Conclusion
CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be safely summarized from this detailed study and evolution of one of the most critical period of early medieval history. The first phase of the early medieval period witnessed a comparative decline in economy. It is reflected in the decay and disappearance of commercial towns in most parts of Northern India, a paucity of coins, a decline in craft, guilds, and degradation in the status of artisans and traders. The present study therefore, throws light on a deteriorating grim scenario, about the economic condition of the historical period spanning from 7th century to 1200 century A.D.

Urban decay led to the migration of a number of skilled craftsmen into the countryside. Some of them even changed their vacations which resulted in the dispersal of technical skill along with artisans and craftsmen into the countryside and therefore, these skilled artisans and craftsmen adopted non-productive works like snake-charming, snake charming, flute playing and jugglery.

We notice a decline in the position of crafts guilds. The surplus wealth of rulers and their feudatories was not inverted in craft production or trade. This was an important reason for the decline of guilds in early medieval northern India. Their number in the post Gupta period increased considerably, half of them were non-productive. The craftsmen and artisans were considered untouchables. The guilds were in a process of being fossilized into low castes. With trading activities at a low ebb, traders were considered inferior.

From the present study, it is clearly evident that the ‘Guilds’ played an important role in the economy. The guilds, as an institution, had their social, political and economic importance in ancient India. In fact, the industrial and mercantile success achieved in ancient India was the result of the efficient functioning of the artisan’s guilds in that age. Although it does not abnegate the notion that independent workmen were also in existence, yet joint efforts and interests always yielded better results and more efficiency. Thus most of the trades and industries were organized into guilds which functioned actively in ancient north India. Although the guilds were basically economic institutions, yet in order to consolidate their own existence and status, they extended their tentacles into social and political spheres as well as in
course of time. They came to perform multifarious functions in the interest of the society at large and carved out a place for themselves in political fabric of the country. It was only due to their capacity to perform diverse functions both for the people and for the central government. 

The study of the Socio-economic formation of early medieval India engages the attention of the scholars of the day. It continues to baffle them. This study also highlight the social status of artisans. From the study of many epigraphic sources, we find so many inscriptions which shows that the members of artisanal guilds paid endowments to the temples, sometimes we also have references about the grants made by the guild chief to temples. So, the present work clear that the position of artisans was not very bad, they had enough money to run their livelihood with comfort. 

Artisans mainly grouped into several guilds. These were potter’s guilds, weavers guilds, carpenter’s guilds, Sculptor’s guilds, etc. The artisans live together in their corporate organizations. Literary and epigraphic sources furnish us with different terms for these corporate organizations. These terms are, gana, puga, sreni, vrata, desi, nigama, sangha and sartha etc. 

Though all these terms convey the idea of an organized life, yet the extent to which they represented the economic organizations is open for discussion. A close study of these various terms establishes firmly that only the term ‘Sreni’ stands in their connotation and denote either political or religious congregations. It is true that sometimes, these terms also denote economic groups, but such references are few. Therefore the term ‘Sreni’ becomes the control point of this study. This term throughout bears the meaning of an association of the people following the same profession irrespective of carts. 

Artisanal guilds can be broadly divided into two groups, namely trade guilds and industrial guilds and number is given as eighteen in the entire ancient Indian literature which appear to be conventional rather that actual on the basis of all sources available for the present study, we can see that the guilds for exceeded in number than the figure of eighteen. Different guilds existed in different periods, but some of them, such as that of carpenters, weavers or leather workers existed at all times perhaps because their crafts were very important as they supplied to the society with daily requisites.
The guilds came into existence on account of the prevailing social and political conditions for the industrial and mercantile classes. Basically, oppression by the upper classes the instinct of insecurity, large scale, the instinct of insecurity, large scale production and promulgation of Jain and Buddhist ideologies were the main factors responsible for the guilds and a new professional class of different type of artisans. They struggled hard to establish their position in the society firmly and succeeded in their efforts. Their organization can be fixed somewhere between the later vedic and the Dharmasutras period. The progressive development of this professional class of artisans is fully testified by the literary and epigraphic sources of the succeeding centuries.

There were three main factors which strengthened the internal organization of guilds and prevented the individual units from disintegration. There were the hereditary nature of crafts, apprenticeship and localization. Craft was normally carried out on hereditary lines as it provided readymade back ground to the young entrants to earn livelihood. For setting up renounced schools of arts, different crafts were localized at different places streets, corners, and sometimes the whole village was inhabited by people following the same vocation. Organisations of craftsmen and merchants were free to move from one place to another according to their needs. Technical skill and efficiency, which was mainly responsible for the industrial advancement achieved in ancient India. A Guild was necessarily organized on the basis of a profession, but besides their traditional profession they came to perform several other functions. They took over tasks of public welfare and religious benefaction. They served the general public by providing road side trees, parks, wells, sheds for travelers and seats on roadside. They also had their own Militia (army) which was lent to the king in times of need. The chief of guild had good relationship with Kings. The King’s six-fold army always included ‘Srenibala’ and the king depended upon their strength in situation of emergency. There diverse functions performed by artisanal guilds clearly indicate that the guild had become, besides economic, and political institutions, social institution as well. Thus the guild played their own part in the political, economic and social life of ancient India.

As a political institution, the corporate organizations were autonomous bodies. They managed their own affairs. To a large extent, lessened the securing local justice from their own group. It also evoked political consciousness in the society. In the
social sphere, it provided to a set up of people following the same profession a life of comfort and safety. The industrial and mercantile professions were reserved by the scriptures for vaisyas and sudras. But the membership of a guild provided there lower classes many privileges which were denied to them as Vaisyas and Sudras. They helped the society by providing them with temples, pavements, parks wells roadside trees and seats etc. so the guilds came to be considered as unavoidable social institution.

Although it is a controversial subject whether the guilds issued coins or not yet some of the specimens prove that the merchants guilds used to issue coins, seals and sealing made of terracotta. There have been recovered in abundance from many sites. Guilds also had their own flags and insignia. But one important thing to be noticed that no specimen of any coin, seal and sealing issued by the guilds of craftsmen and artisans. It is clear that merchant guilds were more powerful in comparison of crafts guilds.

The present study also throw light on the South Indian guilds which were powerful corporative institutions in early medieval period. The South India guilds were flourished in early medieval period. We never found any decline in the position of South Indian guilds like the North Indian Guilds.

The fashion of frequent wars during early medieval periods were also responsible for destruction of the economic life of the people and the guilds were also suffered by these wars.

Their cultural contribution was also no less significant. They were exported the products through merchant organization provided the opportunity for intermixing of the traditions and techniques. Through training prefect crafts men also produced by these organizations. They also constructed temples and other monuments. Thus taking in to account the political, economic, social and cultural contributions of the guilds, it can be safely asserted that the guilds were one of the most important institutions of ancient India, and different craftsmen were the members of these guilds, with their own specialized field of activity and sphere of action.