It is, indeed, difficult to trace the oldest source of history of the Indian civilization. However, the general consensus of opinion is that it is the Vedas that may be regarded as the reliable oldest source of history of our civilization. Hence, for convenience sake, the ancient period covered under the present chapter comprises 2500 B.C. to 800 A.D.

Before going into the details of the working and living conditions of labour and the attitude and policy of rulers towards labour during the ancient period, it will be desirable to have an idea about the social conditions of this period as it is the social set up of a country that plays a significant role in shaping its labour policy.

2.1 Social Conditions and Caste System

The origin of labour policy in India can be traced back to the Vedic times because the Vedas, specially the Rigveda, are rich source that indicate towards the composite civilization that sprouted in India in about 2500 B.C. Any policy that may be social, political or economical can be formulated only if there is a civilized society. Some sort of order is a must if a policy is to be evolved and applied.
Seeds of the Caste System, the curse of latter-day Indian society, were sown during the Vedic period, though it has to be conceded that the system came into being purely for practical reasons. It was to facilitate division of work and responsibilities that the population was segmented into Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Shudras. There was little discrimination and vertical and horizontal social movement among the segments was unhindered and uninhibited. It was only much later that the rigid compartmentalisation was perpetrated.

The Aryans were originally cattle-rearers. They took to agriculture only after settling down in the fertile Indo-Gangetic plain. From agriculture to industry, it was a natural progression. This had to be accompanied by the occupations of carpenters, blacksmiths, physicians, priests, goldsmiths, tanners, barners, etc. But no stigma was attached to any of the occupations and dignity of labour was honoured.

Later, with the increase in population, the division of work that was resorted to merely for convenience, got compartmentalised into specific trade groups. Further, this grouping became rigid and took the form of castes. By the Sutra period, the division was distinct and complete. The Brahmans and the Kshatriyas were elevated in status, with the former being assigned the professions of teaching and preaching and the latter, ruling and serving in the army. Vaisyas were basically traders, besides being responsible for agriculture and cattle rearing. Serving the other three classes became the duty of the Shudras. The first two classes looked down on the other two, labelling them as the labour classes. The lot of the Shudras was the worst. They
were treated with contempt and were disallowed privileges like studying the Vedas or even reading them. It is recorded that if a Shudra intentionally listened to the Vedas, his ears be filled with molten tin or lac and if he recited the Vedas his tongue was to be cut off.\(^1\)

The voice of Buddha was the earliest harbinger of revolt against the caste system. Buddha spread the message of universal equality and brotherhood among human beings. He emphasized that proper knowledge and good conduct should be the determinants of status in society rather than profession and the accident of birth. He outrightly rejected a particular profession for a particular class.\(^2\) He challenged the supremacy of the so-called upper castes and proclaimed that every member of the society had the right to choose his profession, irrespective of his birth. Though the Buddhist teachings loosened the stranglehold of the upper castes, the system persisted in some form or the other. The Chandalas, Nishadas and Pukkasas constituted the lowest class of untouchable labourers.\(^3\) They were treated contemptuously by other classes.

For Kautilya economic, social and political progress of his State was above all other matters. In spite of being an orthodox person and a follower of Varnasrama Dharma, he felt that caste system holds meaning only for law and order. He reformed the conditions of the labour classes and included them in the Aryan Society. For him Shudras (labour) were 'Arya prana'. He introduced the idea of bonus and rewards to skilled labourers for the first

\(^1\) See, Ghurye, G.S., *Caste And Race in India*, Popular Library of Indian Sociology and Social Thought, 1969, p. 61.
\(^3\) Ibid., p. 11.
time. He laid strict rules about regular payments of fixed salaries to labourers and proper punishments to whosoever were wrong labourers or masters.¹ He further enhanced the status of artisans by allowing them to testify in the courts and get recruitment in the Army. Even women were given the facility to earn livelihood by working at home by the Mauryan Government. If any casualty occurred while on duty, the master was bound to compensate the family of the sufferer or the deceased. The movement of labour welfare was further speeded up in this period. But certain inequalities continued because of Kautilya's blind faith in Vedic caste system. These inequalities were later done away by Samrat Ashoka.

The period of Mahabharta and Manu also followed traditional Varna society but there was a great change in the condition of labour classes. The Shudras were given many rights and privileges. Besides serving the upper classes, they could adopt trade, cattle-breeding and various industries.² In Mahabharta, references are there about Shudra kings in Western India.³ At the time of Rajsuya Yaj, Yudhishtira invited Shudras also. In Manu's time, Shudras could teach craft and valuable arts even to Brahmans.⁴ The Shudras were allowed to be present in the religious ceremonies but could not recite Vedic hymns.⁵ In the Ramayana also there are instances that throw light on the tolerable condition of labour class. At the time of Ashavamegha Yagna, instructions of Dashratha were not

³. Ibid., 51, 9.  
⁴. See Jain P.C., Ibid., pp 15-16.  
⁵. Ibid.
to insult artisans and they were treated with respect. Shudras and Vaisyas were allowed to lead a life of ascetics. Shabri, a Shudra woman, was blessed and called 'Tapodhana' by Lord Rama. Valmiki, who taught Vedas and Ayodh Vidya to Lav and Kush, happened to be a Nishada Shudra. All the classes were living in peace and mutual respect. Even the views of a washerwoman were given due importance and considered to be a part of public opinion as happened in the case of Sita, the wife of Lord Rama.

The Gupta period saw the emergence of the labour class from the shadows of contempts and neglect. Though the caste system still survived, there was considerable liberalisation regarding the choice of profession. Shudras were allowed to be merchants and traders and even to serve in the army. There is historical evidence to prove that two Generals of the time belonged to barber and leather-worker families. There is also mention about Brahmans taking to traditionally non-Brahmanical profession like trade and others being allowed to participate and perform religious activities. Pallava inscriptions of A.D. 446 reveal that leather workers, artisans and weavers and even barbers were tax-payers which reflects the level of prosperity of the working class of that time. Certain labour legislations too were enacted to improve working conditions and relations between employers and employees. There were provisions of punishment to both the parties in case of breach of contract. They reduced fine from twelve anas which amounted to be five times more than the wages, to double the amount of wages of workers. Employers were compelled to pay wages with interest in case of late payments. Provisions of bonus and

1. Ramayana I, 13, 15-16.
incentives were applicable to all the workers.¹ Old views of favouring upper classes in law were discarded and lenient rules for lower classes were enforced. People were also free to perform spiritual activities if they were devoted to Krishna, Narayana and Vasudeva. There was no social conflict between upper and lower classes. Inter-caste marriages were permitted. All this proves that labour class enjoyed a good social status and some protection through law during this period.

2.2 Status and Conditions of Agriculture/ Cattle-rearing/ Agricultural Labourers.

From the ancient times, agriculture and cattle-rearing have been main occupations of the people of India. The archeological excavations at Harappa and Mohanjodaro unearthed evidences that ancient societies prospered through agriculture. Along with agriculture, cattle-rearing was an essential part of a farmer's life in the Vedic period. In several Vedic hymns, the ploughing process and the wealth of cattle have been placed side by side. The Aryans, who were originally cattle-rearers, were attracted to Indian Valley in search of green pastures. The cow, which is a sacred animal even today, was sacred to Aryans too. Besides, supplying them with milk, butter, ghee and curd, cow was also used for ploughing, carrying loads and pulling carts. They also used its hides for manufacturing articles like straps, thongs, whips, bellows and bottles.

¹ Jain, P.C., Ibid., p. 19.
In the Buddhist period, we find many references about Kshatriyas and Brahmans to be landlords, cattle reares and farmers.¹ There is an instance of Kasi Bhardwaj Brahman, cultivator of Ekanala, a village in Southern Magadha, who possessed 500 ploughs and a large number of oxen and cows. The big landlords were designated as Gahapatis in Pali literature. Simultaneously, we find poverty-stricken cultivators toiling hard to feed their families. The Gamanichanda Jataka refers to a poor farmer who had to borrow a team of oxen from his neighbour to plough his land. Cultivation was done by deforestation and extracting weeds during monsoon. Even the rulers attached much importance to agriculture and used to attend agricultural festivals.² During this period, the development of agriculture took a turn due to direct interaction between India and long-established countries particularly the people of Western Asia. Without caring about the caste, people indulged in the profession of cattle rearing. Moreover, animals were given religious protection by Buddhism and Jainism which were totally against slaughtering of animals either for sacrificial purposes or for food.

The plough was a sign of prosperity during the early times. Panini used the term 'Krsi' for agriculture and 'Krs' for plough. The farmer was called 'Krsivala'. Farmers were categorised on the basis of the ploughs they used.³

1. Those who did not possess their own plough -- Ahali.
2. Those who used superior plough -- Suhalah.
3. Those using a bad plough -- Durhalah.

¹. Jataka, IV, 38,; 146, 305; VI, 348, 421.
³. See, Jain, P.C., Ibid., p. 48-49.
The importance that had been attached to agriculture is evident in the various laws, rules and regulations, and practices and conventions that were in force during various periods. Kautilya, for example, had elaborated laws to govern farming activities during his time. He allowed the right to possess land only to those who could cultivate it. The land was mainly of two kinds, viz., (a) the crown land, cultivated directly by the department of Sitadhyaksa; and (b) the land possessed by the farmers who were liable to pay land revenue and other dues according to the specification of the State. Irrigation charges differed depending upon the source of water supply. Kautilayan Government protected the farmers and land from natural calamities by engaging a special staff for the purpose.¹ They encouraged people to cultivate waste lands by supplying seeds, cattle and cash. The people were granted cheap loans and seeds at the time of need. The law awarded strict punishment to those who caused loss to the agriculturists.² The importance and sanctity of cows, calves and bulls has been pointed out in Arthasastra also. It was a serious offence to kill or to cause injury to them and capital punishment was given to the offender.

The references in Mahabharata show that during this period the evil of casteism probed its roots and specially Vaisyas were recommended to adopt agriculture and animal husbandry as a profession. Brahmans and upper classes were debarred from these professions. Brahmans adopting these professions were socially degraded and were not allowed to attend funeral feasts.³ But in spite of the above mentioned conditions, the importance of these

¹. Kautilya, Arthasastra, II, 1.
². Ibid.
³. Manu III, 165.
professions was not belittled. Kings used to pay due attention to pastoral labourers and agriculturists. While levying taxes on agriculture, the interest of the farmers was taken into consideration. The means of irrigation were lakes and tanks which were provided by the State. The agriculture was not dependent upon rains.

There was no social stigma attached to casteism and profession during the age of Ramayana. Even the kings took pleasure in ploughing the fields. As the myth goes, King Janak found Sita from the earth while ploughing the field himself. The agriculture and cattle were considered as the real wealth and the sign of prosperity. The cattle were treated at par with a man's wife and son. Most of the people possessed cows and horses.

Agriculture continued to be recognised as an important and good occupation during the age of Guptas, as clearly mentioned in the references given by writers such as Kamadaka and Kalidasa. Legislators also enacted laws for the protection of agriculture, specially the principle of joint stock cultivation for the occupants. The cultivable land was not kept fallow for an indefinite period. Strict rules were made to protect the agricultural interests. A person who misused or destroyed the roots of plants was banished from the country. If anyone stole more than ten kumbhas of grain, he was put to death; if the quantity was less than that, the criminal was fined ten times the quantity stolen. Those who destroyed or stole implements used for agriculture, an embankment, flowers, roots or fruits were fined a hundred panas or more according to the nature of the offence.

Big landlords used to employ the labour and let the land to share-croppers.¹

At the same time there are references of ineffective implementation of the above rules in practice. The whole burden practically fell on the poor peasants. There were no taxes for the people of cities. Agriculture was heavily taxed.² In addition to the usual payment of one-sixth of the produce, there were certain other payments such as emergency levies (kara), regular offering to the king (bali), extra cesses (uparikara), a sort of police tax or irrigation charges (udranga), a plough tax (halirakara) and voluntary subscriptions to ward off calamities. It was not uncommon to come across forced labour in rural areas. In the beginning, land owners worked with their own hands rather than leaving it to be done by others. But later on some of the rich farmers employed some labourers for the agricultural operations. However, such labourers were poorly paid and their lot was not comfortable. During this period, the attitude of the rulers towards the people living in rural areas used to be harsh whereas it was quite liberal towards people living in urban areas.

In the end, we can say that agriculture and cattle-rearing were the primary occupations of the people of ancient India. The prosperity and development of ancient societies had been linked to the development of farming. Rulers, who realized this, enacted laws and initiated practices to ensure its constant growth. Rigidity towards occupation according to caste started giving way to flexibility. As a result, India, even in the modern era, remains predominantly agricultural. However, the lot of

¹. Indian Historical Quarterly, Vol. VI, 1930, p.45.
agricultural and rural labourers was not satisfactory as the attitude of landlords and the rulers was harsh towards rural labourers. On the other hand, the skilled workers, specially in urban areas, enjoyed certain protection and privileges.

2.3 Status and Conditions of Industries and their Workers

Though the ancient Indian society was heavily dependent on agriculture, the ever-increasing demands of the society gave rise to many new occupations. Agriculture, besides providing food for people, supplied raw materials for other occupations like arts, crafts and cottage industries -- the fore-runners of heavy industries of later days. The demand for agricultural implements, weapons and chariots for war discovered craftsmen to manufacture and supply the material. Besides the skilled craftsmen, there was a large number of poor labourers who adopted some other crafts like pottery, basket-making, rope-making, etc.

2.3.1 Important Industries and Trades

The important industries of Vedic period comprised carpentry, weaving, metal work, pottery, and leather work. The industrial conditions in the Sutra period were more or less same as were in Vedic period. Fortunately, the industries during this period also flourished in rural areas. Some of the industries that developed include: carpentry, metal work, pottery, leather work and textile. The industrial workers got a boon in the Buddhist period due to the growth of towns. The major factors responsible for the growth in industry during the Buddhist period consisted of the growth of towns, the establishment of commercial intercourse with the Western Asian people, formation of guild-corporations, and circulation of metallic currency.
It was the development of towns, communication and transportation, internal and foreign trade and expansion of market that the labourers felt tempted to move towards towns to earn more income and to enjoy better life. The competition in the market gave rise to specialists. The main industries and trades that flourished during the period included Wood, Metal, Goldsmithy, Textile, Ivory carving, Painting, Washing and Dyeing, Pottery and Stone cutting, and Architecture etc.

It goes to the credit of Kautilya that he could regulate the industries by making some rules for them. He made separate departments and appointed Superintendents for different industries. By now the industries had become technically sound and were relatively in an advanced stage.

Industries continued flourishing a lot during the epic period also. More references are made about industries in Ramayana than in Mahabharata. However, such references do not spell out the functions of workers and the processes adopted by them. The descriptions about the articles reveal that the industrial workers were proficient in their skill. The main industries of the period comprised Textile, Metal, Ivory, Crystal, making of musical instruments, etc. Due to expansion and consolidation of the Satavahana empire, there was a lot of industrial development. While old towns expanded, many new towns also came up. The industrial workers flourished substantially. Inscriptions of the period reveal various industrial classes, i.e., Kolikas (weavers), Tilapishakas (oil-pressers), Odyantrikas (fabricators of hydraulic engines), Kasakars (braziers), Tesakaras (polishers), Kamaras (iron-workers), Lohavaniyas (iron-mongers), Avesanis (artisans),
Chammakaras (leather-workers), Godhikas (perfumers), Suvanakaras (goldsmiths), Manikaras (jewellers), Mithikas (stone-polishers), Selevaddarkis (stone-masons) and Vaddhakis (carpenters).¹

It is evident from Amarkosa, a work of Gupta period that there existed various industries and numerous workers in the period. The Gupta period is known to be the golden period of the industrial workers. Many arts and crafts flourished during the period. Out of the several types of industrial workers, viz., garland makers, potters, plasterers, weavers, tailors, painters, sharpners of weapons, cobblers, leather-workers, blacksmiths, goldsmiths, bangle makers, copper-smiths, carpenters, sawyers etc., some were settled in the cities and some carried on their work both in the cities and villages. The main industries of the period comprised Carpentry, Textile, Metal, Leather, Pottery and some other industries like Ivory, Washing and Dyeing, Painting, Bamboo and Cane Work, Blacksmithy, Goldsmithy, Stone Cutting, etc.

A brief description of different classes of industrial workers and the concerned industries is given below:

2.3.1(i) Carpenters

Carpenters attained a high status in society in the Vedic period as is clear from the references in Rigveda. Carpentry was quite at an advanced stage and many carpenters were specialised in their fields. There were two types of carpenters -- Taksan (common carpenter) and Rathkara (chariot-makers). While the Rathkara used to make chariots for warfare, for races and supplied carts to farmers, the Taksans were employed in manufacturing vessels for

household furniture, telpa, bed or couch. It goes to the credit of this period that the art of carpentry was so much advanced that the people knew even the art of ship building and boat making. In Sutra period, the chariot makers who used to make chariot only were considered to be the important persons of the society. They were allowed to perform even Srauta sacrifice. The Taksans were given the duty of making sacrificial posts, wooden vessels, carts, mats and other wooden material.

In Buddhist period, the work of carpenters was very hard. The art of carpentry was at its highest proficiency in techniques during the Buddhist period. This can be corroborated from the references which speak of making a mechanical elephant of wood under whose belly sixty men could walk forth and back.1 The wood workers used to manufacture spokes, rims, naves and all other parts of chariots and carts. Most of the houses were made of wood. Even the palace of the king was made of wood. Jain Canon also gives references of wood work in that period. They manufactured household furniture like chairs, beds, boxes, pegs, even toys and various other wooden articles. The art of making wooden images was also known to them.2 Thus, carpentry was quite popular during this period.

We come across references in Arthasasthra about the manufacturing of ships, both of big and small sizes. According to Magasthenes and Strabo, ship building was the monopoly of the government. The ship builders used to work only for kings and used to get wages in lieu thereof. Kautilya was, however, not in

favour of State monopoly and gave rights to construct ships to private concerns also. But at the same time he allowed to hire ships belonging to the State.

According to Amarkosa, in the Gupta period, the carpenters were of two kinds. On the one hand, there were carpenters who were hired by the villages. On the other hand, there were those who carried on their industry independently. There was a head-carpenter (sthapati) to supervise the work in the workshop. Besides, furniture and other articles of daily use, the wood workers used to make large images of wood. Fa-hien has mentioned about an image of Buddha that was worshipped by the people. It was eighty feet high, the folded legs of which measured eight feet across. This shows the extraordinary skill of the wood workers of that time. The art of wood carving was one of the sixty four arts mentioned by Vatsyayana.

2.3.1 (ii) Textile Workers

In the Vedic period, the art of weaving was quite popular. It was done mainly by women. It was wool that was basically used for cloth and garments. They could spin finest type of cloth as there are references of tripe-twisted thread. There were also weaving schools to teach different techniques for textile industry. They had the knowledge of needles and stitched garments were commonly used. The garments were embroidered which were generally worn by female dancers. The textile industry was much developed in Sutra period. This was the main occupation of women.

4. Rigveda IX, 86, 32.
For making a special type of cloth, the yarn was soaked thrice in water or rubbed with ghee.\(^1\) They used to manufacture upper garments, lower garments, blankets and turbans.

The industry had highly developed by the time of Buddhist period. Some of the workers were very proficient in their work and used to adopt a particular process which is unknown even in the present times to convert a coarse woven cloth into a fine one.\(^2\) Cotton was also used for cloth and garments. According to the Digha Nikaya, various cloths and blankets of that time included Gonako (goat's hair coverlets), Cittika, Patika (white blankets), Patalika, Tulika (quilts stuffed with cotton), Vikatika (with figures of lions etc.), Uddalomi (with fur on both sides), Ekantalom (with fur on one side) Koseyam (silken) and Kuttakam (carpets) long enough for sixteen dancers, etc. Muslin and silken garments were luxury of that time. Benaras was the main centre of silken and muslin cloths. Another main product of Benaras was cotton. With the development of the industry, the specialization also took place and spinning and weaving were divided. New classes of textile workers emerged as embroiders, ornament workers and workers in rugs and furs. Though textile industry of this age was highly developed yet the weavers were leading a miserable life.\(^3\) They had to work even in their old age but at the same time this profession was not considered to be inferior in status.

The textile industry was run on a large scale and not left only in the hands of professionals during the Kautilyan period.\(^4\) In addition to qualified persons, orphans, girls and women from

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2. See, Jain, P.C., Ibid., p. 95.
4. Ibid., p. 105.
respectable families were also employed. Skilled workers of fibrous cloth, raiment silk, woollen cloth and cotton fabrics were presented scents, garlanded and given incentives by the State. The weavers made threads, cloth, ropes, various kinds of blankets, curtains, fibrous cloth, silken cloth and woollen cloth. Megasthenes indicates the high standard of their work. The ornamental work on robes was also quite common during that period.

The textile industry was quite developed during the Gupta period also. The fine cloth was woven for aristocratic society and coarse cloth for the poor. They manufactured garments not only from cotton and silk but also from wools and fur. The blankets made of wool and fur were in use. These blankets were commonly used to cover chariots. They also made blankets from the hair of animals like deer, ram and hare which were generally used by rich people. A depiction of a procession in Patliputra by Fa-hien in which a seven storeyed chariot covered with cloth made of hair and painted in various colours, reveals the highly developed art of weavers as the cloth made of hair was as fine as silk. All this goes to illustrate the refinement that had already reached this industry.

2.3.1 (iii) Metal Workers

The well known metals during the Vedic period comprised Ayas, Syama, Karsanasaya (iron, copper or bronze), Gold Hiranya, Harita (Suvarna, Jatarup, etc.), Silver (Rajat, Hiranya or Rajata), Copper (Loha), Lead (Sisa), and Tin (Trapu).

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1. Amarkosa, VI, 116, p. 158.
Metal industry was dominated by Asuras. Since Asuras were expert in the art of metal and working of iron, they dominated this industry. The Smiths were termed as Dhamatri. They used to prepare and supply Abhar (spade), Datra, Srini, (sickle) and Phala (ploughshare) etc. for agriculture and Asi parasu (axe), arrows, spears, daggers, swords, shafts, for warfare, etc. and some other equipments like armour, helmets, anklets, etc. for the protection of warriors. The goldsmiths were known as hiranyakras. They used to manufacture ornaments like necklace, bracelets, etc. and also golden armour decoration for chariots, trapping for horses and some other articles of jewellery. We come across a reference about a golden image of man used for Asvamedha sacrifice as gold was considered a sign of immortality. During the Sutra period, the metal industry workers were divided into two categories, viz., black-smiths, and goldsmiths. Blacksmiths used to manufacture articles of iron, copper, bell-metal, plough shares, spade, sickle, needles, knives, utensils, razors, etc. They also used to make swords, bows, arrows, spears and armours etc. Goldsmiths were also considered to be important persons of the society. People were very fond of ornaments made of gold and silver, specially golden chains.

The metal industry got a further boost during the Buddhist period. The workers had developed specializations in their own fields by doing specialised work in iron, gold, silver, lead, tin, copper and brass. Blacksmiths had a flourishing business. They expanded their trade by manufacturing such items as razors, axes, spades, hammers, augers, instruments for cutting bamboos, iron weapons, grass cutters, swords, pegs, etc. During this period, there were also bow manufacturers, bow-string makers and arrow
flethchers. Jain Canons termed blacksmith as Kammaras. In addition to manufacturing implements like ploughshare, spades and sickle etc. for agriculture, they also used to prepare chains and domestic vessels such as pots, pans and bowls from iron, tin, copper, zinc and lead for the use of house-holders. The art of converting iron into steel was also quite popular during this period and various tools and weapons, coats of nail for warriors, knives, needles, nail cutters and various surgical instruments were made from steel. There are references in Pali literature also about the goldsmiths and workers in jewellery who were highly skilled in their art and were applauded by the people of their age. During this period, the ornaments were made of precious stones and pearls also.¹ There is reference of a necklace to be made for Visakha's marriage which took four months of hundred goldsmiths'. The entire thread work was of silver instead of ordinary thread. This necklace cost nine crores and a thousand rupees. This shows the masterly skill and talent and appreciation about ornaments of the people of Buddhist period. Beautiful images were also made out of gold.

According to Kautilya there was a remarkable development in the mining and metal industry in that period. There used to be the departments for research and development of the industry which used to be headed by specialists. Metals had been classified according to the properties. It was only after removing the impurities that the metals were used for manufacturing different implements, weapons, armour, machines and articles for daily use.² There are references in Arthasastra about some war-machines which

¹. See, Bandupadhayaya, N.C., Economic Life and Progress in India, p.242.
². See, Jain, P.C., Ibid., p. 103.
needed a very high skill, for example Jamadagnya (a large machine to shoot arrows), Parjanyaka (a water-machine to put out fire) and Audhghatima (an instrument to pull down towers). It is evident from this that metal industry of that age was quite advanced. There were provisions for special protection to blacksmiths. According to Megasthenes, there was a provision for death punishment to the person who destroyed the eye or hand of the artisan. Goldsmiths enjoyed a special position in the society. According to Kautilya, three kinds of ornamental work was done ksepana — the ornament studded with jewels, the making of strings for them was known as guna, and for solid work, the manufacturing of globules furnished with a rounded orifice was called ksudra. They were masters in their art. There are references of various varieties of pearls, necklaces, bracelets, anklets, waist bands and so on.

Gupta period witnessed the further rise of metal industry. The discovery of iron articles like hammer, different kind of chisels, axes, pad-lock, a plate of iron with holes, a door ring, a spoon, dagger, a hatehet and small iron pots are the proof of advancement of the metal industry of that period. The iron pillar of Mehrauli belonging to Chandra Gupta II is a clear testimony of the excellence of craftsmanship of that age. The reference of various weapons given on Allahabad stone pillar inscription of Samudra Gupta speaks for the expertise of metal workers. Goldsmiths usually lived in towns and cities. People of the time had a lot of appreciation towards ornaments. The mention of Chudamani, Muktaguna, Kirita, Karnabushna etc. reveals the large scale production of gold ornaments. The workers had become

1. Kautilya, Arthasastra, II, 18
2. See, Jain P. C., Ibid., p.114
pastmasters in their techniques. They had a lot of talent. Kamsutra describes about Bhusanayojanam (studding of jewels in gold ornaments), Taksakarmani (inlay-work on gold ornaments and utensils), Rupyaratnapariksa (testing and valuing of precious stones etc.), Dhaturvadah (combination and purification of metals) and Maniragakarajnanam (knowledge of precious stones) and this art is included in the list of sixty four arts. Archaeologists have discovered many statues made of different metals in different parts of the country which belonged to this period. Besides, a lot of articles like cups, cooking pots, bangles, etc. made of different metals during this period have also been found out by archaeologists. As a matter of fact, metal industry made a tremendous progress during this time.

2.3.1 (iv) Leather Workers

The leather work was termed as Carmamna. The leather industry too flourished a lot during the Vedic period and occupied an important place. The supply of raw material was in abundance. People knew the art of tanning very well and manufactured various articles from hides, e.g., bow strings, slings, reins, saddles for horses and lash of whips, etc. Evidences are there to prove that people used skin-vessles and leather bottles for storing 'soma' juice, honey, curd and wine (called drti) during this period. Armour, leather guard of forearm, leather garments and such other things were also made by leather workers. Similarly, in the Sutra period, making of leather shoes was very common. Several articles for domestic purposes and strips for protecting the warriors' arm against bow string were also made from leather. Paraskara prescribed upper garments of Brahman made from antelope; of ksatriya from a spotted deer; of a Vaisya from the skin of a goat.
or cow. Even ghee, honey, oil, etc. used to be stored in bags made of leather.

During Buddha period, making of foam leather sacks, ropes, straps, shoes and umbrellas were very common. Embroidery of shoes and sandals was usually done by skilled workers. Many people used leather bags for storing gold and silver coins. "The leather workers formed themselves into guilds and the industry was well-organised."\(^1\) Panini refers to the leather workers manufacturing Naddhri (strap), Vardhra (leather thong) and Varatra (strong ropes). The term 'Sarvacharmanah krtah' used in a sutra indicates that shoes were made from all kinds of leather.\(^2\) This shows that leather items were much in use.

The State had the monopoly over the leather industry during the Gupta period. In the Chammak copper plate inscription and the Siwani copper plate inscription of Maharaja Pravarsena II there are references to the right to reserve hide which shows that the big merchants and individual leather workers used to receive leather for manufacturing purposes through State trading agencies. Shoes, leather fans, strings and whips, bellows, leather-bottle, etc. were the major items manufactured by leather workers. It appears from Ajanta paintings that shoes were common in use and were produced on a large-scale. The use of skins of tigers, deer, and other animals by Brahamcharis and people living in forests was also quite common. Leather was used even for bedding and such other purposes.

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2. Panini, V, 2, 5.
2.3.1 (v) Pottery Workers

Potters used to play their own role in Vedic period. Yajurveda and Maitrayani Upanisad used the word Kulala and Mrtpach to denote potter.¹ There are references in Rigvedic hymns about this industry. The earthen vessels were used for storing and drinking 'soma' juice. White jars were used for storing honey and wine, pitchers were used for drawing water from wells and also for storing gold. Pottery enjoyed a special position during the Sutra period. The potters used to make earthen wares, bricks and large and small vessels. Pitchers, cooking pots and plates etc. were also prepared by the potters for domestic use.

The importance of potters has also been pointed to in the contemporary literature. For example, Pali texts and Jain Canons reveal that potter was an important person of the society. The demand for clay ware was very high and the potters took donkey loads of wares to distant cities for sale.² The potter moulded all kind of earthen jars, dishes and bowls on a wheel turned around by hand. The potters were religious minded. Potters brought prosperity to many of its followers. Jain Canons refer to a very rich potter of Palasapura named Saddalaputta, who engaged hundreds of servants to run his five hundred shops outside the city. Earthen wares were presented to king and he used to give money and other gifts to the potters. All types of vessels, large as well as small, were moulded by potters. They used to have beautiful figures on them. The art of making clay vessels was so much valued that even some of the kings mastered it. The

¹. Jain, P.C., Ibid., p.86.
². Ibid., p. 99.
presentation of a clay vessel to Pabhaviti made her think that it was a handiwork of king Kusa. It speaks of the popularity of the art during those days.

It is clear from the excavation of terracotta figurines of the period of Satavahanas that the potters had reached the state of perfection in their art. The excavation of Paithana, Maski and Kandapur in the State of Hyderabad are a proof enough of the perfection of the art of pottery during the period of Satavahanas. The findings at Kandhapur of terracotta figurines too testify to the potters' talents. Such findings comprise terracotta figurines of religious or semi-religious beings like Bothisatva, Yaksa and Yaksanis and animals like bull, horse, the ram and the lion.

In the Gupta period also, pottery was one of the main industries. The skilful and talented state of pottery in moulding, colouring and baking of the earthen ware is evident from the archaeological excavations of Ahichechatra, Hastinapur and Kausambi. The high quality pottery discovered at Kausambi includes bowls, dishes, bowl-cum-basin with ridges and prominent grooves, dish on a stand and other vessels of various shapes and sizes. They also used to make terracotta figurines for the use of poor which were in high demand. People decorated their sleeping rooms with terracotta figures. Terracotta figures were made to represent gods and goddesses for the poor who could hardly afford to buy stone-statues. Earthen beds, necklaces and ear-rings have also been found from Ahichchatri. These ornaments of clay were created to the needs of the poor. It was quite common for people to

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1. Kusa, Jataka, (I. 290-91)
decorate their sleeping rooms with terracotta figures. The discoveries in most of the excavations reflect not only the achievements of pottery industry but also economic, social and religious life of the people in Gupta period.

2.3.1 (vi) Workers in Other Industries

Some of the other industries which came to prominence during the Buddha period comprise ivory, stone-cutting, washing and dyeing and painting. Quite a good number of people used to be engaged in these industries.

2.3.1 (vi)a Ivory Workers

Records prove that ivory was an important trade during the Buddha period. Its raw material was drawn from animal produce. Benaras was the main centre of this trade where the workers lived in Dantakara Vithi (Ivory workers street). Manufacturing of bangles and various kinds of ivory ornaments for the common people and costly carvings for the rich people was the main job of these workers. There are references of ivory work, Dantavanijja, etc. in Jain Canons also. Many hunters used to get money for killing elephants and supply their tusks to the industry. Making of images from ivory and many other articles from bones and horns of animals was also common. Some ivory workers prepared necklaces from the bones of monkeys to be worn by children.¹

¹. Jain, P.C., Ibid., p. 100.
It was in the epic age that this art achieved great heights. The evidence of proficiency of the ivory workers is clearly available from their skill displayed on chairs, thrones, beds, seats, pillars and in royal palaces. "The palace of Kaikeyi was full of stools and seats made of ivory inlay work. The ivory work in Gupta period was highly developed. Only upper classes used the ivory goods."¹

The importance of this art can be corroborated from the fact that it was considered to be "one of the sixty four arts to be mastered by a citizen in view of Vatsyayana."² Kalidasa has also referred to the seat made of ivory. The popularity of this art can be further gauged from the ivory seat discovered from the excavation at Bhita which is dated as fourth or fifth century A.D. The beautiful inscription on the surface of the seal, the surroundings by a headline and device of a crawling tortoise is a remarkable example of the skill of the ivory workers. It is, therefore, evident that ivory workers had their own place in the society during this period.

2.3.1 (vi)b Stone Cutters

Stone-cutters of this period were highly skilled in their art. Sakyastupa is the fine example of stone workers of that period. They had made many tools of superior quality. Many a flight of steps leading into a house or down into reservoirs duly carved was quite common. The use of stone for building purposes, sculptures, and decorative purposes started in the period of Ashoka.³ Fa-hien was very much impressed by the stone palaces and

¹ See, Jain, P.C., Ibid., p. 120.
² Kamsutra, 1, 3, ed. DevaDutta, 1964, p. 84.
³ Jain, P.C., Ibid., p. 108.
halls erected by Ashoka which are still in good condition impressed Fa-hein very much. He used to think as if they were made by spirits. This industry flourished a lot in Mauryan period and stone workers attained a considerable importance.

Stone cutting achieved a lot of perfection in Gupta period. Buildings, pillars, columns, flight of step and statues of this period speak for perfection attained by stone cutters. Undoubtedly, the Buddha's image is a masterpiece of the century. Another wonderful example of the art of stone cutting is available in the caves of Ajanta, Ellora, Badami and Elephantas. The spectacular technique of their work can be seen in the construction of complete temple with ornamentation from a single block of stone on the hill sides. The Kailash temple at Ellora and the life like scene of Ravana's defeat depicted in sculpture therein are marvellous examples of the sculpture art and technique in the Gupta period.

2.3.1 (vi)c Washing and Dyeing Workers

Washing and dyeing was also common those days. Pali text mentions that the work of washing and dyeing was done by the same person. Besides dyeing cloth, they used to dye toys for children. They were living in localities exclusively inhabited by them.1

It was obligatory on the part of washers, during the Kautilyan period to use wooden planks or stones having smooth surface only. If they tore the clothes by using other means they were punished by the Government. They were not allowed to wear,

1. See, Kautilya, Ibid., IV, 1.
sell, mortgage, let on hire, substitute or keep overtime clothes belonging to other people. Arthasastra mentions that the workers in dyeing and washing had attained perfection.

2.3.1 (vi)d Painters

It was in the Buddhist period that art of painting made a considerable progress. The paintings were attached to the work of architect, stone-cutters and the carpenters. Painters of the period were highly competent in their art. The Jataka describes painting of a tunnel either side of which the painter made all manners of painting the splendour of sakka, the zone of Maunt Sineru, the sea and the ocean, the four continents, Himavat, Lake, Anotatta the Vermilion mountain, sun and moon, the heaven of the four great kings, with the six heavens of sense and their divisions, all were to be seen in the tunnel. This art made progress further in the Gupta period. The paintings in Ajanta caves are a clear testimony to that.

2.3.1 (vi)e The Bamboo and Cane Workers

The trade of bamboo and cane work came to prominence during the Gupta period. Cane chairs known as Vetrasana were offered to guests to sit on. Baskets and carts were made out of cane. Fa-hien depicts a religious procession in which such cart was taken out every year in Patliputra. Every year on the eighth day of the second moon, they had a procession of images in which a four wheeled car of five storey was made by lashing together bamboos

1. See, Kautilya, Ibid., IV, 1.
and these storeys were supported by posts in the form of crescent bladed halberds. The cart was over twenty feet in height and in form like a pagoda, and it was draped with a kind of white kashamere which was painted in various colours.¹

Thus, almost all important industries flourished during the Gupta period. The workers had achieved a lot of perfection in their trade. They had developed a lot of skills, techniques and expertise during the period and made significant contributions towards the socio-economic development of the people. Workers were dedicated to their profession and had a place for themselves in the society.

2.4 The Wages of the Workers

In the ancient period, including the Rigvedic age, barter system of economy was there. Though there are some references of using a different kind of currency known as satamana in the later Brahman period,² its use was restricted to the offering of rewards to the priests.³ The use of pieces of gold and sataman by business people was not common. Usually, the labourers were paid in kind. They were also paid with food, clothing and essential commodities in lieu of wages. In Sutra period also, usually payments were made to the workers in the form of coins.

Workers were poorly paid during this period. Since labour was very cheap, their wages were very low. So Gangamala Jataka reveals that the minimum wages of the day labourers ranged from half pana to one and a half pana a day. It was only in some exceptional cases that labourers were paid high wages, e.g., a

². See, Jain, P.C., Ibid., p. 228.
³. Ibid.
king's barber. However, technical workers were paid high wages and gifts. According to the Thananga Sutta, a Jain work, wage-earners were of four types, viz., (i) those who were given their daily wages (Divasabhayaga), (ii) those who were especially engaged for journey (Jattabhayaga), (iii) those who were employed on contract to perform entire work (Ucchattabyayaga), and (iv) those who were employed for the day on the condition that if they did the prescribed work within a day they would be paid the stipulated sum (Kabbalabhayaga).

Since barter system was in vogue whatever article was given in exchange was regarded equal to the value of the things received. Panini called the skilled workers as Silpina and unskilled as Karamkaras. The daily wages were known as Vaitanika. There are also references about monthly wages of five, six or ten karasapanas. The system of engaging labourers on stipulated monthly or daily wages was known as Parikrayana, the employer Prakrita and employee Prakreta.

It was Kautilya who regulated the wages of labourers by framing special rules. The wages were decided on the basis of custom of the land or on the basis of work done and time spent, at the rate prevailing at that time. Labourers were allowed to enter into any contract and to fix their wages before hand. Arthasastra prescribed one-tenth of the produce as the wages of artisans, craftsmen and dancers, etc. The employers were bound to pay regularly. If any one failed to do so he was punished with a

1. Panini, III, 2, 22.
2. Ibid., V, 1, 56.
fine ten times the amount of wages. If he misappropriated the wages, he was punished with a fine of twelve panas.¹

If a worker could not complete his work due to the mistake of the employer or the employer made it difficult, the worker was entitled to claim his wages. A worker could go on leave in case of unavoidable circumstances like disease, calamity, etc. and the work could be done by his substitute. The loss, because of his absence, was made up by the extra work when he returned to duty. On the other hand, if the worker was well and did not complete the work after receiving the wages he used to be fined. While the Prime Minister and the royal priests were the highest paid, i.e., forty eight thousand panas per year, the lower government employees were paid only sixty panas per year. The wages were paid in cash and in kind. Kautilya prescribed a pana and a quarter and sufficient food grains to agricultural workers. Kautilya uses the word Bhaktavetanam for food grains and salaries for a year's labour (vetanam). Skilled artisans were paid four panas every day and royal servants, valets, attendants and guards were given five panas per month. The chief of military corporation, incharge of elephants and horses and the commissioners were given eight thousand panas per annum. The same disparity existed in food. It is, therefore, obvious that during Kautilya period, there was a big gap between the people — while people of higher classes were paid handsomely, most of the workers were used to get meagre wages.

So far as the Gupta period is concerned, the wages were fixed by employer and employees both and they fell into a contract. The time of payment was decided according to the

¹. See, Kautilya, Ibid.
contract, i.e., before the work or after the work or in the middle.\(^1\) The wages had to be paid regularly. The employer was fined and had to pay the wages with fine in case he failed to pay the amount at regular intervals. According to Yajnavalkya, the master could use his discretion to pay or not if the work resulted in loss. But if the profit increased, a proportion of the profit should be paid in the form of excess wages.\(^2\) Manu was more liberal than Kautilya when he fixed wages, i.e., a pana to the lowest category of unskil1 led worker and six panas per day for the skilled worker. Likewise clothing was also given after every six months and one Drona every month was also paid.

During this period, we come across two types of agricultural labourers: i) those who worked in farms, and ii) those who looked after cattle. The labourers who attended to cattle got milk as wages. The farm labourers could get one fifth of the produce plus food and clothing but if one wholly worked for profits he could take only one-third of the produce. If the wages were not fixed before hand, labourers were given one-tenth of the profit.

2.5 Forced Labour and Slavery

The evil practice of forced labour (visti) emerged and developed fully during Kautilyan period. It was one of the most undesirable things that would have happened to a human being. It was unfortunate that Kautilya regarded forced labour as lawful privilege of government and landlords. Villages had to supply free labour in lieu of taxes. Kautilya confined forced labour to agriculture and utilised it for the construction of State buildings. Maurayan Government created a special office,

1. See, Narada, VI, 2; L. Trenbach, Poona Orientalist, 1943, p. 153; S.E. XXXIII, p. 139


vistibandhaka, to procure free labour. During Gupta period, in the beginning, it was confined to artisans but later potters, boatmen, carriage-owners, actors and dancers were also affected. Manu prescribed one day's free labour per month. While in the period of Kautilya, forced labour was confined to a few type of labours, and the labourers were supplied with food in return, in the age of Gupta, forced labour was imposed as tax and was not given anything in lieu thereof.

Slavery, which is another stigma on humanity, was also there in ancient India. A slave is a person who is deprived of all right and devoid of any legal status. He is like a chattel and is considered to be a piece of property. His life depends on the whims of his master or owner who can engage him in rural industrial or household work and can sell him at his will. Varro, the Roman writer called a slave as machine with a voice. This institution of slavery originated in India when Aryans captured a number of slaves in the battle. According to Mahabharta, it was the law of war that the vanquished should become a slave of the victor and served his captor until ransomed. While Vinaya Pitaka classifies slaves in three, the Vidhura Pandita adds one more, making it four. Manu enlarged them to seven types and Kautilya made them nine. Subsequently, in the age of Narada, the kinds of slaves further increased to fifteen as follows:

1) Those captured in battle.
2) Those who become slaves for food.
3) Those born in the house.
4) Slaves who are bought.
5) Those who are given by their parents.

1. See, Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Bengal (Series III), vd. VI, p. 121.
6) Those who are inherent.
7) Those who go into slavery for not paying fine or in execution of judicial decree.
8) Those who are mortgaged.
9) Those who sell themselves.
10) Those who are obtained in bet.
11) One who accepts slavery by saying "I am yours".
12) An apostate from asceticism.
13) One who stipulates to be a slave for a certain time.
14) One who is a slave for food.
15) One who is tempted to be slave out of love for a female slave.

According to Pali cannon, the slave had no legal possession of his body. He was like the movable personal property of his master like oxen, buffalo, gold and silver, garments, sandal wood, horses, treasure, jewel, etc.¹ Thus a slave was considered to be a piece of property. According to Manu, a wife, a son and a slave had no right to property of any kind. Whatever money they earn, belonged to the man to whom they belonged. Narada pointed out that in the time of need, even a Brahman could take away the money of his Shudra slave. However, Kutilya and Yajnavalkya held a generous attitude towards slaves. They said that the slaves could earn money in spare times. Slaves were not considered competent to appear in court for evidence, but Manu allowed them when no other witness was available.²

The slaves were usually assigned the duties of store keepers, treasurers, private secretaries, bodyguards etc. There were normally two categories of slaves, viz., (i) agricultural

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1. Jataka 1, 341, V, 223.
2. Manu, VII, 70.
slaves, and (ii) domestic slaves. The rich people kept a fairly large number of slaves to work as agricultural labour. They also worked on royal farms. Domestic slaves did household work at master's house, such as cooking, serving foods and attending to his physical needs. The slaves also formed the retinue of princesses and wealthy people. Even priests were found to keep the slaves. Slave girls were often kept as concubines. They were trained with prostitutes for the entertainment of people. According to Kautilya, the duty of female slaves were to act as bathroom attendants, shampoorers, bed-room servants, washer-woman, garland makers, gate keepers and even body-guards. It is, therefore, obvious from the foregoing account that the stigma of slavery on humanity was in full swing in ancient India. It went on increasing from the 6th century B.C. down to the 6th century A.D.

2.6 Settlement of Disputes

The advancement of art, craft, industry and specialization led to the formation of guilds and associations. They used to prescribe rules to be followed by their members. Many guilds constituted Nigams or Corporations. They had executive and judicial powers to settle disputes among themselves or the dispute of the members with other corporations. They accepted deposits of the members and lent them money in the time of their need. They were much aware of their professional standards and rules. The profit earned or the loss incurred was equally distributed among the members. Every member had the right to speak. The disputes between President and members were referred to the king. The guilds and corporations were very strong. They also protected their members from the exploitation and ill-
treatment of the upper classes. They took care of fair deal and fair wages of members and improved their conditions. The artisans and craftsmen had so much improved their position that they could get fair wages without any external help.¹

2.7 Social Security

These guilds and corporations also served as a shelter for social security to the diseased, disabled, old people and orphans. Financial assistance was also given to the poor members for training, funerals and other sacrificial ceremonies. They also worked for the society by opening and maintaining schools.

The other major sources of social security of members consisted of joint families, caste, community or 'gotra' which helped the old and infirm, physically handicapped and the needy.² Rich people and community used to look after the interest of needy members. A fixed allowance was given to the family of the dead and to the persons who were old and infirm. Shikracharyana was of the opinion that the son of an employee should get his father's pay till he becomes major. He further remarked that a person who served for forty years should be given pension equal to half of his pay. An employee should also get a sixth part or fourth part of his wages during the period of illness. But if illness continued for more than two years, he was entitled to get his half wages. An employee who had service of five years should be given three-fourth of his wages during the period of illness. The employees were given sickness allowances (benefit) for six months. No deductions were to be made for a week's illness. Kautilya made a regulation for security to a pregnant female slave at the time

¹ Mishra, S.P., Labour Problems in Ancient and Medieval India, pp. 79-82
² Jain, P.C., Ibid., p. 213.
of his confinement. Manu ordained that the worker who returned to duty after illness should be paid his dues. Fa-hien recorded that employees were given pension after a fixed period of service. Thus, it can be said that a sound foundation of the social security was laid during this period.

Conclusion

The foregoing discussion makes it abundantly clear that during the ancient period, the efforts of Kautilya and the rulers of Gupta period contributed significantly towards the development of the so-called labour policy; but the caste system which had established itself fully by the beginning of 800 B.C., had cast its shadow on the labour policy during the entire period under review. The lot of the Shudras was the worst. Even the teachings of Lord Buddha could not ameliorate the lot of this suffering class. Kautilya tried to reform the conditions of the labour classes and lift the Shudras from the depths of contemptuous degradation. But Kautilya's blind faith in Vedic caste system rendered the labour policy conceived by him ineffective during the period of Ashoka. However, during the Mahabharat and Manu period, and in the later Gupta period, the lot of the labouring class improved a bit. Surprisingly, the germination of the modern-day unionism can be traced in the guilds of the Gupta period. Both the agricultural as well as the industrial labour progressed and different artisans involved in various arts and industries flourished during this period. Even the wages of different classes of labour were attended to by some economists of that time. But, simultaneously, curses like 'forced labour' and 'slave labour' too continued, and even flourished in certain cases, during this time. Hence this period can be called a period of mixed fate for the labour class. An analysis of the period shows that progress has its own vices.