CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION
Labour has been considered as the fundamental principle of all comforts and conveniences of human life and achievements. Right from the beginning, physical labour has played a vital role in the progress of human civilization. A large part of people’s daily life was devoted to their profession. Great emphasis was given to physical labour in India since the early period of its history. Archaeological, inscriptive and literary sources reveal that ancient Indians had excelled in different spheres of professions such as agriculture, animal rearing, trade and industry, arts and crafts and so on. The ideas and instructions of thinkers on these subjects in India are interesting and valuable. Various forms of literature give a comprehensive picture of socio-economic life of ancient India. Hence, in order to reconstruct the economic activities of ancient Indian people the literary works composed in that age also have to be analysed well. Rāmāyana, Mahābhārata, Purāṇas, Buddhist texts, Jain literature, Kāmasūtra, Daśakumārācarita etc. give copious references to the daily life of the ancient people. Arthaśāstra of Kauṭilya is the most prominent among such works as it gives abundant information for the study of ancient Indian social, political and economic life. It provides profuse materials about a large number of professions and different types of labour systems that had been presumably prevalent in the age of its composition. A good picture of a large number of professions, different types of labour systems, relations between the state and its employees, the status of different vocations, wage system of work etc. also are revealed through the descriptions of Kauṭilya. The present
study is an attempt to analyse the nature of the different professions and labour systems dealt with in Kautilya’s *Arthaśāstra*.

*Arthaśāstra* basically is a treatise on political science and practical administration of a state. This work although has been used by historians to study a wide variety of themes such as state craft, bureaucracy, finance management, science and technology, secret services and the lives of the common people, the particular aim of this thesis is to reconstruct the economic activities of ancient Indians, on the basis of the discourses on professions and systems of various labours seen in *Arthaśāstra*. Some of the aspects of the very issue to be analysed in this thesis have been examined by various scholars in connection with other topics of discussion in *Arthaśāstra*. This attempt stands apart from the earlier studies on account of the point that no serious effort has been taken by scholars for an inclusive study of the professions and different labour systems reflected in *Arthaśāstra*. A study from this point of view is expected to be of great help in unearthing the social and economic relations prevalent in early Indian.

R.C. Majumdar (1918), K.M. Saran (1957), Uma Chakravarti (2006) have made some scattered references to the labour rules based on *Arthaśāstra*. *Labour in Ancient India* by K.M. Saran (1957) deals with the economic activities of early Indian societies. *Corporate Life in Ancient India* by R.C. Majumdar (1918) is a pioneer work in which he has tried to focus on corporate activities in economic, political, social and religious life of early India from Vedic period to 7th century A.D. He tried to give a
comprehensive picture of the corporate life of ancient period. In *Beyond the Kings and Brāhmaṇas of Ancient India*, Uma Chakravarti (2006) throws some light into the early Indian economic life. But, none of them has analysed the details of the regulations related with labour in depth. The present thesis thus is expected to be is the initial attempt in this direction.

*Aṛthaśāstra of Kauṭilya: A Brief Sketch*

The three-fold objectives of human life, according to ancient Indian tradition, are dharma (righteousness), artha (wealth), and kāma (pleasure) which collectively are known as ‘trivarga’. According to this principle every human being should attempt to satisfy his spiritual needs by fulfilling his moral duties (dharma), his material desires by acquiring the necessaries of life, property, wealth and power (artha) and his sexual desires by following the dictates of pleasure (kāma). The ancient Indian scholars propounded separate śāstra for each of the trivarga, i.e. Dharmaśāstra, Arthaśāstra, and Kāmaśāstra. ‘The Dharmasūtras, Smṛtis, epics and Purāṇas represent a tradition which is religious and out and out Brāhmaṇical. A somewhat different tradition is embodied in the Arthaśāstra, which is more practical and less influenced by religious considerations.’¹ The science which is the means of the attainment and protection of the earth is the Science of Politics (*Aṛthaśāstra*-15.1.1-2). According to Kauṭilya ‘The source of the livelihood (vṛtti) of men is wealth (artha), in other words, the earth inhabited by men. As the word ‘artha’ in *Aṛthaśāstra* denotes ‘earth’, more specifically the earth inhabited by men following various occupations constitutes artha; the
science dealing with such an earth is Arthaśāstra. Its main concern is how to attain such earth and how to protect it.' The oldest surviving text on statecraft in Indian history is Arthaśāstra of Kauṭilya. It is considered as the most valuable work on Arthaśāstra school and ‘most precious work in the whole range of Sanskrit literature.' Winternitz observes ‘The Arthaśāstra of Kauṭilya is one of the world’s oldest treatises on the administration of a state. And it is a unique work, which throws more light on the social conditions and actual life in ancient India than any other work in Indian literature.' Kauṭilya provides better insight into the evolution of ancient Indian society and culture. So, Arthaśāstra has been used as a source of material for the reconstruction of ancient Indian socio-cultural and economic history also.

According to the contents dealt with in this work, the author has categorized Arthaśāstra into 15 Adhikaraṇas, 150 Adhyāyas, and 180 Prakaraṇas. Based on the Arthaśāstra tradition, the whole subject matter of the text can be divided into two titles, namely tantra, the home or internal administration of the state and ‘āvāpa’ the foreign affairs. In the first five Adhikaraṇas the author discusses tantra while the sixth to thirteenth Adhikaraṇas discuss āvāpa. The last two Adhikaraṇas are of miscellaneous in character.

*Arthaśāstra: Author and Date*

The date of Arthaśāstra has been argued over among scholars of Indian history. The time of the composition of Arthaśāstra appears to be
more or less certain. Immediately after the publication of the text of Arthaśāstra in 1909 by R. Shamasstry, several western and Indian scholars questioned the historicity of Kautilya and the authenticity of the text. ‘Perhaps no single question in ancient Indian history has been debated as much as the date and authorship of Arthaśāstra’. The debate still continues, and no generally accepted doctrine about the date of its authorship has been settled. Regarding the authorship and date of Arthaśāstra, R.P. Kangle has made a detailed discussion in his ‘Study’ of Arthaśāstra. He says “The traditional view is that Kautilya, also known as Cāṇakya or Viṣṇugupta, who destroyed the power of the Nandas and placed Candragupta Maurya on the throne of the Magadhā, is the author of the Arthaśāstra. And, as Candragupta is known to have come to the throne in 321 BC or thereafter, the date of the composition of the work is assumed to be the end of the fourth century B.C.”.

All Indian sources- Brahmical, Buddhist and Jain- agree that Kautilya destroyed the Nanda dynasty and placed Candragupta Maurya on the throne of Magadhā. The adventures of Cāṇakya and Candragupta are told in a cycle of tales preserved by these traditions. And also a verse at the end of Arthaśāstra clearly attributes this work to one who destroyed the Nandas (15.1). Further, as says R.S. Sharma, no literary source gives any alternative information suggesting that Kautilya belonged to some other period. However, Indian scholars generally place it in the Maurya period, and European scholars assign it four or five centuries later. The dates
suggested vary from the fourth century BC to third century AD. P.V. Kane assigns the date of this text to 300 BC.\textsuperscript{10} R.P. Kangle reviews the problem of the date at length and concludes by assigning it to the Mauryan period.\textsuperscript{11} He is of opinion that the text marks a culmination of a long period of speculation on the matter on which forms the subject of the śāstra.\textsuperscript{12} Therefore, R.P. Kangle concludes that Arthaśāstra is the work of Kauṭilya, who helped Candragupta to come to power in Magadhā.\textsuperscript{13} And also in the concluding remarks of the study of the Arthaśāstra, Kangle writes: “Some of the interest roused by the work may be said to be due to the antiquity to which it is ascribed, it was argued earlier ... that it may well be assigned to the epoch to which it belongs according to tradition. However, it should be added that even if a somewhat later date be regarded as more probable for its composition that will not detract from its essential worth. Even for the third century AD, which seems to be the latest date to which it could be ascribed; it would still be a very remarkable achievement”.\textsuperscript{14}

A.B. Keith proposes the work to be a product of AD 300 and written by an official attached to some court as at least chiefly because the accounts of the Mauryan state given by Megasthenes in his Indica, and by Kauṭilya in the Arthaśāstra do not coincide.\textsuperscript{15} D.D. Kosambi disagrees with Keith’s views first by showing that the accounts of Megasthenes and Kauṭilya do tally, and, second, by detailing reasons why society depicted in Arthaśāstra could not exist in the India of C.E. 300.\textsuperscript{16} In 1970s, based on the researches done on a statistical analysis of terms used in Arthaśāstra, Thomas R.
Trautmann concludes that there is no unity of authorship in the text and therefore, there are as many dates as the authors and he argues there are specific elements in the text which seem to require a post-Mauryan date to it. Recently he observed ‘The *Arthaśāstra* pays a good deal of attention to luxury goods, including goods coming from as far away as China and Rome. Although it does not speak of the trade with these places directly, it mentions some of the precious commodities that arrive from it. As to China, it speaks of China silk (*cīna-pattā*). The name for China did not come into use until the Chin dynasty, starting in 221 BCE, that is, long after Chandragupta Maurya and Cāṇakya. As to Rome, the Roman trade with India grew rapidly in the first century CE or slightly earlier, long after the Mauryan Empire had broken up, when Greek sailors at Alexandria, then under Roman rule, learned how to use the monsoon winds to carry their ships from the Red sea to India and back in a short time’.\(^\text{17}\) All scholars agree with the fact that trade with the Chinese is not known before the second century BCE. Trautmann hence thinks the text seems to require a post-Mauryan date. However, a probable date suggested by him for the compilation of *Arthaśāstra* is about 150.\(^\text{18}\) S.R. Goyal, one of India’s pre-eminent scholars of ancient India, who made a close comparison of the *Arthaśāstra* with the account of Megasthenes, concluded that the evidence proves the date of the *Arthaśāstra* is post-Mauryan.\(^\text{19}\)

According to R.S. Sharma, all contents of *Arthaśāstra* do not seem to belong to the same period. Like so many other works in Sanskrit,
*Arthaśāstra* may have been recast in later times. He points out that several revenue terms and names of officers mentioned in *Arthaśāstra* first appear in the inscriptions of the sixth and seventh centuries and even of the eleventh-twelfth centuries. However, some similarity of the royal control of economic activities can be noticed in Megasthenes with that recommended by Kauṭilya in Book II which deals with the duties of Adhyakṣas. This may be also true of parts of the Books III and IV and some other portions of *Arthaśāstra.*

Based on these insights it is possible to conclude as Romila Thapar had done that some portions of the text may be considered as later additions. Majority of opinions is now coming round to the view that a part of the text was originally written during the Mauryan period by Kauṭilya or Cāṇakya, and the text was expanded and edited by various writers, until it was rewritten in sūtra form by Viṣṇugupta in fourth century AD. According to Romila Thapar, this is the form with which we are familiar today. To quote Thomas R. Trautmann ‘Whether the *Arthaśāstra* is a text of the Mauryan period or of the post-Mauryan period, over which scholars disagree, most agree that it is the product of a tradition containing different schools of thought and notable teachers, and that some elements of the tradition go back a long way, even before the Mauryan Empire…. The *Arthaśāstra*, by its own account, is not a description of a specific actually existing Kingdom, but a synthesis of prescriptions about the practice of Kingship in general made, perhaps over centuries, by many teachers, whose business was to
advise the King in the running of the Kingdom. This opinion appears to be more likely.

The traditional understanding about the period of *Arthaśāstra* is being destabilized to an extent and a new outlook that the author of the text represents a more developed social situation, is getting stronger. At the same time, as per the Marxian historians and other scholars in this field, many portions of *Arthaśāstra* reflect the social situations of the Mauryan period. In this context, a definite and unanimous position about the time and author of the text seems not plausible. Thus, to look at the various dimension of the labour and laws related to various labours dealt with in the text, a broad canvas of time extending from the Mauryan Empire (321 BC onward) to the second centuries of Christian era is taken into consideration.

**Resources and Method**

Kauṭilya mentions about the labour and labour systems in various parts of the text of which the first five Adhikaraṇas provide vital information regarding the research topic. These have been examined deeply in the light of the historical data available from other works of ancient Indian literature and sources of historical knowledge. An attempt has been made throughout in this study to categorize and illustrate the various systems of labour referred to in *Arthaśāstra*. For textual reference of *Arthaśāstra* the order of Adhikaraṇa, Adhyāya and Sūtra is pursued and it is shown in a bracket along with the statement of the data it implied. Moreover, the text itself is quoted
wherever the context demands. The technique of cross reference is also used on various occasions.

R.P. Kangle’s *The Kauṭilīya Arthaśāstra*, Part I and Part II, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, Seventh Reprint, 2010, is the volume followed for the text and translation of *Arthaśāstra*. Part III of R.P. Kangle’s work which is a study of *Arthaśāstra* has also been utilised by and large. Different translations and commentaries of *Arthaśāstra* have also been made use for the present work. Apart from it, all the related works in Sanskrit and secondary materials dealing with the socio-economic life of ancient India have been consulted as far as possible. The views of D.D. Kosambi, R.C. Majumdar, K.M Saran, P.V. Kane, R.S. Sharma, S.R. Goyal, A.L. Basham, A.B. Keith, L. Sternbach, D.R. Chanana, Romila Thapar, Thomas R. Trautmann, Kumkum Roy, Uma Chakravarti, Vijaya Ramaswamy, Sukumari Bhattacharji, Pranati Ghosal etc. have been made use of for the formation of the conceiving the arguments of this thesis.

Notes:

10 P.V. Kane, History of Dharmaśāstra, Vol. II, BORI, Poona, 1962, p. XI.
12 Ibid., p.10.
13 Ibid., p.106.
14 Ibid., p.266.
16 See D.D. Kosambi, An Introduction to the Study of Indian History, Popular Prakashan New Delhi, 1994, pp.210-212.
22 See Romila Thapar, Cultural Past, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2000, p.411.