimal and sparse. European Civilisation at that time was much backward in comparison with other contemporary neighboring civilisations like the Byzantine and the Islamic world.

The prosperity and relative peace of the period from the 10th century brought about a consequent change in the cultural life of the period. This period witnessed rise in literacy with the spread of primary education and the opening of universities. There was an attempt at the acquisition of classical knowledge as well as knowledge from the Arab Civilisation. Thus, this period saw a progress in knowledge and thought in Europe. It was an important step towards the intellectual flowering that took place during the Modern Period.



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INTEXT QUESTIONS 2.1

1. Describe the bond between the feudal lord and his vassal in about 30 words.
2. Who were the serfs?
3. Justify the following statements giving reasons for the same:
 - (a) The period from the 10th to the 12th century witnessed a revival of trade and growth of town life.

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(b) From the 13th century onwards there was a reversal in the trend of growth of feudal economy.

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(c) The cultural life before the 10th century was a prosperous time for learning and the arts in Europe.

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2.3 ARAB CIVILISATION DURING THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD

Arabia is a peninsula of deserts. Before the founding of Islam, most Arabs were Bedouins, that is, wandering camel herdsman. Their main source of livelihood was pastoralism and the produce of the desert oases such as dates. Craft production was very limited; trade was sluggish and urban development minimal. In the second half of the 6th century, the economy picked up some momentum due to a shift in long distance trade routes. There was an ongoing war between the two dominant neighboring empires of Arabia, namely the Roman and the Persian. Because of these wars, Arabia became a safer transit route than others for caravans going between Africa and Asia. This encouraged the growth of some important towns that took advantage of this trade. The most prominent of these was Mecca which lay on the junction of some major trade routes. Mecca's position also derived from its local religious importance since the Kabah, a pilgrimage shrine was located here. The Kabah at that time served as a centre of worship for diverse Arabian clans and tribes. This shrine was controlled by the Quraysh tribe which played a powerful role in the economic life of Mecca. A brilliant civilisation arose in Arabia in the Medieval Period which influenced a large section of the world population. It owed its emergence to the birth of Islam, which was a significant development in world history.

Prophet Muhammad who spread Islam was born in Mecca into the Quraysh tribe in 570 AD. He was brought up by his uncle since he was orphaned early in life. He grew up to be a prosperous trader, entering the service of a rich widow Khadija, whom he later married. Polytheism or belief in many Gods was replaced by a strict monotheism or belief in one God which became the basis for this new religion known as Islam and Muhammad was hailed as a 'Prophet'. At first, he was not very successful in gaining many converts amongst the Quraysh, except for a limited few including his wife Khadija. Meanwhile, representatives of another town in the north called Yathrib invited Prophet Muhammad to come and resolve their local rivalries. In 622 AD, Muhammad with his followers migrated to that town. That year of migration was called Hijrah and the town was renamed as Medina. He continuously began to organize his converts into a political as well as religious community. In an attempt to spread his faith to Mecca, he and his followers conducted raids on

caravans of the Quraysh. He finally succeeded in 630 AD and entered Mecca after defeating the Quraysh. The Quraysh submitted to the new faith and the Kabah henceforth became the main shrine of Islam. After the defeat of Mecca, other tribes throughout Arabia accepted the new faith.

Islam has simple doctrines. The word 'Islam' means absolute submission to God and adherence to faith. The followers of this faith are known as Muslims. Islam teaches that there is only one God. Prophet Muhammad is believed by Muslims to be the last and greatest prophet of God. They also recognize the prophets of the Jews and Christians. Muslims believe in the Day of Judgment when the pious would be granted eternal life in paradise and the wicked would be damned. Quran is the holy book of the Muslims which is a compilation of the revelations that Prophet Muhammad was believed to have received from God. These steps include dedication to a life of morality and compassion, adherence to some set religious observances like prayer and fast at stipulated times, charity, pilgrimage to Mecca and frequent recitation from the Quran. Apart from the Quran, the Sunna or Practices of the Prophet and Hadis or Sayings of the Prophet also set the norms for desirable behavior among Muslims. In Islam, there are no intermediaries between the individual and God. Instead of priests there are only religious scholars who have the authority to comment on the religion and religious laws. Islam also preaches equality of all. Islam has many similarities in doctrine and beliefs with Judaism and Christianity.

2.3.1 Society and Culture

Arab Philosophy was based on the study of earlier Greek thought. Greek Philosophy was cultivated by philosophers who believed in rationality. These philosophers apart from their philosophical speculation were also distinguished in studying Natural Sciences. They practiced Astrology and Medicine. Their astrology was based on accurate astronomical observation. In medicine, they not only studied the medical writings of the Greeks carefully but went much beyond that. Ibn Sina, known to the West as Avicenna, discovered the infectious nature of tuberculosis and described several types of nervous ailments. Al-Razi, known to the West as Rhazes, one of the greatest clinical physicians of the Medieval World discovered the difference between measles and smallpox. Other Arabic physicians also diagnosed cancer of the stomach and prescribed antidotes for cases of poisoning. An interesting feature about the Arab people is that they excelled over all other medieval cultures in the organization of hospitals. There seems to have been at least 34 hospitals located in important cities of Persia, Syria and Egypt organized on remarkably modern lines.

The Arabs also excelled in Optics, Chemistry and Mathematics. Physicists founded the Science of Optics and drew a number of significant conclusions regarding the velocity, transmission and refraction of light. In chemistry, these people are credited with the discovery of various new substances and compounds like carbonate of soda,



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alum, saltpeter, nitric and sulphuric acids among other things. There were also the first to describe the chemical processes of distillation, filtration and sublimation. In mathematics, the greatest accomplishment of Arabs was to bring together the Geometry of the Greeks and the Number System of the Indians. In fact, the use of the Indian Number System spread so widely through the Arabs that the west named them 'Arabic Numerals'. With a synthesis of all this existing knowledge, the Arabs were able to make great progress in Arithmetic, Geometry and Trigonometry. These Indian numerals are even now used all over the world. They have not now come to be known as European numerals.

European	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Arabic-Indic	.	١	٢	٣	٤	٥	٦	٧	٨	٩
Eastern Arabic-Indic (Persian and Urdu)	.	١	٢	٣	٤	٥	٦	٧	٨	٩
Devanagari (Hindi)	०	१	२	३	४	५	६	७	८	९
Tamil		௧	௨	௩	௪	௫	௬	௭	௮	௯

Figure 2.2 Number System

The Arab Civilisation was also noted for its Literature particularly poetry. The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam is an example of poetry that is remembered to this day. Just as in other fields, Arab Art also represented a beautiful synthesis of various styles like the Byzantine and the Persian. Architecture was the most important of the Arab arts. Examples of Arab architecture include mosques, palaces and madrasas. Its principal features were domes, minarets, arches etc.

In short it may be said that at a time when the West was lagging far behind, Arab Civilisation was at its peak intellectually and artistically. The establishment of a vast empire brought the Arabs into contact with diverse cultures such as Arab, Persian, Turkish, Indian and African. With these diverse elements it created a splendid society leaving behind a legacy of discoveries and achievements.



ACTIVITY 2.2

Recollect and make a list of at least 5 monuments you have visited or seen on books or magazines which reflects Arab architecture, in India as well as outside India. What were the distinct features of these monuments? Where were they located? What were your thoughts on viewing them? Suggest ways to conserve them.

2.4 MEDIEVAL INDIAN CIVILISATION

In the previous lesson we have read about the Gupta Empire. After the reign of King Harshavardhana, began a prolonged period of political decentralization between the

8th and 10th centuries during which several kingdoms struggled for supremacy. In Northern India, the three major kingdoms were those of the Palas, the Pratiharas and the Rashtrakutas. Smaller kingdoms or principalities were established by the Rajput Dynasties of the Chauhans, Paramaras, Gahadavalas, etc. In the South, it was the Chola Dynasty that had control over most of the peninsular part of the country. This situation of fragmentation of political authority was greatly favourable for an invader like Mahmud of Ghazni. After several successful conquests in Western and Central Asia, Mahmud turned toward India. His Indian conquests began in 1000 AD, after which he made repeated invasions over Punjab, as far as Kashmir and Eastern Rajasthan and then into the fertile area of the Gangetic Plains. However, Mahmud was not interested in establishing his rule over this country.



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2.4.1 Political Events

Mahumud's invasions were followed by the coming of the Turks. The Turks established their rule over most of Northern India by the 13th century. The Turkish rulers were known as Sultans and ruled from their capital at Delhi. Their Empire is thus called the Delhi Sultanate. Its most powerful dynasties were those of the Khaljis and the Tughluqs. Most of these rulers had to face the threat of invasions by the Mongols. Meanwhile in the South, the two powerful kingdoms of Vijayanagar and Bahmani were constantly competing with each other for political supremacy. The coming of the Mughals in early 16th century marked a new era in Indian History. Politically, it saw the consolidation of an all India Empire on a scale that had not been witnessed in India for a long time. Socially and culturally, this was a period of fusion of various traditions. Out of this fusion was born a unique tradition which could be seen in the social life, religious practices and beliefs, and in the various arts. It was based on mutual acceptance and a harmonious coexistence.

Parallel to these centralized empires such as the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Empire, there flourished several smaller regional and provincial independent ruling dynasties. Some of these were the Ilyas Shahi and Husain Shahi Dynasties of Bengal, the Ahoms of Assam, the Gajapati Dynasty of Odisha, the Dynasties of Mewar and Marwar in Rajasthan and the Sharqi Dynasty of Jaunpur. The reign of these independent regional dynasties witnessed the growth of strong and flourishing regional and sub-regional languages, literature and cultures.

2.4.2 Political Institutions

The coming of the Turks and the Mughals brought in new ideas of sovereignty and governance. In the first place, kingship itself had no clear-cut legitimate place in the Islamic conception of polity which was based on the notion of a community of equals. Initially power was shared between the Sultan and the powerful Turkish chiefs or nobles. But the reign of Balban saw an elevation of the position of the Sultan, so much so that he assumed absolute power in all matters of state and governance. The

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power of the Turkish nobility was considerably downsized. The Mughals established the power and prestige of the king at an unprecedented level.

The Sultans of Delhi and the Mughal Emperors made some innovations in the administrative system. The Mughal Emperor came to be regarded as the Emperor of India. In the Delhi Sultanate, military commanders were assigned territorial units known as *iqtas*. These territories were transferable. The assignees of these *iqtas* were not given ownership of the land but only control over the revenues collected from them. This revenue was to be used by the *iqtadar*, that is, the assignee to meet his own requirements as well as for the maintenance of his troops. He would then be expected to provide military support with these troops whenever called upon by the emperor to do so. However, the pre-existing structure of control over land and the hierarchy in the landed system of the village continued largely undisturbed.

The Mughal system was more penetrative with control over the revenue and landed network going much deeper right to the village level. The Mughals appointed *mansabdars* who performed military and civil duties. The *mansabs* were actually ranks of position which was fixed according to the position of the officers in Mughal bureaucracy and the military contingents under their command. These *mansabdars* were mostly paid through land assignments called *jagirs* which were frequently transferable. These were similar to *iqtas*, with the difference that while *iqtas* combined administrative charge, *jagirs* did not. The Mughal system was crucially dependent on the smooth functioning of *Mansabdari* and *Jagirdari* Systems.

2.4.3 Economy

The Delhi Sultanate as well as the Mughal Empire was based on the surplus of agricultural produce of the peasants that was extracted in the form of revenue. In the Mughal Empire, particularly in the reign of Akbar, far reaching changes were made in the system of revenue collection. Land was measured and land revenue was fixed according to the exact area of land. Fertility of the land was also taken into account. The cash value of the state's share of the produce was then calculated according to prevailing market prices and the revenue was fixed in cash terms accordingly. The state encouraged payment of revenue in cash. This was a period of commercialization of agriculture and the state encouraged cash crop production. The state also took a lot of interest in the extension of cultivation into zones which were hitherto uncultivated or forest areas. It gave various incentives to pioneer agriculturists. The state also advanced to peasants loans as well as revenue relief in times of crop failure.

Trade and commerce which had declined greatly following the period of the Guptas saw a revival during this time. Urban centers flourished after a considerable period of decline. Inland trade increased in the 13th and 14th centuries as a result of this new urbanization. A vast network of road connecting these urban centers came up which also facilitated trade. Cities like Delhi, Agra, Lahore, Multan, Dhaka,

Ahmadabad, Surat and Bombay rose in importance. The merchandise from Punjab was sent to markets in West and Central Asia. Political stability and relative peace established by the Mughals made it possible to travel with considerable ease among the cities of the empire. Coastal trade also flourished. There were a large number of trading classes and commercial practices were of high standard and integrity. The *seths*, *bohras* and *modis* were engaged in long-distance trade, while *beoparis* and *baniks* dealt in local and retail trade, the *sarafs* or *shroffs* were money changers who issued *hundis* or Bills of Exchange. The *hundi* was a letter of credit that could be paid at a later date at the designated place. This facilitated the movement of goods from one part of the country to another as it made the transaction of money over long distance remarkably easy.

**Notes****2.4.4 Cultural and Religious Life**

In the sphere of religion and culture, the Medieval Period witnessed a great synthesis of traditions. The *Bhakti* Movement and *Sufism* in the religious sphere are examples of this. The *Bhakti* Movement which stressed on oneness with god through personal devotion came very close to the everyday lives of ordinary people. It stressed on love, purity and devotion rather than rituals and sacrifices. It questioned the caste system and the authority of Brahmans. *Bhakti* saints, like Ramananda, Kabir, Ravidas, Mira Bai, Guru Nanak, Tukaram and Chaitanya Mahaprabhu had a deep impact on the minds of the common people and this influence continues even today. In fact, some of these saints developed large following. For example, Guru Nanak had deep influence over the people of Punjab. His large following led him to found a new religion called Sikhism whose followers are called Sikhs.

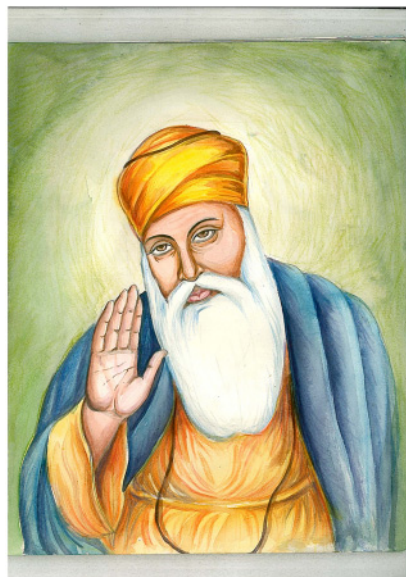


Figure 2.3 Guru Nanakji

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Do you know

Kabir ke Dohe:

Dukh mein simran sab kare, Sukh mein kare na koye
Jo sukh mein simran kare, Tau dukh kahe ko hoye

(Translation)

In anguish everyone prays to Him, in joy does none
To One who prays in happiness, how sorrow can come

In a similar manner, the *Sufi* saints also stressed on devotion and love as the only way to realize the divine. They preached tolerance and compassion. They lived lives of austerity and shared the sorrows and anxieties of the common masses. As a result their influence over the masses, both Hindus and Muslims, was very strong. There was also a lot of interaction between the *Sufi* and *Bhakti* saints and exchange of philosophical idea took place. Both traditions in fact acted as a bridge between the two communities.



ACTIVITY 2.3

Try to find out if any *Bhakti* and *Sufi* saints lived in your state or your neighborhood. Try to find more about them. Visit their shrine, if any. What did you see? Write your experience in about 80-100 words.

Collect pictures of at least 3 *Bhakti* and *Sufi* saints each. Find out about them and their teachings. Do you find similarities and differences in their teachings? Reflect and write a few lines about each of them. What did you learn? Do you find their teachings relevant? Share your thoughts with family and friends.

Language, literature, art, architecture, music and dance also bore out this trend of synthesis between different traditions. In the area of language and literature, classical languages like Persian and Sanskrit flourished. But, the real remarkable development was in the growth of regional languages.

Under the Mughals, painting was organized in the royal *karkhanas* and painters were on government payroll. The Mughal School of painting represented a complete assimilation of the Persian and Indian styles. This to some extent was a result of the fact that the artists of this school brought with them elements of the various traditions to which they belonged like Rajputana, Gujarat, Malwa, etc. Some famous painters were Daswant, Basavan, Mukund and Kesav. The supervision of the Persian masters

like Abdul Samad and Sayyid Ali brought in an element of Persian style as well. Manuscript Illustration was another hallmark of Mughal painting.

Another fascinating aspect of cultural life in Medieval India is visible in its Indo-Islamic architecture. It is characterized by the adaptation of Indian resources, expertise, motifs and designs to Persian styles. New features like the arch and the dome were combined with the use of Hindu motifs like bell, lotus, *swastika* and *kalash*/water pot. The Qutub Minar, the Allai Darwaza and various monuments of the Tulghlaq Period like the Tomb of Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq are fine examples of architecture during the Delhi Sultanate period. The monuments of the Mughal Period reflect a deeper sense of fusion and assimilation of Indo-Islamic styles. For example, the monuments in Fatehpur Sikri, like Panch Mahal, Birbal's Palace and Ibadat Khana, as well as the Tomb of Humayun in Delhi, Akabar's famous Tomb at Sikandra, Itmadudaulah's Tomb in Agra and, of course, the Taj Mahal are outstanding examples of Mughal architecture.

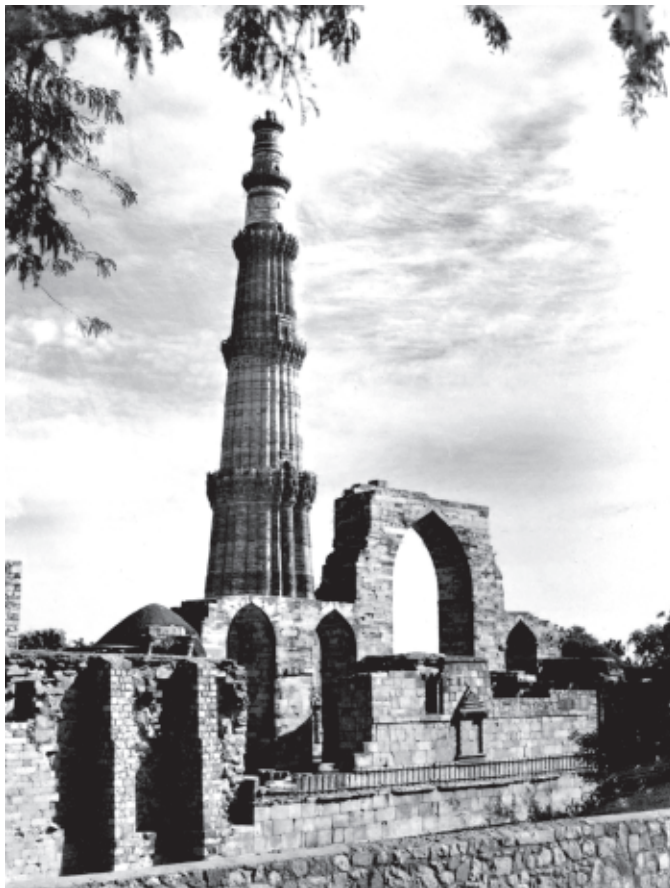
**Notes**

Figure 2.4 *Qutub Minar*

Music was also patronized by most medieval rulers in India. Indian system of vocal and instrumental musical interfaced with Arab, Iranian and Central Asian traditions

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of music. New ragas came to be composed. The *Bhakti* and *Sufi* traditions also gave an impetus to new devotional styles of music.

The Medieval Period of Indian history, quite distinct in its characteristics of political economic and cultural life, was thus another important outstanding period after the Ancient Period.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 2.2

1. Give reasons why Mecca arose into prominence.
2. Enlist at least 5 fields in which we can see the contribution of Arab Civilisation.
3. Fill in the blanks:
 - (a) In the South, it was the Dynasty that held way over most of the Peninsular India.
 - (b) The Mughal System was based on the smooth functioning of the and Systems.
 - (c) The were money changers who issued *hundis* or Bills of Exchange.
 - (d) The *Bhakti* Movement stressed on oneness with God though



WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT

- The Medieval Period cannot be called a Dark Period since so many important developments and growth in various spheres of life took place in different parts of the world.
- The most important institution of the society of Europe in the Medieval Period was Feudalism.
- The feudal system comprised a hierarchical of graded organization of political authority.
- An economic aspect Feudalism was characterized by serfdom and the manorial system of production.
- The feudal system was not a static one. It underwent patterns of prosperity and crisis.
- The period before the 10th century of Europe was marked by low level of cultural achievements. Cultural life improved, learning and intellectual development began to flourish after the 10th century.

- Islam was a new faith spread by Prophet Muhammad around the 7th century. It has simple doctrines.
- Islam spread to large parts of the world
- Up to about 1500 AD, Islamic culture and society was remarkably cosmopolitan and dynamic. It witnessed great strides in cultural and scientific development.
- The coming of the Turks and the Mughals brought new ideas of sovereignty and governance to India. The *iqta*, *jagirdari* and *mansabdari* systems were important administrative innovations.
- The Medieval Period in India was a period of economic growth.
- The cultural and social life in Medieval India was marked by a unique synthesis of different traditions.

**TERMINAL EXERCISES**

1. Explain why the Medieval Period is a significant period that needs to be studied to understand the evolution of human society?
2. Describe the changes that took place in the political and economic life in Western Europe after the downfall of the Roman Empire.
3. Examine the main features of Medieval Indian economy.
4. What are the main teachings of Islam? Discuss in about 100 words.
5. 'Arab Civilisation in the Medieval Period left behind a legacy of discoveries and achievements'. Justify this statement.
6. Differentiate between *Iqtadars* and *Mansabs*.
7. What were the important teachings of the *Bhakti* Movement and *Sufism*? How did it act as a bridge between the Hindus and the Muslims?
8. Illustrate how Medieval Indian culture represented a harmonious synthesis of traditions in the fields of arts, architecture and music.

**ANSWER TO INTEXT QUESTIONS****2.1**

1. The lord and his vassal shared a personal bond which was established through an elaborate ceremony. The vassal would take a vow to serve the lord while the lord protects the vassal in return.

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2. Serfs were dependent peasants of Medieval Europe, tied to the soil and completely under the authority of the lord.
3. (a) Yes. Due to the increase in agricultural yield, people could now sell the excess produce and buy products of long distance trade.
(b) Yes. The reduction in labor services and technological stagnation led to lesser agricultural produce.
(c) No. Education was a privilege of the few with the masses given no education, and learning was dominated by blind faith.

2.2

1. Mecca rose into prominence because it lay on the junction of some major trade routes and it was a place of an important religious shrine, first with the diverse Arabian clans and tribes, and later with the spread of Islam.
2. Astrology, Medicine, Natural Sciences, Literature, Mathematics, Architecture.
3. (a) Chola
(b) *Mansabdari, Jagirdari*
(c) *sarafs* or *shroffs*
(d) personal devotion