CHAPTER III

LABOUR POLICY AND ITS EFFECTIVENESS IN MEDIEVAL INDIA

3.1 Social Conditions

Ancient Indian society was so deeply caste-ridden that there appeared to be no sign of overcoming this problem in the years to come. It is, therefore, no wonder that even today the rural life reflects to a considerable extent the effect of such caste-based policies of the ancient India particularly from the occupational point of view. The period that immediately followed the end of Gupta dynasty witnessed the deterioration in the condition and standard of labourers. Shudras alone did the cultivation. Other labour classes adopted the occupation of butchers, fishermen, executioners and scavengers. Though the time changed yet the fate of the labourers continued to be the same. Evidences are not wanting to show that some rulers of that age were interested "in settling the system of castes and orders" and in "keeping the caste confined to their respective spheres of duty." However, attempts in this direction were not crowned with success.¹ The Shudras were given menial jobs in the society. They were forced to live outside the city walls. The disabilities from which lower castes and labourers suffered increased during this period. The

evil increased to such an extent that even the shadow of Shudra was considered to be polluting. According to one tenet of that time, one should purify oneself by bathing with clothes on and should fast as a penance after touching a shudra.\(^1\) Sharply distinguishing from them were 'Chandalas'. While entering the gate of a city or a market, they stuck a piece of wood to make themselves known so that men avoided them and did not come into contact with them.\(^2\) This fact is vouched for, not only by Indian and Chinese records, but also by Al-Biruni. So was the case with other lower castes.

It is evident from the commentries and digests that there were seven main lower castes in number — workmen, leather workers, fishermen, venas, burriulas, medas and bhillas. Out of these venas, burriulas, medas and bhillas were tribes and other were occupational groups.\(^3\) On the other hand, there are few instances, where Shudras assumed the Kshatriya's occupation of ruling and fighting. We also find members of the priestly and artisan classes taking to the profession of arms and members of the soldier class figuring as merchants. We also find that total immunity was not given even to Brahamans as far as breach of the tenets was concerned. They were not exempted from punishment and dismissals.\(^4\)

The observations of Huien-T-Sang make it amply clear that the people of this country were prosperous and happy. In general, it had enjoyed a good government. Taxes were light and people were

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1. Majumdar, R.C. (Ed.), *The History and Culture of The Indian People -- The Struggle for Empire*, Bhartiya Vidya Bhawan, Bombay, 1966, p. 475.
2. Majumdar, R.C., Raychaudhuri, H.C. and Datta, Kalinkinner, Ibid., p.196.
not subjected to arbitrary tyranny. Forced service, though not unknown, was sparingly used and labour was usually paid.¹ In other parts of India, we find that although the conditions of the labourers were depressed and they followed rules and regulations given by Dharamshastras, yet the labourers in many crafts specially the stone cutters, silk weavers, labourers working in pearl fisheries in South India and those engaged in ivory works and sandalwood comparatively had a slightly better fate.

The arrival of Muslims in the country made the caste system of Hindus more rigid. Islam, as it believed in brotherhood and equality, did not make any distinctions in man and man. However, Hindus could not reconcile with the fact of mixing with the Muslim invaders and tried to isolate themselves from the Muslims. They treated Muslims as 'Melachhas' with a social status much lower than Shudras. With a view to strengthen the Hindu society, they recast the smiritis.² But with the passage of time this attitude of Hindus started changing. Anyway, many people of lower castes started adopting Islam in the search of higher social status and certain other facilities offered by the Muslim high-ups. The position of Brahmans underwent a great change. They earlier enjoyed exemptions from all sorts of taxes. But now they were deprived of this favourtism. This naturally implied a change in their traditional duties and they had to undertake other professions like farming, etc. But they took to agriculture through hired labour and not directly.³ This resulted in their not devoting wholly to Vedic studies and spiritual pursuits. This affected Brahmans' view that even a Shudra could listen to the

³. Ibid., p. 57.
recitation of the Puranas and could take to certain trades which were earlier forbidden to them. During this period, the Muslim society remained divided into ethnic and racial groups. The Turks, Iranians, Afghans and Indian Muslims rarely went for inter-caste marriages. The Hindu converts who had adopted Islam with a view to escape social disadvantage, found their conditions not better in the Muslim society. Such was the state of affairs during the period.

As a matter of fact, the medieval society consisted of three classes. The upper class consisted of enormously wealthy nobles and high officials. They enjoyed certain privileges and rights which were beyond the reach of an ordinary citizen. These officials and nobles mainly belonged to high castes. In the middle class, there were professionals like teachers, vaids, merchants, clerks, etc. Though the middle classes were not so rich, their condition was quite comfortable. The lower class comprised labourers (carpenters, smiths, weavers, artisans etc.), small businessmen, soldiers, peasants, workers, etc. Their condition was quite miserable and they did not have sufficient earnings to satisfy their needs. The taxes on these people were quite exhorbitant and they were left with only one-third of their produce. Theirs was indeed a miserable lot.

Sultanate period had some Hindu rulers also in other parts of India, e.g., Vijaynagar, Rajputana States, etc. Vijaynagar empire, that was one of the most important Hindu empires during medieval period, had a well organised administration. The king cared much about the welfare of the people and carried on

2. Ibid., p. 11.
administration in accordance with the tenets of Dharmas. The laws were mainly based on customs and traditions. The punishments were rather severe. The crimes like theft, adultery and treason were punished with death or mutilation of limbs. The ordinary crimes were punished with fines. The Court of Vijaynagar rulers was known for its grandeur. The administration of Rajput States was based on caste system. Only people of the higher castes were associated with the administration. The State was divided into number of units; each under the control of 'Mukhiya' or 'leader' of dominant caste. Military organisation was also based on caste system. Each sub-leader of the caste maintained his own unit of army.

There is no denying the fact that India flourished considerably under Mughals. People belonging to various castes, races, religions and customs lived side by side, such as Hindus, Muslims, Parsis, Christians, and so on. The Hindus formed the great majority and were divided into castes. They included the Jains, the Buddhists, and the Sikhs among them. The upper classes of them belonged mostly to Rajput, Brahman, Kayasth and Vaish castes and did not inter-dine or inter-marry among themselves. The Rajputs, as a rule, were military men and their tribal leaders were rulers of territories and held high ranks as Mansabdars in the Imperial service. Some Brahmans like Gujarati Nagars were found taking to study of Persian and were employed as officers. Under the later Mughals, a few members of this class (Nagar) figured even as governors of provinces. The Vaishas formed the mercantile community and Kayasthas were engaged as clerks, munshis (secretaries) and revenue officers. Some of the lower caste

Hindus, notably in Bengal and certain other parts of the country, had been converted to Islam and some high castes in Kashmir had, in the same manner, been compelled to abandon their ancestral religion. The Mohammedans were sharply divided into two sections—1) those who had come for employment or trade from Arabia, Persia and other countries; and 2) those who were converts from the indigenous Hindu populations or descendants of early converts. The number of the latter converts was fairly large. These people mostly belonged to lower castes. The condition of these people remained the same except in certain cases. They were looked down upon even by the Muslims. In Islamic religion, there was an eternal difference between Muslims and Non-Muslims through declaring the latter as 'zimmis' or protected labourers without right of full citizen.¹

There used to be levied a pilgrim tax, known as 'Jajiya' upon the Hindus, which was abolished by Akbar but was started again by later Mughals. During the times of famine and other natural calamities, the common people died in large numbers and the State did not take any step to save them. The standard of the labourer was rather miserable. According to Pelsaert writings about habitants of people during the time of Jahangir, "Their houses are built of mud with thatched roofs. Furniture there is little or none except some earthenware pots to hold water and for cooking and two beds; their bed clothes are scanty, merely a sheet or perhaps two serving as under and over-sheets. This is sufficient in the hot weather but the bitter cold nights are miserable indeed."² However, the condition of peasantry, unskilled

² Raychoudhary, S.C., Ibid., p. 83.
workers and menial servants showed some improvements under the Mughals but from the time of Akbar onward it started deteriorating again and became worse under the later Mughals.

3.2 Agricultural Labour

As has always been the case, agriculture used to be the main occupation of people in the medieval period. By and large, people were self sufficient and produced enough to meet their requirements. The farmers were more dependent on natural resources. Usually in normal times, the peasants produced much more than was actually needed by them. Though there are no contemporary references regarding the system of cultivation, it must have resembled the present one. In addition to the food-crops, the people cultivated medicinal herbs, spices and fragrant wood which had a good foreign market. The practice of storing or stocking the surplus grain was in vogue. The grain was usually stored in grain pits or 'khathees'. Village was the basic unit of economic organisation. The chief feature of Indian village community was a harmonious coordination of the specialized functions of its various component groups of workers.

However, peasants were not a happy lot. They were heavily taxed. The State took the large share of the produce from land in the shape of tax and various other duties. Out of the remainder, the peasants distributed fixed share to the various classes of domestic and other labourers. A certain share was also earmarked for the priest and the domestic animals. Consequently, the peasant was left with a little stock only to meet his daily needs. The peasant worked hard and unceasingly. His wife and other

1. Raychoudhary, S.C., Ibid., p. 75-76.
members of the family also shared some burden. In return for all this, he could merely get one square meal everyday. Prof. K.M. Ashraf has rightly observed, "There are very few vague references to the life of peasants but it can be asserted with confidence that their lot was very miserable and they lived constantly in a state of semi-starvation."\(^1\) The famines were quite frequent and the State made no provision for relief to the affected peasants. Even the remission in revenue was negligible.

An idea about the wretched condition of the peasants can be had from the fact that they were not allowed even to eat the food of their own choice and to wear the clothes they wanted. During this period, the rulers and their officials were basically interested in levying taxes and collecting the money from the people. According to S.C. Raychoudhary,"These taxes were not spent for the welfare activities of the people because the State had neither the responsibility nor the will to provide these facilities to its subjects."\(^2\) The taxes were not uniform for all sections of the society, the rate of tax was determined differently by different Sultan and ranged from 1/10 to 1/2. Ala-ud-Din Khilji charged 50% of the agriculture produce as share. According to Islamic law there were two types of taxes — Usher and Kharaj.\(^3\) Usher was the land tax charged on land held by Muslim and was usually one-tenth of the total produce. Kharaj was the tax charged on the land owned by the Hindus and it varied from one-tenth to one-half. The Jagirdari system was in existence and the Jagirdar acted as middleman between cultivator and the State. Even Jagirdar could claim the share for himself in addition to the

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2. Ibid., p. 221.
3. Ibid., p. 222.
regular tax. After paying these taxes, the peasants were reduced to sore straits. Ghias-ud-din Tughlaq softened the rigorous policy and reduced the tax on agriculture to 1/10 of the total produce. During his time, many ruined lands were brought under cultivation. He also paid attention towards the welfare of the peasants. Mohammed Bin Tughlaq also paid attention to this area. He introduced a uniform standard of land revenue and established the department of agriculture, Diva-i-kohi. Firoz Tughlaq also paid some attention towards the conditions of peasants. He reduced State's share in the produce. He provided 'Taqavi' loans to the cultivators and provided greater facilities for irrigation. He got dug four canals for irrigation and levied irrigation tax on the cultivators who made use of water from canal. The tax was charged at the rate of 1/10 of the produce of the irrigated area. Though the ruler took some steps to improve the conditions of peasants from time to time yet due to Jagirdari system these were not much effective. The conditions of cultivators could never become satisfactory because of their exploitation by jagirdars and revenue officials.

A separate department named 'athavana' was established in Vijaynagar Empire. Land revenue known as 'sist' was the principal source of income. The land was divided under three categories — 'wet land', 'dry land', and 'orchard and wood' or garden land. The rulers adopted the principle of differential taxation, that was levied according to the fertility of land. To meet the heavy burden of State and to solve the problem of obtaining man and money to withstand its enemies, the Vijaynagar Empire gave up the

2. Majumdar, R.C., Raychaudhuri, H.C. and Datta, Kakinkinner, Ibid., p. 381.
traditional rate of assessment of one-sixth of the produce and increased it a little. The taxes were taken in kind or cash and the burden of tax on peasant was crushingly heavy. There were also certain evidences of village uprise against this burden. While the nobles lived in luxury, the mass of the people went all but naked and lived in hovels. Wilks and later authorities also refer to the multitude of vexatious cesses levied upon peasants and merchants alike.\textsuperscript{1} It was not uncommon to come across oppression of the people by the provincial governors and revenue officials.

Hardly any change was noticeable in the condition of peasants under the first two Mughals, Babur and Humayun, and it continued to be as it was under Sultanate Period. However, credit goes to Sher Shah Suri, (Emperor of India between Humayun and Akbar) for providing an excellent land revenue system. He ordered to measure the land on uniform standard. The cultivable land was divided into three categories — good, middling and bad. The average of these three was taken to determine the produce of land per bigha. The share of State was fixed at 1/3 of the gross produce. The farmers could pay the tax in kind or in cash. In addition to this, each cultivator was to pay in kind two and a half per cent of the revenue he paid to the State. In lieu of this, he got grain at very cheap rates during the time of famine and other calamities.\textsuperscript{2} Sher Shah paid a lot of attention towards the welfare of the peasants. He reduced or waived the tax in adverse times. He had given specific instructions to his officials to be lenient at the time of assessment but once the assessment had been made, the tax was to be collected with severity. He gave ruthless punishments to the soldiers if they destroyed the crop.

\textsuperscript{1} Smith, Vincent A., Ibid., p. 314.
\textsuperscript{2} Raychoudhary, S.C., Ibid., p. 224.
The loans were advanced to the peasants in case of damage to crops caused by encampment of soldiers or the insufficiency of rain.¹ These reforms increased the resources of the State and at the same time were conducive to the interest of the people. After the death of Sher Shah, there was complete disorder and the work done by him for the peasantry was shattered.

Akbar too paid attention towards agriculture and improved the land system. He found at his accession three kinds of land in the country — (1) The Khalsa or crown lands, (2) the Jagir lands, enjoyed by some nobles who collected the local revenue, out of which they sent a portion to the central exchequer and kept the rest for themselves, and (3) the Sayurghel lands, granted on free tenure.² Akbar reorganised the land system and prepared a revised system based on estimates framed by the local Qanungoes and checked by the ten superior Qanungoes at the headquarters. In 1575-76, Akbar abolished the old land revenue system and introduced a new system. He divided the whole Empire, except Gujarat, Bengal and Bihar, into a large number of units, each yielding one crore a year, and placed over each of them an officer called the Krori, whose duty was to collect revenue and encourage cultivation. But the Kroris soon grew corrupt and their tyranny reduced the peasants to great misery.³ Hence their offices were abolished. Akbar introduced important reforms and a land revenue system in 1582 when he appointed Todar Mal as the Diwan-i-Ashraf. The land was divided into four categories. The first category of land was Polaj, which was always in cultivation.

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¹ Majumdar, R.C., Raychoudhuri, H.C. and Datta, Kalinkinner, Ibid., p. 440.
² Ibid., p. 560.
³ Ibid., pp. 560-61.
Throughout the year it had some crop ready according to the season. Parauti was the second category, which had to be left fallow for one or two years to recoup the fertility. Chachar was the third category which had to be left fallow for three or four years to gain the fertility. The fourth category of the land was known as Banjar or barren, which had to be left fallow for five years or more. Polaj and Parauti were further sub-divided into three types — good, middling, and bad. The produce of the three was calculated and their average was considered to be the actual produce of the land on which the State's share was fixed. The tax in respect of Polaj and Parauti was fixed at one-third of the average produce of the three grades. On Chachar land, the tax was 1/15 of the produce in the first year, 2/15 in the second year, 1/5 in the third year, 4/15 in the fourth year and 1/3 in the fifth year. Similarly, on Banjar land, the Government charged 1/26 of the produce in first year, 1/13 in the second year, 2/13 in the third year, 3/13 in the fourth year, and 1/3 in the fifth year. This system continued to be operated throughout the Mughal Period with more or less no change. It is important to note that though the State collected so much money from the taxes on peasants and common mass, there was no expenditure incurred upon the welfare activities. Most of the money collected was spent on wars and personal luxuries of the rulers. The condition of the peasant was not much better under the Mughals. The sufferings of the peasants and people knew no bounds. The Mughal State then made no systematic and prolonged efforts to provide relief and affected no substantial remission in revenue collection. The little they did was insufficient to elevate the acute miseries of the people who died of starvation and pestilence that closely followed it. Such was the pathetic condition of the people including the peasants.
3.3 Industrial Labour

There is little doubt that agriculture occupied prominent place in Indian economy, the country had been famous for small as well as for cottage crafts since early times. The system of production, the quality of goods, and the direction and the nature of foreign trade left an indelible mark on the working of our industrial economy. A brief account of Indian industries which flourished during medieval India is as follows:

3.3.1 Textile Industry

The most important and the biggest industry during the medieval period was the textile industry. It manufactured cotton, woollen and silken clothes. Marco Polo referred to production and manufacture of goods in Gujarat, Cambay, Telingana, Malabar and Bengal. He also remarked that fine Buckrangs (Muslins) and Cintzes were produced.¹ The cotton was exported to Africa, Arabia and Persia.² Bengal, Gujrat, Ahmedabad, Surat, Orissa, Cambay and Kashmir were the centres of silk industry. According to Abul Fazal, all kinds of silk spinning were brought to perfection.³ Besides producing cloth, silk carpets mixed with gold of superior quality were manufactured at Surat and in the city of Cambay.⁴ The Mughul empire believed in quality than in quantity. In their karkhanas, master-pieces were turned out which is evidenced by Ain-i-Akbari. Shawls and shawl stuffs received a special attention.

¹ Gupta, N.S., Industrial Structure of India During Medieval India, S. Chand and Co., New Delhi, 1970, p. 89.
³ See, Ibid.
⁴ Gupta, N.S., Ibid., p. 89.
during the reign of Akbar. Woollen tweeds, blankets and carpets were also manufactured. The textile industry continued to flourish under the Mughals. Indian clothes were exported to Middle Coast, Burma, Malaya, Java, etc. The silk industry received special patronage during the times of Akbar.

3.3.2 Metal Industry

Metal industry also flourished under the Sultans and the Mughals. The Indian metal workers handled the various kinds of iron, brass, silver, zinc with great skill. They made tools and implements for agriculture, arms, and general utility articles. Besides they also produced basins, cups, knives and scissors. Copper was also used in coins, bell metals and utensils. They showed their skill in manufacturing of inlaid ornaments, embroidery and damascened work. A great refinement in metal industry was done under the Mughals and it reached its zenith under Akbar.

3.3.3 Leather Industry

Leather industry too occupied an important place among the medieval period industries. It developed considerably, during this time. It was obtained from the skin of goat, buffalo or rhinoceros. Gujrat was the main centre of the industry. It was also exported to other countries. Leather was used to manufacture shoes, saddles and bridles for horses, packing, scabbards of swords, and other items of common use. The peasants used water buckets of leather. The covers of books were also made of leather and Bengal sugar was packed in leather bags for export purposes. The most excellent item made out of leather was the leather mats made of red and blue leather and exquisitely inlaid with figures
of birds and beasts and skilfully embroidered with gold and silver wires.¹

3.3.4 Sugar Industry

Sugar industry made a tremendous progress during medieval period. There were three types of sugar — powder, candy and unrefined sugar which were produced in the modern States of Punjab, U.P., Bihar, undivided Bengal and the Malabar coast in the South.² The sugar was made from the sugarcane. Besides meeting the local demands, the sugar was also exported to other countries, viz., Ceylon, Arabia, Persia, etc.

3.3.5 Paper Industry

The art of paper making was quite popular during medieval period in India. Niclo Conti also mentioned the use of paper by the people of Cambay. Amir Khusru also pointed out the use of Shami (Surian) paper in Delhi. Paper making from rags was introduced in India during the time of Akbar. The manuscripts and other documents which have come down to us from medieval period also testify to the existence of paper industry during that period. Khusru made the mention of regular market of book-sellers in Delhi. Sialkot, Kashmir and Gaya were the centres of paper industry. Shahjoodpur was known for the special quality of paper.

3.3.6 Pottery

Pottery has been an important craft of the ancient India. With the advent of Muslims, this industry developed a lot. The glazed pottery which was hitherto unknown to Indian people, was a

¹. Gupta, N.S., Ibid., p. 113.
². Ibid., p. 111.
notable contribution of the medieval times. Glazed earthen wares and the coloured tiles for mosques were in use during this period. Pottery made such a progress during the times that our clay vessels of Kulam were sold in the cities of Persia in competition with China.¹

3.3.7 Ship-building Industry

Ship-building occupied quite an important place among the industries of medieval period. The contemporary literary references and observation of travellers proved the fact. Nicolo Conte says "the Indian ships are much bigger than our ships."² The Mughals established a centre in the Bay of Bengal for the construction of ships. This industry attained a good reputation and even the Portuguese had some of their best ships built in India. The ship-building activities were mainly carried on the Western Coasts of India.

3.3.8 Stone and Brick Work

The Indian artisans and masons possessed superb skill in this art. Besides displaying their skill in India, they also constructed a number of buildings in Kabul, Ghazni and Samarqand. The Government had given patronage to the workers of this industry. Ala-ud-Din Khilji had employed 70,000 workers for the construction of State buildings. Babur also took pride in claiming that he engaged 680 stone-cutters in the construction of the buildings at Agra. The Dilwara temple at Mount Abu, the buildings of Chittorgarh and Taj Mahal at Agra are a testimony of brilliance of the Indian craftsmen in stone and brick works. They also used enamelled tiles and bricks.

¹ Gupta, N.S., Ibid., p. 103.
² Raychoudhary, S.C., Ibid., p. 78.
3.4 Working and Living Conditions of Labour

References are also available with regard to industrial workers like washermen, bakers, cooks, oilmen, barbers, garland makers, painters, grass-cutters, porters, etc. The industries of medieval period may be divided under two categories, the urban industries and the rural crafts. The urban industries were again of two types, viz., 1) the State-owned industries, and 2) the private industries. The State industries popularly known as State workshops or Imperial Karkhanas were mainly concerned with meeting the demands of royal households while the private industries produced the things to meet the requirements of the general public and the exporting merchants. The rural industry was traditionally organised on the basis of the hereditary system. The village economy was self sufficient.

Imperial Karkhanas were headed by General Superintendent who was directly responsible to the King or the Emperor. He was known as 'Mutassarirf',¹ in the days of Tughlaq, and in the Mughal times as 'Khan-i-Saman'.² Each Karkhana was under the charge of a superintendent. He was either a great lord (Khan) or a notable chief (Malik).³ The production in private enterprises was carried on artisan level. We find at the top, the master artisan who guided his subordinates and arranged finance, raw material and marketing of the finished product. The apprentices or the artisans were the subordinates of the master artisans. At the bottom were the beginners. The village manufacturers dealt in unrefined sugar, weaving, carpentering, etc. The village crafts

². Gupta, N.S., Ibid., p. 41.
³. Eliot and Dowson, Ibid., p. 339.
were mostly confined to blacksmithy, goldsmithy and silversmithy, shoe manufacturing and oil expelling. Other minor industries were cap making, basket making, etc. The villages which were near the cities did not enjoy self sufficiency in their economy and they were mutually dependent on each other.¹

Caste system played the main role in the supply of labour. The skill and the workmanship was hereditary and people could not think of changing the occupation. The caste system also worked as an effective institution. Since the childhood, the artisan learnt the craft with his father and then under seasoned and matured guidance of the master artisan. The system of apprenticeship was in vogue. During medieval period the industrial labour was broadly categorised under four heads: 1) Master artisan, 2) Skilled craftsman, 3) Apprentice, and 4) Unskilled labour or beginner. Master artisan was a highly qualified and matured person who acquired a good deal of excellence and perfection in his crafts. He employed the skilled craftsman and the apprentice and headed private organisations. Apart from owing the establishment, they served in the State workshops or Imperial Karkhanas as employees of the government. In Imperial workshops, they worked in two capacities; 1) to work on the delicate and the finer articles of higher artistic excellence, and 2) to guide and supervise the work of skilled workers and apprentices. Their wages were three times higher than the wages of ordinary workers. The production was carried on mainly by skilled workers who acquired this status after completing the period of apprenticeship under the master. They were paid double the wages of an ordinary worker. The next category of labour was apprentices who assisted the skilled labour

¹ Gupta, N.S., Ibid., p. 119.
by doing very simple work in addition to learning the craft. Lastly, the beginners were not paid anything. However, they were given free instructions or training by the skilled labourer during the time they were unable to produce something. After acquiring a little bit of training they were first paid some pocket expenses and then wages.

However, conditions of work during medieval period were not satisfactory. Both Pelesaert and Bernier have stated that the workmen worked from early morning till late in evening. There were no watches or any labour legislation to regulate the hours of work and the working hours were decided by the rising and setting of the sun, which were longer in summer and shorter in winter. There was no system of weekly rest or holidays or even leave with pay. The conditions in State workshops were a little better because of security of employment, effective training and better remuneration as compared to private establishments. There was also child labour and the children were mostly employed as trainees and apprentices and the hours of work were very heavy on them. There was no legislation to regulate the age of child labour. The State officials recruited the workmen for Imperial Karkhana on the agreed term that the workmen would keep on making a regular illegal payment to them out of the monthly wages. In the State enterprises recruitment was done by two methods, 1) Democratic, i.e., by attracting the capable persons to work, and 2) Despotic, i.e., by catching any body from any where and force him to work on the wage fixed at the pleasure of the State official. At times, corporal punishments were given to them if they were hesitant to work. Thus the forced labour and forceful

2. Ibid., pp. 255-56.
recruitment prevailed during the medieval period too. The emperor followed the policy of least interference. Like the Omrhas and Mansabdar, the private establishments were also free to enforce any stricture on industrial labour. The condition of labour worsened further by the system of tax and other illegal excavation. The working class was not leading a peaceful and comfortable life during this time. Their wages were insufficient to meet their nominal requirements of feeding, clothing and shelter. De Laet mentioned about 'Kitsery' composed of pulse and rice in the evening and only parched pulses or other grain in the daytime as the staple diet of the labourers in the medieval period.¹

In the days of famine and food scarcity, their condition was horrible. They were left with only one option, i.e., to opt slavery. The famines were a regular feature and the condition of the labour continued to suffer in one part of the country or the other. The emperor and the foreign travellers also observed the bad condition of the labour. Babur, in 'Memories of Babur', mentioned, about man and a woman having insufficient clothing to cover their bodies.² Varthema also referred to the people of Vijaynagar where he saw people roaming about more or less naked with only a piece of cloth about their middle.³ This speaks for the pathetic condition of labour, during medieval period.

Barbosa too hinted towards labour's conditions of clothing and of housing on the Malabar coast at Calicut as bad.⁴ The condition of labour on the Eastern Coast was also not different.

2. Beverage, Memories of Babur, Quoted by Gupta, N.S., Ibid., p. 136.
4. Ibid.
Besides fooding and clothing, their housing conditions were also not satisfactory. The houses of labourers were mud huts and were hygienically unfit for human habitation. So we can say that the standard of living of the labourers was on the margin of bare subsistence and their distress was aggravated further by the high-handedness of State officials and the disintegration of the labour force in a state of feudalism. Thus labourers' was a totally neglected lot.

3.5 Wages

During the medieval period, the wage structure lacked soundness and uniformity. The nobles were leading a life of extravagance. There is a reference of appointment by Sultan Jala-ud-din Khilji of one of his old friends as his Vakil-i-dar and paid him a sum of 1,00,000 Jittals. Under Muhammad Tughlaq, the Naib of Sultan enjoyed the income of a province as large as Iraq. The ministers received from 20,000 to 40,000 tankas every year. The value of one tanka was a little more than that of a rupee.¹ The secretariat personal staff were given 10,000 tankas per year.

Sultan Ala-ud-Din Khilji fixed the salary of a soldier at 234 tankas per year with an extra annual allowance of 78 tankas to a du-Aspa soldier for the additional horses.² The wages of labouring class were very low during this period. 5 tankas per month, on average, had been considered enough to maintain the whole family. The labourers like the bricklayers, the carpenters, the builders, the matchlockmen and the archers were given between five rupees and one and a half rupees. The wage structure in South

¹ Majumdar, R.C., Raychaudhuri, H.C., and Datta, Kalinkinner, Ibid., p. 308.
² See, Ibid.
India was different from that of the North. According to Madras Museum Plates of Uttam Chola, a watchman was given the wage of one Kurani per day and two Kalanjus per annum were given to a gardener. A wood-cutter was paid four Nalis of paddy per day, in A.D. 1018. The daily wage of a palanquin bearer was also paid four Nalis of paddy. A garden labourer for lifting water and irrigating the garden and fields and for gathering flowers was given 10 Nalis per day. The male labourer was given 8 Nalis per day.

Akbar had fixed the salary of each mansabdar according to his grade. Out of his pay, he had to defray the cost of his establishment. The salary, even after deducting the cost of establishment, was very handsome as is shown in the table 3.1 given by Moreland:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ranks</th>
<th>Monthly salary in Rs.</th>
<th>Cost of appropriate force.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I Class</td>
<td>II class</td>
<td>III class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5000</td>
<td>30000</td>
<td>29000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3000</td>
<td>17000</td>
<td>16000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1000</td>
<td>8200</td>
<td>8100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500</td>
<td>2500</td>
<td>2300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>82.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Ahadis troopers were given the highest salary. Some times, an Ahadis trooper was given the salary of Rs. 500/- per month. The wages of industrial labour during the reign of Akbar varied
between 2 dams to 7 dams per day for different classes of workers at a time when 40 dams formed one rupee. According to Abul Fazal's account, the labourers may be divided under three heads on the basis of the rate of wages received by them, as follows:

**TABLE : 3.2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Rate per day</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Master Artisan</td>
<td>5 to 7 dams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled Craftman</td>
<td>3 to 6 dams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unskilled Labour</td>
<td>2 dams</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Moreland has also classified the labour into four different categories which is slightly heterogeneous in nature. He has also calculated the equivalent rate of wage in 1920 as follows:

**TABLE : 3.3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Sanctioned rate</th>
<th>Equivalent in 1920</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ordinary Labour</td>
<td>2 dams daily</td>
<td>5 and half annas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superior Labour</td>
<td>3-4 dams daily</td>
<td>8 and half-11 annas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpenters</td>
<td>3-7 dams daily</td>
<td>8 and half annas to Re 1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Builders</td>
<td>5-7 dams daily</td>
<td>14 annas to Re 1.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


During the reign of Jahangir, the wage had increased as compared to the reign of Akbar. Whereas the value of dam in terms of rupee was increased by 25%, the duration of the month was enhanced by 33%. In place of 40 dams, a rupee formed 30 dams
during Jahangir's time. In the same way, the duration of month was increased from 30 or 31 days to 40 days. Pelsaert has pointed out that 5 to 6 tankas or 4 to 5 stivers were received daily by goldsmiths, painters, carpet makers and other skilled craftsmen. 5 to 6 tankas means 10 to 12 pice per day or 300 to 360 pice per month. De Laet mentioned four categories of labour, during Shah Jehan's reign, under the following heads.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of labour</th>
<th>Daily wages</th>
<th>Monthly wages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Annas (1637)</td>
<td>Rs. (1637)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. UNSKILLED LABOUR</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ordinary</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>2.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superior</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>3.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. CARPENTER (SKILLED)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ordinary</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>6.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superior</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>7.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The wages of Master artisan, who was performing the function of a supervisor, may be equivalent to what he was getting during Jahangir's time.

3.6 Slave Labour

Slavery, a social evil, existed in India since early times. It was also fairly common in the medieval India. The slaves were freely distributed among friends and relatives. Usually, slaves were captured through wars and also were purchased from the markets. The slaves were males and females both. The Sultans patronised the slaves in administration as well as in factories,

from the very beginning of Muslim reign in India.

It was usual with Muhammad Ghaznavi to consult all important administrative activities with Ayaz, a famous slave officer. He had employed a large number of slaves in his army and other administrative departments. Slaves also formed a major section of Muhammad Ghori's nobility of whom Qutb-ud-Din Aibak, Nasirud-din Qubacha and Yields became rulers of different States as Lahore and Punjab, Sind and Multan, and Ghazni respectively. Sultan Shams-ud-din Iltumush and Ghiyas-ud-Din Balban also belonged to the slave dynasty. Ala-ud-din Khilji had 50,000 slaves, at the beginning of the 13th century. He patronized Malik Kapur, a slave purchased in Gujrat, who reached the position of the Deputy ruler of the Empire.

Tughlaqs also patronized slaves and they appointed them on high official posts. Firuz Shah Tughlaq established a separate department for the administration and maintenance of slaves and started the system of making slaves as paid labourers. Afif, a contemporary historian, has pointed out that the Sultan was much interested in purchasing the slaves. He established a new department known Diwan-i-Ariz-i-Bandgan due to abnormal rise of royal slaves to 1,80,000. It was his order to all provincial governors to capture slaves and send the best of them to the capital, where they were assigned different jobs according to their abilities. Some were placed under tradesman and were taught mechanical arts. Nearly 12,000 became efficient artisans and craftsmen, 40,000 soldiers who served as guards at the royal palace, and some were absorbed in Imperial Karkhanas. The slaves were employed in various other capacities in different departments as ewer bearers, curtain bearers, weapon bearers, keepers of
medicine and library. Their monthly salary ranged from 10 tankas to 100 tankas. The salary was given in terms of cash or cultivable land without any deductions. Bashir, the defence minister who was a slave; died issueless and left a fortune of 4 crores of tankas. In spite of Firuz Shah's welfare activities for the slaves to improve their lot, the slaves after his death played havoc in the capital by forming a guild, looting the treasury and killing the sons and grandsons of the Sultan. The Royal army ultimately overpowered them and slaughtered them mercilessly.

The slavery system finished by itself with the decline of Tughlaq dynasty because it proved quite dangerous to employ slaves in large number, during the reign of Firuz Shah. No reference of slaves in 15th and 16th century is found. The system survived only in Bengal due to great poverty, during the reign of Akbar. But it vanished completely during the reign of later Mughals.

3.7 Labour Policy, its Implementation and Effectiveness

We find that as in ancient India, there was no clear cut labour policy in medieval India too. The rulers were busy in wars and they had no time to look into the conditions of working class. In fact their attitude towards labouring class was indifferent. The feudalism of medieval times was least interested in the welfare of industrial labour and peasants. Their hours of work, the modes of wage payment, regulations of rest intervals and other conditions of work to maintain the efficiency of labour were left unattended by the medieval rulers. They were not supposed to bother for anything so long the political peace in the kingdom was not disturbed. None, perhaps, recognised the labourers as even human beings. The emperors and the State officials treated them no
better than the beasts of burden at certain times.\textsuperscript{1} They were fortunate enough if they did not receive any whipping besides working with no awards at times. The workers had no freedom and they were puppets in the hands of the State officials or the private merchants. During this period, Jagirdari system was in vogue and they exploited the agricultural class to the maximum.

Thus the description of life of the working class and their working conditions clearly reflect that there was practically no scope for them to lead a peaceful and comfortable life. Their standard of living was on the margin of bare subsistence. The indifference of the rulers, the absence of the present social forces to plead the cause of working class and the shattering of the traditional craft-guilds made the position of the working people very weak and vulnerable. They were always at the receiving end.

Whatever little was done for the welfare of the working class by Tughlaq, Sher Shah Suri and Akbar by making some systematic rules and regulation, it was far from satisfactory. In fact these rules proved impracticable at the implementation level. Jagirdars, State officials and big landlords did not allow these rules to be operated smoothly. Hence this policy proved ineffective and the lot of the working people cannot be said to have improved in any significant manner. The working conditions developed in them a sense of pessimism towards their profession. The stiff attitude of the State officials, the apathy of the feudal lords and the parochial outlook of the trading merchants disgraced them from every meaningful concentration to their callings.

\textsuperscript{1} Gupta, N.S., Ibid., p. 140.
In the end, it can be stated that the Indian labourers continued to maintain their name, fame and efficiency in the midst of all vicissitudes and tyranny of administrative and industrial organism. Neither atrocities of the State officials, nor the parochial or rather the harassing attitude of trading merchants could deter them from the course of increasing an efficient production. In spite of the fact that they could not get even the bare necessities of life, it was their hard work, sweat and toiling which earned laurels for the country and brought the flow of gold and silver from other countries.

Conclusion

It can, therefore, be safely concluded that during the medieval period, the overall condition of labour was very poor to say the least. There were all types of hard decisions, rules and regulations that went against the interest of labouring class. There were forced labourers, bonded labourers and slave labourers who found it very hard to make their both ends meet despite their hard work. The medieval rulers were more or less uninterested and indifferent towards upliftment of this miserable section of the society. It were specially the 'Shudras' who were exploited not only economically but also socially. They were looked down upon by the other sections even after the conversion of their religion. Moreover, the social customs and policies of those times also were against them simply because the overall attitude of the people did not favour this suffering class of the society. Theirs was a miserable lot.

The primary factor responsible for this treatment meted out to the labour class was the caste-ridden policies of the ancient
period which continued to be effective during the medieval period also. Although the professions of different castes got mixed up, yet the fate of the labour class did not change much whether the worker was a fisherman or a leather worker or a peasant. There is no doubt that in this period the art of different artisans developed to great heights but materially or economically they were not much better off. Peasants were heavily taxed and they could not eat the food of their own choice though they produced food for the whole State. The Muslim rule did try to bring in some reforms but those also were lost very soon because of the ulterior motives of the rulers. The working conditions of the labour were also very discouraging and distressing and so was the case with their living conditions. It was all due to the absence of any specified labour policy or the lukewarm attitude of the officials towards the implementation of guidelines even if a few of these were there at all.