



## Transition From Ancient Society To Medieval Society : A Review

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### Abstract

The central factor that eventually transformed ancient Indian society into a medieval society was the practice of land grants. The brahmanas were granted villages free from taxes which were collected by the king from the villages. In addition, the beneficiaries were given the right to govern the people living in the donated villages. Royal control was eroded through the payment of government officials by land grants. There is a distinct evolution of the landlordism and devolution of the central state authority by the seventh century. The important change in the agrarian economy is noted. The decline of trade led to the decay of towns. There was an increasing divine hierarchy in post-Gupta times. The Bhakti cult spread throughout India. Bhakti meant that people made all kinds of offerings to the god in return for which they received the prasada or the favour of the god.

Keywords: medieval society, land grants, central state authority, landlordism, agrarian economy, decline of trade, decay of towns, divine hierarchy, Bhakti cult

### Introduction

For the sake of the convenience of study history has been divided into three – the ancient, medieval and modern periods. Of course we do not have any date or even a century to demarcate these periods. The concept of ancient, medieval and modern is amorphous. It varies according to regions. Still there are characteristic features of these epochs. The accepted demarcations of ancient, medieval and modern world are a Europe centric one. The fall of Western Roman Empire in AD 476 is considered to be the end of ancient period and beginning of the middle ages. The eastern Roman Empire continued to exist for about a thousand years more and the fall of the eastern Roman Empire in 1453, following the conquest of Constantinople by the Turks is considered to be the end of the medieval period and the beginning of modern period. The general features of the transition from ancient to medieval world the decline of ancient empire decline of trade and urban centres, development of feudal land relations growth of regional kingdoms in the West, emergence of new empires in the Eastern, etc.





With the exception of ancient Greece all other city states and small kingdoms developed into empires in the ancient world. Thus the empire of the Nandas and Mauryas in ancient India, that of the Chou, Shang, Chin and Han in ancient China, those of the Persian Hebrew and the like in West Asia and above all the Roman empire have been characteristic of ancient world. But all declined giving way to a new world under. But their decline was not sudden; it was through centuries, “Rome was not built in a day; nor was it destroyed in a day”, so goes the proverb. The fall of the empires were seemingly political. But they involved deep economic social and cultural aspects.

### **The transition from ancient society to medieval society**

The transition from ancient society to medieval society has been differently interpreted March Bloc considers the changes resulting from barbarian invasions not as a transition but as a continuation. The Marxist historians consider it as a transition from slave Moderate of production. Anderson stresses this change in the mode of production Lynn white attributes the transition to the changes in military technology. Duby gives importance to the warrior peasant society while discussing the transition. According to Toynbee the religion of Christianity led to the decline of the empire. When Rome became an empire by foreign conquest there was a great increase in the member of slaves. And there was a change in the character of the Romans. Christianity that adhered to the principle of poverty and chastity was against the luxurious life of the Roman rulers and nobility. In the beginning the Roman rulers followed a policy of persecution towards Christianity. The Christians formed what may be called an “internal proletariat” of the Roman Empire, in the Toynbean sense. The barbarians have been the external proletariat. When the ‘external proletariat’ attacked Roman empire the internal proletariat welcomed them. The barbarians accepted Christianity.

Henry Pierenne does not give much importance to the Germanic invasions of Roman Empire as a factor contributing to the transition from ancient to the medieval society. According to him it is a mistake to suppose that the German tribal invasions led to the introduction of the agrarian economy in the occupied zone of the Roman empire. Instead he gives importance to the Islamic invasions of the 7th Century A.D. The occupation of Syria, Tunisia and Spain by the Muslim invaders destroyed the Mediterranean unity and caused the final separation between East and



West. The economy of the ancient Roman World depended on the commercial navigation in the Mediterranean. So long as this commercial navigation remained unmolested there was a regular flow of commerce and the population of Rome would be fed on African corn. Pierenne attributes the decline of trade and commerce to the decline of the empire. He shows how the agricultural wealth was locked up within the country when their happened to be no outlet for the same to the world outside Pierenne characterizes this as the “economy of no outlets”. When commerce ceased to be one of the branches social activity, each domain endeavoured to provide for all its needs from it own resources. Land came to be the only source of wealth and feudalism was the outcome of this economy of no outlets. Pierenne comes to the conclusion that the Mediterranean commerce so far as the Latin west was concerned came to an end by the last quarter of the 7th century. According to him the invasion of the Muslims might be taken as an important factor in disrupting the Mediterranean navigation. By the beginning of the 8th A.D the Muslims captured Palestine, Syria, Egypt, Tunisia and Spain. After the occupation of Tunisia the Muslims could disrupt the communication between the eastern and western halves of the Mediterranean. The Italian cities of Pisa Genoa and Provence were cut off from navigation on which their commerce depended. A vacuum was created in the great port of Marseilles, the principle mart connecting the west with the east. This affected the cities of southern Gaul also. Pierenne shows the disappearance of a few commodities of overseas trade especially spices, olive oil, oriental silk, pepper etc from the Frankish Kingdom before the last quarter of the 8th century as a symptom of the decline in overseas trade. Pierenne comes to conclusion that it was the incursion of the Muslims into the Mediterranean that caused the fall of the empire and the transition from ancient period to the medieval.

Change in the mode of production, moral degeneration of the people change in character of the army, changes in military technology, decline of trade-all were behind the long process of decline and fall of the Roman Empire. All these factors are International connected.

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