

**SOCIAL AND CULTURAL HISTORY OF BRITAIN
(ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL PERIOD)**

I Semester

**Complementary Course
for**

BA ENGLISH

(2014 Admission)



UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT
SCHOOL OF DISTANCE EDUCATION
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STUDY MATERIAL

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MODULE 1 EARLY HISTORY

Geographical Features Of British Isles

Geography is always a defining factor in the growth and development of a nation's history. The peculiar geographical location of Great Britain has contributed much in shaping the life and condition of its people. The strategic location of Britain in the European mainland was a reason for its growth as a powerful nation in the modern period. It is this geographic location that made British people to be skilful in maritime activities and in the course of time they became greatest navel powers in history. Britain came to occupy a central position after the discovery of American continent that helped them to increase relationship with other countries. The comparatively salubrious climatic condition of the country also made the people more energetic and industrious. Like climate, the topography of the land also played a key role in the British history.

The Britain is a group of Island that includes hundreds of small and large islands. The two major Islands are Britain and Ireland. England, Scotland, and wales are the three important political division of the Island of Great Britain. The constitutional name of the country is United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Now the names of England and Great Britain are used interchangeably to denote the United Kingdom (UK). The UK is separated from the European continent by the English Channel and North Sea. This separation of Britain from the mainland of Europe and the security given by natural boundaries enabled the country to develop her own characteristics like institutions, laws, customs, manners etc. So like advent of new settlers and conquerorssince early periodhave saved English society from stagnation. If the country includes many islands and regions, its population consists of several racial elements like Iberians, Celtics, Romans, Saxons, Danish, Normans etc.

Early Settlements and Invasions

The knowledge about the earliest inhabitant of Britain is derived wholly from the material remains that have been uncovered by archaeological research. The classification of these inhabitants is consequently based upon the types of material culture that characterized them in the successive stages. The earliest inhabitants of Great Britain belonged mainly two long periods; Palaeolithic and Neolithic. The people of Palaeolithic period (around 30,000 BC) were short of stature, averaging about five feet, long armed and short legged, with low fore heads and poorly developed chin. They lived in the open, under rock shelters or later in caves. We know nothing about the language of Palaeolithic culture.

Neolithic is likewise a convenient term to designate the people who possess a superior kind of stone implement, often polished and a higher culture (around 5000 BC). The people of this period belonged to the Mediterranean race. It was a dark race of slightly larger stature than the Palaeolithic population. Technologically they had an advanced culture. They started domestication of animals and elementary agriculture. They made crude pottery and did a little weaving. Like Palaeolithicpeople, their language has also not survived.

The stone ages were followed by metal ages. The Bronze Age in England is believed to have begun about 2000 BC. A little before the dawn of the metal age, there appeared a new race of people called the Iberians. Their original home land was Africa. They were dark haired and short statured people.

The Iberian element is predominant in the blood of the people of Wales, Scotland and Ireland. The Celts came to Britain a few centuries before the beginning of Christian era. Several waves of Celtic immigrants reached Britain. They were tall and golden haired. There were several tribes among them especially Britons. Great Britain owes her name to the Britons. Celts were the first people in Britain about whose language we have definite knowledge. Celtic was probably the first Indo-European tongue to be spoken in Britain.

The Celtic tribes defeated the Iberians and drove them in to the north west of the country. When new people like the Teutons came, the Celts also were driven out from the fertile south eastern part of Britain. In the course of time the Celts and Iberians got themselves mingled and mixed. Latin language was introduced when Britain became a province of the Roman Empire (43AD). Later the Anglo Saxons took the place vacated by the Romans. In the 9th and 10th century, there came another set of invaders; the Danes and Normans, the later were the last conquerors of the British Islands. All these groups mingled and mixed each other through the centuries.

Roman Conquest

The first great event in the history of Britain is the invasion of Julius Caesar in 55 BC. Julius Caesar had been sent, in 58 BC, by the Roman Republics to conquer Gaul (France). During his wars in Gaul, he noticed that the tribes in Britain were helping their friends in Gaul and hence he decided to punish them. Moreover, by conquering Britain he could expect to win glory, fame and loot. In 55 BC, he attacked Britain and partly conquered it. After obtaining the nominal subjugation of the Celtic rulers, Caesar returned to Rome. But the complete conquest and subjugation of Britain were left to Caesar's successors. It was in 43 AD that the Emperor Claudius decided to undertake the actual conquest of the island. He made Britain a Roman province and appointed a governor.

The successive Roman rulers in Britain accomplished the complete subjugation of the Britain. But during the 5th century AD, the barbarians began to attack the Roman Empire from many quarters. The very seat of Roman Empire in Italy were threatened. Under such a condition, the Roman emperor was forced to withdraw the imperial legions from Britain for the purpose of self-defence (410 AD). Thus, the Roman rule in Britain came to an abrupt end with the withdrawal of the legions. Soon the Saxons, the Angles and the Jutes began to occupy the British Islands.

Results Of Roman Conquest

The Roman occupation was largely but not exclusively, a military occupation especially in the north and west. There was no general introduction of complete Roman civic life. The military system introduced by the Romans was retained to some extent even after their withdrawal. There was a great increase in the number of towns and trading centres as a result of Roman rule. Many buildings such as temples, houses and baths were constructed. They also constructed four great high ways and a number of lesser roads. Although the Roman roads were originally made for military purposes, they facilitated the growth of commerce. A score of small cities and more than a hundred towns testify to the introduction of Roman habits of life.

The houses built during the Roman rule were equipped with heating apparatus and water supply. Their floors were paved in mosaic and walls were of painted stucco. Roman dress, Roman ornaments, Roman pottery and glass ware seem to have been in general use. The Romans were reputed for their "Pax Romana" or Roman Peace which improved their social life. Agriculture, lead mining, iron mining etc. were improved. Latin language was introduced in the country. A

great number of inscriptions have been found, all of them in Latin. Roman historian Tacitus tells us that in the time of Agricola, the Britons who had hitherto shown only hostility to the language of their conquerors now became eager to speak it. Christianity was introduced into Britain during the Roman rule by the Christian soldier from Gaul. It spread in Britain in the 2nd century AD and became a leading religion in the 3rd century AD. The Christian church at Silchester is a relic of that Christianity. Another result of Roman conquest was that Britain was opened to the world. She was forcibly made a part of the civilized world. The Roman writers and historians could write about the Britons and their life. Such writings are very much useful as a source material.

Advent Of Christianity

Christianity had been introduced in Britain in the 4th century AD; during the time of the Roman emperor Constantine. However, the Anglo-Saxons invaders (invaded Britain in 410 AD) were fierce heathens who took delight in massacring the Christians in Britain and sacking their churches and cathedrals. In spite of it, Christianity was not completely wiped out. The local priests continued to do their work in their own way. Christianity preached by them is known as Celtic Christianity or Wales Christianity. Celtic Christians were very sincere to their religious beliefs and practices but they did not possess the organization of Roman Christianity. When the differences between Celtic and Roman Christianity emerged, a Synod was convened in 664 AD at Whitby (Synod of Whitby) to settle the issues. After the Synod of Whitby Roman Christianity strengthened her hold in England. Pope sent Theodore of Tarsus as Archbishop of Canterbury and later he organized English church on the Roman model. So like St. Patrick carried Christianity to Ireland in 420 AD and St. Columba to Scotland.

Celtic Christianity was already making headway in northern England when the attention of the Pope of Rome was drawn to the necessity and desirability of spreading Christianity in Britain. Soon many Roman missionaries landed in the country. In 597 AD Pope Gregory the Great deputed a band of missionaries headed by a Benedictine Monk, St. Augustine. St. Augustine was cordially invited by Ethelbert, the king of Kent. Ethelbert and his people were brought to the fold of the church by the efforts of St. Augustine who later became its first Archbishop.

The conversion of the rest of England was a gradual process. Edwin, the powerful Northumbrian king married a daughter of Ethelbert, and thereby the new faith spread northward. After the death of the pagan king Penda, Mercia was also converted. Other Saxon kingdoms soon accepted the faith and within a hundred years of the landing of Augustine in Kent, all England was Christianised.

Formation of England: Anglo Saxon Period

The Anglo-Saxons were a people who inhabited Great Britain from the 5th Century AD. Their period includes the creation of an English nation with many of the aspects that survive today including regional government of shires and hundreds, the re-establishment of Christianity, a flowering in literature, the establishment of charters and law and the English language. It was in the year 449 AD that the Anglo-Saxons (Germanic Tribes) invaded Great Britain and transformed it into England, the land of Anglo-Saxons.

The traditional accounts of the Germanic invasions go back to 'Anglo Saxon chronicles' and Venerable Bede. Venerable Bede, the first English historian, tells us that the Germanic tribe that conquered Britain were Jutes, Saxons and the Angles. They were originally the Anglo-Saxons in habitants of Schleswig and the surrounding areas between Germany and Denmark. They all talked the English language. Thus common language (English) and common blood (Teutons) made them a single people. They knew nothing about civilization and had little respect for the civilized. Finding pleasure in destruction they completely wiped out the Roman British civilization and made British their permanent home.

Society and Culture

The striking features of English social life have developed from the social habits and customs of Anglo-Saxons. They are the originators of present village. The society was divided into four classes like Eorls (noble man), Ceorls (free man owned land), Leats (free man having no land) and The owas (slaves). The freedom of a man and his social status according to the Anglo Saxon conception depended on the holding of the land. The main occupation of the Anglo Saxon was the agriculture as they mainly lived in rural areas. The whole village was divided into three sections which were used to cultivate bread crop (wheat), drink crop (barley) and the remaining section left fallow. In addition to agriculture, they practiced carpentry, smithery and cottage industries.

The Anglo Saxon had brought with them certain important social and military institutions, a governmental system and an agricultural system. They established a complete system of administration in the form of village and shires (group of villages). Each village was under a sheriff appointed by the King. Every town had a town council called town moot. The highest assembly of the Anglo Saxon period was The WITAN (assembly of wise men). The Anglo-Saxon followed a severe judicial system. The punishments were awarded on the basis of the social status of the individual. There was no centralized judicial law. If a large number of men saw that a man was innocent, he was left free. The popular method of trial was Trial by compurgation and trial by ordeal. Anglo Saxon had numerous Gods and Goddesses and celebrated many festivals in honour of them. They were also fond of jewellery and had appropriate songs and ballads for marriage, harvest and funerals.

The Anglo Saxon chronicle is a venerated monument of old English prose. The chronicles were written by many hands. It deals with the history of England up to the 9th century AD. King Alfred the Great was a part of the chronicles. The portion dealing with the Danish invasion is a master piece of historical narrative. Widsith, Genesis, Exodus, Christ and Satan etc. are the important Anglo Saxon poems. Venerable Bede, the first English historian, was a prominent prose writer of the Anglo Saxon period. His favourite pursuits were history, astronomy, lives of the martyrs and saints. He is the author of famous work "Ecclesiastical history of the English people". Though writing in Latin, Bede set to English the model of a simple, lucid and unsophisticated style.

Alfred the Great

Alfred was the youngest son of Ethelwulf, who became the ruler of England in 871 AD. His period is considered as the Golden age in Saxon history. As warrior, administrator and scholar, Alfred towered above all. In many respects Alfred deserves to be called The Great and he is the only ruler in English history so called. Alfred started his reign with a legacy of war with Danes. He suffered a temporary defeat from the hands of the Danes at Wilton. But in 878 AD, he successfully defeated them in the battle of Eddington and the treaty of Wedmore paved the way for the peaceful co-existence of the Saxons and Danes. As an administrator and statesman, Alfred rendered valuable service to the countrymen. He organised the militia on a new basis and made it more effective. He began the English Navy and gave order to build long ships.

When peace was established in the country, Alfred became English school master. Many schools and monasteries were set up in various parts of the empire. As a scholar Alfred translated "History of the world" (Orosius) and Ecclesiastical History of the English People" (Bede). He had very great interest in history and was a part author of Anglo-Saxon chronicles. Alfred decided to have a national chronicle, a record of the public life of the nation, which was begun with his own

hand and kept up to date by the members of the certain monasteries. He built schools for boys and sent monks to teach in these schools.

Alfred imitated the Danes in the matters of town. The Danes had built towns and used them as forts against the enemy. Alfred also did the same. He established around 45 forts on Danish frontier to check the Danish invaders. To ensure order and good government, Alfred also revised the laws of predecessors and codified them. He re-enacted the existing laws and modified them by applying mosaic laws and teachings of Christianity. He anxiously aimed at the moral and material improvement of his people. Because of his efforts to build a strong nation, Alfred has rightly been called "Wessex darling" by the Chroniclers.

Advent of the Danes

From the close of the 8th Century AD, Danes began to invade England. They are called by various names like Northman, Scandinavians, Vikings and Normans as they came mainly from Denmark and Norway. Danes came to England in their ships in the same way as the Anglo Saxon had come earlier. They were poor and cruel and attacked cities, monasteries and killed women, old men and children. The Danes settled in France came to be called as Norsemen and their territory in France as Normandy. Historians have divided the Danish invasion of England in to three periods. First Period (786-851 AD)-was a period of attack and plundering of England. Second Period (851-896 AD)-was a period of Danish settlement in England. Third Period (980-1042 AD)-was characterised by the attacks made to conquer England and to rule it from Denmark.

The arrival of Danes had its own effects on the political and social history of the Britain. Their attacks paved the way for the national unification. The weakened Saxon kingdoms were found to accept the leadership of Wessex to resist the Danes. Another important result was the Division of England in to two; west Saxon territory and Dane Low. The Danes put the Teutonic blood in to Anglo Saxon race. Many Danish words were introduced in England. Their invasion also influenced the foreign policy of English Kings ; which also gave impetus to maritime activity. The English people began to realise the necessity of ship building to resist the Danes and thus a beginning was made in the building of British Navy. One of the principle results of the Danish invasion was the growth of towns which became great centres of Trade and commerce. They built many towns and used them as forts against their enemies. An adverse result of their attack was the decline religion and learning.

Norman Conquest

The Norman Conquest was an epoch making event in the British History. The rulers of Normandy had originally been Scandinavian Vikings. They occupied parts of Northern France (Normandy) and in the early 10th century AD, they were recognized by the French Crown. By the middle of 11th century AD, they lost their Scandinavian speech, instead spoke French and were essentially French in culture.

During the reign of English king Edward the Confessor, Harold the Earl of Wessex happened to visit Normandy. William, the Duke of Normandy had a hope to become the king of England after the death of childless Edward and Harold offered to help him in this matter. But the Witan (Body of elders) in obedience to the dying words of the Edward elected Harold as the King. The infuriated William landed

in England with a mighty army in 1066 AD. Harold could not get the whole hearted support of the all nobles. So in the historic Battle of Hastings fought in 1066 AD, Harold, last of the Saxon kings, was defeated and William the conqueror became the new king of England. Since

William also continued to be the duke of Normandy, there was a steady flow of people between England and Normandy.

Results of Norman Conquest

The Norman Conquest was a turning point in the history of England. The immediate result of the Norman Conquest was that the government passed from the hands of the English to those of the Normans and Norman barons and knights. The Anglo Saxon nobility was completely destroyed and most of the English men became vassals. England lost her royal dynasty and she also lost her freedom. King William had to curb the power of those elements which threatened the security of his rule. Each rebellion was followed by confiscation of English lands and these lands were rewarded to his Norman followers. All rebellions were suppressed and the feudal system was encouraged. The Norman feudal system completely altered the face of England.

The first great change made by the Norman Conquest was that England came in to close contact with what was happening in Europe. The English began to display great interest in intellectual, political and religious movement in Europe. Kings and people began to play an important part in France, in the policies of Europe and even in the crusades. The trade of England goes very much affected. Merchants from England began to travel all over Europe and were able to set up their trade relations in the countries with which they came in to contact. Jews came and settled in England. An immediate result of the conquest had been a great immigration of Normans in to England. They all gradually mixed with English people. Norman conquest supplied England an illustrious line of able rulers. They used new feudalism to attain national unity. Most of the institutions which are the pride of English men today like representative assembly (Magna Carta), universities, juries and the common law was acquired during these periods of foreign rule and influence. Domesday Book and Oath of Salisbury are the other results.

The Church of England came in to close contact with the church of Rome. They reformed the English church and made it the real leader of the people in morals, learning and in charity. Ecclesiastical courts were separated from the secular courts. Church encouraged education, art and architecture. Schools started in all monasteries where Latin was taught. Large numbers of cathedrals were built in Norman's time. Thus church began to play a vital role in the lives of the people. The Norman Conquest also profoundly affected learning in England. The Latin language began to be studied with great interest. Latin and French became the official language of the government. Under French influence, English language was completely changed. The two languages gradually merged in to what is known as Middle English. Trevelyan points out that one outcome of the Norman conquest was the making of the English language. On the whole, it can be said that the Norman conquest was a very important event in the history of England. It revolutionised everything in the country. Although English men suffered for sometimes as a result of the Norman conquest, their initial loss were more than made up later.

William The Conqueror

William I's real claim to the English throne rested on his victory in the battle of Hastings in 1066 AD against Harold. However the defeat of Harold alone did not result in the submission of all the English men. As a matter of fact, there were many revolts in south-west, Mercia and Northumbria and one by one they were all ruthlessly suppressed. Each revolt was followed by fresh confiscation of land possessed by the English nobility. The land thus captured was used for rewarding William's own Norman followers. At the same time he had to make himself master of both English and Normandy. To the English William was a foreign ruler. So in order to secure his position, William decided to confiscate the land of rebels by suppressing the uprisings with an

iron hand, by developing the feudal system and by using the English against his own rebellious barons.

Norman Brand of Feudalism

Feudalism was a socio-political and economic system which developed in medieval Europe after the downfall of Western Roman Empire. The word feudalism is derived from the Latin word 'feud' which means 'fief' or a portion of land. In feudalism land played an important role. It was the basis of the relationship between the land lord and the vassal. Theoretically, in feudalism, the king was the owner of the whole land. But it was actually controlled by the feudal lords. Then the land lord gave some land to a person called Vassal who was required to take an oath of allegiance which bonds the vassal and the land lord. As a result, the land lord assured him full protection from every aggression and disturbances. In return for protection, the vassal was expected to give military services, attend lord's court when summoned and to give money grants etc.

The lords everywhere lived a happy luxurious life. Their lands were cultivated by the serfs. They could not sell or mortgage the land but go on tilling that throughout the life. Not only this, the land lords could levy taxes on them and punish them of their offences. Under feudalism a feudal lord had two courts; one for the nobles and the other for the vassals & other tenants. From these courts a new type of legal system evolved. All the feudal lords were supposed to be loyal to the king but as the time passed they posed a great threat to his authority. The knights enjoyed a significant position in the feudalism. He was the son of a noble and it was at the age of 21 that he got knighthood. His main duty was to fight and as such his prestige and position depended on his ability to handle weapon as an expert.

At the top of the Norman Feudal hierarchy was the king. In the feudal relationship the king was the suzerain, or lord, of a group of dukes and counts who were his vassals. Each of these vassals was in turn lord to lesser vassals, who had even less important vassals. At the bottom of the pyramid were the knights, who had no vassals. Lord and vassal, owed certain obligations to each other. Serf, who were tied with land, occupied the bottom section of feudal hierarchy. In Britain Normans rendered Feudalism in to a rigid system in which the rights and duties of lords, free men and serfs were clearly defined.

Oath of Salisbury

Oath of Salisbury was one of the anti-feudal measures taken by William the conqueror. He wanted to remedy some of the defects of English feudalism. A universal defect of feudalism was the weakness of the royal authority. One reason for this was the absence of royal control over the sub tenants. They held their estate from their over lords called tenants in chief. Therefore the sub tenants were not directly responsible for the king who was theoretically the central authority. In order to make sub tenant loyal to the royal person, William 1st and others gathered on the Salisbury plain, Wiltshire in 1086 AD. The king himself administered an oath of Loyalty. The Barons and chief land lords who took the pledge were morally bound to be loyal to the king.

The Dooms Day Book

The Domesday Book is a manuscript record of the "Great Survey" of much of England and parts of Wales completed in 1086 by order of King William the Conqueror. The Domesday Book is the result of an attempt to strengthen king's hold on the feudal barons and their subordinates. It marked the beginning of an ordered financial system. It was an enquiry into the wealth and resources of England. The dooms day survey is probably the first of its kind ever made. It served at once two purposes; fiscal and political. Politically it helped William to ascertain the tax that was due to him from every land holder in his realm. Assessment of tax was based on the findings of the royal surveyors. The decisions were final and incontrovertible like the verdict of God on the last judgement Day and hence

the name of Doom's Day Book. As a historical record, dooms day book is a valuable account to know the economic and social condition of ancient Britain under Normans.

Earldom

An Earl is a member of the nobility. In Anglo-Saxon England, Earls had authority over their own regions and right of judgment in provincial courts as delegated by the king. They collected fines and taxes. In wartime they led the king's armies. Some shires were grouped together into larger units known as Earldom, headed by an ealdorman or earl. Under Edward the confessor, earldoms like Wessex, Mercia, East Anglia and Northumbria were much larger than any shire. Earls originally functioned essentially as royal governors. Though the title of Earl was nominally equal to the continental duke, unlike them Earls were not de facto rulers in their own right. After the Norman Conquest, William the conqueror tried to rule England using the traditional system but eventually modified it to his own liking. Shires became the largest secular subdivision in England and earldoms disappeared. The Normans did create new earls like those of Herefordshire, Shropshire and Cheshire but they were associated with only a single shire at most. Under the Normans, Earls no longer aided in tax collection or made decisions in country courts and their numbers were small.

MODULE II

MEDIEVAL HISTORY

Medieval Social Formations

The social history of England tells us many social changes over the centuries. The Medieval British social formation was characterized by the contributions of Anglo Saxons, Anglo-Normans and the developments in the later middle ages. Though pagans, the later phase of Anglo Saxon influence on English society saw some of the developments in education, literature and social life. Medieval English society was dominated by Clergies, knights and peasants. Most of the land were owned by these groups. But after the Norman Conquest, society seemed fixed and unchanging for several centuries. Feudalism was the order of medieval society. Everything in the society was determined by the land and the relationships between lord and vassal. Church also exerted a lot of influence in the society through crusades and its monasteries. As a whole England remained mainly a rural society during the medieval period.

Manorial System

Manorial system dominated the early middle Age's social, economic and political life. The manor firstly emerged in the Carolingian times and continued to be a dominant form of agrarian, social and economic organization in most of the north western countries till the end of the 13th century. In feudalism the basic unit of land was called manor. A manor had the appearance of a small village in which proprietor lived in the largest house which was located at the most advantageous position. It was situated at a sufficient distances from the houses of tillers.

The manorial system was different from the feudal system. Basically it was an economic system in which large estates were worked by the serfs. Agriculture was the main occupation of the people but the cultivation methods were very rude. Open field system was generally practiced in the agricultural area. The land available for the cultivation was divided into three. One was used for full planting, another one third for spring planting and the remaining one third left uncultivated for the purpose of increasing the fertility of the land. For providing fuel to the men, a part of the land was kept as woodland. Similarly these used to be common land which was used for rearing the cattles.

The land of the lord was cultivated by the serfs. They lived in cottages away from the castle, in a life of poverty. It was his duty to maintain contacts with his master. For his safety of his life and property of his lord was of paramount power. The serfs could not be sold in the markets but at the same time they could not leave a manor without the permission of his land lord. When a manor was transferred to another land lord with them serfs also transferred. For them decisions of the manorial court was final and they could not make any appeal against it they were expected to cultivate their own land as well as that of his lord honestly and timely and not allow it to be damaged by the animals. Again, each serfs had required to pay one third of his produce to the church.

Under manorial system every effort was made to make the manor a self-sufficient unit. Manorial lord was the head of the administration, who was assisted by stewards (manager), bailiffs (supervising serfs works), reeves (accountant) and Heyward (supervised of harvest). Thus,

manorial system because of its division in extreme, was a cause of concern for the society and because of exploitation, it was disliked by the society. It came to an end as feudalism decayed. =

Church Mechanism

Roman Catholic Church is one of the major institutions in the medieval period. The term church is used to mean the Christian organization or Christian society or community following the religion of Christianity. In the beginning Christians were considered as a forbidden class and they were not allowed public worship. But Roman emperor Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the empire. Since then Christianity began to spread throughout the world. Soon Roman Catholic Church became the most powerful institution in the world. It had controlled the whole aspects of human life.

The period from 1073 to 1517 is the time in history when the Roman Catholic Church held a death grip on everything and rose to its greatest heights as an ecclesiastical organization. This is also a period in which the Papacy (Government of Church) freed itself from the secular rule and became the dominant force in European politics and religious life. This period also showed a few glimpses of light, but most of it is a tale of corruptions and chaos and is a great blot on all who call themselves Christians. The corruptive condition of the church showed the great need for reformation within the church.

The domination of Roman Catholic Church also resulted in its quarrels with the Norman Britain. The successors of William the Conqueror had been successful in suppressing the power of the nobles. But the church still stood outside the royal jurisdiction. It defied the king in anyway. Hence Henry II, the British ruler was determined to bring the church under his sway. The introduction of the practices like simony (selling of religious offices) and lay investiture (receive high posts of church from king) etc. were opposed by the churchmen. The leaders of the church wanted to make it an institution completely independent of the state. This resulted in the quarrel between church and state.

Incidents associated with the king Henry and Thomas Becket is worth to mention here. Henry made his friend Thomas Becket as the Archbishop of famous Canterbury church hoping that Becket would change the existing law which exempts priests from trial. Henry and Becket had a big argument on this matter and finally Becket ran away to France. Later he came back to England and continued his pro church policy which finally led to his murder (1170) by the soldiers of Henry. Soon Becket was hailed as a martyr and saint by all. The murder of the archbishop shocked the whole of Christendom. Henry was forced to yield. Thus Becket's martyrdom preserved the privileges of the clergy. His tomb at Canterbury became the greatest of English shrines.

Magna Carta

Magna Carta is an English Charter which limited the powers of English Monarch from absolute rule. It was first issued on June 15, 1215 at the meadows of Runnymede. Magna Carta or Great Charter is also called as Magna Carta Libertatum. It was written in Latin because generally writing in the middle ages was in Latin. Magna Carta was the result of disagreement between the Pope and the King and his barons over the rights of the king. The Magna Carta required the king to renounce certain rights and respect certain legal procedure and to accept that the will of the king could be bound by law. Magna Carta is widely considered to be the first step in a long historical process leading to the rule of constitutional law.

After the Norman conquest in 1066 and advances in the 12th century, the English king had by 1199AD became the most powerful monarch Europe had ever seen. This was due to a number of factors including the procedures of the new Norman rulers. However after King John took power in the Early 13th Century, a series of stunning failures on his part led the barons of England to revolt and place checks on the King's unlimited power. King John's period witnessed the lack of respect for the Kingship due to his failure in the battle of Bovines (1214) with France and his dispute with church over the appointment of the Office of the archbishop of Canterbury. The struggle between king John and Church went on for several years during which England was placed under a sentence of interdict and finally John was forced to submit to the will of the Church in 1213.

There was a general opposition to the King John. The barons were disappointed on account of the loss of their power through the growth of absolute Monarchy. They had suffered on account of cruel punishment by the king, heavy taxations, harsh exercise of feudal rights and also from his immoral conduct. Now it was time for the discontented clergy and barons to assemble together under the leadership of the Archbishop and enumerated their demands in the form a charter. They met at a place called Runnymede on 15th June 1215 AD, and the archbishop presented the document to the king who was forced to sign in it.

Magna Carta is composed of 63 clauses or articles, the majority of which are very specific to the 13th century and of temporary importance. A large part of Magna Carta was copied from the charter of liberties of Henry 1 which bounded the king to certain laws regarding the treatment of church officials and nobles, effectively granting certain civil liberties to the church and the English nobility. The charter also repealed certain royal taxes that were unpopular and reduced the amount of hunting land that was royal. Article 39 says that king must judge individuals according to the law and not on the basis of his will.

Magna Carta is an important landmark in the history of England and English people because it is the bedrock upon which the noble edifice of the English constitution was built. It is the starting point of the English man's democratic freedom, the voice of a nation against aristocracy and oppression. That is why the charter is often described as the key stone of 'English liberties or the Bible of the English Constitution'.

Crusades

The Crusades were a series of holy wars fought by the Christians of Europe against the Moslems of Turkey in between 11th to 13th century. It got its name from the fact that the Christians took the Cross as their emblem in these holy wars. The main reason for the crusades was the persecution meted out to the Christians of Palestine from the hands of Turkish Moslems who held Palestine including the holy city of Jerusalem in the 11th & 12th Century. The Christian countries of Europe, in spite of their diversity in language and culture, had united to fight for the interest of Christians. All the monarchs and Christian population felt it was a common issue touching their faith itself and they were only glad to die to protect their faith. The papal invocation for the crusades got a thunderous welcome from all over the Europe to march against the infidels ruling over the holy places.

Of all the crusades the first one (1097-99AD) was the most successful one because Christians took back Jerusalem from the hands of the Turkish Muslims. The second crusades was fought in 1147 AD when the Muslims captured one of the Christians kingdom in Palestine. The first two crusades passed without England's participation. The third crusades was fought in 1189

AD when the Holy city was captured by Seljuk Turks under their leader Saladin in 1187 AD. England took the leadership at this under the king Richard 1st. The fourth crusades (1202) were not a crusades in the real sense of the word. It was a war between Venice & Constantinople for commercial supremacy.

English participation in the third crusades was minimal and Richard 1st was the only king of England to participate in it personally. In 1189 AD, Richard's army defeated Turks at Acre, and though they failed to take Jerusalem, peace was made with the Turkish king Saladin over Christian access to the Holy city. The bravery of Richard won for him the title of "the Lion hearted". Medieval and modern story tellers have been attracted by his reckless valour, great personal strength and amazing adventures. With his death (1199AD) crusading zeal in England diminished. However, Englishmen participated almost in all the crusades either in official capacities or as private citizens.

Results

The crusades were failures as the Holy City was never freed from the Muslims. But the Crusades had a drastic effect on the English society. Money was required to recover the Holy land from the Muslims. From time to time new taxes (For Ex:Saladdin tax) were levied for the purpose of the crusades. The crusades stimulated the curiosity for the explorations in the 16th century. It strengthened the hands of the monarchs and weakened the nobility which also hastened the destruction of the feudalism. There was also a growth of towns in Europe especially in Britain. The trading centers were able to buy several privileges in the form of charters from the king or lords who needed money for the crusades. The English towns after obtaining freedom developed their organizations and activities on independent lines.

Crusades gave a new impetus to trade and commerce. The crusades opened new trade routes or reopened old ones long blocked by the Saracens. There was interchange of ideas too between the East and West. Several good aspects of the oriental civilization stimulated the western thought greatly. The English language also was benefited by the crusades. The religious wars helped the introduction of several Arabic or Eastern words. The crusades also brought the custom of using the surnames into the western world.

Hundred Year's War

Hundred year 's war was a long drawn out war between the French and the English from 1337 to 1453. It is true that it was not a continuous war but sometimes there was war and other times was peace. At times one party had the upper hand and other times the second party. However the relationship between the French and the England were unfriendly for about hundred years. It was the first European war that can be called national.

The main cause of these intermittent wars was the desire of the French king to drive England out of their realm and the attempt of the English monarchs to retain their vast possessions in France. Edward, the English king wanted to regain the lost possessions of English territory in France especially Normandy, Maine, Calaise etc. The French king on the other hand wanted to deprive England of Gascony and Flanders; the two important trading centres of British goods like wine and wool. The commercial rivalry between England and France also led to these wars. However the immediate reason for the outbreak of hostilities between England and France was the attempt of Philip VI of France to oust the English from the duchies of Gascony and Guienne.

The war that broke out in 1337 lasted with occasional break till 1453 AD. This war covered the reigns of five English kings; Edward III, Richard II, Henry IV, Henry V and Henry VI. The first great victory was scored by England in the battle of Crecy and Poitiers in 1360. This was followed by a time of set backs. The tide of war turned towards France with the advent of Joan of Arc in the middle of 1440s. Gradually England lost everything and French attained ultimate victory.

The Hundred year's war produced many consequences in both countries. The war created fighting instincts among the people. Now the people became brute, irreligious and immoral. The barons who took great pleasure in war did not lead a peaceful life in England even after defeat in France. They fought each other at home and this ultimately led to the wars of the Roses. Further the war arrested the moral, economic and social development of both in England and France. It engendered national spirit and patriotism in England, for England fought as one nation against France. The feeling against the French helped to put an end to the subordination of English to the French Culture which the Norman Conquest had established. After the war, the French was regarded as an enemy language and it was considered to be unpatriotic to use the same. This led to the disappointment of French

language from England and its replacement by English.

To England, the loss of French territory was a blessing in disguise in one respect. Instead of wasting time, energy, and money in a foreign country, English people now turned their attention to improve their country through trade and commerce. When England failed on land, she turned to the sea and in the course of time became a great naval and colonial power. Another result of the war was the growth of the power of Parliament during the hundred year's war. The war was an expensive one and the kings of England did not possess a lot of money. The result was that they had to depend more and more on parliament for the grant of fund.

Decline of Feudalism

Feudalism saw the beginning of its decline during the late middle Ages. As a system based on land feudalism declined due to the inherent weaknesses. The factors which contributed to the decline of feudalism are as follows:-

Growth of trade and Commerce:- During the 12th and 13th centuries, the use of money, rather than goods, as a means of exchange led to a revival of commerce. A merchant class developed, renting land in places suitable for trade. These settlements often became thriving marketplaces for all sorts of goods. For a fee, a commercial settlement could obtain a charter from the local lord, establishing it as a town and giving it the authority to govern itself. Many lords were willing to grant charters to ensure a market for agricultural produce nearby. So this weakened the feudal system.

Decline of Serfdom:- The revival of commerce and the widespread use of money altered the relations between feudal lord and serf. Lords began to rent out their lands to tenant farmers. Some serfs, by engaging in trade, were able to substitute a money payment for their feudal obligations and become tenant farmers. The labour shortage and the rise in wages caused by the Black Death in the 14th century led some nobles to temporarily forbid the substitution of money

payments for feudal obligations. By the end of the Middle Ages, however, many serfs had become able to purchase their freedom and most feudal lords had become landlords.

Rise of Royal Power:-As stability and security in Europe were gradually restored during the Middle Ages, the demand for a feudal knight's military service declined. At relatively low cost, monarchs were able to assemble large mercenary armies, which they used to conquer feudal domains and to re-establish royal authority.

Apart from the above said factors, the following were the reasons for the decline of feudalism in England.

- 1- The Crusades and travel during the middle Ages opened new trade options to England.
- 2- England started to move from land based economy to a money based economy.
- 3- The Black Death reduced the population of England by one third. Labour became a valuable commodity.
- 4- The Peasants Revolt - Peasants realised their worth and demanded changes. Charters were granted but ignored by nobles.
- 5- More trade saw the growth of more towns.
- 6- Peasants moved away from the country into towns they were eventually allowed to buy their freedom.
- 7- Land was rented and the rights of lords over labour decreased.
- 8- The Feudal Levy was unpopular and as time went by Nobles preferred to pay the King rather than to fight and raise troops.
- 9- Armed men were paid a wage and medieval warfare was financed by taxes and loans.
- 10- Nobles became weaker - the Kings took back their lands and power.
- 11- A centralised government was established.

All of these factors led to the end of feudalism as a system of government. In England the Wars of the Roses (1455–1485) weakened the nobility and led to the establishment of strong monarchical rule by the Tudor dynasty. Still, the idea of government as an agreement between ruler and ruled owes much to the lord-vassal relationship. Political units such as counties and parishes, and local offices such as sheriff, constable, and bailiff, reflect feudal origins. Many rules of etiquette originated as part of the feudal knight's code of chivalry.

Black Death

Black Death was a terrible and widespread outbreak of Plague that ravaged Europe during the 14th Century. The epidemic originated in Asia and was transmitted to Europeans in 1347 when a Turkish army besieging a Genoese trading post in the Crimea. During their siege, Turkish Army catapulted plague infested corpses into the town. It spread from the Mediterranean ports and ravaged all of Europe between 1347 and 1351. Renewed outbreaks of plague occurred in 1361-63, 1369-71, 1374-75 and 1390 and 1400.

In England, Black death carried off at least one third of the population. Outbreak of pestilences was very common in those days as the people had little knowledge of hygiene and sanitations. Some of the villages were completely emptied; many monasteries and parishes became desolate. Few parts of the England escaped altogether but the violence of the first plague was severe by the end of 1349. A second and less severe visitation of plague followed in 1361 and a third in 1369.

Apart from the terrible loss of life, the plague had far reaching effects which influenced the social and economic life of the English people. There was acute shortage of labourers and therefore sheep farming that required few labourers was adopted by land lords. They converted many acres of arable land into pasture land and England began to export wool to abroad which made the nation rich. After the Black Death there was a shortage of labour and consequently many landlords began to hire extra labourers. The hired labourers demanded higher wages but the landlords resisted. Statutes of Labourers were passed in 1349 and 1351 to meet the situation. Infact the peasant revolt of 1381 was an indirect result of the Black death.

As a large number of clergy men died, many new clergy men had to be ordained. To meet the demand for additional clergymen, new religious houses were founded and many colleges were set up at oxford and Cambridge to train the secular priests. Black death also stimulated tenant farming; many land lords began to give away land for an annual rent for cultivating purposes.

Peasant's Revolt

The most important event of the reign of English King Richard II was the Peasants Revolt of 1381. There were many causes for the outbreak of the peasant's revolt of 1381. There was a lot of discontentment in the country on account of the efforts of the land lords to enforce the statute of laborers which were very harsh and completely ignored the situation created in the country as a result of the Black death. The workers did not get a fare wage. Besides the prices had risen and it was impossible for the laborers to accept the low wages which were wholly insufficient for their existence. The government also imposed new taxes on the people to meet the expenses of the hundred year's war and the people were not willing to pay them as the govt was not pursuing the war with success. The imposition of poll tax in 1380 was the immediate cause of the revolt of 1381. The writings of John Wycliffe have had an indirect influence on the peasant's revolt. He influenced the revolt by preaching the doctrine of equality of men before God and his attack on the wealth of clergy. Under these circumstances the people's anger burst into flames. Revolts took place in different places especially in London, Kent, Canterbury etc. Taylor, Canterbury Archbishop, John ball were some of the leaders of the revolts.

As regards to the results of the peasants revolts of 1381, it seemed to be an utter failure. But in the long run it was responsible for the complete disappearance of Villeinage from the England. The land lord started paying higher wages to the hired laborers. Those who were not willing to pay higher wages took to sheep farming and converted their arable land into pastures for sheep. In a way the revolt of 1381 changed the rural face of England and prepared the way for conditions under which land is let out at money rent.

Development Of Trade

In Medieval England, Towns were built on trade, and the elite of towns were the merchants. Merchant guilds controlled town government, though they often clashed with craft guilds for power. Merchants needed stability for trade, so they supported the king and the establishment of a strong central government against the rule of individual nobles. The king, for his part, encouraged the growth of towns and trade. Town charters became a major source of royal revenue. Eventually the growth of towns and guilds led to the breakdown of the manor-centered feudal society. Merchant Guilds controlled the trade in a town. Merchant guilds regulated prices, quality, weights and measures, and business practices. The power of the guilds was absolute in their domain, and to be expelled from a guild made it impossible to earn a living. Each guild had a patron saint, celebrated religious festivals together, put on religious plays, and looked after the health and welfare of the members and their families.

With guild system other trading activities in medieval England also grew substantially. Towns grew in number and size, and their inhabitants gained greater autonomy to run their affairs, both of which

laid the foundations of civic life. At the time of the Norman Conquest in 1100AD most trade tended to be episodic, and commercial institutions were weakly developed in England. Over the course of the 12th and 13th centuries these structures were transformed. Laws and legal institutions developed to facilitate trade, transport improved, demand for goods and services grew, the labor force became more diversified and specialized, and markets and fairs mushroomed. Towns boomed in size and number, and urban self-government, culture and confidence grew. The tumultuous climatic, demographic and social changes of the 14th century ushered in a paradoxical period of commercial retrenchment, rationalization and restructuring, and, perhaps, the first consumer boom.

MODULE III

NEW TRENDS IN MEDIEVAL ENGLAND.

Many institutions, trends, movements, art and literature considered to be part of modern life and culture of England trace their origins to the medieval period. The concept of darkness is not fully acceptable to the late phase of Medieval European history, for the feudal disintegration ultimately shattered the existing socio-cultural setup, and gradually Europe entered into a new phase of modern social formations. The similar type of developments happened in Britain too. The actual roots of modern education, the religious reform movements, and the new linguistic and literary developments lies in Medieval period of European history. The legacy of Medieval Christian Church, Universities, Lollards, Chaucer and others indicates the continuity of European culture from its Medieval phase to Modern phase.

Intellectual Development- Medieval Universities:

During early Medieval times education and learning were the monopoly of the Church, and their purpose was chiefly to train the students for ecclesiastic life and to instill in them a firm devotion to the Church and its creed. The Christian Monasteries were the chief centers of learning but the scope of education imparted there was very limited. From 8th c AD there was a revival of education due to the efforts of Charlemagne, the great Holy Roman Emperor. He established a palace school at his capital and it became a model for several Cathedral Schools in later years. The chief subjects taught in these schools were the seven liberal arts such as grammar, rhetoric, logic, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music. But the cathedral schools were incapable of teaching new concepts in mathematics and logic or professional subjects like law or medicine. A more elaborate institution was required to satisfy this demand and that was provided by University.

The term 'university' is derived from the Latin word 'universitas'; meaning a guild of learners, both students and teachers, who came together to study at a particular place. In Medieval times Universities were organized on two different patterns. The students themselves constituting the guild or corporation represented one pattern. In this pattern the students employed the teachers, paid their salaries and determined the service conditions of the teachers. The guild of teachers represented the second pattern and that included four faculties of arts, theology, law and medicine each headed by an elected dean. The head of the faculty of arts was also the head of the University and he was designated as Rector.

In a Medieval University curriculum consisted of seven liberal arts in addition to law, medicine, and theology. The first three of the liberal arts namely grammar, rhetoric, and logic (Trivium) were offered for a period of three to five years. After completing the study a student was conferred the bachelors degree. There after for the study of the other four liberal arts like

arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music (Quadrivium) another three to five years could be made use of. After the study a student would be conferred Masters Degree.

A Medieval University was usually an independent community. All University men were called 'Clerks'. They were exempted from paying taxes and rendering military services. The method of teaching was lecture method and students had to depend much upon such lecture classes since books and libraries were very rare. From the thirteenth century onwards colleges were formed and attached to the Universities. Like other European countries such as Italy and France England too produced great centers of learning during the Middle ages. Two great Universities emerged in England were the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. The Oxford University developed from a great school started in 1167 with the support of Henry II. The University of Cambridge was established in 1209 to help the scholars who fled from Oxford after a riot that occurred between townsmen and scholars of Oxford during the reign of King John. After the development of college system the two Universities came to have a network of colleges. These universities became the valuable centers of learning and became the centre of many significant religious, social, political, cultural and intellectual movements in succeeding phase of British history.

Anti-Clerical Movement- John Wycliffe.

The most powerful institution in Medieval period was the Church also known as the Ecclesia. Originally this institution was established for the moral monitoring of the Christian community. In the initial stage Church contributed too much to the development of Medieval man. It imposed a sense of order through a belief system and asked the believers to contribute to its development. But gradually the Church entered in worldly matters. A clear cut social division developed among the Christian community. The laymen separated from the clergymen. The Priestly class were exempted from paying taxes and rendering military services to the state and they were tried in ecclesiastical court. The material interest and the interference of the church in worldly matters led to the development of corruption among the priests. Many complexities originated in connection with the penetration of the Church into the non-religious domain. Some resistance movement developed against the malpractices of the Church in Medieval period. The Lollard movement started by John Wycliffe in the fourteenth century was an early reformist movement in this direction.

John Wycliffe (1330 - 1384) was an eminent Oxford based religious reformer and the early leader of English Reformation. As a priest and Professor at Oxford who taught theology and believed in the doctrine of predestination. In his estimation many members of the clerical order violated the Christian norms and were not fit for spiritual election. He openly criticized the Church and said that the humiliating agreement made by the English king John to pay tribute to the Pope need not to be honored. He supported the State and said that it was higher than the Church. Wycliffe declared that the Pope was unworthy to become the representative of God on earth, as he was anti-Christ in spirit. Monasticism, pilgrimages and sacraments were also criticized by him. According to him Bible was to be regarded as the only guide of Christians. He translated bible into English to enable the common man to understand it.

Wycliffe called upon the priest to lead simple and virtuous lives, and be worthy of becoming the servants of God. The priests who followed him were called Lollards or poor priests. They lolled mumbled prayers as they walked about. The Lollard movement was a movement with its aim to purify the church and make the clergy convinced of their faults. It also aimed at following the simple truth of Holy Scriptures, instead of giving too much importance to rituals,

prayer, and fasting. Wycliffe condemned the worldliness, wealth, and luxury of the church. He was able to exert a tremendous influence on all sections of societies. As he preached about 150 years before Martin Luther, he was called the Morning star of Reformation.

In 1377 Wycliffe was charged with heresy, but as public opinion strongly favored him, he escaped from trial. In 1378 he was deprived of priestly powers and in 1380 he was condemned as heretic. In 1382 he was expelled from Oxford. After his death in 1384, the Council of Constance condemned him in 1415, and his body was disinterred and cremated. But persecution could not crush Lollards completely. They continued their activities against some of the teachings and practices of the church. Thus Wycliffe and his poor priests prepared the ground for Reformation.

Middle English Language and Literature:

Latin was the language in which the cultured man of Norman times wrote. And French was the spoken in polite society. The Saxon tongue languished and there is little doubt that the Norman conquest did for a time militate against the development of English literature. Many Saxons wrote in French and the bulk of the prose was written in Latin. But gradually this trend was changed and in 14th & 15th centuries there took place a revival of English language and the upper classes began to use it. During Edward III's reign it replaced French in law courts. A statute of parliament enjoined that men of law 'should plead in their mother tongue. This consciousness was the result of the birth of nationalism and towards the beginning of the 15th century English was adopted as the universal medium of instruction. The revival of English language and the development of nationalism were two silent revolutions fraught with great significance.

The Medieval English was divided into several provincial dialects like Northumbrian, East and West Midland. The East Midland dialect triumphed over others and became the ancestor of modern English. Chaucer, Gower, Langland and many others contributed too much to this triumph.

John Gower (1330-1408)

John Gower was an English poet and a friend of Chaucer. He was a man of Kent and seems to have been a person of shrewd business instincts with a large amount of landed property in East Anglia. Some authorities say he was a lawyer. But his biographer G.C. Macaulay suggests that he made his money as a merchant. Some scholars point out that he was landlord with vested interests. However that may be, it is clear that about middle life he is concerned entirely with the management of his estates and the writing of books. Gower wrote in different languages like Latin, French and English.

Gower's chief works were *Speculum Hominis*, written in French; the *Vox Clamantis*, written in Latin; and the *Confessio Amantis*, written in English. The first is a poem of some 30,000 lines, somewhat in the nature of a Morality. The Vices and Virtues are classified and a picture of society is drawn. The *Vox Clamantis*, consists of seven books. Throughout the poem, politics and theology are intermingled. The author divides people into three classes: clerk, soldier and ploughman. He criticized the clergy and the corruption of the medieval church. His *Confessio Amantis* initially dedicated to Richard II but later on he substitutes the name of Henry IV. It is clear from the drift of the poem that the writer is opposed to the social reform. He believes in an aristocratic government and disapproves strongly of the vacillation of Richard II. The author uses

a number of stories with the definite intention of telling the people what are the rudiments of good morality. This was a long collection of exemplary tales of love. His last writing *Traite*, deals with love and marriage. It consists of a number ballads exhibiting many of the qualities shown in his earlier works. This work was addressed to married people.

Geoffrey Chaucer (1342-1400)

Geoffrey Chaucer, the great English poet was born in London in a middle class family, as son of a London wine merchant. Of middle class birth, he was a courtier, diplomat, and civil servant, trusted by three kings in his active and varied career. He was Controller of Customs, Commissioner of Roads, a Member of parliament, and several times made diplomatic mission to France, Flanders, and Italy. This gave him opportunity to mix all sorts of people and study their lives. He was influenced by Italian poets like Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio.

Geoffrey Chaucer symbolizes the Middle Ages. His place in English literature is more important, for he is the first English writer, the first man to use 'naked words' in English. The writings of Chaucer may be divided into three periods. The French, The Italian, and the English. His first important poem, *The Book of the Duchesse* (1369/70) was a dream vision elegy for the duchess of Lancaster. In the 1380s he produced mature works, including *The Parliament of Fowls*, a dream vision for St. Valentine's Day about a conference of birds choosing their mates; the fine tragic verse romance *Troilus and Criseyde*; and the unfinished dream vision *Legend of Good Women*. *Troilus and Criseyde* is the first great narrative poem in English, contain more than 8000 lines of rhyme-royal. *The Legend of Good Women* deals with the poet as wishing to make reparation for past errors.

Chaucer's best-known work, the unfinished *Canterbury Tales*, written in 1387-1400, is an intricate dramatic narrative that employs a pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Thomas Becket in Canterbury as a framing device for a highly varied collection of stories. This work gives us a clear-cut picture of the social life of the medieval England. The thirty pilgrims taking part in the pilgrimage belong to different walks of life and all their individualities and eccentricities are well depicted by Chaucer. The wealth and variety of his tales are astonishing. Some of them are adaptations of Boccaccio's *Decameron*. With a fine sense of humor he makes mild criticism of the corruption of the church. *Canterbury Tales* reflects the tempo of the age in which it is written. It is one of the finest work in English literature. Even in its incomplete state the work is a small literature in itself, an almost unmeasured abundance and variety of humor and pathos, of narrative and description and dialogue and digression.

Geoffrey Chaucer not only laid the foundation for modern English, but also introduced fresh beauties in English. He invented a particular kind of stanza for writing poetry called 'Rhyme Royal' a stanza of 7 lines each containing 10 syllables with a rhyme scheme ab abb cc. It is written in iambic pentameter. Indeed for all his considerable powers and pathos, his happy fancy, his lucid imagination, it is as a great humorist that Chaucer lingers longest in our memories, with a humor, rich, profound and sane, devoid of spite and cynicism, irradiated by a genial kindness and a perfect knowledge of human life.

William Langland (1330-1400)

William Langland was one of the greatest Middle English poet, who wrote *The Book of Piers the Plowman*, and he was the contemporary of Chaucer. He was born at Cleobury Mortimer in Shropshire and educated probably at Malvern. Little is known of his life, though he clearly had a deep knowledge of theology and was interested in the asceticism. His *Piers*

Plowman is a best example for Middle English alliterative poems, and also an allegorical work in the form of a series of dream visions with a complex variety of religious themes. This was written in simple, colloquial language with powerful imagery. Social responsibility, faith, and individual salvation constitute the primary themes in this poem. The quiet assuredness of the poem is one of its most remarkable characteristics and it is undoubtedly placed among the marvels of Medieval literature. In addition to this unfinished work Langland wrote a poem called *Richard the Redeless*, i.e. devoid of counsel, which related to the expected deposition of Richard II in 1399. The shadow of obscurity hangs over his later years, but he died probably about the same time as Chaucer, in 1400.

Epic and Romance:

Epic is long, narrative poem in an elevated style that celebrates heroic achievement and treats themes of historical, national, religious or legendary significance. Primary or traditional epics are shaped from the legends traditions of a heroic age and are part of oral tradition. Secondary or literary epics are written down from the beginning, and their poets adapt aspects of traditional epics. The poems of Homer are usually regarded as the first important epic and the main source of epic conventions in Western Europe. These conventions include the centrality of a hero, sometimes semi divine; an extensive perhaps cosmic, setting; heroic battle; extended journeying; and the involvement of supernatural beings.

Romance is a literary form that developed in the aristocratic courts of mid-12th century France. The staple subject matter is chivalric adventure, though love stories and religious allegories are sometimes interwoven. Chivalry was related with knighthood. The Medieval society was conventionally thought as three quite distinct classes: the clergy, the nobility, and the common toilers. The code of conduct that developed in this society was called chivalry. It arose out of feudal obligation and stressed loyalty by a knight to his God, his lord, his lady, thus melding Christian and military virtues. In addition to loyalty and honor, the chivalric virtues included valor, piety, courtesy, and chastity. It was the poets who introduced an element of romance into chivalry. The chivalrous knight should also be romantic. The medieval poems are full of chivalric spirit. Medieval legends and stories like 'King Arthur and his Round table', and novels like those of Scott are full of knight errant and their exploits. Writers like Shakespeare and Spenser evinced great interest in the chivalric past.

Courtly Literature:

The distance between chevalier and villain, or knight and churl, widened and became hereditary; a literature for the court developed in Medieval period. This literary category includes three important story-cycles. The best known examples for this type of literature are the 'Matter of Rome', includes of The story of Troy, and the adventures Alexander of Macedon. The Trojan story inspired Virgil and was popular in France during the 12th and 13th centuries. The romances of Alexander were full of marvels, and the romances of Aeneas took the part of Queen Dido, whom Aeneas abandoned in order to go and found Rome. The Matter of France includes, the Charlemagne Romance, Sir Gawayne and the Green Knight. It is more important as a literary influence. It dealt with Charlemagne and started in France with the Story of Roland. The groundwork of this cycle is historical, and the struggles depicted between the feudal nobles and their over-lord are based on fact. This cycle was wonderfully popular in Medieval times and

greatly influenced the European literature. For example, the stories of Ariosto. The Matter of Britain; consisted of Arthurian Cycle and Celtic Origin. Arthurian romance was more popular with ladies. Among the writers who contributed to the literary evolution of the Arthurian cycle, the first place must be assigned to Geoffrey Monmouth. His important work *Historia Regum Britannioe* brings together material drawn from ancient poets and prose writers, possibly also oral traditions and with the aid of imagination he welds the scattered legends into an harmonious whole. The other important names are Gaimar, an Anglo-Norman poet and Wace, a Norman poet. Famous examples of this large category are: *King Horn*, *Floris and Blancheflower*, *Havelok the Dane*, *Bevis of Hampton* and *Guy of Warwick*.

Lyrics:

Lyrics are verses or poems that can be sung to musical accompaniment, in ancient times usually a lyre. The lyric expresses intense personal emotion in a manner suggestive of a song. Lyric poetry expresses the thoughts and feelings of the poet and is sometimes contrasted with narrative poetry and verse drama, which relate events in the form of a story. The elegy, ode, and sonnet are important forms of lyric poetry. The nightingale had become the bird of love in provincial lyrics of the early 12th century. In these first lyrics of courtly love, the service due to a feudal lord was transferred to a lady. Whatever the relation of this literary cult to real-life wooing, it is not found in classical literature.

Hundreds of Medieval lyrics remain in manuscripts which can be roughly dated. But the details of their composition and authors are usually unknown. There are popular songs like 'The Nut-Brown Maid', drinking songs, Robin Hood ballads, and mnemonics like '*Thirty days hath September/April, June and November*'. There are also few political poems like '*When Adam delved and eve span/ Who was then the gentleman?*' and '*The axe was sharp, the stock was hard/ in the fourteenth year of King Richard*'. Most of the Lyrics are religious, for eg. The hymn of St. Godric dated 1170. Religious lyrics are derived from Latin songs and hymns. Hymns came into the Latin Church in 4th century, bringing in accentual rhythm and rhyme from popular song.

Spiritual Writings:

Spiritual writing begins in Middle English with Richard Rolle (1300-1394), an English mystic. He left the university of Oxford without a degree, dissatisfied with the subjects of study, and became a hermit. Writing in the vernacular for the sake of women readers, he exalted the contemplative life and emphasized a rapturous mystical union with God. He may have been spiritual adviser to the nuns of Hampole in his late years. His Latin works were much read in Europe. His English writings include the *Ego Dormio* (I Sleep), *Song of Songs*, and *Form of Living*. Poems and prose marked by a musical rhetoric poured out from his Yorkshire hermitage. The first was a meditation on the Old Testament, and the second is an allegory of Christ's love for the church and the soul. His *Form of Living* celebrates the solitary's direct experience of the divine especially through the devotion to the holy name of Jesus. *The Scale (Ladder) of Perfection* by Walter Hilton is another important work in spiritual writing. It is addressed to a contemplative, and to all who wish to live the spiritual life. Julian of Norwich (1342-1416) is the finest English spiritual writer before George Herbert. Her '*Revelations of Divine Love*' is remarkable for its clarity, beauty and profundity.

Secular Prose:

Since the end of the Peterborough Chronicle in 1154, English secular prose or non religious prose had been used for practical matters. During the time of Richard II English came into general use. John Trevisa translated a French encyclopedia and Latin world history. Sir John Mandeville who wrote his 'Travels' at this time may have been as fictional as most of his stories. The chief travels are to the holy land, thrice visited by Chaucer's Wife of Bath, twice by St. Godric, and once by Margery Kempe. Margery a king's lynn house wife, dedicated '*The Book Of Margery Kempe*', revising it 1436. In a mental crisis

after the birth of the first of her 14 children, she had a religious conversion. Her confessional testament is fascinating and artless. The *Paston Letters*, the correspondence of a 15th century Norfolk family have a similar human interest.

Ricardian Poetry:

The reign of Richard II saw the arrival of a mature poetic literature in Middle English. Besides lyrics and religious prose, we have spirited Arthurian verse romances. The revival of English alliterative verse produced at least two great poems: *Piers Plowman* and *Gawain and the Green Knight*. The historic development however, is the appearance of an assured syllabic verse in the long poems of John Gower and the literary experiments of Chaucer. (collect more details from previous pages).