CHAPTER V

SOCIAL STATUS OF PROFESSIONS
AND LABOURERS IN ARTHAŚĀSTRA
As the work mainly deals with practical concerns, *Arthaśāstra* of Kauṭilya does reflect, to a remarkable extent, the social conditions of early India. The text mentions many forms of labour and these include slavery, forms of debt servitude and the wage labour or share-cropping by people who do not own cultivable land. Social and economic status of slaves, ordinary labourers, guilds, artisans, weavers, entertainers, prostitutes, government servants, high dignitaries of the state etc. during its period is revealed through the descriptions of Kauṭilya. The perspectives expressed by the author and the details provided in the text are enough to make a clear picture about the lifestyle and social conditions of different categories of labourers of that age. The present chapter is an attempt to analyse the above mentioned aspects.

**Social Order**

The Kauṭilyan state upholds the Brahmanical social order based on Varṇa and Āśrama system. It may be regarded as the bedrock of *Arthaśāstra* polity. Thus, the Kauṭilyan society pre-dominantly was divided into two groups- Āryas consisting of the four Varṇas namely Brāhmaṇa, Kṣatriya, Vaiśya and Śūdra and non-Āryans consisting of the lower castes that are not considered to be the part of the Varṇa system. The hierarchy was clearly established with the Brāhmaṇa at the top and next in order Kṣatriya, Vaiśya and Śūdra. ‘These four classes came to represent four stages of a man’s development: the man of knowledge and learning was known as a ‘Brāhmaṇa’, the man of valour and action was termed a ‘Kṣatriya’, the
traders and agriculturists were called ‘Vaiśya’ and manual workers were named Śūdra’. Originally various arts and crafts did not pertain to the three higher classes, but belonged to the Śūdra. The four Varṇas which were the symbolic representation of the priestly, warring, industrial and trading and manual occupations were largely created on the basis of cultural, social and intellectual achievements of the people and the nature of the vocation they chose for their livelihood. As peasants, herders, and traders the Vaiśyas became the principal taxpayers, and as slaves and hired labourers the Śūdras became the primary suppliers of labour power. Kauṭiliya specifies that the primary duty of the ruler is to uphold the institutions of family, property and the hierarchical Varṇa system, which was based on inequality of power, status, and resources. The king should never allow the people to deviate from their duty. Obviously, the Kauṭiliyan ruler wanted to see that everyone carries out the duties of the four Varṇas and the four Āśramas to which he/she belongs as laid down in the Vedic way of life (एष त्रिधर्मशोच्चु वर्णानामाध्यमां च स्वधर्मस्यायनादीपकारिकः:11.3.4). In this way the Kauṭiliyan state governed all aspects of life and behavior of the people.

**Occupations and Divisions of Labour in *Arthaśāstra***

Occupations in *Arthaśāstra* are mainly classified as priestly, warring, agricultural, industrial, cattle rearing, commerce, trade, arts and crafts and various other manual works. The role of the four Varṇas specified by the author and the above mentioned professions strictly followed by Brāhmaṇa, Kṣatriya, Vaiśya and Śūdra appropriated in their respect. As per *Arthaśāstra* agriculture, cattle rearing and commerce and trade are the constituents of
one branch- vārttā, which is one of the four main branches of knowledge.
The well being of the state depends upon it. It is because of that the state
receives grains, cattle, money and large kinds of products. It also supplies
viṣṭi, i.e. labourers to the state (कृषिप्रशासिते विज्ञा च वार्ता,
धन्यपशुहिंसाकाृतिप्रशिक्षादायावदायिकारी । 1.4.1.).

The four classes and the various castes and sub-castes represent
various occupations and they enjoyed distinct status in the society. Kauṭilya
prescribes the specific duties of each of the four Varṇas as follows. The
special duties of the Brāhmaṇa are: studying, teaching, performing sacrifices
for self, officiating at other people’s sacrifices, making gifts and receiving
gifts. Those of the Kṣatriya are: studying, performing sacrifices for self,
making gifts, living by the profession of arms and protecting beings. Those
of Vaiśya are: studying, performing sacrifices for self, making gifts,
agriculture, cattle rearing and trade. Those of Śūdra are: service of the twice-
born, engaging in an economic calling (viz., agriculture, cattle-rearing and
trade) and the profession of the artisan and the actor’ (स्वधर्मां!
पापश्चास्यादध्ययनमध्ययनं यजनं याजनं दानं प्रतिगहत्वा। शत्रुष्यादध्ययनं यजनं दानं
शस्त्रातीयो भूतकर्षणं च। वैश्यादध्ययनं यजनं दानं कृषिप्रशासिते विज्ञा च। शूद्रस्य
द्विजातिशुद्धृष्टा वार्ता कार्यकृतीलवकर्मं च। 1.3.5-8).

The above references make it clear that in Arthaśāstra Brāhmaṇa was
to teach and guide; and they are to act as the intellectual class of the society.
The teaching of Vedas and Vedāṅgas and other traditional sciences (śāstras)
belong professionally to Brāhmaṇa class but the teaching of fine-arts and
performing arts, music, drama, dance etc., to courtesans; and other
categories of artistes seem to be open to other Varṇas. Kṣatriya was to take
and enforce decisions and protect the people, while Vaiśya has to supply the
necessaries of life. Śūdra had to do the manual work and, sometimes, also
worked as a subordinate to Vaiśyas as agricultural labourer, a herdsman’s or
a traders servants. This is a significant aspect of Kauṭilyan society, because,
the Smṛti writers generally allow to the Śūdra, only service of the twice-born
and allow him trade or an artisans profession only if the service of the twice-
born is not possible. However, in Arthaśāstra, the arts and crafts appear to
be exclusively practiced by them alone. Manual and unskilled works were
considered to be low and were thus left for Śūdra. Thus, Kauṭilya takes a
practical view of them and allow Śūdra to follow some of the vocations of
Vaiśya. The separate mention of the ‘वार्ता कार्यकृषीलब्धम्’ is a sufficient
evidence to prove that originally vārttā was one of the duties prescribed for
Śūdras. While examining the various professions prescribed to Śūdra it can
be found that Kauṭilya is the only authority in the vast field of Sanskrit
literature that lays down vārttā as one of the major duties allowed to Śūdra
community. But some scholars hold difference of opinion with regard to
this point. R.S. Sharma argues that the term ‘वार्ता’ in Arthaśāstra passage
‘शूद्रस्य द्विजातिशुशुष्णा वार्ताकार्यकृषीलब्धम्’ is used in the sense of
'livelelihood', and not in the sense of agriculture, cattle rearing, and trade. He
is of opinion that this view endorsed by Jayamaṅgalā commentary. It is
more reasonable to think that in the period of Kauṭilya, the Vaiśya peasants
were few in number and a considerable population, perhaps, the majority was belonging to the Śūdra class.⁸ In this state of things Kauṭīlya, as a practical thinker, presents the actual state of things more accurately than the views of Smṛti writers and allows Śūdras to engage in economic calling.⁹ It may also be noted that Kauṭīlya refers to troops recruited from the three Varṇas, and his preference is for a well-trained Kṣatriya army, or a strong Vaiśya army or Śūdra army (9.2.24). The troop of Śūdras has no sanction of Smṛtis.

Thus, the demand for labour in Arthaśāstra was from three principal vocations. These are recognized as providing men with the means of livelihood, i.e. agriculture, cattle-rearing and trade. These three produce grain, livestock, money, raw materials and labour (1.4.1). Arts and crafts also were a source of livelihood to Śūdras. But these were primarily excluded from the scope of vārttā, because; during the period of Kauṭīlya the arts and crafts did not play a significant role in the economic life of society as did the three components included vārttā. However, it was included as one of the items of state revenue. Singing and dancing, different forms of music, its participants, singers, musicians, and dancers, indicate that singing and dancing were practiced not only as forms of entertainment but also as the means of earning livelihood. Existence of dancing and singing as separate vocations like any other has added an additional degree to it and at the same time indicates a change or development in the society.

Thus, the supply of labourers for all these sectors was mainly from three sections; slaves, Śūdras and Vaiśyas. They were the principal
labouring groups mentioned in the text. The essence of the Varṇa system lay in the fact that the two higher orders, Brāhmaṇas and Kṣatriyas worked as managers of production whereas the remaining two Varṇas, the Vaiśyas and the Śūdras, served as real prodders. According to R.S. Sharma, an important feature of the Varṇa system was the withdrawal of members of the higher orders from manual work. The Brāhmaṇic lawgivers did not permit the Brāhmaṇas and the Kṣatriyas to lend their hand to the plough. Similarly members of higher orders are not allowed to take to various types of crafts and artisanal activities. It seems that eventually the hatred for manual work and different types of rituals associated with purity and impurity gave rise to the order of untouchables or the dalits.

**Slaves and Labourers (Dāsa-karmakaras)**

*Arthaśāstra* gives a clear picture of the slaves and institution of slavery presumably prevalent in the ancient period in India. It also contains genuine data about the social status of slaves and ordinary labourers. The Dāsakarmakara portion of *Arthaśāstra* specially discusses the matters of slaves and wage earners. The term ‘karmakara’ is frequently mentioned in this section along with the term ‘dāsa’. Slaves are Dāsas and hired labourers are Karmakaras and they differ with each other from social point of view. The Dāsas were sold for lifelong slavery while a Karmakara worked for wages on contract. In a way he was pledged to a certain amount of work and the power over hired servants was limited. It seems that there was a union of such people. This union probably used to make a contract with the employer, and distribute the wages among the labourers. They both were
liable for forced labour (2.15.62). However, a considerable part of the Karmakaras were generally hired workers, but not always independent. R.S. Sharma suggests that the Karmakaras of the pre-Mauryan period were not free labourers but were attached to their masters in a special way. They were probably brought under his control either on account of their failure to pay debts or owing to having their habitations on his land. They were in a semi-serflike position and could be even treated as an item of property.¹⁴ In Kauṭिलya, Karmakara belonged to the Ārya society but slaves hailed from Dāsavarna (some Śūdras and mostly Mlecchas). Moreover the Dāsas could be sold in the foreign states without their will but a Karmakara could not be sent to a foreign land without his will.¹⁵

In Arthaśāstra the Dāsakarmakara figure as a twin. Probably, it could be due to the comparable plight of both although Karmakara seems to have been casual labourer engaged for a specific task for a fixed wage. According to R.P. Kangle, the distinction between the un-free Dāsa and the free wage earner Karmakara in regard to actual conditions was very thin. Dāsas were not well off but Karmakaras were not in the power of another person.¹⁶ The master had whole control over his Dāsa. And also one thing is very significant that both the Dāsas and Karmakaras were normally landless. Debt and poverty probably drive them into temporary servitude. Reference to landless labourers in Arthaśāstra proves this fact. Extreme form of capitalism is involved to this kind of forced and slave labour. The use of forced labour belonged to the state while slaves were commonly used by the public, mostly as personal attendants. The subject is treated in the Smṛtis
under three heads of law, namely vetanasyānapākarma (non-payment of wages), abhyupetyāsūsrūṣā (non-rendition of service) and svāmipālavivāda (dispute between master and herdsman). 17 Nāradasmṛti (5.5.7) and Brhaspatismṛti (1.15.16-18) enumerate the kinds of impure work reserved for slaves unlike the pure work for hired labourers.

According to Kauṭilya, an Ārya could never be slave (3.13.4). All slaves were non- Aryans. It must be noted here that the nature of slavery that did prevail in India during the period of Kauṭilya was not of the same nature that had been in practice in other parts of the world, especially of that did exist in Greece. 18 Megasthenes, who visited the subcontinent during the Mauryan period, noted that chattel slavery was unknown in India. Kumkum Roy suggests this was probably because the forms and scale of slavery were different from those in contemporary Greece. 19 In this context A.L. Basham evidently marked that ‘the latifundia of the Roman magnate had no counterpart in India.’20 Some scholars hold, the term ‘dāsa’ interpreted literally bears the meaning ‘man’. 21 In Rgveda, Dāsas are described as being in a perpetual state of conflict with the Aryans, against whom they stood in a relation of opposition. Uma Chakravarti too finds the major part of the references to the word ‘dāsa’ in Rgveda with this connotation. She further opines that the references implying slave are not only much less frequent but appear only in the later chapters of Rgveda.22 The connotation of the term dāsa as ‘slave’ was a latter development which grew out of the fact that the group as a whole came to be subjugated. 23 According to D.D. Kosambi ‘The principal change in the productive relations was the formation of a servile
class from the conquered Dāsa population, the word thereafter came to mean a helot of some sort. The Dāsas could be transferred, inherited, bought and sold like property. However, in *Arthaśāstra* the power of the master over his Dāsa was restricted by the caste rules and certain categories of the Dāsas are afforded a very well-defined protection. Thus the word ‘dāsa’ signifies not only human beings living under the absolute domination of their master and hence slaves in the real sense of the term, but also human beings over whom the power of the master is limited.

In India there was no caste of slaves; though most of the slaves were of low castes. However, an individual of any class might in certain circumstances become a slave. *Arthaśāstra* uses a variety of terms to denote different aspects of this phenomenon- Dāsa (a slave), Dāsatva (the concept of slavery), Dāsabhāva (the state of being a slave), and Dāsakalpa (the rules regarding slavery) (3.13.1-20). Slave markets are not mentioned in the text. Indeed, many contexts in *Arthaśāstra* would seem that the term Dāsa implies rather a bondman or serf than a chattel slave. According to Kangle this seems to have been in vogue in most periods of Indian history.

It is also mentioned that, the Dāsa can be owned by private individuals as well as the state. But there is no direct reference in the text to the employment of Dāsa in agriculture by private landowners; however, it may be assumed that they also were employed in private farm land. It is interesting to note that both the Dāsa and Karmakara were paid cash wages. The lowest wage allowed to them was one and a quarter paṇas per month along with food (2.24.28). The state feeds not only the labourers but also his
dependents, but he alone get the cash wage of 1 ¼ paṇa per month. Kauṭilya is the only writer who provides property rights for slaves. Slave’s property could be inherited by their relatives and in the absence of the relatives this was gone in the hands of the state or the master. 29

The state authorities seem to have taken sympathetic attitude towards Dāsakarmakaras as it is seen in the cases that dependents of labourers too were allowed with food as per their requirement. The quantity and quality of food supplied to them do not appear to have been much above the subsistence level. It is also evident from a terse comments as, ‘broken grains may be given to Dāsakarmakaras who constitute the ‘viṣṭi’ (2.15.61), ‘bad wine may be supplied to the Dāsas’ (2.25.7-9). This is a clear indication towards the fact that their work was viewed as of low nature. All this goes to show that the Dāsakarmakaras lead an inferior type of life.

Classification of Slaves

Arthaśāstra gives a detailed account of the slaves and the institution of slavery. It was well established and was accepted as something normal and was a necessary element of the society by its time. Thus, Kauṭilya classifies Dāsas according to their origin or their functions into nine separate types. They are Grhejāta (those born in the house of the master), Dāyāgata (those were inherited), Labdha (those who were received as gift), Kṛīta (those who were purchased), Udaradāsa (those reduced to the status of Dāsa for food), Āhitaka (those who were mortgaged), Ātmavikrayī (those who sold themselves as Dāsas), Daṇḍapraṇīta (those reduced to the status of Dāsas by judicial decree), and Dhvajāhṛta (persons captured in war) (3.13.1-
of permanent servitude whereas the rest to the impermanent. And they would be manumitted under the specific conditions stipulated. According to Manusmrti (8.412) members of the twice-born communities cannot be reduced to slavery, and that anyone who compels a ‘dvija’ to work as a slave, deserves to be punished by the state. Like Manusmrti, Smṛti writers of the following centuries also continued to be concerned about the need to fit the owner-slave relationship within the framework of caste. YañjavalkyasmrŃ, NāradasmṛŃ and KātyāyanasmrŃ ruled that slavery should conform to the anuloma order and not be in the inverted order. Kātyāyana even asserts that a Brāhmaṇa cannot ever be a slave.

Of the above categories, the Udaradāsa is one who is compelled to choose slavery in order to fill their stomach in the days of distress and poverty. In such cases they live with another person in better circumstances and work for him as a slave in return for food. They were accepted the slave status for their living. A minor also be so handed over for his maintenance. However, there is no actual sale in this case, but only stay for time being.

Ātmavikrayi is a bonded labourer who mortgages himself or has been mortgaged by someone else apparently against a debt. If a person was rescued from a dangerous situation by another person then the former could become the later’s slave either to repay the debt or because of his distress situation. They could also attain freedom through redeemed by paying the amount owned (3.13.15-17). An Ārya individual who sells himself loses his personal liberty, his children remain free.
Danḍapraṇīta is a person enslaved because of the judicial punishment. The crime could be any kind. This kind of slavery was for a fixed period because he could be freed by serving his sentence. They had to serve like slaves under Sutradhyakṣa (2.23.2), in state weaving industry and under Sītādhyakṣa (see chapter 2.24) on state farms. The whole of his wage goes towards his ransom amount.\(^{35}\) They could be released after their duration of enslavement was completed.

Dhvajāhṛta is a person captured in a war was enslaved for a specified period. In certain cases captured person enjoyed a high status in his native country. In Kauṭilya he was mentioned Āryaprāṇa with a slave of war. They could attain their Ārya status by paying half of their price or by doing work (3.13.19).\(^{36}\) After doing work assigned for a specific period he becomes free. It is also noted here that Arthasastra provides for the release of convicted persons from prison, if they have been purged of their crime by personal labour.\(^{37}\) Among the rest four types the Dāyāgata alone seems to belong to the category of permanent servitude. Grhejāta were the slaves who were born in the house of the master from Dāsis (3.13.20). Grhejāta, Labdha, and Krīta are impermanent slaves and would be manumitted under specific conditions stipulated.\(^{38}\) Dāyāgata could never attain their freedom in the whole of their life. They were, mostly, from non-Āryan communities or Mlecchas who could sell their children to slavery.\(^{39}\) Kauṭilya’s laws on slavery indicate that the institution of slavery had become very tough at his time and the slaves existed in quite a good number.
Social Status of Slaves

The Dāsas were of low status and had extremely limited social relations. The slaves were also employed by the state in various kinds of enterprises such as weaving (2.23), trading in liquor (2.25), brothels (2.27), secret services (1.12) running of gambling dens (3.20), and also as bodyguards (1.21). According to the text an Ārya cannot be subjected to slavery (त्रैवार्यमिति दासभावः। 3.13.4). Kautilya considers the enslavement of a person who is Ārya by his kin, a crime to be punished by severe fine, and this appears to apply to all four Varnas viz., Brāhmaṇa, Kṣatriya, Vaiśya and Śūdra (3.13.1). As mentioned earlier, he included Śūdras in the Āryan status and advocated very liberal ideas for them. This was the main dictum of Kautilya’s theory of slavery. He propounded that slavery is limited to Mlecchas (3.13.3). But, it is allowed that due to some misfortune, family troubles or the necessity for earning more money than usual, an Ārya may temporarily work as a slave. He can buy back his freedom when his term of agreement is over, and assume his normal life. It is noteworthy that Kautilya allowed slavery of only Mleccha barbarians (non-Aryan, foreigners, who would include the Greeks), as it is customary among them (3.13.3). The Āṭavikas, according to some scholars was also the major source of slave population. This would seem to refer to foreigners as well as tribals not absorbed in Aryan society. Mixed castes would be on a par with Śūdra (शूद्रस्थिरत्यं वा, अन्यत्र जण्डालेभं। 3.7.37). They are not allowed
to follow the profession of a Śūdra. Breloer remarks that this corroborates the fact that the bondman were of foreign origin.⁴³

Kauṭilya sanctions release of prisoners by remitting a fine or paying taxes through personal labour for the King on his farmland or mines or in workshops. In such enslavement the worker was unskilled and temporary. Dev Raj Chanana, who anaysed this issue deeply, observes, ‘In the domain of their employment one does not come across slaves who are doctors, teachers etc. slaves are also not found among the artisans, except those who work in the workshop mentioned by Kauṭilya. Slaves are mostly employed in domestic service and in agriculture. They are also recruited into the army.’⁴⁴ They are found working along with free labourers, such as those who are paid a daily wage, small peasants, soldiers recruited from among free men.⁴⁵

Āhitaka Slaves

The Dāsas and Āhitakas were two different categories of employees. Mortgaged slaves are described as Āhitakas in Arthaśāstra. They engaged in the profession of wet-nurses, as maid servants etc. They appear to be a more personal attendant (3.13.9). They had to bathe the master and his family members. These categories make a lot of difference between the other types of slaves. These slave women were protected against the uncontrolled lust of the men folk.⁴⁶ A mortgaged slave was under anyone’s bondage only for a short time but a slave could be for a life-time or a short period. Even the master’s power over an Āhitaka was more limited.⁴⁷
Mortgaged persons could not be put to all sort of work. Kautilya strictly ruled that the mortgaged persons were not given any kind of dirty work. The text lays down a number of liberal rules applicable to them. According to the text ‘making a people pick up a corps, dung, urine or leavings of food and making women (pledges) give bath to a naked person, giving corporal punishment to them and dishonoring them shall result in freedom for a nurse, a female attended or a woman tenant tilling for half the produce and a maid’ (3.13.9). The creditor loses his money if he makes the mortgaged person carry dead body, urine or leavings of food or if they are beaten or violated. This rule clearly implies that the status of Āhitakas in debt bondage was somewhat better than that of other categories of Dāsas. The rules mentioned above imply that the ordinary slaves could be assaulted abused and employed in impure work by the owner. R.S. Sharma in this regard says, ‘The liberal laws of Kautilya mostly cover the Āhitakas and the ex-Aryan slaves whose numbers must have been small; only a few of these laws apply to the greater number of ordinary slaves, who were evidently Śūdras’. However, Kautilya stipulates punishments against the acts such as denial of wage, assignment of impossible or spurious functions and refusal of relaxation during illness, to the Bhṛtakas and Karmakaras.

Workers on State Mines and Factories (Ākarakarmāntapravartaka)

Arthaśāstra displayed noticeable enterprise in extending area of mining activity facilitated by exploiting the labour of Dāsakarmakaras and convicted persons (Daṇḍapratikartṛs). Mining activity was directly
controlled by the state and it was deemed necessary that the produce of the various mines should be turned in to the articles of use in factories.

The Director of mines employs the people from the groups of skilled or semi-skilled persons. Generally, persons who had committed offences and had therefore to pay fines could earn the money for the fine by working in mines. They are, of course, treated as slaves. Dāsakarmakaras, who wanted to earn their livelihood by manual labour, were employed in such factories and mines. The Jātakas also contain evidences to Karmakaras employed as Dāsas in mines. The Karmakaras were indeed skilled craftsmen but without access to the textualized knowledge in the respective field, which was the monopoly of the masters. They were in plenty in the urban centers and semi-urban complexes attached to the various karmāntas. In addition to the above said, those who belong to the disgruntled with the regime are to be posted in the mines as labourers (1.13.21). Kauṭilya also prescribes those impure high official candidates to be posted in mines (सच्चारशृंखलाविश्वस्तवनकोपनेपूष्पयोजयएत् 11.10.15). The occupation of these types of people in karmāntas is not clear from the text. According to Śrimulā commentary they appeared in karmāntas as ordinary labourer (कायायासकमीणि). Jayamaṅgalā explains that they are engaged in mines as assistants of officers of the mines (अन्वितार्थिक्रुते: सहकारयेत्). It must be borne in mind here that the candidates for the high posts are surely from the higher orders of the society. At the same time, manual labour is specially preserved for Dāsakarmakaras. They appeared as experts in these fields. Kauṭilya’s direction hence indicates, probably, they worked as assistants of the chief
officer of the mine. Here it may be noted that *Arthaśāstra* stipulates that Nagaradhānyavyāvahārika (grain-dealers of the city), Karmāntika (factory officers), Balādhyakṣa (army officers), Rūpājīvā (prostitutes) Tālāvacaras (dancers) and persons of Vaiśya community should be located in the southern quarter of the fort (तत्तःपरं नगरधान्यव्यावहारिकर्मतिस्थिता्वलाभ्यः: पद्माशुरमांसपण्या रूपाजीवासालावचरा वैश्याश्च दक्षिणं दिशामिथविसेवुः । 2.4.11). This direction clearly implies that the status of factory officers is neither very high nor very low.

**Agricultural Labourers**

*Arthaśāstra* is one of the richest sources of data relating to agriculture and agrarian life of ancient India. Of all kinds of labours, agriculture was considered to be the most important. Kauṭilya gives a detailed description on this subject. The lower strata of society were mainly engaged in agricultural activities. According to the text the agriculturalists are mostly from the Śūdravaraṇa. The employment of Śūdras in agricultural operations on a large scale is a striking social development of the period of *Arthaśāstra*.

**Śūdrakarṣaka (Śūdra Cultivators/ Peasants)**

Kauṭilya indeed stressed that settlements in the virgin lands should consist overwhelmingly of Śūdrakarṣaka and other lower classes (avaravarna) being more amenable to exploitation (शुद्रकर्षक्यां कुलशतवरं पष्पकुलशतपरं ग्राम क्रोशन्त्रोशसीमानमन्योपायायं निवेशयेतुः । 2.1.2), मध्ये चान्ते च स्थानवान्ताथ्यः परवायनश्वापदि स्वार्थः स्वाजीवः शतुद्विधी शक्यमान्तः पण्यपायशोवरशिवकां वैश्याश्च मूगातिविहीनः कान्तः सीताक्षिभवथिुस्तिवस्वान्
The Śūdras were considered as the principal agricultural community. This evidentially is a great deviation from the perspective of the then prevalent Brahmanical tradition. Kauṭilya held a changing view of his society towards Śūdras and adopted well formulated strategies unto them. Scholars attest the fact that during the period of Kauṭilya the actual workers on farmland were only Śūdras, and also noted that they were not treated as slaves. But the term Śūdrakarṣaka actually denotes, according to some scholars, ‘Śūdras and cultivators’. R.S. Sharma opines that the term Śūdrakaṣaka is a compound form of the terms Śūdra and karṣaka actually and he suggests that the Śūdras were not peasants. Some others hold the view that the term peasant means a person who undertakes agriculture on his own, working with his own implements and using labour of his family. Thus, the landless labourers are not treated as peasants. Obviously in the history of ancient India, the Śūdras were landless, and probably they had extensively worked under landlords. R.S. Sharma is of opinion that Kauṭilya’s *Arthaśāstra* does not signify any fundamental change in the position of Śūdras. The text merely focuses on the role of Śūdras as slaves, artisans and agricultural labourers in settlement on new territories in cultivation and in establishing new villages. But it is
evident from the text that the status of Śūdras in *Arthaśāstra* is of some significance. In Kauṭilya, the term Śūdra had a wide and varied connotation in its applicability as a designation for ‘Ārya’ in general (3.13.1). The text also promotes a well trained Śūdra army (9.2.24). In the traditional Varṇa theory the occupation of agriculture and cattle rearing was assigned to Vaiśyas only. But a definite and deliberate change in attitudes towards Śūdras is seen in *Arthaśāstra*. The reasons for change in attitudes towards them lie in the actual historical situation governed by expediency and pragmatism. This of course is an effect of certain economic factors, especially the growth of trade, commerce and industry from sixth century BCE onwards which necessitated some departure from the occupational distributions of classical Varṇa theory. As trade and commerce began weaning away a substantial number of Vaiśyas from agriculture and farming, more and more Śūdras had to be called in for manning these jobs.  

Thus, according to *Arthaśāstra* vārttā and kārkuśīlavakarman were the occupations of Śūdras along with the service of twice-borns which alone constitutes their proper vocation according to Smṛtis (शूद्रस्य द्विजाविश्वाय वार्ताः कारकुशीलवकर्मैः । 1.3.8). ‘Manusmṛti still repeats the formal statement that agriculture was one of the Vaiśya occupations though it was clearly held to be the lowliest of these; and the labourer in tillage was a Śūdra.’ Thus, while the Smṛtis of Yājñavalkya (1.120), Gautama (10.60) and Viśnū (3.8.33) allowed them to carry on their livelihood by following trade only upon their failure to live by serving the higher classes and by practicing the mechanical arts. Kauṭilya made vārttā their normal occupation along with
kārkuśilavakarman- arts and professions of bards and actors. This is sufficient evidence to the fact that the line of demarcation between the occupations of the Vaiśyas and those of the lower communities was neither rigid nor very accurately determined. Vārttā according to the definition in Arthashastra includes agriculture, cattle rearing and trade (1.4.1). All these suggestions made by Kauṭilya explicitly indicate that the labour of Śūdras was extensively used for agricultural operations in the capacity of hired workers, artisans, sometimes as sharecroppers, and more rarely as owner cultivators. Thus, Kauṭilya’s designation of Śūdrakarṣaka can more properly be defined the actual status of the peasants. Actually, Kauṭilya is silent about the role and duty of other castes/classes in the field of agriculture. Obviously, Arthashastra in the present case uses the term clearly in the sense of peasant-cultivators. And it must be noted that Arthashastra represents the actual state of things more accurately. By the seventh century A.D, Yuan Chwang would classify the peasants simply as Śūdras. Thomas R. Trautmann in this connection observes ‘The emphasis on Śūdras as desirable farmers, rather than a landed warrior aristocracy of Kṣatriyas, is striking. It gives the impression of a separation of farming and warfare, and of a direct relation between king and farmer, unmediated by a landlord class.’

However, compared to the other Varṇas the social position of the agricultural labourers was extremely low and was almost on a par with the outcastes. The two higher Varṇas formed privileged classes and lived at the cost of the working class communities. M.G.S Narayanan in this regard observes, ‘The peasant has been the underdog throughout early history. It has been subjugated and exploited because he has been the chief human
agency for producing the items required for the maintenance of life.’\textsuperscript{67} They produced more than they needed for their upkeep and they could provide food for artisans and other urbans with their surplus. More importantly they created conditions for the formation of the full-fledged state. The peasant’s voice has been curtailed or completely removed. They did not occupy the centre of the stage where we find the fighting and ruling groups who lived in fortified capitals with the help of the surplus that the peasant produced.\textsuperscript{68}

\textbf{Share Croppers}

From the Mauryan period onwards, the practice of share cropping which for the first time is mentioned in \textit{Arthaśāstra}, seems to have been a growing phenomenon.\textsuperscript{69} Naturally this would have affected the old pattern in agriculture, since a considerable part of the labour invested in it had been contributed by slaves and wage earners.\textsuperscript{70} While small landowners cultivated their land with the help of household labour, large landowners depended on sharecroppers and landless labourers.\textsuperscript{71} \textit{Arthaśāstra} introduces its readers even more prominently to the king’s land in part cultivated by Dāsa-Karmakaras and others, under the supervision of Sītādhyaṅka. The state, however, found impossible to put to direct cultivation all its land. The remainder had to be leased out. However, the amount of state land leased out to cultivators thus could not have been very small.\textsuperscript{72} Ardhaśītikas and Svāvīryopajīvins are the two categories of sharecroppers mentioned in \textit{Arthaśāstra}. The term Svāvīryopajīvins was interpreted to mean “those who have nothing to contribute but labour of their bodies.” But it is better understood as “those who live by valour” i.e. unemployed professional
soldiers and the like’.\textsuperscript{73} On the other hand, the Ardhaśītikas were peasants cultivating on a half-share basis.\textsuperscript{74} The Svāvīryopajīvins paid one-fourth or one-fifth of the produce to the state (बापातिरितमयशीतिका: कुल्, स्वचीरोपजीविनी वा चतुर्पश्यामिका: | 2.24.16) and they enjoyed a greater degree of autonomy and better terms than the other categories of agricultural workers mentioned in the chapter on Śītādhyakṣa. Implements, equipments, seeds etc. were provided to the Svāvīryopajīvins by the state.\textsuperscript{75} The term Svāvīryopajīvins reminds the expression ‘शूद्रांश्च आत्मोपजीविन्’ referred to by Manu, meaning independent Śūdra labourers working for wages.\textsuperscript{76} Meanwhile the Ardhaśītikas had to arrange their own implements, equipments, seeds etc. However, the exact status of the Svāvīryopajīvins is not clear from Arthaśāstra. Thomas R. Trautmann holds the view that ‘the existence of labour at a wage or on terms of share-cropping in the King’s farms shows the presence of landless people in the countryside who must work for hire or for the use of farmland belonging to someone else. While debt and poverty drive many into temporary servitude, it is landlessness that creates the fundamental socio-economic division in the countryside, forcing the landless to work for the landowners on terms disadvantages to themselves.\textsuperscript{77} Thus, Kauṭilya’s references clearly show that the sharecroppers obviously were exploited by rich peasants. At a later stage, these rich peasants called mahattara, eventually grew into local landlords living on the rents and services of the common peasantry.\textsuperscript{78}
Aboriginals as Agricultural Gardener’s

In *Arthaśāstra*, among the others the Sītādhyaṅka has to seek the service of Sarpagrāhaka (snake-catchers) to watch out farms or the gardens and look after the cattle (कर्पयनन्त्रोपकरणविवेधायपमसंहारं कारयेत, कारभिभ कर्मार्कुटकमेदकर्जुवत्कसर्पग्राहार्दिस्यध । 2.24.3). However, in this connection, Kauṭilya does not give any evidence to infer that from which of the groups of people, the watchmen, the gardeners etc. were employed. R.S. Sharma in this connection remarks ‘Strabo informs that the third caste of shepherds and hunters led a nomadic life and were given an allowance of corn from the King for keeping out the wild beasts and birds from the land’.\(^7\) He further observes that the Sarpagrāhaka seem to be similar to the nomadic aboriginals, engaged in catching snakes and other wild beasts, apparently belonged to the Śūdravarṇa.\(^8\) This is more likely.

Herdsman

Rearing Cattle was the second most important occupation of Vaiśyavarṇa, behind agriculture. Cattle herds were taken out to graze by professional graziers to whose interest and to those of their charge, the text gave due attention. The herdsman was to take cattle to pasture when the night was over and take them back in the evening after they had eaten grass and drunk water.\(^9\) The status of the herdsman was more or less similar to those of the agricultural labourers. Both of them received same wage of one paṇa and a quarter per month (2.24.28). However, both are included in state service. Private cowherds are also mentioned. Those working for private
citizens receive one-tenth part of butter, as in the absence of any stipulation. But if the wage is agreed upon they get as agreed upon (3.13.29).

**Aupasthāyikavarga (Group of Attenders)**

*Arthaśāstra* considers animals as wealth and discusses about different groups of workers engaged in the welfare and upkeep of cattle, elephants and horses. The affairs of each category of animals were maintained by separate departments worked under the charge of experts. The workers engaged in the field of animal welfare are commonly known as aупāsthāyikavarga. However, the author does not present the social position of the workers in this field. Some of them are merely ordinary labourers probably from the section of Dāsakarmakaras. They include the Lubdhaka, Piṇḍāraka, Manthaka, Dohaka, Aśvabandhaka, Sthānapālaka, Keśakara, Yāvasika etc. Yogyacārya (teachers of trainers), Anīkastha (trainer of elephants), Cikitsaka (physician) etc. are also included in the group of Aupasthāyikas. Apparently, the Cikitsakas came from vegetarian classes and it can be assumed that they belonged to higher Varṇas.82 Physicians, the horse tamers and the elephant trainers were placed in the sixth grade of pay and they get a salary of 2,000 paṇas. It may be noted here that while the lowest salary recommended was 60 paṇas for the ordinary labourers, the salary of 2,000 paṇas was comparatively high amount and probably they were recruited from upper classes where as the ordinary servants that were paid a small scale of pay belong to the lower order. Moreover, the amount of 2,000 is significant, because the Adhyakṣas who seem to have been the chief of the each department, is provided a minimum salary of 1000 paṇas only.
This too is clear evidence in support of the view that the physicians were of higher order in the Varna system.

**Craft Workers**

*Arthaśāstra* presupposes for state control of production of a variety of goods, ranging from textiles to metal working. The status of craft workers varied substantially. Several craft specialists including leather workers, carpenters, weavers, blacksmiths, sculptor etc. were classified as low-status group. They constituted a group of representative of various crafts. The blacksmith and the carpenter were an indispensable part of every village since they manufactured the agricultural tools of production like ploughshares, hoes and axes. In ancient India craftwork was commonly practised by various sections of the Śūdra community. However, the chief carpenter Vardhakī is included in the salary list of state servants (रथिकानीकश्यिकिसःकाश्यिकाक्ष्यिके योपेष्का द्रिसाहिः। 5.3.12). According to this he has received a salary of 2,000 paṇas, like the physician and charioteer.

**Workers on Gold**

Metal industry in the age of Kauṭiliya had an indelible impact on various aspect of social life, for they provided not only new avenues of employment but also useful articles of life. Naturally Kauṭiliya gives a long list of commonly used metals. He looks upon metal industry as a major sector of occupation and mentions several categories of expert workers in it. The Royal Goldsmiths supervise a body of artisans ‘doing the work
offsetting in gold’, blowers, servants and dust washers. Entry into the gold workshop had high restriction. The workers are to be thoroughly searched before they enter and leave their tools. Uncompleted work remaining in the workshop must be assessed every day.\(^8^7\) In the ideal state of Kauṭilya the gold workshop was situated in the middle of market highway. This implies that the metal industry was an urbanized profession in its character. Gold and silver ornaments were widely manufactured for villagers and rural inhabitants on a large scale. Gold and silver play a large part both in the kingdom, as a store of wealth useful for the costly ventures of the state, including war and diplomacy, and also as signs of the king’s pre-eminence. These precious metals are equally important to the people of the countryside and of the city as stores of wealth and as signs of status.\(^8^8\) Sauvarṇika controlled the activity for the state in this field. Apparently, private goldsmiths were to work under his supervision. According to Kauṭilya the Sauvarṇika must be, 'skilled in his profession, of noble birth and trustworthy' (विशिष्टाध्ये सौवर्णिकं शिल्पवत्तमभिज्ञं प्रात्यायिकं च स्थापयेन् | 12.13.2). This injunction clearly shows that the goldsmiths belong to the higher castes, probably the Vaišyavrāṇa, they being the principal craftsmen in ancient India. ‘In India, professions requiring a special training such as that of charioteers, mahouts etc. are exercised by trained people helped by their pupils’.\(^8^9\) The expertise in their profession was handed over only to their decentands or disciples who used to stay with them. This practice of not revealing the tricks of the trade except to pupils of long standing is also found in the case of manufacturer, artisans, etc. These latter groups of labourers have already been organized into guilds and performed their work
with the help of apprentices, generally belonging to their own families.\textsuperscript{90} These, skilled, semi-skilled and sizable class of artisans may work on a piece-rate basis through their guild. Whatever was earned by the guild belonged to its members and was distributed equally among them all. They were thus in the position of both the employers and the wage-earners.\textsuperscript{91} Unskilled workers in state gold workshop, such as blowers, servants, and dust washers were probably from the lower orders of the society.

**Weavers**

The profession of spinning and weaving was mainly opened to women workers. Women in different categories in the society actively participated in these professions. Unmarried girls, widows, crippled women, convicted women, mothers of prostitutes, retired women servants of the king and retired temple prostitutes were permitted engage in this occupation. Evidently these women were too old to continue in their respective previous professions and had no means of sustenance.\textsuperscript{92} A.L. Basham observes that probably these were all low class women and worked under male overseers, in the royal establishment of weaving and spinning.\textsuperscript{93}

The women of upper castes also were engaged in the profession of spinning. For instance, the women who do not stir of their homes (aniṣkāsĩnĩ), those whose husbands have gone abroad (proṣṭā), and those who are crippled (nyaṅgā) have supported themselves by spinning yarn.\textsuperscript{94} It is stated that where possible, a maid servant should act as the go between, when the women has to send for yarn or return the woven material.\textsuperscript{95} This could be either the processing of certain types of raw material or spinning. It
may be noted here that these were the women who had been marginalized due to circumstances. Women, who had committed offences and had therefore to pay fines, could earn money for the fine by working as weavers. All of these were women who were too old to continue in their profession and had no means of sustenance and have to work in order to maintain themselves. These activities were performed separately from their gender roles imposed on them by society as a girl, wife, mother, widow and so on. This was a means of income-generation to most of the women and can be cited as an example of the state policy towards the rehabilitation of these marginalized women. Weaving was also one of the prime industries in Kautilyan time which employed both men and women. Thus this industry had provided livelihood to the needy ones.

**Social and Economic Status of Performing Artistes**

*Arthaśāstra* describes detailed records about specialized artistes in various performing arts. It shows that theatrical performance in ancient India was a very comprehensive art, and this profession was open to lower communities of society especially Śūdras. However, *Arthaśāstra* always treats actors as a community or group, formed on the basis of a common profession. As people associated with theatre were common people belonging to the lower strata of the society, the art always had a close affinity with folk tradition, which had its roots in magical dance and impersonation. In *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyana* too people associated with theatre often worked with Śūdras. *Anuśāsanaparvan* of *Mahābhārata* specifies that commonly members belonging to lower communities take the
profession of acting. This evidently says that theatre artistes did not enjoy a respectable position in the epic period. Performing artistes were known for their loose character. Though their art always considered exceedingly attractive to people, entertainers were never enjoyed a reputable position in Arthaśāstra period also. Kauṭilya clearly attests this fact. He is of opinion that the state should facilitate, regulate and control public entertainment.

Theatrical performance were put up probably on the stage by women artistes and men artistes separately (3.3.21). The women of higher communities were not to witness these stage shows along with men folk. Possibly, stage performances were performed exclusively by women for them. If women visited such shows without taking permission of their husbands they were suitably punished (3.3.21-22). The touring troupes of artistes used to present various forms of entertainments such as dancing, music, acrobats, operas and dramatic performances etc. However, the movements of different kinds of entertainers were to be regulated by the state (कुशील्या वर्षा रात्रेन्द्रोक्ता चेतन: | 4.1.58). They were not allowed to enter villages as their performances would hinder agricultural operations by attracting labourers in the field and thereby it would harm the economic interests of the state and cultivators. It appears that most of the performances were on open air or on pavilions built temporarily. It was a major activity that provided livelihood to the Śūdras (1.3.8).

Kauṭilya has treated entertainers as any other class of the state’s subjects and dispassionately discussed their duties and legal responsibilities towards the state. Thus, although the status of entertainers was low the
author does extend to them a few special privileges and limited state patronage, as he is shrewd enough to extract taxes from them for the state in return for these occasional favours. Some of the entertainers were used as cover by secret agents. The actors and actresses were employed in the house of high officials for spying on them (1.12.9).

The actors through their varied arts provided entertainment to the people of all sections, thus their work was no less important than any other section. In comparison to the importance of the work they rendered to the society, they were not given an honourable position in ancient Indian society. The degraded social status of actors and actresses in early Indian societies has been well accounted by \textit{Nātyaśāstra} of Bharata. \textit{Nātyaśāstra} (36.28-35) says that the actors in comic vein, made fun of certain holy sages and were cursed with the loss of their status thereafter, came to the status of Śūdras. The story of curse concocted for the degraded position of the actors as mentioned in \textit{Nātyaśāstra} definitely leads one to believe that the artistes had a very low position in ancient Indian societies. Most probably, they led a life which did not conform to the status concept of the higher communities of the main stream society and was disliked very much by them.\textsuperscript{101} \textit{Arthaśāstra} maintains a very low opinion about the actors. Kauṭilya too at one place warns ‘the actors are thieves, in effect, though not name’, and hence includes them in the list of anti-social elements (4.1.65). Thus, it seems that during the period of Kauṭilya performing artistes were common folks having no social respects and social status at all.\textsuperscript{102} Kauṭilya lays down certain rules for entertainers. He warned them against passing comments on
some socially sensitive things and hurting people’s feelings (कामे
देशजातिगोत्रधर्ममैथुनाविवाहमें नर्मियुः। 4.1.61). This strong prohibition
indicates that they indulged in presenting such scenes on stage. From the
references seen in the text it may be inferred that the state itself had
employed some entertainers in the state service. The artistes employed in
such a manner received a fixed salary from the state treasury. Manusmṛti
does not have a good impression for artistes either. It says that the testimony
of a Kuśālava in legal affairs is not valid (8.65). Manu (10.22, 12.45) also
treats the profession of actors as the lowest means of livelihood and wants to
be avoided it. It further says that the judge would consider the Kuśālava as a
Śūdra and the king should drive him out from the town (8.102). This was
due to the bad reputation they had during ancient time.103 Yañjavalkyasmrī
t (11.5.70-71) too views the profession of acting as low. Yañjavalkya treats
the actors as āyogava, a mixed caste, a result of improper alliance between
the Śūdras and women of Vaiśya.104

Salaries for different categories of performers, apparently those who
are affiliated with the royal court, are specifically shown by Kauṭīlya. They
received a fixed salary from the state treasury. A Kuśālava was to be paid
250 pañas, those who were conversant with playing musical instruments
were given 500 pañas (5.3.15). It appears that dramatic performances,
mimicry and satires, besides, singing and dancing and acrobatic teats were
popular forms of entertainment.105 Probably, the remuneration of common
folk artistes was paid by the money collected from the audience of village or
the locality (3.10.37). The wages of the above categories, of course, is much
better than that of an ordinary labourer. But, these people were not privileged to food allowances. All references from ancient sources indicate that performing artistes were low class people, having very little social prestige. They are often classed with antyajas, i.e. untouchables.

**Status of Sexual Entertainers**

Ancient Indians attitude towards the institution of prostitution is worthy of note. It was not considered as a shameful profession. Prostitutes were not entirely abhorred and looked down upon. *Arthaśāstra* explicitly refers to a more regularized form of prostitution which was recognized as a social institution. Kauṭilya’s law recognizes this institution and within proper limits, protects such an extra-marital relationship. The government organizes a part of this vocation and derives many advantages from it. Kauṭilya looks it from an economic point of view. For among the sources of state revenue formed under the head of fort (durga), the text enumerates vēśyā (prostitute), dyūta (gambling), and surā (Liquor) (2.6.2). Prostitution during the time was mainly urban in character and it is generally an adjunct to city life. The courtesans enjoyed a high position at the royal court. They used to attend the court of the king, stood behind the throne, held the royal umbrella, etc. Their high social status is evident from many literary sources in Sanskrit, Pāli and Tamil. The treatises of Indian dramaturgy give a clear idea of the high status of prostitutes in ancient Indian social life. They are referred to as heroines of the plays. *Nātyaśāstra* (34.7) mentions the nature of as heroines as divyā, nr̥papatīṇī, kulastrī and gaṇīkā and says that they are of a very high character (34.10). The high social position of sex workers
was also registered by travellers who visited India. Strabo, referring to 
Megasthenes, says that crowds of women surrounded the king; they rode in 
chariots or horses and some even on elephants.\textsuperscript{107} \textit{Kāmasūtra} also expresses 
the general social attitude of contemporary society towards prostitution. 
Vātsyāyana states ‘to have sexual intercourse with courtesans and widows is 
neither approved nor prohibited as resource to such acts is only for the sake 
of pleasure but not with sastraic objects (\textit{Kāmasūtra}, 1.53).\textsuperscript{108}

\textit{Arthaśāstra} bears testimony to the existence of different categories of 
sex workers. The numerous synonyms signify the social and economical 
status of the prostitutes and bearing different connotations and also 
signifying the social strata to which they belong. Thus, they all played an 
important role in the contemporary social life though their status was that of 
an inanimate object of enjoyment and was subhuman. The instructions made 
by Kauṭilya incidentally provide some information about the social position 
of sex workers. Despite variations in the status of different prostitutes, all 
avenues of prostitution did not offer the same kind of economic security for 
all categories of prostitutes.\textsuperscript{109}

\textbf{Celebrity Status of Gaṇikā}

In \textit{Arthaśāstra}, the word gaṇikā always refers to the courtesan of the 
highest degree obviously is of a high rank among public women.\textsuperscript{110} She is 
not an ordinary prostitute. The civilised public women, proficient in the arts, 
winsome in her ways, and endowed with exceptional beauty and charm is 
called a Gaṇikā (2.27.1). They were trained in the 64 arts at the state’s 
expense. Gaṇikā lived in a palace, sumptuously, had many servants, maids,
procurers, viṭas, male attendants and musicians at her services. Below her are ranked women who do not possess the talents of a Gaṇikā. Rūpadāśī, Rūpājīva, Māṭrī, Puṁścalī, Vēśyā, Devadāsī, Bandhākī, etc. are some of the terms applied to women who are treated ordinary prostitutes. Monika Saxena observes, ‘A Gaṇikā was a social celebrity because of her intellectual and artistic accomplishments. As townships and cities arose and maritime trade flourished, towns and cities became centres housing prostitutes, attracting money from travellers. They are recorded to have lived in capital cities and large commercial centers such as Ujjayinī, Vaiśālī, Vārāṇaṣī and Pāṭaliputra. These mercantile centres boasted of rich merchants who spent millions to maintain their splendid establishments and patronizing Gaṇikā’s well-versed in the art of eroticism’. In Arthaśāstra Gaṇikā has a special meaning, that is, of a state servant who received a monthly salary from the state treasury. Recruitment method to the profession was varied: in some instances the profession was hereditary, passing from mother to daughter, while in others women were drawn in either through capture or on account of poverty. Some women taking up this profession had to be sure of an independent livelihood and had to depend on clients to make it a viable proposition. A section of girls had to adopt this profession because their mothers earned their livelihood by way of prostitution. While women in that era generally were economically dependent on men, prostitutes were independent and supported themselves by professional skills and artistic accomplishments. They were sufficiently educated and civilized.
In *Arthaśāstra* the Superintendents of Prostitutes (Gaṇikādhyaṅkṣa) is the authority to grant the status of Gaṇikā to a deserving prostitute. Though belonging to the class of public women, the Gaṇikā has been treated with special consideration. Kauṭilya states that courtesans were either born as prostitutes’ daughters, were purchased, captured in war or were women who had been punished for adultery.⁵¹⁶ The requisite qualifications for the status are richly endowed with beauty, youth, and artistic ability (रूपोपरिवर्तनसम्प्रत्व- 2.27.1). The Gaṇikā, because of her youth, beauty, training and accomplishment belonged to a superior social status.⁵¹⁷

**Vēśyā**

Vēśyās appeared in the text as common prostitutes and bear an ordinary social status. They are different from Gaṇikā and lived by selling their physical charms and beauty. They had no cultural accomplishments like a Gaṇikā. A Gaṇikā earned large sums of income by courting men of high social classes which gave them a high social standing. The *Śabdakalpadruma* quotes approximately 30 synonyms of the word Vēśyā and the *Kāmasūtra* considers the word as the most general one for the designation of all kinds of prostitutes.⁵¹⁸ Vēśyās are required to watch the conduct of soldiers. They engaged in this profession to earn their livelihood.

**Devadāsī**

The term Dēvadāsī means female slave of god. Significantly, the term appeared for the first time in Kauṭilya’s *Arthaśāstra*. They are mentioned by Kauṭilya in connection with the women who find labour in the state weaving
industry because of their age or illness or because of other circumstances (2.23.2). They having ended to attend the temple must be involved in such factory. They were employed by the state for spinning cotton, wool and flax. Kautilya states that if they had ceased to attend the temples on service they had to be employed in spinning field. However, Kautilya does not show their actual role they are expected to do in temples. 

Apparently Devadasis being notionally dedicated to gods could not have served the state through their earnings or employment in some politically useful role, unlike the Rupajiva and Rupadasis, and hence are less visible in the text although inscriptional evidence testifies to the existence of the institution of Devadasis in the third century BCE. However, all these exploited women including the female slaves of the king, faced penury and insecurity in old age and had to tend for themselves by spinning yarn. In Arthasastra, the Devadasis were mentioned along with mothers of prostitutes (Rupajivamatrikā), and old female servants of the king (Vṛddharājādāśī) might suggest that the Devadasis are likely to be loose women. Later literary sources prove that they were sacred courtesans connected with temple prostitution. They had to work under the rules of their masters. Disciplines on them were enforced by the state and enjoyed some degree of protection. These types of prostitutes pursued their trade in an odour of sanctity.

Devadasis social status, originally, was quite high. They were the honourable members of the temple functionaries. As the Devadasis position in the temple degenerated, their status in society, also, degenerated and quite
naturally they were treated as temple prostitutes. Thus, they were dragged down from their respectable elevated position to the level of ordinary prostitutes. In their old age they were forced to seek other means to substantiate their income, when not engaged in their legitimate duties.

**Secret Agents (Gṛdhahpuruṣa)**

The most characteristic feature of the Kauṭilyan state was the extensive network of secret service which cover all citizens and officers, and even members of the royal family. *Arthaśāstra* devotes some chapters for dealing with the various functions of Gṛdhahpuruṣas. They occupied a very important role in the administrative set up of Kauṭilya. The hidden army of spies and secret agents were used by the state. Their work was considered to be of utmost importance. The text gives an institutionalized form of spy work to maintain and watch over seducible and non seducible elements in the home territory, whether they are prominent persons or common people (1.13.26). The network of spies was organized by the state and had no private practices.

Spies were employed as servants and entertainers and advised to keep an eye on the private character of the high officials of the state. They disguised as householders, cultivators, merchants, hermits, ascetics practicing austerities, mendicant women and disciples or students, mixed with all ranks of society and collected information. The king employed them to watch the movements not only of his high officials, including priests, ministers and the commander in chief, but even of his own sons and heir apparent to the throne. All methods were permissible for the spies, viz.
spying, lying, bribing, poisoning, women’s wiles and the assassin’s knife, practice of all kinds of frauds, incendiaryism and robbery.\textsuperscript{126}

Spies were treated as a separate class within the administrative system. Megasthenes included overseers (spies) as constituting one of the seven castes in the society. He says; “the sixth caste consists of the overseers. It is their province to enquire into all that goes on in India, and report to the king.”\textsuperscript{127} Spies were provided with necessary money to work, to start a trade etc. to pose successfully as one of the active members of the class over which they have to spy. The agents of secret services were given due honour and satisfactory wages. Kauṭilya classifies the grades of spy agents in term of salary. The group of Śaṅsthā was placed in the sixth grade of pay and the members of Śaṅcāra were placed in the seventh pay of grade. The salary of Śaṅsthā is higher probably owing to the fact that while they are expected to organize a network of secret agents. The Śaṅcāras mostly work on their own effort.

**High Dignitaries**

The Kauṭilyan state was governed by a large number of officials of many ranks. Ghoshal classifies the Kauṭilyan officials in many grades; Grade I; Mantrin (The Councillor), Purohita (The Chaplain), Senāpati (The Commander in Chief), Yuvarāja (The Crown Prince). Grade II; Praśāṣṭr (The Director of Labour Corps), Samāhartṛ (The Administrator), Sannidhātṛ (The Director Labour of Corps) and second in command of the army. Grade III; Nāyaka (The Commandant), Pauravyāvahārika (The City Judge), Karmāntika (The Director of Factories), Mantripariṣadadhyakṣa (President
of the Council of Ministers), Daṇḍapāla (The Chief of the Army), Durgapāla (The commander of Forts), Antapāla (The Commander of Frontier Forts) and princes of inferior rank. Grade IV; The mukhya in-charge of śreṇī troops, elephants, horses and chariots, Pradeśṭṛ (The Magistrate). Grade V; Adhyakṣas of infantry, cavalry, chariots, and elephants and guards in charge of economic forests and elephant forests. Grade VI: miscellaneous groups of king’s attendants. Grade VII; comprised all civil Adhyakṣas and five categories of Saṁsthā spies. Grade VIII; consisted of accountant and scribe, trained infantry-men and four categories of Saṅcāra spies. Grade IX, X and XI consisted of similar groups of lower grades of state employees.  

The whole state machinery was a well-knit and graded bureaucratic type which owed its existence to the monarch. All of them were answerable to the state. *Arthaśāstra* prescribed the principle of coordinated work amongst all departments. The higher officers of the Kauṭilyan state are usually referred to as Amātyas. According to the text all undertakings were initiated by them. Three grades of Amātyas are recognized, the highest, the middling and the lowest, according to the degree of qualifications possessed by them.  

Then on another context Kauṭilya specifies that “all superintendents endowed with the excellences of a minister, should be appointed to works according to their capacity” (2.9.1). In view of the great importance of the position of the Amātyas, Kauṭilya discussed in detail the proper modes of selecting them. Before employing Amātyas on responsible duties, their characters were tested by secret agents. The application of secret tests introduces us to a new phase in early Indian administrative history, namely that of the specialization of offices. The merits of the
Amātyas decided their grade, the highest, the middle and the lowest. Those who failed in one or more tests, but were otherwise qualified, were appointed in the category of inferior rank, in accordance with the ascertained degree of purity, to the various departments in the civil service. Those who were successful in all respects but were appointed as Mantrins (whose number was limited) were probably designated as Mahāmātras and may have been members of the Mantripariṣad. Members of the Mantripariṣad were inferior in rank to Mantrins. This was more like an executive council whose main function was to see that the work decided upon is started in earnest, work under progress is completed, and completed work is improved upon. Mantrins were probably recruited from amongst the experienced administrators.\(^{130}\) All these precautions show that the Amātyas were there on impersonal basis, answering to the idea of a bureaucracy.\(^{131}\) Kauṭilya’s list of requisite qualifications for higher posts shows that these were looked upon as a special preserve of the members of the upper Varṇas.\(^{132}\)

In Kauṭilya’s view the Amātyas constitute the highest cadre of officials from which Mantrins (The Councillors), Purohita (The Chaplain), Samāhartṛ (The Administrator), Sannidhātṛ (The Director Labour of Corps), Dauvārika (The Palace Usher), Antarvarṇāśika (The Chief of the Palace Guards), and the Adhyakṣas of various departments are to be recruited. The general nature of their duties is indicated by their names. However, the distinction between the Amātyas and the Adhyakṣas is not very clear from the text. The professional class of councilors and assessors monopolised the highest posts of government, executive and judicial. According to
Megasthenes, who divides the population into seven classes, the civil and military employees of the state constituted as many as three classes- ⁵ᵗʰ, ⁶ᵗʰ, and ⁷ᵗʰ.¹³³ All references show that the avenues to the higher bureaucracy were closed to the people of the lower orders.

**Heads of Departments (Adhyakṣas)**

Next to the high dignitaries, the lower branch consisted mainly of the Adhyakṣas of the various departments into which the administration was divided. The Adhyakṣa stands for the departmental head and includes all the ‘overseers’ mentioned in the section named *Adhyakṣapracāra*. The persons to be appointed as administrators should be selected purely on the basis of merits and they should perform their professional duties with efficiency and integrity.¹³⁴ R.P. Kangle rightly observes that ‘the kind of state control over the economy *Arthaśāstra* presupposes is not possible without an efficient administration. We, therefore, find in it a description of elaborate administrative machinery’.¹³⁵ Thus, the Adhyakṣas were responsible for the efficient working of a particular department under their charge. An Adhyakṣa was in over all charge of all the activities of his department. There are thirty four Adhyakṣas mentioned in the text. But, they all were not at the entire same grade. The text gives a salary scale for all departmental heads as 1000 paṇas. But at the same time, the salary of the Director of Factories (Karmāntika) is recommended as 12,000 paṇas and that of the Guardians of material and Elephant forest (Dravyahastivanapāla) as 4,000 paṇas (पत्यधिकान्त निवृत्त अध्यक्षः द्रव्यः स्थितिन्त्रपालः च चतुः साहस्रः। 5.3.11). Hence, the salary of an Adhyakṣa could have been anywhere between 1000 to 12,000 paṇas,
with or without perquisites.¹³⁶ That one Adhyakṣa could be paid differently from another is also borne out by the reason that the Director of Mines (Ākarādhyakṣa), himself an Adhyakṣa had under him a number of Adhyakṣas, such as Lohādhyakṣa, Lakṣaṇādhyakṣa, Khanyadhyakṣa, Lavanādhyakṣa and Rūpadarśaka, the implication being that the Ākarādhyakṣa was of a higher grade.

The entire thirty four Adhyakṣas may be classified as treasury officials, agriculture, forestry and livestock officials, industry officials, trade and transport officials, defence officials, and miscellaneous in character. Their duties and responsibilities are clearly defined. Each Adhyakṣa carried on his work with the help of a number of assistants and subordinates.

At this distance of time it is difficult to form a sufficient image of the social status of labourers in the time of Arthaśāstra. However it is easy to see that all avenues to life did not offer same kind of socio-economic security to professional groups. In ancient times, the social life and status of the people was mainly determined by two factors, i.e. Varṇas (four castes) and Āśramas (four orders of life), because the daily activities were fixed according to the particular caste and stage of life to which one belonged to. Thus, theoretically Arthaśāstra introduces a new phase in the history of labour relations since it clearly came to the grip with the reality of slavery and bondage. The author attempted to bring some order and clarity into the definition of the status of Śūdrā and the status of Dāsakarmakaras. As a part of it Kauṭilya introduces a new avocation and rank of Śūdrās. And he held a changing view and envisages the possibility of admitting some Śūdrās to
agricultural and trading facilities. However, the two higher classes still formed the priesthood and ruling classes while the Vaiśyas and Śūdras continued as working class.

NOTES:

1 ‘Varṇa is translated as order, estate, etc., which obscures its identity as class, and it is said that in each case the economic status of a Varṇa does not approximate to its social and ritual status.’ For more details see R.S. Sharma, Material Culture and Social Formations of in Ancient India, Second Edition, MacMillan, New Delhi, 2007, p.4.


3 ‘It is but a common knowledge from history that in the division of labour among all communities whether in the East or in the West, in ancient or modern days, all the higher and honourable professions are appropriated by the conquering or dominating classes while the menial occupations and those involving manual labour are left to the helots, Plebeians, Serfs or Śūdras.’ See Ambuj Nath Banerji, Studies in Economics of Ancient India, Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Vol. 10 192, p.87.


5 See R.S. Sharma, op.cit., p.137.

6 See Manusmṛti, 9.334, Yāñjavalkyasmṛti, 1.120, Gautamamṛti, 10.60, and Bhagavadgītā 18.44.


8 Ibid, p.163.


11 Ibid.


14 R.S. Sharma, op.cit., p.110.

15 Rekha Rani Sharma, op.cit., p.192.


23 Ibid, p.72.
26 A.L. Basham, op. cit., p.152.
27 Ibid.
29 Rekha Rani Sharma, op. cit., p.192.
30 The classification of the slaves in Manusmrti (7.415) resembles with that of Arthaśāstra. According to Manu there are seven types of slaves i.e. brought with flag (Dhvajāḥṭa), slave of rice (Bhaktādāsa), slave born in the house (Grhejāṭa), purchased (Krīṭa), given (Dattāra), received from father (Paṁṭka), and slave of justice (Daṇḍāśa). Āhita (mortgaged) and Ātmāvikrayi (who sells himself), type of slaves of Kautilya is not mentioned by Manu. See Manusmṛti, with the Sanskrit Commentary Manvartha-Mukāvavālī of Kulūkabhāṭṭa, Volume II, Rakesh Shastry (Ed.), Vidyanidhi Prakashan, Delhi, 2005.
31 Rajan Gurukkal, op. cit., p.7.
32 Uma Chakravarti, op. cit., p.98.
34 Rekha Rani Sharma, op. cit., p.189.
35 R.P. Kangle, op. cit., Note on 3.13.18
36 Rekha Rani Sharma, op. cit., p.187.
40 See Romila Thapar, Asoka and the Decline of Mauroys, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999, p.91.
42 Rajan Gurukkal, op. cit., p.4.
44 Dev Raj Chanana, op. cit., p.112.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
47 Rekha Rani Sharma, op. cit., p.189.
48 Ibid, p.190.
49 A.K. Tyagi, Women Workers in Ancient India, Radha Publications, Delhi, 1994, p.95.
50 R.S. Sharma, op. cit., p.181.
51 Rajan Gurukkal, *op.cit.*, p.3.
53 Ibid.
56 Ibid, Part II, Note on 2.1.2.
63 See Ambuj Nath Banerji, *op.cit.*, p.103.
66 Romila Thapar, *op.cit.*, p.89.
68 Ibid, p.18.
69 Uma Chakravarti, *op.cit.*, p.83.
70 Ibid.
74 *Manasūrti* (4.253) also refers to this type of peasants.
80 Ibid.
82 R.P. Kangle, *op.cit.*, Part II, Note on 2.32.17.
83 Kumkum Roy, *op.cit.*, p.82.
90 *Ibid*.
96 Romila Thapar, *op.cit.*, 2000, p.413.
102 Iravati, *op.cit.*, p.207.
109 The sixty four arts are classified by L. Sternbach into eleven major groups, that is, general education (14), domestic science (4), toilet (4), dressing (2), music and dancing (5), fine arts (8), physical culture (3), games (4), arts of entertaining (4), professional training (14) and pet animals (2). See L. Sternbach, *op.cit.*, p.29.
110 In all sources of Indian literature the word gaṇikā always denotes the highest class of public women who entertained men with her services and possessed the knowledge of fine arts. Major Mahākāvyas in Sanskrit i.e. *Raghuvaṃśa* (7.51), *Kumārasambhava* (16.36, 48), *Kirātārjunīya* (4.51) and *Śīnapalavadha* (18.60, 61) contain genuine references to courtesans as a prestigious decoration of a royal a court and an indispensable part of city life. According to *Kāmasūtra* (1.3.20), a prostitute who has good character, beauty and virtue and has progressed through the arts shall attain the title of Gaṇikā and place in the public gathering. In the Jātaka literature the word gaṇikā is used in the meaning of highly esteemed women. It is used promiscuously with Nagaraśobhini and Vaṃḍāṣi (Vrāṇadāṣī). *Mahābhārata* (*Ādiyarvan*, 115.39, *Udyoparvan*, 130.38) gives colourful descriptions of Gaṇikā and their intimate connection with the state. All varieties literary sources tend to show that the ancient Indian society did not consider the king’s association with prostitutes to be sinful or immoral. Politically these accomplished women render much more service to the government. They are the part of the royal splendour.


113 L. Sternbach, *op.cit.*, p.27.


118 Monika Saxsena, *op.cit.*, p.29.

119 The overt duty of the Devadāsīs was to dance at the time of the evening worship in the temple, but they were also treated as concubines by the temple priests. Sukumari Bhattacharji, *op.cit.*, p.217.


121 Pratap Chandra Chunder, *op.cit.*, p.111.


