Chapter VI

Conclusion

Feudalism, as a political and socio-economic institution was a historical development. It stood mid-way in the transition of the Western European economy from a slave based system of agricultural production to one dominated by capitalism. The system evolved due to political bankruptcy and the failure of the Roman government to protect its subjects from the tribal inroads in the 7th-8th century. Pursuant to this, life had become most insecure. Socio-economic and political institutions had virtually crumbled and villages and towns had become isolated following breakdown of communication and transport network.

Under these circumstances, the Roman Empire allowed the strongest local chieftains to guard and raise fortified walls around their respective areas for human security. The emperor legally recognized these chieftains as the owners of whatever was under and above the land in the said areas. However, in return, they were bound to acknowledge the emperor as their overlord and provide him tribute and necessary military services as and when asked for.

For the fear of death, weaker sections of the peasantry sought refuge in the fortified domains of their lords. In lieu therefore, they pledged loyalty and surrendered their all hitherto-held hereditary rights on land. Thus, developed a give and take relationship based on a contract between the overlord and lord/ protector and the protected/the lord and the vassal.

On a personal bond, the lord provided a strip of land along with the agricultural inputs to the peasants from his estates. It was termed as “fief” from which latter emanated the term “feudal.” Thus, under forced circumstances, former peasant proprietors either became tenant farmers (paid rent to the lord for the use of his land) or worst serfs who were tied to the lord’s land in perpetuity. Besides working on the fief, they were required to render involuntary services on the personal
land of the lord, the “manor.” They lived in dreary houses adjacent to “manor,” the smallest land holding and the most self-sufficient productive unit. All this led to radical change in land tenures and social formation, and evolved two broad social divisions of the nobles and clergy on the one hand and most unprivileged tenants on the other. Because of the immense exploitation of their labour and produce, the latter were transformed into salable commodities, and thus pushed to a life next to that of the animals.

However, feudalism either as a social and political organization or as a mode of production, wherein the basic producers were siphoned of their surplus produce through extra-economic force, was neither regional nor time-specific institution. It was in vogue in different forms in both European and non-European communities during a protracted course of history. In an ever widening circle, it obtained in Spain, Mediterranean World, East Europe, Turkey, Iran, India, Japan, China notwithstanding geographical, technological and cultural variations; hence, was named differently such as European feudalism, Japanese feudalism, Indian feudalism, Chinese feudalism, nomadic feudalism so on and so forth.

In Central Asian Khanates of Bukhara, Khiva and Khokand, the said phenomenon surfaced with the chaotic conditions following the breakdown of the centralized Uzbek Khanate (16th century), tribal invasions, socio-economic deprivation and human insecurity, and ever decaying communication and transportation networks. Thus developed feudalism out of a destabilized power structure of the Khanates in the 16th century.

Since feudalism in the Khanates and elsewhere was agrarian-oriented, whole set of social and economic relations revolved round the lord-tenant bond. True, theoretically all land belonged to the Khan/Amir as mamlık-i-padşahi which left no scope for private property in land. In actual practice, however, the Khans of Khiva, Khokand and Bukhara parceled out some portions of land and its revenue among the heirs, and civil and military officials in lieu of their salary. The land grants/estates were made out of the state land termed amlok. These assignees called
tanhkohdar/chekdar recognized the Amir as their overlord and agreed to pay tribute and provide him military services at the time of political crisis arising out of internal strife or external invasions. This sort of reciprocity of give and take relationship, made the feudal institution strong in the history of the Khanates.

However, since the estates were quite large in extent, the vassals sub-infeudated them among their own men. In this way, began the multi-layered process of lord-vassal relationship and the chain of potentates organized in some hierarchical order with Amir/Khan as overlord at the top and the petty civil official or soldiers at the bottom pledging. Still lower in feudal organization and social stratification was the peasantry (dehkan) who pledged loyalty to their concerned lords and surrendered hereditary land rights to them in exchange of the assured security.

The lords were entitled to enormous rights both on land and on peasantry, the most exploited group of the nascent serfs. They paid rent to the landlord for use of land and were tied to the same. They were disallowed to leave the land or village without the permission of their lords. The violation thereof, was reckoned with their flogging /death/captivity. On grounds of suspicion, their ears were nailed to a post or the house door, where they were left for three days without food and exposed to jibes of passersby. At times, they were subjected to death in an isolated room either by starvation or because of the strings/bites of the swarming flies. On top of it, they had no right to appeal before any legal or administrative authority. They were denied water rights for irrigation or else evicted from land in case they ever refused tillage of land due to over-exactions. They were bound to seek prior permission of the lords for marriage of their children suggesting extreme level of personal enslavement under the Khanates much like their European or Indian counterparts.

However, this should not presuppose that whole land in the Khanates was feudal in organization. There were indeed milkiyati sets of land held by the peasants with rights to possess, use, own, and “free production.” Nonetheless, their right to appropriate surplus was limited due to enormous state taxes and levies; hence, approached the feudatories for agricultural capital, draught animals, seeds,
implements etc., on much exorbitant interest rates of 40-60%, indicating their, over or covert, dependence on the feudal structure. In view of their incapacity to repay the same, they often, if not always, disposed of or pawned their lands to the feudatories as reimbursement.

Since feudalism in Central Asia was based on labour and surplus extraction of agricultural produce from the peasants through feudal mode of governance, it caused adverse impact on the overall growth and development of the Khanates. Politically, the Khanates fragmented into a number of power pockets held by hoards of feudal lords. These ran parallel to the state-run institutions and their holders practically functioned as “parcelized sovereigns” in their defined domain. The feudatories of Shahr-i-Sabz, Ḥiṣar, Qarategin, and Darvaz in Bukhara, and Nurata, Kolab, Khujand, Ura-Tube, Jizak, Khatirchi, Kattakurgan, etc. in Khokand substantiate the fact. This automatically triggered the circumstances whereby royal powers shrank and that of the feudatories swelled. The extent was such that the weak AmirAbul Fayz Khan (1711-1747) of Bukhara was virtually confined to his fortified palace.

The waqf grant holders, muftis and qazis, also developed feudal tendencies in view of weakening state system. They assumed next to the feudal lords in their own domain, amassed disproportionate wealth from their religious grants, and meddled with political affairs of the Khanates. The role of Makhdum-i-Azam, a sufi saint of Farghana, Ihsan Baba Akhund Shadman, in early 20th century, offers the typical example in this regard. As a matter of fact, the feudatories were emboldened enough to absorb in themselves the powers beyond their prescribed jurisdiction and legal framework. They denied the payment of dues to the Khanates causing immense loss to the exchequer.

Paradoxically, instead of daunting them for their violative behaviour, the Amirs and Khans adopted alternate measures to supplement the resources through the sale of state and madrassa lands to those private individuals who had no knowledge of statecraft or learning. The Khan of Khokand adopted a new monetary policy to cope up with the economic crisis. The weight of the silver coins was reduced, say
from 4.44 grams to 3-2.50 grams a *tanga/tenghe* (a silver coin) in the early 19th century: one *tanga* was worth 20 silver *kopecks*. Besides reinforcing the state exchequer, the said measure lowered down prices of the commercial crops: in Bukhara, an indigo costing 12 *tillas/pood* (one *tilla* was equal to 15 *rubles*), fell by 11 to 10, 8, 6, 4 and 2 *tilllas a pood* by 1833. The purchasing power went so low that “the customers were dragged by their sleeves and flap” and trading activities were inevitably subordinated to the traditional barter and credit system. The given scenario suggests growing feudal powers in the face of weakening Khanates and the anarchy, chaos, and confusion following thereupon.

Encouraged by the said scenario, the feudal lords exploited the peasants/tenants/serfs beyond proportions. Under the rent structure, they realized $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ of the yield from the tenants as rent of the leased land, $\frac{2}{5}$-$\frac{3}{4}$ as rent of the working cattle and implements, $\frac{1}{2}$-$\frac{4}{5}$ as interest on the given seeds, and $\frac{1}{4}$-$\frac{1}{6}$ of the yield as interest on the leased money and clothes. Curiously, rent was collected in advance for several years together and arbitrarily increased as high as seven fold. The cruelest ever were the unpaid services asked from them by the feudatories (*hasher*) to maintain orchards, canals, houses, and roads. Taking advantage of the weak Amirs, the feudal lords encroached upon the state land and exploited peasant proprietors through an assortment of exorbitant taxes/levies. *Kharaj* was collected at $\frac{2}{3}$rd of the produce as against $\frac{1}{2}$ or $\frac{1}{4}$th prescribed by the state, and *mirobana* (water duty) at 10% of their annual produce. Further, they were to annually deliver four cattle each tribal family in the name of *kibitka* (house tax), and the additional levies (*wajuhat*) like *kishpuli* (levy on a pair of draught animal in relation to land holding), *yak shira* (head-wise levy on draught animals), *qafshan* (levy paid towards revenue functionaries like *amlokdar*), *tanafpuli* and *alafpuli* (levy on orchards and vegetable gardens), *kuprulpuli* (toll on bridges), *baj* (custom duty paid towards the lord), *nikhana* (duty on marriage contracts), *tarikana/tarakana* (duty on legal documents of inheritance), and various gifts to be presented to the
feudatories on the festive occasions (*toi*): in all the levies numbered fifty five in Bukhara and twenty five in Khiva.

At the end, the peasants/tenants/serfs were barely left with anything except their own person. Boris Pazuklin, the envoy of Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich (1875-1895) to Bukhara, gives a pathetic view of the worsening situation: “… and over the years very little bread is left in some homes [of Bukhara, Balkh and Khiva].” Therefore, their conditions were most appalling as regards housing, food, and clothing. In fact, these aggravated in the event of crop failures, famines, draught, etc. Naturally, for most part of the year, the peasants subsisted on fruits, vegetables, milk etc. Building assets or keeping reserves of food stocks for rainy days was too distant a dream for the peasants at large. They were, more often than not, forced to borrow loans from the feudatories or resort to theft and brigandage for survival. The loans (*bunak*) were provided at exorbitant interest rates of 40-60% when the feudatories themselves obtained the same at quite low interest rates of 8-9%. As was natural, the debts accumulated year after year, which forced even the ordinary self-cultivating peasants whatever land or material possessions they had with them. Buyers in most, if not in all cases, were the feudal lords. Consequently, their landed estates enlarged manifold so that under the land distribution pattern, 12.2% land was under *khasa* (personal property of the Amir), 55.8% *amlak* (state land), 24.2% *waqf* (endowment), and just 7.8% was *milki* (private) lands. This indicates that 92.3% of the peasant population, out-numbering the *milkiyati* holders, worked on rent basis, and were inevitably dependent on the feudatories.

Living in the countryside and bound by law to the land, they depended on their little crops for subsistence. The share there from was so limited that their choice to buy even their routine consumer goods from the open markets at inflated prices fixed by the feudatories, was restricted. Amid this sort of “natural economy,” the society had two broad divisions, the lord, and the servile peasantry. The former were privileged enough to master maximum means and forces of production, and the latter helplessly facilitated their urge for over-exploitation. This eventually forged great
deal of economic differentiation between the “exploiter” and the “exploited” in the Central Asian Khanates, and thereby created what Maurice Dobb terms as the “bi-polarity” of European feudalism. On top of it, was the personal enslavement of the serfs, who were tied to land of the lord in the worst ever cruel form. Their routine personal and family activities were subordinated to the whims and wishes of the feudatories. They had no right to appeal against the feudal extortion, and had the mere satisfaction owing to right to land use (tasarruf-i-malikana).

Obviously, therefore, the peasants took exodus for better mode of existence. In sequence, village population contracted, say in Samarkand from 1, 50,000 souls in the 15th century to only 10, 000 towards the early 19th century. Similarly, the pastoralist population of Kazakhs in the Ti’en Shan Plateau declined by 9% between 1902 and 1912. In Farghana, Samarkand and Bukhara, 25-54% peasant families deserted by 1914, and those who stayed back had just one dessiatine of land for cultivation. The land situated between Panjdeh to Yalatun of the Murgab valley of Samarkand was, as such, deserted. However, the above abominable phenomenon must have not have been alone due to feudal or state excesses but rather other conditions related to natural calamity, political instability etc.

Even though the serf-lord relations were apparently smooth but a simmering indignation existed at its root on the issue of the appropriation of the produce. The feudatories claimed it under law whereas the tenants/serfs were reluctant to surrender the same for their own compulsions: growing family needs, traditional means of productions and climatic excesses. For these limitation, they could not contemplate in terms of any anti-feudal uprising fearing the patronage of the Amirs to them. Instead, one comes across the tenant supplications to them for justice and relief. This is why the tenants largely welcomed the anti-feudal drive of General Chernief in 1865 notwithstanding his representing the imperial Russia.

True the above predicament characterizing agrarian crisis, was quite deleterious to the peasantry for it denied them natural right to produce as per their own choice and optimize the surplus as a pre-requisite to their asset building
capacity. But the feudatories themselves were uncomfortable with it because the peasants meant for them the hen that laid golden eggs for them in perpetuity. With this consideration in mind, the feudatories strived to keep the tenants in good humour by supporting them with money, loans, cattle, seeds, and other forms of agricultural investment. For strategic reasons, they provided them food, clothes and agricultural implements like metal plough driven by horses, yoke and assess, and facilitated them drawing water from the canals for irrigation of their agricultural fields. Credit loans (bunak), levies and taxes, at times, were remitted, say by Mohammad Rahim (1806–1826), the Khan of Khiva, and rent on land and cattle was exempted. Further, the peasants were permitted to dispose of their surplus, if any, before the stocks of the feudatories were exhausted.

However, the economic loss caused to the feudatories on above account was soon made up by them through corresponding measures, which included the cultivation of such crops, wheat, rice, sesame and jugan, as were relatively profitable to them. They enjoyed full patronage of the Amirs to impose their own choice of production on the tenants, though, at the same time, the Khanates showed considerable, if not equal, interests in the welfare of the tenants. For example, under The Law Code (Ulozhenie) of 1649 A.D., the tenants were empowered to leave the villages temporarily to seek employment with the bourgeoisie in towns and cities for better wages, food, and wage earnings in cash. The cash earnings, according to Marx, naturally was the last form of the dissolution of feudalism and growth of capitalism. Similarly, during 1826-60, Amir Nasrullah of Bukhara, introduced several politico-administrative measures to marginalize the feudatories for the relief of the peasantry, and the re-establishment of the Khanates’s preponderance over them. He confiscated all tankhoh grants and brought them under amlok (state land) and re-allotted them later to those able and loyal men who acknowledged the king as their sovereign. Likewise, waqf grants were rationalized on the hereditary lines. The begs/biis (feudatories) were directed to share a certain part of their revenue with the state (the king as an overlord). The state dependence on the feudatories for supply of troops
was minimized by the recruitment of a regular state army (sarboz/askariyya). Slavery was done away with by Amir Abdul Ahad of Bukhara (1885-1910). During 1799-1811, Amir Alim Khan of Khokand worked out a four-pronged strategy to empower the state versus feudatories. He forbade feudal gifts and the taxes/levies excepting those prescribed by the state, and de-recognized the prices of legal deeds at will. Instead of land grants, he paid his officials in regular salary. Likewise, in Khiva, Iltuzar or Ilt Nazar (1804-1806) scuttled the feudatories by including Sarts (non-tribal urban dwellers) in administration.

Nonetheless, feudal excesses perpetuated as before. While Amir Subhan Kuli Khan (1681-1702 AD) enhanced the rent of the tenants by seven times, Baqi Mohammad stopped the water of Nasaf Canal for irrigation to the restive peasants of Bukhara. Even the early Tsars proved of no respite to the tenants on above account. The actual change occurred with the introduction of the “Statute for the Administration of the Turkestan Region” towards 1886, whereby ownership rights of the feudatories on the big estates, were withdrawn and declared state property. Subsequently, it was distributed among the tenants on the basis of customary law and hereditary principle. Waqf grants were transferred to village communities for use, and those held by the private persons (waqf-i-ahli) were allowed to be inherited by their next heirs. No further land was earmarked for the waqf grants. Aqsoqols (village elders), aryk-aqsoqols (village official in-charge of small streams) and mirobs (official in charge of irrigation) were declared accountable for equitable water distribution with no preferential treatment to feudatories. Besides, a host of feudal levies were done away with, and instead of kharaj (at the rate of 1/10th of the gross produce), tanop (orchard tax) and zakat (2½ %) on the trading capital were realized. Any collection beyond the fixed schedule by the revenue functionaries was strictly forbidden. These legislations regulated the feudal laws in Central Asia during the post-Khanate period. In fact, such changes in the feudal structure were pre-empted by commercialization of agriculture, development of trade (both internal and external) and the growth of cities and towns. With the declining trend in feudalism, capitalist
mode of production surfaced as its alternative, and the serfs were instantly declared free from the feudal bondage.

In short, the feudalism in medieval Khanates of Central Asia was analogous to European feudalism in many, if not in all ways. Firstly, the Khan was an absolute ruler in Central Asia with no legal obligation/binding as was the case with their European counterparts. Secondly, private ownership in land was a powerful institution in Central Asia whereas it was weakly developed in medieval Europe. Thirdly, like Europe, Central Asian feudalism was governed by the hereditary principle, though the same was, at times, withdrawn on the grounds of expediency. Consequently, the Central Asia variety of feudalism characterized what is termed as the “prebendal” feudalism. Fourthly, vassals in Central Asia had no right to appeal against the lords whereas in Europe they had such a right guaranteed under feudal norms.