CHAPTER II

NATURE OF LABOURS AND
SECTIONS OF LABOURERS IN EARLY INDIA
History of labour in ancient India is an interesting area of study. The ancient working class had engaged in a variety of vocations like agriculture, animal husbandry, trade, industry and commerce. They had established a reputation for having developed the science of agriculture and for having acquired impressive mastery over different arts and crafts.\(^1\) Animal Husbandry, Architecture, Metallurgy etc. have been developed as separate branches of knowledge in India ancient times itself.\(^2\) The artifacts unearthed through the excavations at the sites like Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro and various inscriptions show that the development of industries, trading, gold smithy, carpentry, agriculture, spinning and weaving was unparallel in ancient India. This evidently proves that a large number of workmen were engaged in various professions in that age. It can be learnt from ancient sources that the people working in different vocations were belonging to different categories of society and the nature of the labourship of each category varied in each case. Hence, a general awareness about the labours and labourers existed in India in the ancient past would be necessary for the better understanding of the state of affairs in the field of this study. Probably, this state had come into existence and developed as early as the composition of *Arthaśāstra* of Kauṭilya.\(^3\) As mentioned earlier, no other work of that age gives a comprehensive account on this topic as the *Arthaśāstra* does. Nevertheless, a general idea regarding this topic can be formulated by analysing the historical evidences supplied by ancient
Sanskrit works. The present chapter is an inquiry into the matters related to the nature of labours and sections of labourers in ancient India.

**Agriculture**

Agriculture is a system of life in which humans, plants and animals are interwoven. It has been playing a major role in the economy of India since the pre-Neolithic times. It was considered as an honourable profession and man took this as the principal means of livelihood. The earliest evidence as regards to agriculture comes from Mehrgarh (8000 BCE onward) in the North West and from sites in the Deccan, central India, Kashmir and the northwest.\(^4\) The process of domestication of plants and cereals would have taken a long time. Evidences of cereals can be traced at Mehrgarh and in the Vindhyas in 6,000 BCE. Wild varieties of rice have been found in the Vindhyan region in a Mesolithic context at Chopanimando in Meja Tehsil of Allahabad.\(^5\) In later times, the excavations at Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro proved that there did exit a good system of agriculture.\(^6\) The fabric of Indus agriculture rested undoubtedly on plough cultivation.\(^7\) The discovery of the furrows of a ‘ploughed field’ at Kalibangan and the plough explains the really large extend of Indus agriculture, covering the North-West plains and extending into Gujarat.\(^8\) The granaries at Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, the stack of storage jars at Kalibangan etc. suggest that the people were producing surplus\(^9\) grains.\(^10\) From the early historical period onward, texts and inscriptions in Sanskrit, Pāli, Prakrit and Tamil literature provide
occasional descriptions of agricultural practices. Probably all castes and communities of Indian society, rich and poor, male and female were engaged in agricultural activities. They were commonly known as farmers and do not constitute a homogeneous group.

The Vedic literature gives plentiful evidence to agriculture. In *Rgveda*\(^1\) there is abundance of data with regard to agriculture. Agriculture was the significant characteristic of the Ārya community and it was counted as a distinguishing mark of the ‘civilized’ from the ‘barbarians’. It was not confined to the lowest strata of population, but had been the occupation of a class of men who were held an important position in the society.\(^2\) According to *Rgveda*, cultivated fields are called kṣētra\(^3\) and fertile ones urvara\(^4\) which might indicate alluvial lands as well. Another term used in connection with agriculture is sītā. The term kṛṣṭī in *Rgveda* which denotes people in general, appear to imply that they were by and large agriculturists.\(^5\) It refers to the preservation of seeds which indicates that agriculture was a regular occupation from year to year (5.53.13). The *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* mentions different agricultural operations such as ploughing (karṣaṇa), sowing (vāpa), reaping (lava), and threshing (niśpāva). It may be understood from this that in the total processing there were four stages of operations, viz., ploughing the field, sowing of seeds, harvesting ripe corn, and threshing and separating the straws from corn (1.6.1-3). It distinguishes two kinds of plants, viz., grāmya-oṣadhī, cultivated in rural areas and aranya-oṣadhī, growing wild (2.1.72). ‘The later Vedic people
produced barley, wheat, rice, sugarcane, paddy, and several kinds of pulses. They also produced mudga (green gram) which takes 6-8 weeks to ripen, and they grew kulmāsa (black gram) which was considered to be the food of the poor in times of famine in the Kuru land." The maxim 'अन्न वै कृषि:' mentioned in Śatapatrabhāma (7.2.26), meaning 'food is agriculture' clearly declares that food was chiefly derived by agriculture. According to Taittirīyasaṁhitā, cultivation of at least fourteen types of corn was known to the people (नाट्यविश्वास्ती समायां ओषधिः समरणः 5.2.5). It is learnt from it, two crops were grown in a year (तस्मादिन्त्रिधिवर्तस्य स्त्यं पच्यते।1.7.3). Megasthenes states that during the Mauryan period the greater part of the soil of India was under irrigation and consequently bore two crops in the year. The Vājasaneyasaṁhitā (18.12) mentions a long list of various crops such as rice, yava, wheat, māṣa, sesame, mudga etc. Brhadāranyakopaniṣad (6.3.13) enumerates ten kinds of grāmyāṇi dhānyāṇi. The main products of agriculture in Sangam period were sugarcane, paddy, ragi, pulses like lablab etc. The importance of cereals (anna) is emphasized in the Chāndogyopaniṣad, which also tells how the rains contributed to the origin of anna, and the sun to its ripening. Cultivation of various types of fruits, flowers and vegetables was done in Buddhist time. During the post-Vedic time agriculture, cattle rearing, trade and commerce which altogether known as vārttā, were the principal means of livelihood. Among these agriculture was the most prominent, for the rural economy was based upon it. This
period witnessed significant progress in various fields of agriculture. Rice and wheat were cultivated in this age. When the Aryans moved to the Gangetic valley, pulses of different varieties and other products were developed. Agricultural operations came to be associated with domestic rituals in the later Vedic age.25

Work Force

As regards farmers, in Vedic literature, there are four or five terms viz. kināsa (Ṛgveda, 4.57.8), kārṣīṇa (Atharvaveda, 6.116.1), vāpa (Vājasaneyīsamhitā, 30.7, Taิตirīyabrāhmaṇa, 3.4.3.1) and idvāh (Aitareyabrāhmaṇa, 3.4.3.1). All these terms seem to mean cultivator or farmer in its general sense, or the persons who were somehow involved in the process of cultivation.26 The protector of the agricultural fields-Kṣētraraksakā is also seen in Ṛgveda (10.68.1). Probably he may have protected the cultivated fields from birds, fire and pest.27 The major sources for labour-force during the period of Ṛgveda were Dāsas who were made captive in war or received in donation from the king. Arthaśāstra recognizes that in early centuries of Christian era, agriculture was depended to a very large measure on the labour of Śūdras and avaravarnas.28 The labour force was responsible for most of the agricultural operations such as ploughing, levelling, sowing, watering, threshing, collecting, loading on cattle the produce and carrying them to owner’s house.29
Agriculture as a Profession

In *Manusmṛti*, it is stated that agriculture is thought to be good by some, but as a profession it was blamed by all. 30 (कृषि साधिति मन्यन्ते सा वृहि: सदिकर्षिता। भूसिंह भूमिश्यांश्रेव हृद्यति काष्ठयोमुखम् 110.84). In terms of Varna *Yājnavalkyasmṛti* recommended that the agriculture, cattle-rearing, trade and money lending as an activity specific to Vaiśya community (कृषितज्ञोपयोगिन्यः पशुपालिन् विशेषः स्मृतम् 1.5.108). However, other sources mention that men belonging to all social categories participate in agricultural production. Specific terms are used to designate cultivators include Kīnāsa, Karśaka, Kuṭumbin (Sanskrit), and Kassaka (Pāli). Agriculture appears as a pious, devoted and virtuous job in Pāli canonical literature. The farmer has been designated in Pāli as Kassaka or Kṣetrapāla. It does not represent a caste but mentions the person who is engaged in cultivation of land or agricultural activities. 31 Buddha says for a farmer- यो तत् कोति मनुस्म्रेः गोरक्षम् उपजीविति। एवं वासेथां जानांति कस्सहो न ब्राह्मणे॥ (Among persons, who ever live by keeping cattle is known as farmer, not as a Brāhmaṇa. 32). In Buddhist age agriculture was not looked down as an occupation of low grade, where as it was considered as an honourable profession.

According to Sangam literature the dignified cultivators or farmers of wetlands were popularly known as Maratam. The cultivators or farmers employed labourers or tenants for their agriculture. However, the ownership
right of land was vested in the state and thus kings and rulers were the real owners of the land. The peasants were cultivating their fields on a rent fixed by their landlords. The cultivation was done both by men and women workers untiringly, with the result that food was produced in abundance in the Sangam age. Carpenters, blacksmiths, and weavers were the main groups in assistance of agrarian social groups.\textsuperscript{35}

**State assistance for Agriculture**

_Mahābhārata_ informs that the state has to do a lot of things for the well being of agriculture. The state was held responsible for any damage to crops due to its inadvertence or negligence (_Śāntiparvan_, 88.28).\textsuperscript{34} _Abhijñānaśākuntala_ of Kālidāsa (Act V, Verse 9) also supports this view. It was a bounden duty of the king to please cultivators. The state had to give seeds and other materials for agriculture free of cost (_Sabhāparvan_, 5. 79). A sixth part of the produce was to be levied on cultivators as revenue. Kālidāsa too refers to it in his drama.\textsuperscript{35} In _Mahābhārata_ the king is advised to have large tanks in different areas of the country. There should be full of water and the king must see that agriculture did not depend on the rains alone (कश्चिंत् राज्ये तदनि पूर्णाति च बुद्धिन्ति च। भागशो विनिविदतानि न कृषिदेवमांतूर्ता। _Sabhāparvan_, 5.78.)

The state was granted loan to needy peasants at one percent interest per mensem. Such a loan was also granted which was called anugraha-ṛṣa
(loan for favour).\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Agnipurāṇa} [253.66] also refers to this practice. According to \textit{Arthaśāstra} agricultural production was managed by an officer known as Sitādhīyaṅka. The text reminds that the state could have played an active role in organizing agricultural production, mobilizing labour and allocating resources. The state had taken steps for the management of famine. No land was left unutilized. Agriculture was one of the lawful modes of acquiring wealth, according to \textit{Arthaśāstra} tradition.\textsuperscript{37}

The ancient Indian cultivators had acquired a wealthy knowledge of climatology, classification and selection of soil, plant physiology, seasonable cultivation and rotation of crops, protection of crops, treatments of seeds and different kinds of manure.\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Bṛhatsamhitā}, \textit{Agnipurāṇā}, \textit{Vṛksāyurveda}, \textit{Arthaśāstra}, \textit{Krṣiparāśara}, and \textit{Krṣi-saṅgraha} contain advanced knowledge of crops, weather, rainfall, fertilizers, implements etc. The ancient Indians knew the use of manure, and the \textit{Arthaśāstra} lays down several rules for the management of the state farms which points to a well developed agricultural technique.\textsuperscript{39}

\textbf{Animal Husbandry}

Cattle breeding and dairy farming had been a major sector of the economy in ancient India. Agriculture and animal husbandry have been practiced in India for at least six or seven thousand years since the pre-Vedic times.\textsuperscript{40} In Vedic and post-Vedic times and also in later centuries enough attention was paid to animal husbandry and farming. From the point of view
of agriculture, tending of cattle was very important; for it provided diary produce and labour. Therefore, cattle meant food and wealth. Moreover, in ancient times the cattle were also used as a medium of exchange. Archaeological, epigraphic, and literary sources bear ample testimony to it. All these sources evidently prove that it was an essential sector of occupation in early India and was carried out by certain sections of the people who thoroughly understood and mastered the business.

**Cattle Rearing**

‘The basic livestock of the Indian peasant was cattle, used for ploughing, transport and food. As the cattle owned by cultivating peasants there were large herds belonging to professional herdsmen, who led a semi nomadic life in the wilder parts of the country.’ The cow was supposed to be the best one among all cattle. The other domestic animals include buffalo, goat, sheep, pig, donkey, camel, dog and mules. The goat was bred widely in India, where as the sheep in the cooler areas only. The domestic pig was also reared, though it did not play a very significant part in rural economy of ancient India.

Horses and elephants were mostly used for transport both civil and army. Other domestic animals like buffalo, sheep goat, asses, dogs etc. were utilized for a variety of purposes directly or indirectly connected with agricultural practices.
Animal Husbandry as a Profession

Literary evidences show that livestock and animal husbandry in ancient India, were not a vocation of a particular class or community or group of people. All the four Varṇas of the society and also the avaravarsnas (lower castes/out castes) were engaged in this vocation. However, some authorities on Dharmaśāstra prescribe it only for Vaiśya community. Thus, practically it is supposed to think that, every villager in ancient India used to keep a few animals for draught purposes with him at his house to meet the supply of his own household.\textsuperscript{45}

As regards persons involved in cattle rearing, there are references to Paśupa, Gopa (herdsman), Godhuh, Dogdhṛ (milkman) etc., which shows cattle tending was practiced as a major profession since the pre-Vedic period.\textsuperscript{46} The term gopālaka has been frequently used in the Pāli canonical literature for the person who reared cattle. Śatapathabrāhmaṇa (3.6.2, 12), Aitareyāranyaka (7.19), Chāndogyopaniṣad (4.4.5) and Brhadāranyakopaniṣad (3.1.1) inform that cattle tending was one of the daily duties of a student.\textsuperscript{47} It is also important to be noted that, people belonging to each and every caste could have any cattle, but most of the Brāhmaṇas reared cows alone.\textsuperscript{48} However, the cattle rearing persons of any caste were called Gopālaka. This obviously points to the fact that in rearing the cattle there was no caste distinction in Buddhist India.\textsuperscript{49} Mahābhāṣya testifies that a country’s wealth consists of its food crops and abundance of
cattle (अर्थात देश उन्नते यस्मिन् गायो सस्थानि च वर्तन्ते). The author also refers to the rearing of cow and sheep and uses the terms Paśupālikā and Gopālikā (4.1.48) and it clearly implies that women also were engaged in cattle-rearing on economic basis. Obviously this was the occupation of the most of the people, solely or partly.

During the epic period also cattle remained as the principal wealth. That the cattle wealth of the country was substantial is evident from the references to the numerous occasions when myriads of cows were given away as gifts to supplicants (Rāmāyana, 1.14.50, 1.53.9, 2.40.43, elsewhere). Mahābhārata also made genuine references to cattle wealth. According to it the state itself was a large owner of cattle wealth. The text speaks of various types of wild and domestic animals such as cow, goats, sheep, horse, mule and ass.

Arthaśāstra shows a well developed state of things regarding animal husbandry which was considered as a prominent sector of occupation at scientific and industrial level. Specific rules were laid down for the maintainance and use of cattle. The text prescribes to post an official named Go’dhyaṅka (Superintendent of Cattle) to look into the affairs in this field. His exclusive duty was to supervise cattle in the state, keep a census of cattle and to see that they are properly reared and cared by the herds (see Chapter 2.29). The state made great efforts for cattle rearing and made stringent rules for their protection and for the provisions of pastures for them. Every village
was provided with common pasture lands and wood lands. The king is advised to make provision for pasture grounds on uncultivated tracts (2.2.1). In brief, being a means to sustain life cattle rearing and animal husbandry have been a way of income generation in India throughout history.

**Fisheries**

From the references of ancient Indian literature it can be understood that some people were engaged in the profession of fishing. Some indications to the fish and its being caught in nets are visible in them. References to the profession of fisherman are available in the sources of later Vedic period. Vājasaneyīsāṁhitā (30.16) and Taittirīyabrāhmaṇa (3.4.12.1) mention fisherman. The Kandahar inscription contains curious references to fishermen of the king, which reads as follows, ‘... and the king refrains from (eating) living beings, and indeed other men and whosoever (were) the king’s huntsmen and fishermen have ceased from hunting...’. Romila Thapar suggests that, this refers to hunters and fishermen employed by the king on his estates or for his private purpose. She adds the view that all the hunters and fishermen throughout the empire had ceased to hunt and to fish. Arthaśāstra considers fish as a source of wealth and fishing was strictly controlled by the state. All fishermen had to pay a tax to the state (2.28.3). In ancient South India women also were engaged in fishery. The fisherwomen who caught and sold fish were known as Parataiyār. Akanāṇūku refers to fisherman as Paṇimakal and informs that they sat in
street-corners selling their fish. *Ainkurunāku* (47: 1-3) and *Puśkanaṇāku* (24: 1-16) also refer to fisherwomen.⁵⁶

**Cottage Industry**

Cottage industry was developed from the Vedic period onwards. Men and women had played an active role in cottage industry. People in that age had sufficient expertise in weaving, carpentry, pottery etc. *Puśkanaṇāku* speaks of potter-women.⁵⁷ They were also involved in smoothening the clay or baking the pots. The manufacture of textiles was clearly one of the foremost domestic industries in ancient India.

**Handloom Workers**

Textile manufacture has been a domestic industry in India since pre-Vedic times. Activities concerned with spinning and weaving were known in the Indus civilization also.⁵⁸ *Amarakośa* gives a wide variety of clothes used for different purposes as well as materials used for the manufacture of cloth. Weaving was one of the major professions from early Vedic period and was practiced by a particular sect of people who were neither Brāhmaṇas nor preparers of libations.⁵⁹ Clothes being an important element of civilised society the workers engaged in this field of vocation have occupied a significant position in economic and social affairs in ancient India from early phase of the history.
Women Weavers

The Vedic texts speak of women spinners. However, *Rgveda* (10.26.6) indicates that occasionally men also worked it. References to women weavers viz. Vayanti (*Rgveda*, 2.3.6, 2.38.4; *Vajasaneyiṣamhitā* 20.41), Sirī (*Rgveda*, 10.71.9), Vayitrī (*Pañcaviṃśatabhāmaṇa* 1.8.9) suggest that the work of spinning and weaving was done mainly by the females. *Atharvaveda* (10.7.42, 14.2.512) and *Śatapathabhrāmaṇa* (12.7.2, 11) also tell that spinning is the occupation of women. *Kṛṣṇayajurvedīya Taittirīyasamhitā* (25.1.7) refers to women spinners and weavers and their activity is considered impure. In later Vedic times, women were engaged in the work of dyeing cloths. The *Śuklayajurvedīyasamhitā* (3.12) and *Kṛṣṇayajurvedīyasamhitā* (34.7.1) refer to them as Rājayitrī. The work was generally done by them in their homes. During Vedic period cotton, silk, wool and animal skin were used as dress material. Even grass and feathers also were woven. Weaving technique has been recorded in *Atharvaveda* (10.7.42). According to *Vajasaneyiṣamhitā* (19.83) weaver’s loom was termed as ‘veman’. Two persons were required to handle it, most probably for weaving forward and backward (*Rgveda*, 10.130.2, 10.131.2). Basket weaving is women’s work according to Vedic literature. References to women basket weavers are more frequent in Sangam literature. Basket weaving is also mentioned in *Arhaśāstra* (2.23.4), but the nature of the work is not clear from the text. Apparently very poor women were taken to this profession. In South Indian regions, especially in Andhra and
Karnataka, the basket weavers belonged to the Medara caste. References suggest that women basket weavers from this community were poor. In Mauryan India spinning and weaving were practiced by women of all age on large scale. Arthaśāstra presents a long list of women all of whom are marginalized due to various circumstances. The Kṛīṭabhīrāmama of Vallabhācārya also says many of the categories of women weavers from Medara community took to prostitution out of compulsion. In south India this was done entirely by women while in north men can also be seen spinning on a spindle. Spinning of thread was done by housewives, it was by and large the sole occupation of indigent women, cripples, widows, orphans, unmarried girls, beggar women, women who had failed to pay fines and were compelled to work them off, and broken down prostitutes (2.23.2). Better class women fell on evil days were also engaged in the profession of spinning (2.23.11). All types of women took to this profession as a source of livelihood. They are all to work on contractual basis. Wages were determined according to the amount of work completed. Female spinners in Sangam literature are known as Pārutti peṇṇukal. The Nāṉai informs that widows spun fine thread.

Craft Specialization

Craft specialization can be traced back to Neolithic-Chalcolithic times, as the second stage of iron brought about a major revolution in the production of craft goods. Around 500 BCE, the production of low carbon
steel led to the making of more and more iron tools, which could be used to create various types of craft objects with greater case and agility.\textsuperscript{71}

**Carpentry**

*Rgveda* and *Atharvaveda* give numerous references to the carpenter and chariot-right. They are registered as Tvaṣṭṛ (*Rgveda* 1.85.9), Taṣṭṛ (*Rgveda*, 1.20.6, 1.61.4, 1.105.18, 7.32.20 and elsewhere), and Takṣan (*Rgveda*, 9.112.1, *Atharvaveda*, 10.6.3). *Maitrāyaṇīṣamhitā* (3.9.5), *Kāthakasamhitā* (12.10), *Vājasaneyīṣamhitā* (16.27) and *Taittirīyabṛāhmaṇa* (3.4.2.1) also refer to them. They manufactured different kinds of wooden implements and utensils, viz. varieties of wooden jars, furniture, beds, chairs, seats and cradles which were used to serve mainly ritual purposes. Naturally their products establish the value of their service.\textsuperscript{72} *Maitrāyaṇīṣamhitā* (2.6.5, 4.3.8) and *Śatapathabṛāhmaṇa* (5.3.1.1) signify that the Takṣan and Rathakāra being associated with the members of king’s workers had earned respectable position in the early Indian society.\textsuperscript{73} ‘Gupta period inscriptions mention the carpenters plot in a village. The carpenter is not one fortuitously settled in a village, but is an official component of the village with a blacksmith, leather-worker, potter and the other nāru-kāru who continue to this day in the more conservative villages, while occurring in inscriptions of the late classical and early medieval period’.\textsuperscript{74}

In later times craftsmen were generally known by the name of Viśvakarman, the divine architect of gods. *Mahābhārata* states
‘Viśvakarman, Lord of arts, master of thousand crafts, carpenter of gods and builder of their palaces divine, fashioner of every jewel, first of craftsmen by whose art men live, and whom, a great and deathless God, they continuously worship.’

They played a crucial role in the early medieval economy of India. In medieval period they constituted a group of workers in five crafts i.e. gold smiths, brass smiths, black smiths, carpenters and masons. They were regionally named Taṭṭān, Kaṃṇan, Karuman, Kollan and Taccan or Kal-taccan respectively. ‘They were known in the Tamil country as Kammāḷar, in Karnatak as Paṇcāḷar and in Andhra as the Pancanamuvaru. In medieval inscriptions of south India they are collectively mentioned as Rathakārar or Kammāḷarathakārar.’

**Smith**

Profession of blacksmith was highly important for providing instruments and tools required for continuing the task of other professionals. In *Ṛgveda* three terms, viz. Karmāra, Dhmāṭr and, Dravi are found used to mean blacksmith or smelter (5.9.5, 6.3.4, 9.11.2.2, 10.72.2). The terms Dhmāṭr and Dravi indicate his task of smelting ore on the fire. The smith has been described as a cunning worker in *Atharvaveda* (3.5.6). The earliest reference to the name of goldsmith- Hiraṇyakāra and jeweler-Maṅkāra as professional workers appear in the *Vājasaneyīsamhitā* (30.7, 30.17) and *Taittirīyabrāhmaṇa* (3.4.3.1, 3.4.13.1). However, evidence to the use of varieties of ornaments and jewellerys can been noticed from the
Rgvedic period onwards. Probably the existence of these crafts and craftsmen as well may be presumed from early Vedic age.\textsuperscript{79}

\textbf{Pottery}

Pottery is one of the few sections of important labours in ancient India. The earliest pottery found from Neolithic sites, was generally cored and handmade, with evidence of the use of rice husk and straw as binding material. Archaeological materials indicate that a wide range of different kind of pottery was in use simultaneously.\textsuperscript{80} The early Vedic age pottery possibly existed as a small industry.\textsuperscript{81} However, the name of potter Kulāla, Kaulāla etc. as a separate professional is mentioned for the first time in the \textit{Maitrāyaṇīśaṁhitā} (16.27, 30.7).

The techniques of manufacturing pots were well known to the people of ancient India.\textsuperscript{82} Surprisingly enough, \textit{Arthaśāstra} does not mention the potter’s craft, beyond a brief mention of trade in earthenware pots. Considering the frequency with which pots and potsherds are found in Mauryan sites, the potters’ guilds must have been flourishing ones.\textsuperscript{83}

\textbf{Trade Guilds}

Textual evidences points to the existence of śrenī, a form of industrial and mercantile organization, which developed in the early Buddhist period and continued through the Mauryan period. Probably this system was started from the later Vedic period onward. There are uncertain mentions to some
sort of organization in this period. Vājasaneyīsanhitā refers to gaṇa and gaṇapati (23.19.1). In Upaniṣadic period, it may reasonably be assumed that the craft was developed to a large extent and initial formation of the employees unions happened. Arthaśāstra uses the term śreṇī to mean a group of employees and laid down various rules for the regulation of guilds of artisans (4.1.2). Kātyāyanaśmṛti refers to the terms śreṇī, pūga, gaṇa, vrat and saṅgha to indicate a group. ‘Guild craftsmen existed; this is proved by the epigraph of a silk-weavers guild at Mandasor (AD 473-74).’ By the time of Amarakośa the śreṇīs came to be regarded as the constituent element in the organizations of capitals or towns. In Amarakośa (2.8.18), the term occurs more than once in the sense of guild. Evidently, these were the associations of artisans and traders and it shows the importance of the institution. Amarakośa states, ‘Rājyāṅgāni prakṛtya paurāṇam śreṇayopi ca.’ ‘The civic guilds are among the limbs of the kingdom’. There are references to the guild of artisans in Raghuvamśa of Kālidāsa.

तां शिल्पिस्थान: प्रभुणा नियुक्तास्थानां सम्भृतसाधनत्वात्।
पुरुषोद्विश्लेषणां विसर्गान्धावेषाम्: निदासग्रस्तिपितामहोवेऽविवेयम्।। (16.38)

R.C. Majumdar considers the organization of śreṇī as corresponding to the ‘guilds’ in medieval Europe. This is defined as a corporation of people, i.e. traders, merchants, cultivators, herdsmen, money lenders and artisans, belonging to the same or different castes or communities but following the same trade and industrial activity. These guilds seem to have been more or less independent units of production, practically free from the
control of the state. ‘Economically it was better to work in a group than to work individually, as a corporation would provide added social status, and when necessary, assistance could be sought from other members. By gradual stages these guilds developed into the most important industrial bodies in their areas.’\(^{91}\) The growth of the urban markets resulting from the rise of town from the sixth century BCE onwards was bound to induce an extension in cultivation of market and industrial crops. These developments required more intensive and skilled labour in early centuries of Christian era.\(^{92}\) According to A.L. Basham, guilds played a big part in the economy of ancient India as it did in that of any other ancient or medieval civilization.\(^{93}\)

**Categories of Guilds**

*Mu̇ghapakkha-Jātaka* (No. 538) refers to the existence eighteen types of guilds, each consisting of the four castes\(^{94}\) The conventional number of different kinds of guilds in a state was set down as eighteen. A more detailed list of twenty eight guilds is given by R.C. Majumdar in his work *Corporate Life of Ancient India*.\(^{95}\)

An observation of the names of guilds obviously suggests that nearly all the important branches of industry in ancient India formed themselves into guilds. Many of these artisans functioned as both producers and small traders. Their number must have differed considerably not only in different periods but also in different localities. The twenty eight types of guilds were working under their respective chief, usually called the ‘Elder’ (Jyeṣṭhaka, in
Pāli Jetthaka). He was assisted by a council of senior members. The chief was hereditary and the position was held by one of the richest members of the guild. ‘The guild had power not only over the economic, but also over the social life of its members. It acted as guardian of their widows and orphans, and as their insurance against sickness.’ Toward the end of the first millennium BCE and subsequently, inscriptions from western India indicate that guilds sometimes functioned as banks, accepting deposits and using the interest for specific purposes. These are also indications that during the mid-first millennium CE the heads of guilds played an active role in the local administration of cities.

Secret Agents

Since the ancient times in India the institution of spies was thought to be inevitable in running administration of state. Thus, the ancient rulers of India employed intelligent agents and the institution of spies was widely discussed by the authorities on politics and statecraft. The spy network gradually became a permanent feature of statecraft. Both in the civil and military affairs, secret service system played a crucial role in ancient India. It was organized and practiced in a most uninhibited manner. The earliest references to the activities of intelligent agents are available in the first Maṇḍala of Rgveda. It says that Varuṇa had his own agents who were watchful and moved extensively to collect information. Atharvaveda (4.16.4) also presents some evidence to the practice of espionage. According
to it, the secret agents of Varuṇa are said to have thousand eyes to watch the whole world.\textsuperscript{99} The historical reference of the existence of the system of secret service is found in the descriptions of Greek traveller Megasthenes and the Áśokan Rock Edicts.\textsuperscript{100} The references to spies even such in the grammatical text Āśṭādhyāyī of Pāṇini show that secret service had come to be recognized as an indispensable feature of administration even before \textit{Arthaśāstra} of Kauṭilya.\textsuperscript{101} The most distinguishing characteristic of the Mauryan state had a wide-ranging network of secret service which covers all citizens and government servants, and even members of the royal family.\textsuperscript{102} \textit{Amarakośa} also describes them in various terms. An elaborate account of secret service is to be met within the vast area of Sanskrit texts. \textit{Rāmāyaṇa}, \textit{Mahābhārata}, Dharmaśāstra texts, etc. are also a mine of valuable information in this regard.

The intelligent agents were employed for reporting about the state, administration, polity, economy, military and society. They were in the country under various covers of agriculturalists, traders, ascetics, beggars, astrologers, barbers, and also as professional artistes.\textsuperscript{103} According to \textit{Arthaśāstra}, secret agents could be recruited from practically any social category and could consist of both men and women. ‘Brāhmaṇas unable to make a living by their learning, merchants fallen on evil days, humble servitors, prostitutes, etc. are also enrolled as secret agents.’\textsuperscript{104} The functions recommended for spies included eliciting and determining public opinion both within the realm and outside. They were engaged to test evasion of duty
on goods at the toll-house by the traders and also to send secret information
to the state about the site of the caravan of traders.\textsuperscript{105} They were also likely
to carry out assassinations of those who are designated as the king’s
enemies. They were controlled by the state, and there was no private practice
of spies in ancient India.\textsuperscript{106} Nevertheless the network of secret agents
affecting the highest official and the lowest citizen must have had shocking
force on the officers and the ordinary citizens, and thus constituted a
potential risk to the stability of the empire and its administration.\textsuperscript{107}

**Performing Artistes**

In ancient India theatrical performances were the main attractions for
the people. Literary evidences prove that ancient Indian theatre is a
comprehensive one and is a very popular for entertainment. Cultural arts like
dancing, singing, puppet shows etc. were formulated and enacted from pre-
Vedic period onwards. Historically, the origin of dance as a form of
entertainment can be traced in the Indus valley period. The findings of
archeological excavations from Mohenjo-Daro suggest that dance was very
much popular in those days. ‘Some of the earliest representations of scenes
of dancing occur in cave paintings found in Mesolithic rock shelters.
Subsequently, finds of sculpture and representations on seals from Harappan
civilization (c. 2700- 1800 BCE) have been taken to represent dancers.’\textsuperscript{108}
The posture of grey slate figure of a male dancer from Harappa reminds of
tāṇḍava and supports the affinity between the male deity of Harappan
culture and later Śiva. It seems that Indus people were interested in theatrical art very much.\textsuperscript{109}

Some scholars hold the view that theatrical performances developed from the instinct of primitive peoples to imitate the action of people and nature around them.\textsuperscript{110} During their leisure they had cultivated various kinds of fine arts, music, dance etc. Further, it developed as theatrical art and it provides suitable jobs, artistic engagements and also a source of livelihood for men and women. Scholars suggest that performance tradition emerged probably from ritual contexts. A.L. Basham says, ‘as in most other civilizations there is little doubt that the Indian drama developed from ritual miming song and dance.’\textsuperscript{111} A.B. Keith also shares this opinion. He states, ‘The Vedic ritual contained within themselves the germs of drama, yet there are nothing but elements of representation.’\textsuperscript{112} Most probably dancing and singing were regarded as important features of ritual performances. Practice of various forms of performing arts in the socio-economic life of people has been traced in ancient Indian literature. ‘In Vedic period, music and dance can be divided mainly under two heads; ritual and secular/social.’\textsuperscript{113}

\textbf{Professional Artistes}

The Vedic literature mentions some professional singers, e.g. Kāru (\textit{Rgveda}, 9.112.3), Jaritā and Sūta (\textit{Atharvaveda}, 5.11.8, \textit{Vājasaneyīsamhitā} (6.18) and Gāyana (\textit{Gopathabrāhmaṇa}, 1.1.9). \textit{Rgveda} also refers to professional dancers (1.192.4). References to dancing and singing suggest
that music and dance performances were held in solo (*Rgveda*, 1.83.6, 1.92.4, 10.71.11.), duet (*Rgveda*, 6.63.5, *Atharvaveda*, 5.12.7) sometimes in chorus (*Rgveda*, 1.6.6, 1.7.1, *Atharvaveda*, 4.1.15) form also.\textsuperscript{114} *Atharvaveda* (2.36.1) also refers to public dance of women. Such women were known by the general term Naṭī, or Naṭakīyā.\textsuperscript{115} *Nāṭyaśāstra* also refers to them. Bharata’s Nāṭakīyā was a professional artiste who received proper training under the guidance of an Ācārya. According to the definition of Bharata, ‘Women who have physical beauty, good qualities, generosity, feminine charm, patience, and good manners, and who possess soft, sweet and charming voice, and varying notes in her throat, and who are experts in representation of passion, and feeling, know well of representation of the temperament, have sweetness of manners, are skilled in playing musical instruments, have a knowledge of notes, Tāla and Yati are associated with the master for the dramatic art, clever, skilled in acting, capable of using reasoning positive and negative, and have youthful age with beauty, are known as actresses (Nāṭakīyā).\textsuperscript{116} Later Saṃhitās refer to women participation in theatrical art especially in music and dance.\textsuperscript{117} The word naṭa does not occur in Vedic literature. It is found for the first time in *Aṣṭādhyāyī* of Pāṇini (4.3.110-111) and there it means pantomime.\textsuperscript{118} Naturally *Mahābhāṣya* (1.4.29) too refers to naṭa. Post-Vedic literature gives different terms for artistes. Their arts had different forms. Śailūṣa in *Taittirīyabrāhmaṇa* (III.4.2.1) denotes an actor skilled in the four-fold abhinaya. Śailūṣa is a term often mentioned in many sources in the sense of
a dancer. Among the other artistes Śobhanikas were probably pantomimes and Grantikas were recites. Kuśilavas and Kathaka were referred to as actors.\textsuperscript{119} Śailūša is mentioned in \textit{Rāmāyaṇa} in the sense of an actor.\textsuperscript{120} The \textit{Rāmāyaṇa} records the performance of dance and drama.\textsuperscript{121} In this connection Naṭa, Narttaka, Vādaka, and Tālāvacaras are other artistes referred to in \textit{Rāmāyaṇa}. \textit{Ayodhyākāṇḍa} (6.14) says that artistes had their own troupes (नाट्यनिर्माण्यानि गायत्रिकानि च गायतरम्। मनःकर्णसुच्व वाचः शुष्काच जनता ततः)\textsuperscript{11).} \textit{Mahābhārata} probably contain references much older than the time of its compilation and it refers to a very old tradition of professional artistes i.e. Naṭa, Narttaka, Malla, Māyāvī, Vaitālika, Sūta, Māgadha etc.\textsuperscript{122} These professional artistes represent a community consisting of artistes from both the classical and folk traditions.\textsuperscript{123} The Buddhist Nikāyas and Jātakas also speak of different types of entertainers. Jātaka stories inform that the family of actors learnt and adopted their family-art as their family profession. Actors known from Buddhist literature were mostly folk artistes and they earn money through their art.\textsuperscript{124}

In \textit{Arthasastra}, Naṭa is mentioned as a community or a class. Their art was their profession, as source of their livelihood. \textit{Arthasastra} mentions Kuśilava as actor, and thus it seems that amalgamation of different performing arts has already begun.\textsuperscript{125} It is generally believed that the term is derived from Kuṣa and Lava of \textit{Rāmāyaṇa} of Vālmiki, twin sons of Rāma who sung \textit{Rāmāyaṇa} for the first time.\textsuperscript{126} According to \textit{Nātyaśāstra} Kuśilava
was an important member of the dramatic troupe who has to organise different instrumentalists. It is on the basis of his capability, deep knowledge and unperturbed serenity he was known as Kuśālava.\textsuperscript{127}

A.B. Keith thinks the mode of formation of the compound Kuśālava is strange, in which the first member represents a woman’s name. Perhaps it was due to the bad morals of such artistes that later, instead of Kuśālava, they came to be known as Kuśālava (śīla, meaning manners, with prefix ku, denoting of bad morals).\textsuperscript{128} ‘The artistes, whose function was to recite the heroic deeds of ancient kings in a dramatic style, came to be known as Kuśālavas, after the twin brothers of \textit{Rāmāyaṇa}. Formerly they were reciters like later Kathakas but gradually their association with drama deepened and they became known as actors.’\textsuperscript{129} In \textit{Arthaśāstra} they appear as wandering artistes. Bards and dancers referred to as Virāṇyār, and Vīrāṇ (men and women of Pāṇar community) occupied a very important position in Sangam literature. They were very graceful dancers and appeared as wandering minstrels.\textsuperscript{130} Actors, Dancers, and other professional artistes, both men and women, were viewed with disfavour in the Dharmaśāstras. Thus, all sources prove that in ancient period singing, dancing, acting and other forms of performing arts were practiced not only as forms of entertainment but also as a means of revenue and a livelihood at least by some sects of people.
Sex Workers

Prostitution was a well established institution in ancient India. Ancient literary sources provide detailed accounts of this profession. It is known as the oldest profession came to be regarded throughout history of the world. From the very early times prostitutes formed a class of women who were not bound by the rules and restrictions of society. Information about prostitution in India is available from the Vedic literature. In later centuries the women engaged in prostitution had to attend royal court and were regularly employed in the royal household on a sufficient salary. Generally women taking up this profession had to be sure of an independent livelihood. Various theories have been formed by scholars regarding the historical development of prostitution. Sukumari Bhattacharji in this regard observes; ‘Gradually, there arose a section of women who, either because they could not find suitable husbands, or because of early widowhood, unsatisfactory married life or other social pressures, especially if they had been violated, abducted or forcibly enjoyed and so denied an honourable status in society, or had been given away as gifts in religious or secular events- such women were frequently forced to take up prostitution as a profession. And when they did so, they constituted the only section of women who had to be their own breadwinners and guardians.’\(^{13}\) According to *Arthaśāstra* a prostitute is attached primarily to the royal court. The state appointed a special officer (Gaṇikādhyakṣa) to regulating the activities of prostitutes and levying of tax. The text makes special rules for training of
courtesans in 64 arts at the expense of state. *Mrčchakaṭṭhika* gives some indication to Sangītikā and Gāṇḍharvakalā or musical concerts as the arts in which Gaṇikās are to be trained. Kuṭṭanāṭa also gives reference to Naṭyācārya, Naṭopadesāka, Narṭakācārya etc.

**Categories of Sex Workers**

The wide range of ancient accounts- Vedic literature, political treatises, epics, dramas, poems, treatises erotic science, Buddhist religious texts, Jain religious art etc. point out the level to which the picture of the prostitutes stirred the lives and thoughts of Indian society during ancient age. The earliest reference of prostitution occurs in *Rgveda*, which is the earliest extant literature on record. The allusions to sexual promiscuity in *Rgveda* have occasionally been regarded as the pre-cursors of institutionalized prostitution. *Rgveda* mentions Hasrā, a frivolous woman and also Agrū (4.19.9, 16.19.30) and Sādhāraṇī. (1.167.4, 11, 12, 13, 15, and 17) who could be considered as public women. Later Vedic literature testifies that by this time it was recognized as a social institution. Early Buddhist literature, especially the Jātakas provides evidence to the existence of various categories of professional prostitutes. In the Jātakas, the Gaṇikās are called by the name Nagaraśobhanī or Nagaramaṇḍanā which literally mean those who rendered the town beautiful. The Buddhist and Jain literature speak in support of prostitution and depicted several categories of sexual entertainers. The Buddhists tolerated prostitution and there was no bar
against prostitutes being admitted to the order of Buddhist saṅghas.\textsuperscript{137} Purānic literature has given fictitious accounts of the institution of prostitution. \textit{Agnipurāṇa} (168.1-2) and \textit{Matsyapurāṇa} (LXX, 26-32) mention prostitutes as Kalyāṇī, Kāminī, Vārastrī, Veṣyā etc. \textit{Kāmasūtra}, (6.6.50) gives a long list of women of easy virtue among prostitutes. They are Kumbhādāsi, Paricārīka, Kulaṭā, Svairiṇī, Naṭi, Śilpakārīka, Rūpājīvā, Prakāśavinaṣṭa and Gaṇikā. All these women formed different types of prostitutes (Veṣyāviśeṣa) with different social status (कुम्भदासी परिचारिका कुलटा नटी शिल्पकारिका प्रकाशविनिष्ठा रुपाजीवा गणिका चैति विश्वाविशेषा: \textsuperscript{11}).

According to \textit{Amarakośa} (\textit{Manuśyavarga}, 19) the term Veṣyā, Vārastrī, Gaṇikā and Rūpājīvā are synonyms. (बारह्री गणिका वेश्या रुपाजीवाथ सा जैसः, सत्कृता बायमुख्या स्यात् कटुनी सम्भवी समे \textsuperscript{11}). Hemachandra in his \textit{Abhidhānacintāmaṇi}, enlists names of prostitutes as Sādharaṇastraṭi, Parāṅgana, Bhuṇjikā, Vāravadhū, Vāramukhyā, Gaṇikā, Veṣyā, Paṇiyagārā, Laṇjikā and Bhujisya.\textsuperscript{138} \textit{Kuṭṭanāmita} mentions Veṣyā, Anyapūrṇā, Cetiṇā, Jīvikā etc.\textsuperscript{139} L. Sternbach comments that in the wide range of Sanskrit literary works there are at least 38 synonyms for the term Gaṇikā.\textsuperscript{140} Many of the synonyms possibly signify varying grades or classes and also indicate that love outside wedlock was a familiar phenomenon and unions promoted by mere lust are mentioned in quite an uninhibited manner.\textsuperscript{141}
Professional Workers

Plentiful information can be gathered from many works in Sankrit with regard to some other professions also which are inevitable in community. The relevant aspects of such vocations are furnished in brief manner.

Barber

The Barber’s profession all over the world has enjoyed a long vogue since ancient times onwards. This in India was commonly a hereditary vocation. Barber is mentioned even in Rgveda. Vaptṛ is the term used to denote professional barber in Rgveda (10.142.4). The word vaptṛ, on account of its being derived from the root ‘vapa’ which means ‘to shave’, suggests his duty, i.e. task of shaving. Atharvaveda (6.68.1-3, 8.2.17) and Śatapathabrāhmaṇa (3.1.2.2) have given two more terms Vapa and Nāpita for barber.¹⁴² Taittirīyasamhitā (6.1.2.2) considers it as an impure work. Kātyāyanaśrautasūtra (25.7.18-19) informs that there was a system of shaving the dead body before it is cremated. Arthaśāstra also refers to the profession of barber. It is mentioned in connection with spies and the term used is kalpaka (kalpako nāpitaḥ)¹⁴³ (1.12.9). They worked as wandering spies and required to keep a strict surveillance on the higher officials. Amarakośa has given five synonyms of a barber (धर्मुणिण्डिवाकीतिनापितान्तावसायिन:, निष्णुकः: स्याद्रजः: शौचिकः मण्ड्टारः: || Śūdravarga, 10).
Washermen

Washing of cloths was generally accepted as an important labour as it is necessary for everyday life. The labourers engaged in this work also were considered as a distinct caste. In India from very early time itself washermen had formed distinct labour guilds. They normally perform other kinds of cleansing acts as well, such as purifying the house where a birth or death has occurred, or removing the pollution of child birth or funeral attendance by sprinkling water on the persons involved.

Other Professional Groups

The ancient Indians had excelled in very many other fields of professions in which both men and women were engaged. Women bodyguards also appear in the history of ancient Indian political accounts. These women belonged to the courtesan class. Nurses are frequently mentioned in various sources. Nursing seems to be a profession generally set apart for women. Women were also engaged in various economic activities such as embroidery. Pēśākarī- female embroidery worker (Vājasaneyīsahitā, 30.9, Taśtitirīyābrāhmana, 3.4.5.1) and Upalaprakāśinī- corn-grinder (Ṛgveda, 9.112.3) etc. appear in the early literature in Sanskrit. They used to provide service of the basic necessities of life.

Slave Workers

Slave labour was practiced in ancient India. It has been documented by a variety of textual traditions. Prescriptive and narrative texts from the
early historic period refer to servile people. Vedic and post-Vedic sources indicate that slave labour was very familiar to ancient Indian society.  ‘From the Vedic through the Buddhist to the age of Mauryans slaves existed as property owned by their masters and as objects of exchange.’\textsuperscript{146} The information regarding slavery can be gathered mainly from \textit{Ṛgveda}, \textit{Dirghaniṅkāya}, \textit{Tripiṭaka}, \textit{Rāmāyaṇa}, \textit{Mahābhārata}, \textit{Arthaśāstra}, \textit{Manusmṛti}, \textit{Nāradasmṛti} etc. These ancient authors and lawgivers have also dealt with the rights of slaves. The terms dāsa and dāsī, appearing in Sanskrit, Pāli and Prakrit has been accepted as a synonym of slave.\textsuperscript{147} Scholars suggest that, the term Dāsa originally carried an on ethnic signification but later became synonym for slave as a result of the change in the status of the dāsa tribe.\textsuperscript{148} A.L. Basham in this regard states, ‘The word dāsa originally meant a member of the peoples conquered by the Aryans in their first invasions of India. Its later connotation no doubt developed from the reduction to bondage of the many Dāsa captured in battle, and here we find the probable origin of Indian slavery.’\textsuperscript{149} The common word dāsa is used for a broad range of distinctiveness implying subservience, without distinguishing between slavery and debt bondage or between slave labour and bonded labour.\textsuperscript{150}

Scholars suggest that the characteristics of slavery in India first appear in Vedic times. According to \textit{Ṛgveda} the word Dāsa indicates the black-skinned people who had been subjugated by the Vedic Aryans.\textsuperscript{151} ‘A Dāsa enjoys no rights; all his possessions can be appropriated by his
possessor, his master. The Dāsis, the women-slaves are sometimes taken as mistresses, but not as wives.\textsuperscript{152} Rgveda mentions domestic women slaves, who apparently are the first ‘wage earners’. They were paid for their labour by being adopted in the family and fed and maintained. They were occasionally employed in agricultural sector as well.\textsuperscript{153} Rgveda also contains references to another category of slaves who were regarded as a form of property and donated on ritual and other occasions.\textsuperscript{154} During the Buddhist era slavery was not exclusively confined to any particular class. Persons belonging to all castes could become slave in this period. Even Brāhmaṇas, Kṣatriyas, and men of high birth might be reduced to slavery.\textsuperscript{155} However, the nature of their subjugation may have been different, and the mass of the servile labour was supplied by Śūdrarśa.\textsuperscript{156} They were mainly employed in agricultural sector.

\textbf{Categories of Slaves}

The Pāli canonical literature throws some light on the living conditions of slaves. There is plenty of evidence for the ill-treatment such as chopping of ears, nose etc., mutilation, and murder of slaves by their owners.\textsuperscript{157} Vinayapitaka (4.224) classifies slaves into three separate types, i.e. children born of women slave (Antojātako), those purchased (Dhanakkito), and those captured in war (Karamarāṇito).\textsuperscript{158} Of the three kinds, the slaves captured in war are likely to be historically significant in the origin of the institution of slavery in India.\textsuperscript{159} According to the Jain literature there are six type slaves- slaves by birth, those who were bought,
those who are reduced to slave status for non-payment of debt and those who became slaves during famine, those who failed to pay fines and those who were taken as prisoners.  

A vivid picture of slavery in the Mauryan period can be construed from the *Arthaśāstra* of Kauṭilya, the account of Megasthenes and the inscriptions of Aśoka. *Arthaśāstra* classifies slaves into nine types. These include those born into slavery, the children of slaves, and prisoners of war in addition to those who were sold for slavery. The classification of slaves in *Manusmṛti* resembles with that of *Arthaśāstra*, whereas the list of *Nāradasmṛti* is longer. According to *Manusmṛti* there are seven types of slaves while the *Nāradasmṛti* has enumerated fifteen types of slaves.

However, only a few of these account are new types of slaves, the rest being refinements of the older categories. In the pre-Mauryan system of slavery neither there was distinction between the permanent and temporary nor any limitations on the master’s power over slaves. However a notable change in Mauryan period was the introduction of a clear distinction between permanent and temporary servitude. Slaves continued to exist during the Gupta period, but they were used largely for domestic purpose. Therefore it can be summed up that slavery did exist in early India but it was domestic and milder. Indeed in many contexts it would seem that the term Dāsa implies rather a bondman or serf than a chattel slave.

In short, based on the above details it can be we can argued that from the early half of the Christian era, the ancient India has witnessed a complex
system of labour and labour relations in accordance with a more complex and vast production and distribution oriented social system. If these discussions are related with that of epics, Purāṇas, Dharmaśāstras and other scriptures it could be made out that a system, that was bound to the class and cast discrimination in dividing the labour of the society has already been existed in the time of compilation of the text. This period has also witnessed the development of human society in which agriculture, animal husbandry and trade become the mainstream economic activities and gradually merged under the control of the state. It also observable that as the new areas of labour evolved, so evolved the division of caste, sub caste and mixed caste which gradually registered the division of labour to the respective fields. A close observation of the ancient Indian scenario in the field of labours and labourers makes it clear that the supply of labour in ancient India is largely is of three sources: Dāsakarmakaras, Śūdras and Vaiśyas. These are the principal working class and they constituted a major part of the state population. They engaged in skilled and semi-skilled labour activities related to agriculture, animal husbandry and industry. They could also be employed as craftsmen. However skilled craftsmen were usually found among the Vaiśya class. The bulk of the supply of unskilled labourers was from the Śūdra class. In ancient sources they appear as household servant, industrial and agricultural labourer and also as dancer, singer, painter, actor etc.167

This chapter mainly intented two things. In one way, it is an interrogation of the issue how the labour system dealt with in Arthaśāstra is
floated in other Sanskrit texts of the period prior to *Arthaśāstra*. Secondly, it enquires how the ancient Indian society got shaped to the social system explained by Kauṭilya in *Arthaśāstra*. The main aspiration of the above queries primarily is to show how the *Arthaśāstra* represents its historical context with regard to the social system. This endeavor is thought to be inevitable for a clearer understanding of the discussions made in the upcoming chapters where a relative approach of the details given in *Arthaśāstra* is of great help. The forthcoming chapters will also discuss the details regarding the designations and social status related to each and every profession discussed in *Arthaśāstra*.

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**Notes:**

9. ‘The concept of surplus plays a vital role in the Marxist theory. If producers consisting of peasants, artisans and others produce something over and above their day-to-day needs, the extra produce is called surplus.’ For more details See R.S. Sharma, *Material Culture and Social Formations of in Ancient India*, MacMillan, New Delhi, 2007, p.239.
11 Ṛgveda, 1.23.15, 1.117.21, 1.168.7, 1.176.2, 3.3.7, 8.20.19, 8.22.6, 10.34.13, 10.94.13 etc. See Ṛgvedasamhitā, Swamy Jagadisvaranda Saraswati (Ed.), Samskara Publishers, Delhi, 2000. See also R.S. Sharma, op.cit., 2007, p.29.


13 Ṛgveda, 5.62.7, 9.85.4, and 91.6.

14 Ṛgveda, 4.38.1, 41.6; 5.33.4; 6.20.1, 25.4; 8.21.3, 91.5.


16 R.S. Sharma, op.cit., p.87.

17 The Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa, Sanskrit Text with English Translation, Notes and Index, Julius Eggeling (Tr.), Maitreyee Deshpande (Ed.), New Bharatiya Book Corporation, Delhi, 2008.


19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 R.S. Sharma, op.cit., p.87.

22 See H.S. Shukla, Agriculture as Revealed by the Pāli Literature, in D.P. Chattopadhyaya (Gen. Ed.), Lalani Gopal and V.C Srivastava (Eds.), op.cit., p.393.

23 Vārttā was an independent branch of learning in ancient India. The term is derived from the root वृत्त, which etymologically denotes वृत्ती or means of livelihood. Agriculture, cattle rearing, and trade constitute vārttā, according to Kautilya (1.4.1). Vārttā is used in two different senses in Sanskrit. In the primary sense, it stood for the group of occupations specially set apart for Vaiśyas. The second meaning of the term follows the primary one, and the science that had Vārttā as its subject of study came also to receive that appellation. See for a detailed discussion on this subject Ambuj Nath Banerji, Studies in Economics of Ancient India, Annals of Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Vol. 10, No 1/2, 1929.


31 See H.S. Shukla, op.cit., p.385.

32 See Khuddaka Nikaya (Suttanipātā), Edited by Bhikkhu J. Kasyap, Nalanda, 1958, p. 364, quoted in H.S. Shukla, op.cit., p.386.

35 See *Abhijñānaśākuntala* of Kālidāsa, Act V, Verse 4.
36 See *Mahābhārata*, *Sabhāparvan*, 5.79.
42 See *Arthaśāstra*, Chapter 2.29.
46 See *Rgveda* 1.4.1, 1.144.6, 3.45.3, 4.6.4, 5.31.1, 6.19.3, 10.19.4-5, *Atharvaveda* 3.8.4, 6.77.2, 7.73.6, 8.9.1, etc.
52 *Rgveda*, 7.18.6, 10.68.8.
56 Vijaya Ramaswamy, Aspects of Women and Work in Early South India, in Kum Kum Roy (Ed.), *Women in Early Indian Societies*, Munshiram Manoharlal, Delhi, 2001, p. 158.

66 Vijaya Ramaswamy, *op.cit.*, p.156.

67 Romila Thapar, *op.cit.*, 1999, p.86.


70 Vijaya Ramaswamy, *op.cit.*, pp.154-169.


77 Pranati Ghosal, *op.cit.*, p.91.


80 See Kumkum Roy, *op.cit.*, p.250.

81 Pranati Ghosal, *op.cit.*, p.94.


84 See *Brhadāranyakopanisad* I.8.12.


87 See *Amarakośa*, 2.4.4, Edited by Ramanathan, (Ed.), The Adyar Library and Research Centre, Madras, 1989 (reprint).


90 See R.C. Majumdar, *Corporate Life Ancient India*, Calcutta, 1918, p.3.

91 Romila Thapar, *op.cit.*, p.73.

92 Irfan Habib, *op.cit.*, p.213


97 Kumkum Roy, *op. cit.*, p.120.
103 See *Arthaśāstra*,I.12.9.
115 Iravati, *op. cit.*, p.66.
116 See *Nātyaśāstra*, 34.48-50.
119 Iravati, *op. cit.*, p.16.
120 त्वम हि भार्या कैम प्रसन्ना त्रियासुरिपिता नतीजे।
   श्रीरामचर्येण इव मा राम परंपरों व दत्तामिक्षमि।
   || See *Rāmagama* of Vālmīkī, 2.8.16, with the
   || commentaries, *Tilaka, Śiromani and Bhūsana*, Śāstri Srinivasa Katti Mudholakara (Ed.),
   || Parimal Publications, Delhi, 1990.
121 न राजके जनपदे प्रशस्तनात्सकः। उत्सवांश समाजांश वर्जनेन राजस्विनां।। *Rāmagama,
   || Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, 67.15.
122 न रहितां न्यायदीर्घं मल्लानु मात्याचिन्तत्वः। श्रेप्येः षुपरमधे षुरुष सर्वेषः।।
   || *Śantisparvan*, 69.60.
   || See also *Āśausahaanparvan* (33.12.), *Vanaparvan* (313.80).
124 *Ibid*.
Nañatīśīvadāne praśīyamānām pravartana kūṣalakī. | kūṣalavardhāvābhāvānpyo samātattamatūtā kūśīvavāna

Nātyaśāstra, 35.106.

Ibid.

Īravati, op. cit., pp.31-32.


31 Sukumari Bhattacharji, in Kumkum Roy, Ibid., p.197.

32 M.R. Kale, Myṛcchakatika, Act IV, p.73.

33 Kuṭṭanīmita, Verses 83, 793-94. See Monika Saxena, op. cit., p.11.

34 Kumkum Roy, op. cit., p.81.


40 According to L. Sternbach, ‘Ajanā, Arthaśārtikā, Āpanyanā, Āpanyayoṣī, Kariṇī, Kurīnhadāsī, Kulaṭā, Kṣudrā, Dārikā, Dāsi, Nagaraśobhini, Naṭī, Paṇastra, Paṇāganā, Paṇyayoṣī, Paṇyavanī, Paṇyapuranḍharī, Parīcārikā, Pratiṣṭhā, Prakaśanā, Prakaśavinasā, Bhūjīṣyā, Rūpāṅīvā, Laṅgikā, Lāsīkā, Vannādāsī, Vāramukhyā, Vāravadhū, Vāravanī, Vāravilāśī, Vārastā, Vīlaśī, Veṣyā, Śilpakārikā, Śādharanastra, Svairiṇī and Hastini’ are the different terms for prostitutes. All these words have other meanings, the difference being in some cases very slight. See L. Sternbach, op. cit., p.26.

41 Sukumari Bhattacharji, op. cit., p.196.

42 See for more details Pranati Ghosal, op. cit., pp. 96-97.

43 See Śrīmāla Commentary, Kuṭṭalīyamaraṭhāśāstraṃ of Ācārya Viśnugupta, with five commentaries, Edited by Visvanathasastri Datara, Sampurnananda Sanskrit University, Varanasi, 1991, p.327.

44 See R.C. Majumdar, op. cit., p.4.


49 A.L. Basham, Ibid.

50 Uma Chakravarti, Everyday Lives Everyday Histories: Beyond the Kings and Brahmanas of Ancient India, Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2007, p.70.
151 Dev Raj Chanana, op.cit., p.108.
152 Ibid.
154 Kumkum Roy, op.cit., p.299.
156 A.Bose, Social and Rural Economy of North India, p.423, see R.S. Sharma, op.cit., p.104.
159 Uma Cakravarti, op.cit. p.72.
162 द्रिघ्राजीम् शुद्धज्ञ स्त्रित्रितिम्। पौर्णिकीय वण्डवासस्य सृजनाति दानयोगः॥ Manusmṛti, 7.45. See Manusmṛti, with the Sanskrit Commentary Manvartha-Muktāvali of Kullūkabhaṭṭa, Volume II, Rakesh Shastri (Ed.), Vidyanidhi Prakashan, Delhi, 2005. 7.415.
163 वर्णवासस्य विजेत्यज्ञेश्वर यद्यादि। प्रेक्षाय वामनः शाखे द्यानः पञ्चकश्च मृत्युः॥ Nāradasmṛti, 4.5.28. See Nāradasmṛti, Braja Kishore Swain (Ed.), Chaukamba Sanskrit Bhavan, Varanasi, 1996, 4.5.28.
164 Uma Chakravart, op.cit., p.74.
165 Rajan Gurukkal, op.cit., pp.143-144.