Chapter – 1

History of Guilds
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In the early medieval period the guilds, which had played an important role in the industrial organization of early centuries of Christian era were no longer very effective. The bonds which united the craftsmen or artisans of any particular industry in any area appear to have blocked. The guilds would seem in general not to be in a position to wield effective control over their members. These guilds had their own rules and regulations which to certain extent, governed the life of their members, and also safeguarded their interests. The epigraphic records of the period throw some light upon the working of guilds. The origin of the type of economic organization or group life known as sreni can be traced back to the later Vedic period. Its development is revealed in literature and inscriptions of subsequent times. In Abhidhanchitamani sreni and prakriti appears as synonymous terms.

Human psychology is one of the foremost reasons for the emergence of guilds organizations in India or elsewhere in the world. Basically man is a social animal and fond of living in groups. He depended upon his fellow men for the fulfillment of his demands and necessities. It was an account of his dependence that society came into existence. This inherent group instinct manifested itself in ancient India in the economic sphere because of common aims and purposes. Whenever a number of people followed the same profession and enjoyed equal social status, it was very natural for them to come in close association with each other and form a group for better fulfillment of their common goals. Thus, we see that instinct of co-operation was not instilled from outside, but was deep-rooted in human nature.

The functional division of society into Brahma, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra was the second reason which facilitated the emergence of guilds. In contrast to the primitive society where each man performed several functions for himself, the varna system envisaged a fixed type of work for the fixed section of people. The system helped in preserving the social energy. The Brahmans’s duty was to learn and

3. Abhidha, III, V. 714 – प्रकृतियाँ वैराग्यम् अन्धोदिका
guide; the Kshtriya’s to protect and rule, the Vaisya’s to carry economic pursuits and Sudra’s to till and cultivate the soil. Sub-divisions with in these four varnas must have resulted from the natural tendency among groups of people to form their closure associations. Brahmana and kshtriya classes were not very much susceptible to such divisions as they were compact functional classes. On the other hand Vaisyas and Sudras did not form homogeneous classes. These were essentially economic in nature and open to divergent social divisions. Therefore, each vaisya could choose any profession out of various occupations. It was thus, very natural for the vaisyas engaged in different occupations to form their distinct groups. Similar was the case with the sudras.

The entire sudra community could hardly be accommodated in the occupation of serving brahmanas and kshtriyas. They were concealed the freedom of taking up different crafts and from their community the different groups emerged on the lines of vaisyas. As a result of the expansion of aryan settlement, the non-aryan groups were also incorporated into the aryan hierarchical division of society alongwith vaisyas and sudras. As these groups had a long history of group life and democratic tradition, they took up a profession out of those prescribed for them and lived a distinct life. Their democratic ideas must also have lended the idea of equalitarian principles to the groups formed among vaisyas and sudras. Later on, their groups also acquired the old names of non-aryan groups like sreni, gana, puga etc. Thus the caste system had its beneficial effects in the field of trade and industry on the one hand, it insured an occupation to each individual since his birth, on the other hand, because of the segregation tendency, it accelerated the instinct of specialization in different branches of trade and industry.5

The side effects of the caste system were not as healthy as they appeared to be. It can to provide immense powers to the Brahmans and Kshatriyas over the vaisyas and sudras, who were denied the privileges enjoyed by the upper classes. The submissive and servile position of the vaisyas is attested by the later vedic literature. The Aitareya Brahmana used three terms for them namely, anjasya, balikate (to be auxiliary of others), anyasyadayak (to be oppressed at wukk (and yathakam jyejah (to

be lived upon by others). This downtrodden position of the vaisyas and sudras is further attested by the Taittiriya samhita it says that Vaisyas among men and cows among beash were to be eaten by others. Furthermore, the Tandya Brahmana says that Brahmanas and Kshatriyas had the liberty to exploit the vaisyas as much as they liked because they were never exhausted by such treatment. Non-aryan Institutions like gana sreni etc. also encountered the hatred of the upper classes. This tyranny and oppression by upper classes must have served as an exigency for these lower classes to form their corporate groups in order to safeguard against their deteriorating social condition. Their joint strength must have forced the higher classes to lessen their oppression over these groups. In fact, it was an opportunity as existing social conditions given by the vaisyas sudras and other non-aryan groups.10

The instinct of insecurity also contributed much to growth of guilds. The artisans and traders felt insecure because of the severity of civil laws concerning them and from perilous long distance journeys which they had to undertake to secure raw materials. Initially, the artisans were subjected to severe civil laws, as mentioned in the Manusmriti. According to it, a dishonest goldsmith was to be chopped up in very small pieces with sharp knives, whereas the ordinary thieves or cheats were namely to be beheaded. It is argued that perhaps goldsmiths and silversmiths were the first to organized so that they could have these punishment commuted into expulsion from the guild of which the culprit was a member. The exclusion from the membership meant the prohibition to carry ancestral profession. This restrained the members from misappropriation to greater extent the previous severe law. Besides this, merchants and traders had to march through roads and forests which were unable to resist the attacks and protect their belongings.

The jatakas very often provide us evidences in favour of this statement. Long caravans of traders and merchants with 500 or 100 carts loaded with costly wares marching through deserts or dense forests or in ships, are a regular feature of the

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7. Taittiriya Brahmana, VII, 1, 1, 5.
8. Tandya Brahmana, VI, 1, 10.
9. Gautma, XVII, 17; Apastamba Dharma, p. 9 I, 6, 18, 16; Manu, III, 151.
11. Manu, IX, 292.
Following the traders and merchants, robbers or plunderers had also organized themselves into large groups, as we find references of merchant caravans being attacked by the water organizations of robbers in the jatakas. But the caravans also employed their own militia to protect their goods and there were organized under an able leadership who had a proper knowledge of the route through which the caravans had transverse.

The *Jatakas* depict the picture of caravans being saved by the leader’s (*sattavaha*) wit and vigilance. As there were complete absence of rapid means of travelling, it took months to reach remote destinations. On their way they were like to fall a prey to ailment also. Members of the caravans took care of each other while in journey. To secure these benefits, merchant associations must have come in to being. The *Brhaspatismriti* states that the danger to a person was considered as danger to all and they jointly attempted to redress it.

Industrial and mercantile professions being lucrative by nature, attracted people from all varnas in sufficient members. Thus, to sum up with Hopskins “as the Buddhist placed the warriors caste before the priest caste and gave unrestricted freedom to the third estate, it is not wonderful that guild lie is characteristic of Buddhist environment”. Prospects of trade and industry were very much facilitated by these new ideologies. It gave rise to big organizations who rained large capitals. All this brought prosperity and affluence to the lower castes and also added to their social status. Perhaps for this reason only guilds and guild-masters are often referred to in the Buddhist literature. Thus the ascendancy of Buddhism and Jainism can also be taken to be an important factor in the emergence of guild organizations in Northern India.

These social changes were paralleled by the rise of territorial states which improved the conditions of roads and provided greater security during journeys. With the improved means of communication and transport, traders and artisans came in close association with each other. All this resulted in gradual specialization of

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industry the number of craft and industries increased by leaps and bonds, and the
demand for necessities and the luxuries export of indigenous products. To cope up
with the increasing demands the production of commodities became essential. This
was possible only when workers formed their own group to act jointly for increasing
production. This gave a further encouragement to guild activity in industrial as well as
in merchantile fields.\textsuperscript{18} Thus, in the \textit{Cullaka-Setthi Jataka}, we find the case of a
hundred merchants who, on hearing the arrival of a ship, assembled to purchase the
cargo of that ship.\textsuperscript{19} The \textit{Losaka Jataka} tells about a thousand fishermen families who
were settled in a village under a headmen.\textsuperscript{20} The \textit{Makasa-Jataka} records the
settlement of a number of carpenters in a village.\textsuperscript{21}

The \textit{Valahassa-Jataka} also mentions about five hundred ship-wrecked
traders.\textsuperscript{22} The \textit{Kundaka-kucchi Sindhava Jataka} records five hundred horse dealers
carrying horses to Banaras.\textsuperscript{23} The \textit{suci-Jatakas} refers to a village of one thousand
smiths.\textsuperscript{24} All these references point towards large scale industrial and merchantile
activities. The Buddhist literature is duly substantiated by Arthasastra of Kautilya
which enumerates a number of industrial products from different parts of India. The
shipment of industrial products from one part of the country to another is an index of
large scale production in those centuries.\textsuperscript{25} Kautilya also devised various government
departments for the regulation of industrial production of merchantile transactions.\textsuperscript{26}
These evidences conclusively point to the large volume of industrial production and
trading practices at that time.

These literary evidences are well supported by archaeological finds at \textit{Bhita}
and \textit{Barah} Sir John Marshal found at Bhila a real die in the foundation of a house
which was termed by him as “the house of the guild” and concluded that this might be
taken to mark the site of the office of \textit{Nigma}.\textsuperscript{27} He concluded that perhaps “something

\begin{footnotes}
20. Ibid., No. 4, p. 234; See also, Vol. II, No. 156, No. 15.
475, p. 207.
\end{footnotes}
like the modern chamber of commerce existed in upper India at some big trading centre perhaps at Pattiputra.28 To summarise the existence of big offices calls in the existence of big transactions and widespread activities of guilds in ancient India.

It is, thus evident that guilds were the natural outcome of the existing social and economic conditions, while some of the above mentioned factors laid the foundation of institution. Human psychology, the instinct of insecurity and oppression by upper classes were basic factors on which edifice on which the institution stood. While the enunciation of Buddhist and Jain ideologies and acceleration of trade and industry due to stable political conditions provided a solid background for its successful existence in succeeding centuries. Through the instrument of a guild, the common interests of its members were readily realized Therefore, the society fully appreciated its advantages and adopted it as a means for development and achieving peace.

Another important point of investigation is as to when did the guild organization actually come into being. Therefore the tracing of the origin and antiquity in northern India is indispensable before dealing with the development of the institution in the succeeding centuries. It is easy to understand how in ancient India co-operation of a certain kind among trades was a necessity forced upon them by the insecurity of the times. Often having long distances and insecure roads to travellers, they could individually be no match for robbers or hostile tribes, but they could, when united in a body, oppose a successful resistance of the latter. The existence of such dangers in specifically referred to in later literature. Thus a Jataka story refers to a village of 500 robbers with an elder at their head.29 Such organization of robbers was met by the counter organization of traders to which, again, references is made in a numbers of Jataka stories.30 It is quite in the nature of things that organization of merchantile classes was brought into existence by a similar process even in earlier periods of Indian history, and evidences are not altogether wanting in support of this.

The term pani which occurs several times in the Rigveda has been differently interpreted by different scholars.31 The St. Petersburgh Dictionary derives it from the

31. See V.I, p. 471.
root pan, “to barter”, and explains it as merchants, trader. Zimmer and Ludwig also take the word in the sense of merchant. Now in a certain hymn, the Gods are asked to attack the Panis who referred to as defeated with slaughter. Ludwig thinks that there “references to fights with panis are to be explained by their having been aboriginal traders who went in caravans –

- As in Arabia and Northern Africa
- Prepared to fight, if need be to protect the goods against attacks which the Aryans would naturally deem quite justified.” If we accept this meaning, we shall have necessarily to presume a corporation of Merchants, strong enough to defy their opponents, and carry on fight against them Thus the institution referred to in the Jatakas may be traced back to the period represented by the hymns of the Rigveda.

To the same class belongs the corporate organization of artisans, although probably somewhat different in nature and origin. It is difficult to determine, with any amount of definiteness, whether these institutions corresponding to guilds of Medieval Europe, had developed in the early vedic period. At present the evidence on this point consists of the use of the words Sresthin and gana in vedic literature. It is well known that the word Sresthin in later literature denoted the “headman of a guild”. Dr. Macdonell remarks that the word may already have that sense in the vedic literature. Again, the word gana means any corporate organisation, although in later literature it is almost exclusively used with reference to political and religious bodies. Roth, however, points out that it is used in the sense of a guild in vedic literature.

A careful study of the source materials brings forth several terms which denoted co-operative organizations in ancient India. The exact meaning and nature of

34. V.I. P. 471
35. But, as already noticed, the meaning of the term which is here given is not unanimously accepted.
36. Aitraveya Br, III, 30,3, Kausitaki, XXVIII, 6, Taitiriya Br., III, 1, 4, 10, See V.I., p. 403.
37. Parchivmsa Brahmana, VI, 9, 25; XVII, 1,5, 12; VS XVI 25; T.S. 1.8 10.2.
38. V.I., P. 403.
39. Dr. R.K. Mookerji (Local Government in Ancient India, pp. 41ff) seems to content that the word Sraisthya in vedic literature always refers to the position of the head of a guild.
each of them is difficult to determine in view of the fact that a single term does not have a strict consistent connotation throughout the ages. These were used in more than one sense at different places. Confusion in much more enhanced as commentators of legal texts greatly differ in their interpretation of these terms, though they unanimously accept that these words denoted cooperative organizations. It has, therefore, to be established how far these terms denoted economic organization consequently, a thorough study of these terms and their various interpretations by the legal commentators becomes imperative.

The term literally means a line or a series. In the Vedic literature, it stands in that simple sense only or, for that matter, denotes group life. But in Panini’s Astadhyayi, the term bears some technical meaning and denotes a specific class. This process of development in well attested by Kasika a commentary on this Sutra of Panini. It illustrates that those who were not classified before were aspiring to attain that stage. Therefore, it is clear from Panini’s Sutra by 5th century B.C. Sreni had emerged as a special class. In the epics as well, Sreni occurs frequently. The epic passages speak of Sreni headed by a person known as Srenimukhya who enjoyed considerable royal recognition and prestige in the state. The Mahabharata mentions validity to Srenidharma which makes it a self-governing corporation. It seems that the term Sreni was used in epics in the typical sense of a guild of artisans and craftsmen. In the Buddhist and Jaina literature the number of Sreni is given as eighteen.

In Mahamagga Jataka masons, carpenters, blacksmiths, painters and men skilled. In all arts and crafts are referred to as type of Sreni. Thus Buddhist text provide a firmer ground for positive assertion that Sreni was an industrial organization Kautilya in his Arthasastra uses the term in three different senses. At one place he refers to the Sreni of Kamboja and Saurashtra living on agriculture, trade and wielding

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41 Vācaśirya, Iśālaśāra śīloṣā-sahāsramā ēsēni nāvāt. Vaya n ēsēni pātu-vivājāntāmādī vinīkūt-saṃnunātātātāt. R. g. I, 1264; III. 38.6; V, 59.7: Chandogya upanisad, V, XIV.1.
43 śrēṇīyādā yuvādānti: —Ibid., P. 246.
44 śrēṇīyādā yuvādānti: —Ibid., P. 246.
45 Rama, II, 105, 11; 124, 23; VI, 108, 14, 127, 4; Mbh., XII, 140, 64.
46 Mbh., XII, 140, 64.
weapons, and at the other Srenis of Licchavikas, Mallakas, Madrakas, Kurus and panchalas etc. with the title of Raja, are mentioned.\(^49\) This statement of Kautilya sows that in the Kamboja and Saurastra region Sreni stood for collectivistic economy, all working for their subsistence and safety together.

The non-aryan character of Sreni is also evident from his statement. This collectivistic economic pattern of the set up was clearly in contrast to the vedic society where functional division was a marked feature. The second part of Kautilya’s statement points to the emergence of class division on the basis of power and wealth. All their tribes and regions are condemned in the Dharmasastras and forbidden for an aryan to visit and mix-up.\(^50\) The use of the term Sreni for tribal organizations shows that it existed outside the circle of fold and had not till then been absorbed in the hierarchical division of the society.\(^51\) But Kautilya elsewhere used the term in the restricted sense of corporation of artisans and merchants also.\(^52\) A number of such organizations were functioning at that time as is evident from the expression Srenipraya used for a country consisting mostly of Industrial guilds.\(^53\) After Kautilya, Sreni was always defined in terms of art and crafts. The term occurs in Patanjali’s Mahabhasya\(^54\) also.

The commentaries, Uddyota and Pradipa, have interpreted it as the group of people subsisting on the earning of a single craft.\(^55\) Medhatithi, a commentator of Manusmriti\(^56\), construes the term as a group of people following same profession like artisans (Karu), merchants (Vanik), barbers (Kusida), and brahmanas learned in the four Vedas.\(^57\) Yajnavalkya also uses the word at different places.\(^58\) His commentators Vijneswara and Mitramisra, define it as trade guild of person either belonging to different castes or to the same caste, e.g. of horse dealers (hedabukas), betel sellers (tanbullika) caste weavers (Kuvindas) and curriers (Carmakaras) in similar

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\(^{49}\) Artha. 9 XI, 1.  
\(^{50}\) Manu, II, 39; X, 22.  
\(^{51}\) Kosambi, P.D., Introduction to the study of Indian History, p. 221; see also, Drekmeir Charles, bigship and community in early India, P. 277.  
\(^{52}\) Artha, II, 4; IV, II.  
\(^{53}\) Ibid., VII, 1.  
\(^{54}\) Mahabhasya, II, 1, 58.  
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words. According to Nilkantha and Candeswara, it is a guild of persons belonging to the same caste and pursuing the same calling as the guild of oilmen (*tailikas*) or of weavers (*Kuridas*). Madanratna used the term for a group of people of different castes but pursuing same vocation. He cites Merchants and cultivators as examples. In the – *Saraswativilas*, betel sellers are referred to as *Sreni*.

This survey reveals that the term *Sreni* stands in the restricted sense of an economic organization and generally denotes a group of persons of same or different castes, but pursuing the same occupation and inhabiting in the same place. Although the term *Sreni* is accepted in general sense of a guild, industrial as well as mercantile, as is clear from different definitions given above, yet it mainly stand for the industrial and craft guilds.

*Gana* is another important term used for guilds. In epics the term bears some special meaning denoting political corporation governed by aristocrats known as *Ganavallabha*, *Garamubhya* and *Caniswara* enjoining high status and importance in the political set up of the epic society. The Term *gana* is employed by *Ramayana* for the groups of *Vanaras* and *Raksasas*. The *Vanarakings*, *Vali* and *Sugriva* and the *Lanka Ravana* are often addressed as *Ganeswara*. In later *Buddhist* literature also, it alludes to religious bodies only. In Milindpanho the King enquires if there was any learned person, whether a wandering teacher or a Brahmana, the head of some school or order or the master of some band of pupils. (*Ganachariya*), who would be able to talk to him and resolve his doubt.

In *Jainasutra* too *gana* is used the sense of religious congregation of monks. For the first time, *gana* in used for the corporation of craftsmen in *Arthasastra* of *Kautilya*. The *Vishnusmriti* also assigns to the members of a *gana* the communal

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59 श्रेणि नागाजातिनाथे य जातीयध्वर्यमयीविद्विया संघाता। हेतुकानुबासितमुलिककुकुमब सर्मकारानादात। MIlt., p.944; Viram., p. 38.
60 Vyaraharamayukha, P. S’ Vivadarantmakas, P. 177.
61 Madanartanapradipa, P.11.
62 Ibid., P. 14.
63 श्रेणि तान्त्रिकाद्वियां — Saraswativilas, p. 17.
64 Rama; IIm 81, 12; IV,17, 3; Mbh, XIII, 107, 25, 28, 32.
65 Rama; IV,17,3; 32, 10; V, 13, 1; 62, 10.
68 महर्षि द्रष्टविनां — Artha., II.6.
proprietary rights. The term occurs in Manusmriti, which has been interpreted by Medhatithi as a group of Merchants (Varik) labourers (Karun) and baroh (Kusilava) etc. Visvarupacharya explains the term as a group of merchants. Gana of Elephant riders is mentioned as Mahamatra gana in Nagardhana plate of Svaniraja also. In the second Prasasti of Baijnath the gana is mentioned as a corporation of oil merchants. There observations indicate that gana initially denoted tribal set up which later on became a specific term for either the religions bodies or for the economic corporations. Therefore, this term does not always denote an economic organization.

The Next term which is used in contact of guilds is Puga. The term was for the first time used in the Kausitiki Brahmana where Rudra is called as Jhega. Panini mentions if along with gana and Samgha and its leader is termed as gramini. Narada and Brahaspati also uses this term in the sense of a corporation of artisans of Merchants. Katyayana explain the term Puga as a group of merchants. The Smiritichandrika gives the examples of Puga as riders o elephants and horses. According to Visvarupa it is a group of Brahmanas.

The puga was essentially an economic organization of traders and merchants. It was a bigger institution than Sreni. Another important term used for guilds is Vrata, like the others terms, Vrata also occurs in the vedic literature, although its meaning is very much obscure. Panini refers to vrata as a way of living. Patanjali further elaborates this term for a multitude or mass composed of various castes, who have no fixed employment and live by violence or physical labour. Those who lived
the Vrata were called Vratin.\textsuperscript{84} Katyayana defines Vrata as a troop of persons nearing various kinds of arms\textsuperscript{85} and he groups gana, Puga, Vrata, Sreni etc. together as forming the constituents of a varga\textsuperscript{86} But, in view of some verses from Naradasmriti. It is hard to believe that Vrata continued to make their livelihood by predatory activities.\textsuperscript{87} Originally Vratas were like tribes subsisting on the earnings of their arms, but with the growth of civilization they turned towards peaceful means of livelihood under their traditional calling.

Another important term for the corporate organization is Samgha, the word itself suggests a corporate structure. It is clear from Panini Sutra that it was similar in nature to Puga and gana.\textsuperscript{88} Panini himself regards gana and Samgha to be synonymous terms.\textsuperscript{89} In Buddhist and Jaina literature the Samgha used for monasteries of monks (Bhinu Samagha)\textsuperscript{90} The Apasthamba Dharmasutra refers to a Brahmacharismagha setting forth for alms.\textsuperscript{91} Katyayna defines Samgha as a group of followers of Cernats and of Saugatas.\textsuperscript{92}

Thus the term lost its original conversation with the passage of time. It is often used in generic sense of a corporation, either religious, economic or political, but it is mostly applied to religious congregations of Buddhists and Jainas.

Another term is Naigma, the term occurs frequently in literature, epigraphs coins, seats and scaling. In Panini’s Astadhayayi, it is grouped along with gocara, sancena etc. as ambiguous terms.\textsuperscript{93} In the Amarkosa naigma and Vanika said to be synonymous with each other.\textsuperscript{94} The term occurs in Smiritis along with Sreni, Puga, Vrata, Gana etc.\textsuperscript{95} Nilkantha construes the term as those traders who are not opposed to the Vedas\textsuperscript{96}

\textsuperscript{84} नन्दाजलीय अनिधि वृत्तान् व्यतिरेकीविच संधाब्राताः तेषां कर्म प्रत्येकः प्रातः कर्मणां जीववीति — प्रातः —
Mahabharya, Vol.IV, P.314.
\textsuperscript{85} नन्दाजलीय प्राताः समस्येत: प्रकृतितिः; कृत, V. 678.
\textsuperscript{86} Ket, v. 682.
\textsuperscript{87} Narada., X. 2.
\textsuperscript{88} Panini, V, 11,52.
\textsuperscript{89} सान्देही गणाः प्रायः प्रत्येकः; — Ibid., III, III, 86.
\textsuperscript{90} Mahaparinibbana Sutra, P. 10, Liider Nos. 1024,1127.
\textsuperscript{91} Apasthamba Dharmasutra, I, I, 3, 26.
\textsuperscript{92} आपत्सभंभनसुत्रः; तु समुहः सत्यसः उच्चतात्त्वतिः; — Kat., V. 681.
\textsuperscript{93} Panini, III, III, 119.
\textsuperscript{94} Amarkosa, II, 9, 78, Seeaho, Vikramaveriya, IV 13.
\textsuperscript{95} Yaj, II, 192, Narada, X, 2.
\textsuperscript{96} Vyavaharanayukta, p. 241.
Besides there literary evidences, the term *naigma* or *negama* is traced in various inscriptions. The keen association of *naigma* with *sreni* evident from the Nasik cave inscription also which records the endowments made by Rasabhadatta. The amount was deposited with two weaver Srenis at Govardhana. The Records mentions that all these endowments were proclaimed and registered at the town hall (*naigama-sabha*). It appears that the merchant corals had the power to compel the *Sreni* fulfil their engagements.

It seems that originally merchants were designated as *Naigma*. Because of their allied nature with *Sreni* and better status in society, they began to exercise same control over *Sreni* or craft guilds generally inhabiting the villages.

Next term is *Sartha*, means ‘a Caravan’. The term in conspicuous by its absence in the vedic literature, but frequently occurs in *Mahabharata Vanaprava* provide us a beautiful description of a *Mahasstra* which was mainly comprised traders and merchants. The head of *Sartha* was known as *Sarthavaha*. The term occurs in a number of inscriptions and some seals excavated from Basrah.

*Vaillabhattasvamin* temple inscription of Gwalior, Damodar copper plate inscription and seals, all represent *Sarthavaha*, along with *Sresthi* and *Kuliga* as holding important place in the town council. This on the one hand establishes the intrinsic connection between *Sarthavaha, Sresthi* (the baber) and *Kulika* (head of the artisans) and, on the other hand, hints at a somewhat permanent organisation of caravan merchants in Sartha under the able leadership of *Sarthavaha*. The synonymous use of *Sattha* and *naigma* also lands furthers force to this inference.

We have one more term i.e. *Desi* used for corporate organizations. It is a new synonym for *Sreni* which occurs in inscription of early medieval India line-8 of *Peheva* inscription from the temple of *Garibanatha* dated 882-883 A.D. reads as “*nanaderabhatakanyavahardea-desi*”. The *Nadlai* inscription records that the *Vanajarakas* of Abhinavpuri Badari and *Nadlai* assembled together in a

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99 Mbh,111, 61, 117-118, 121-122; 62, 8, 9, 17.
101 Bloch, T., op. cit., p. 104.
Karitalai stone inscription, an undated record, also bears the term desi making some donations. Therefore, it can reasonably be inferred that desi also denoted merchant guilds in the early medieval India.

A comprehensive study of different terms help us to know how far these terms provides us relevant information on the subject of guilds. The reason for variation in its meaning has been explained by professor Aiyanger. He had the view that, “either in course of time corporate organisation changed their composition and function while retaining their old class titles or that in the days when the later smritis and digests were composed, such corporations had fallen in to decay and definitions of the digest writers were based on vague traditions and not on contemporary observations. The fundamental unity underlying these various terms is explicit while Sreni, Puga, Desi, Naigma, and Sartha often denoted an economic organization, either industrial or merchantile, gana and samgha usually stored for political corporations or religious congregations. Among these various terms, Sreni and Naigma are of basic importance to the present study as they denote craft and trade guilds respectively.

A close study of the literature and epigraphs of this period clearly indicates that men following similar means of livelihood usually formed themselves in to a corporation with definite rules to guide themselves. These corporations are guilds. Although the actual number of guilds must have always for exceeded even these numbers. It is interesting to note that the idea of the conventional 18 guilds persisted down to modern times in India. The compound gana-pana is used in the sense of communal and professional guilds and these formed parts of the local assemblies. The paucity of material makes impossible to trace the history of the all guilds in detail. We can only hope to describe the general course of their development during the successive periods of Indian History.

To start with the vedic period, there is considerable disagreement among scholars whether the guilds existed in that age or not. The terms desi, puga, sreni, samgha all were used in vedic literature and the terms like sresthin and Sraisthya are also founds in the vedic literature, on the basis of also these terms we can say that

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103 Ibid., Vol. XI, No. XI, p. 42.
105 Aiyanger, K.V., Aspects of Ancient Indian Political Thoughts, p. 186.
guilds were emerged during vedic period. We can only admit that trade and industry were advancing rapidly towards specialization and by the concluding centuries of the later vedic period the background for the emergence of economic organizations was laid.

The period following the later vedic age up to 400 B.C. has been termed as pre-mauryan age. Indian society was well settled by that time. The period witnessed a further growth in the field of made and industry. The Industrial guilds were flocked by people from all Varanasi this period. We come across the terms like Srenimubhya, Srenimahatras, nigmamubrya, all these were the head of the guilds we have instances of 500 or even 1000 families of crafts being organised under headmen. Another thing that marked the guild organization of this period was localization of crafts we have instances when parts of cities, suburban areas or sometimes even the whole village was inhabited by people enjoyed in a single craft. Trade guilds were not as well organised in this period as the Industrial guilds. Guilds enjoyed the liberty of arranging for their own safety also. It is clearly evident that the guilds had become powerful institution by this period. Most of the crafts and industries were organised into guilds in this period. A list of 48 guilds functioning in this period can be compiled on the basis of the available sources.

In the Mauryan period guilds flourished all around. A number of powerful guilds were functioning in the country, as it is evident from the impression of Srenipraya. In fact, the industrial and mercantile organizations were an important sources of the state revenue. A significant advance made by the guilds in this period was their functioning as bank. The guild deposited their money with other reliable guild and drew money from them. Kautilya also accept the inclusion of the Srenibala among the six fold army of a King. The guilds also extended their activities to municipal sphere. Kautilya granted many liberties to industrial and

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107 Rama, II, 29, 16, mbh, XII, 59, 49; 140, 64.
109 Rama., II, 15.2.
110 Jat., Vol. IV, No. 466, p. 158.
112 Ibid., Vol. II, No. 159, p. 36.
113 E.I. & H., p. 526; Davids, Rhys, Buddhist India, pp. 90-97.
114 Astha., VII, 1.
115 Ibid., III, 10.
116 Ibid. IX, 2.

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mercantile guilds, but not the independent status which they enjoyed in proceeding centuries. The available sources indicates that 14 guilds to be functioning in the age of the Maurya.

With the evident of 4th century A.D. the period of Golden age of Guptas, came to be a most flourishing period for the guilds. The full-fledged development of guilds in this period attested by the later Dharmasastras of Narada, Brahaspati, Katyana and other secular literature, inscriptions seals and sealing. The guild laws, customs and convections continued to operate with royal sanction behind them. Although the head of the guild and the Executive officers were given full authority in all matters arising with in a guild. The guilds continued to function as ordinary courts of justice, as mentioned by Yajnavalkya.117

The banking functions of guilds was still intact. The inscriptional evidences in this context stated that the guild was bound to fulfil the agreement “till the sun, the moon and earth endure” and even the guild monetary from its settlement.118 It seems that the guilds had their own insignia, flags and seals. In Harivansa, the guilds are stated to have gone to the court of Kamsa, with their respective flags.119 The overall development and autonomy enjoyed by the guilds in this period. We see that the power of the guilds reached its zenith in the Gupta period on basis of available sources the numbers of guilds existing during this period can be put as 26.

After the death of Harsha, India again lost her political unity under such disturbed political conditions the trade and industry were addressly affected and so were the guilds. The power and autonomy which the guilds enjoyed ended Gupta’s us now where visible in the guilds of this period. The reasons for this degeneration of the guilds in early medieval India can be summed up a follows.

The most important was the disturbed political conditions of that time. There was complete absence of any powerful control authority after Harsha winch could unify the whole of northern India under its sovereignty. The political disturbances must have kept the people busy in moving from one place to another for safety and security and so also to the trades men and craftsman. Thus political upheaval exercised its worst effect on the guild organization.120

117 Narada., I, 7; Brhas., I, 75; Kat., V. 82.
119 Harivansa, 29, 5.
120 Jain, P.C. Socio-economic exploration of Medieval India, p. 301.
The 6th century A.D. witnessed the ascending of the landed aristocracy in the form of somantas over the Naigamas, Sarthas and Srenis. Therefore Samantas replaced Srenis and naigmas in the political administration. The Dudhapani rock inscription of the 6th century A.D. tells us that the three merchants become masters of three villages in the Hazaribagha district of Magadha. The Barla inscription of 11th Century A.D. records that Thakura Palhudas was a trader by profession.

The traders and merchants were under the burden of additional taxes in this period. During the reign of Raypala, his feudatory sons issued in 11th Century A.D. an order that one Palika (measure) of oil due to them was to be collected from each oil mill. Again in same century, another feudatory of the same king asked for 2 Pakilas of oil due to him from each oil mill. An additional tax was imposed at the custom house in the 11th Century A.D. On account of these taxes, the guilds of merchants and traders could not flourish and prosper as in the preceding centuries. The Gwalior stone inscription records that in 876 A.D., nine chiefs of oil millers of four villages and all the members of the guild of oil millers came to an agreement with each other that each of them would give 1 Palika of oil on the 9th day of the bright half of every month for the illumination of a lamp in the Vaillabhattaswamin temple. On the same date, guild of gardeners combined to provide 50 flower garlands for the worship of the same deity.

The decline of guilds was also the result of their being consolidated into sub-castes. One important factor which turned these guilds into sub castes was supplied by the hereditary character of occupation. This made the guild life permanent and resulted in the transformation of guilds into closed groups with their own rules and occupations. Since the beginning, guild rules (Srenidharma) were placed on equal footing with the caste rules (Jatidharma).

The transformation of guilds into sub castes was further accelerated by the

121 Majumdar, B.P., Merchants and Landed Aristocracy infeudel economy of Northern Industry, pp. 67-68.
123 Ibid., Vol. XXXIII, No. 52, pp. 299ff.
125 Ibid., p. 41.
126 Ibid., p. 48.
127 Ep. Ind., Vol. I, No. XX, pp. 159-60.
128 Manu., VIII, 41.
assimilation of some ethnic groups in the rank of mixed castes.\textsuperscript{129} In early medieval India, the guilds mostly appear to have fossilized into sub castes.\textsuperscript{130} Within these sub castes, however some sort of social control over members and the instinct of co-operation was still alive. But the economic co-operation which was at the root of all their successes in ancient India, was rapidly disappearing. This change, therefore appear to be one of the important factor which contributed to the degeneration of guilds.

The \textit{Smritichandrika} and the \textit{Virmitrodaya} defined \textit{Sreni} as 18 low caste people such as the rajakas (washermen)\textsuperscript{131}. Bhattotpala simply defines \textit{Sreni} as a group of people belonging to the same caste.\textsuperscript{132} In \textit{Kanhadadeprabandha}, four castes and 18 \textit{varnas} are referred to which clearly attests to the transformation of guild into sub castes.\textsuperscript{133} On account of these aforesaid reasons, the guilds lost their ground in the early medieval period. Unlike the previous centuries which had witnessed a very strong and compact organization of guilds, the guilds of this period do not indicate any traces of a very sound organization. It is evident from the statement of \textit{Medhatithi}, a 10 century A.D. commentator of the \textit{Manusmriti} that executive officers of guilds were loosing their control over the members. Mutual co-operation and confidence were the basic ideas of a co-operation like a guild which seemed to be disappearing from the organization.\textsuperscript{134}

The local character of the guilds is also one of the distinguished features of this age. The guilds were circumscribed to a particular region and came to include men of some particular areas. In general the commentators of this period define \textit{Sreni} as a group of people following the same profession such as, oilmen, artisans, money-lenders, betel sellers, traders, weavers etc.\textsuperscript{135}

In early Medieval India the temples stood in competition with the ancient institution of guilds severing the society as banks. Temples were bestow with substantial gifts by rulers and other different donors in this period which resulted in

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[130] Basham, A.L., \textit{The wonder that was India}, p. 217.
\item[131] \textit{On Brahatsanhit}, XXXIV, 19, Gopal, L. \textit{The Economic life of Northern India}, P. 83.
\item[132] See also, Jain, P.C., \textit{op. cit.}, p. 304; Gopal L., \textit{op. cit.}, p. 82.
\item[133] \textit{Kanhadadeprabandha} I, 238 – Jain, K.C. \textit{Rajasthan through the Ages}, p. 500.
\item[134] See also, Jain, P.C., \textit{op. cit.}, p. 38; Dh.K., Vol. I, Pt.I, pt.2.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
the temples becoming the richest institution of the time.\textsuperscript{136} A Siyadoni inscription records that in 912 A.D, \textit{Nagaka}, a merchant withdraw the money he had earlier deposited with distillers of spirituous liquor and reposited the amount with a temple.\textsuperscript{137} But this is not suggest that the guilds did not receive public deposits at all as banks and did not pay a regular interest in earlier period.

The literature and the epigraphic sources of this period tells us that guild organization and their administrative machinery their localized nature, their right to enact rules and regulations their judicial authorities were still intact and no remarkable change was visible in these centuries. During the period of 700 to 1200 A.D. its organizational solidarity and corrosion was fast vanishing. The constant wars of Mohammad Ghori from 1175 to 1206 A.D. and finally of Timur he came in 1398 A.D., broke down the vast organization of trade and industry in India. As a result of these blows the curtain drew down, on the history of guild organization in India. Security of life and prosperity were not restored until the reign of \textit{Akbar, the great}. The number of guilds is again given to be 18 in the literature of the early medieval India.\textsuperscript{138} But in earlier times, inscriptions and literature mention much more that 18 trades and industries being organised into guilds.

Thus the guilds present a picture of rise and fall throughout early medieval India. They emerged out of existing social, political and economic conditions and gradually assumed the shape of an established institution of the country. Growing specialization in the field of made and industry added to their number as most of the trades and crafts became organized in to guilds. The institution provided political and social shelter to an individual workman who could hardly establish his long existence in those times when laws for traders and artisans were very severe and their social status was far from satisfactory.

In medieval period, the guilds system was not very popular. They converted themselves into \textit{karkhanas}. Now the guilds termed as \textit{karkhanas}. The new rulers were interested in products of artisans manufacture and not the castes of artisans, and so were indifferent to the imposition of caste restraints that had burdened the town

\textsuperscript{136} C.I.I., Vol. IV, No.31, p. 147.
\textsuperscript{137} Ep. Ind., Vol I, No. XXI, p 166.
artisans and checked inter-professional mobility in pre-Sultanate India. From the villages, the rulers wanted more revenue; and so the greatest of them, ‘Ala’uddin Khalji’ (1296-1316) eliminated the ‘intermediaries’ who used to take a large share of the surplus and oppress the lower peasantry.\(^\text{139}\)

The increase in craft production that accompanied urban growth was also reinforced by a number of changes or improvements in technology which can be ascribed to the period of the Sultanate. First of all, in the cotton textile sector the arrival of the spinning wheel was bound to increase the production of yarn manifold.

Another textile craft whose introduction from Persia took place very probably in the Sultanate period was carpet-weaving on the vertical loom; definite evidence of the importation of this technique into India, however, dates only from the Mughal period.\(^\text{140}\)

Other manufacturing crafts were also established, most notably that of paper. The earliest surviving piece of paper presumably made in India belongs to the early thirteenth century and comes from Gujarat.\(^\text{141}\) By the early fourteenth century its manufacture had become so extensive that sweetmeat-sellers in Delhi could pack their preparations in paper for the convenience of their customers.\(^\text{142}\)

The building industry underwent a notable technological transformation. The growth of commerce under the Sultans is reflected pre-eminently in their coinage.

The major channel growth of an urban Muslim artisan class. Standing outside the rigorous framework of the caste system, this probably contributed an important element of competition and mobility in the organization of Indian craft production. There is, on the other hand, no evidence of any direct assault from the state or the Muslims upon the caste system, nor even of any revolt from within, until the fifteenth century, when Kabir’s verses might suggest the first misgivings of the artisan regarding caste restraints and regarding his lowly position within the social order.

The royal and aristocratic demand for luxuries and craft products helped

\(^{139}\) Introduction to new edition of Elliot and Dowson, *History of India*, Vol. II, p. 81.


maintain large populations of not only local craftsmen but also craftsmen working in towns in distant regions, specializing in particular goods. Even the demand for imported horses of high breeds from Iran and Central Asia indirectly assisted the Indian craft sector, since the animals were paid for mainly by export of Indian products, notably textiles.

Even though the service sector accounted for a large part of the population, the towns were still home to very large numbers engaged in manufactures, extractive industries and construction. M.D. Morris has shown, there was considerable flexibility in the caste system for professional adjustments in the long term.

Market relationships dominated craft production outside the villages. Many artisans simply produced their wares and put them up for sale in their huts or shops or in the open in fairs and bazaars, especially if the costs of materials were low (of which ordinary potters provide). But even where materials were more expensive, as in the weaving of ‘ambery’ calicos, where the further process of washing had also to be paid for by the weavers, we find the weavers selling their products to merchants waiting for them in the markets (‘gonges’ – ganj). Some artisans, like goldsmiths, who dealt in still more expensive wares, had workshops (karkhanas) of their own, and worked presumably with hired labourers.

The merchants’ control over artisanal production began with the effort to induce artisans to produce according to their orders, the obligation secured through the giving of advances (dadani). In certain cases, merchants made the advances not in the form of money but in that of the material to be worked, e.g., silk-yarn to weavers in Bengal. The next step was for them to establish karkhanas of their own. The way two English factors, on their first visit to Patna in 1620, set up a ‘Cor Conna’ employing nearly a hundred workmen to wind silk, suggests that they were only following a locally established practice.

The king, princes and nobles too had their karkhanas where numbers of workmen were employed to manufacture luxury goods, weapons, etc., for their use, but these workshops did not produce goods for the market and, therefore, could only have limited economic significance. They were by no means nuclear of capitalistic activity, for which profit is the basic objective.
Till the beginning of the nineteenth century India was famous for its handicrafts all over the world. They were not only very important items of export, but a strong pillar of the Indian economy. They consisted of textiles, metal wares, artistic pottery, arms, carpets, woodwork and so on. They provided employment opportunities and sources of income to a number of people and helped develop artistic skills. These handicrafts catered largely to the needs of export, aristocrats and other urban dwellers and the army.

In the rural areas there were cottage industries, catering mainly to the needs of the local people. They were cheaper and not very artistic or of high quality. They were based on locally available raw materials and skills and were produced for local market. The artisans engaged in them were either full-time or part-time workers and were indispensable for the rural economy. There was a unity between agriculture and village industries. While agriculture supplied food and raw materials to artisans, the latter supplied and repaired implements, ornaments, pottery, cloth, shoes, furniture, etc. There was very little use of money in the process of exchange in rural areas. It was the barter system which prevailed. As is well known, villages had a large measure of self-sufficiency.

According to industrial activities, the most important was the production of textiles, both cotton and woollen. The production of cotton textiles was spread all over the country. The woollen goods of Kashmir, Punjab and other neighbouring places were much in demand. Varanasi, Mirzapur, Moradabad, Nasik, Pune, Hyderabad, Vishakhapatnam, Tanjavur, Sialkot, Lahore and so on were famous for metalwares of various kinds. Rajasthan was well-known for its enamelled jewellery, stone-carving and arms.

All these handicrafts entered in an era of decline in the second half of the eighteenth century with the establishment of British rule in India. It meant the collapse of the Mughal rule and weakening of social prestige and economic power of regional rulers. The disappearance of Indian rulers and their courts meant the cessation of almost entire volume of demand for artistic goods and a great deal of demand for other urban handicrafts. Handicraftsmen lost their patrons who had been giving them material help and encouragement to improve their skills and indulge in experiments to bring in new patterns and designs. At times these patrons organised
exhibitions and competition to induce handicraftsmen to better their skills and products.

With the establishment and extension of the British rule, the number of tourists coming from Europe increased tremendously. The development of railways and construction of better kinds of roads, along with bringing into existence a measure of security and safety to travellers, led to an upsurge in the number of visitors from abroad. They were attracted to Indian handicrafts and, for a while, it seemed that the tourists’ demand would arrest the rapidity of decline of handicrafts and give a new lease of life to them. They wanted the craftsmen to cater to their own fancy designs and patterns. Obviously, this marred the creative talents of craftsmen. Their products became lifeless and shoddy and their artistic value-became a thing of the past.

The disappearance of Indian ruling families and their courtiers alongwith a radical change in the nature of arms and ammunitions and the technology of warfare rendered blacksmiths and those who manufactured the equipment for horses, elephants and camels to be used in battles jobless. Blacksmiths who, till 1850s, were engaged in damascening and inlaying of arms, weapons and shields, were rendered jobless. After 1858 when a measure of law and order was restored in the country, it became unnecessary for individuals to possess arms for their own protection while at home or on journey.

As has already been noted, the craftsmen based in urban areas produced goods of excellence and were highly skilled. They always took care to improve their arts and crafts and seldom compromised on quality. They were organised into guilds which exercised a very tight quality control and helped the members with money, raw materials and marketing facilities when the need arose. They saw to it that no undesirable elements entered them. The chiefs of these guilds, known as shreshthis or Nagar Seths, were hereditary and very wealthy people. During the Mughal rule, there were various kinds of karkhanas attached to the royal palaces and emperors took pains to help craftsmen improve their skills. Akbar and Jahangir invited specialists from abroad to instruct craftsman attached to their karkhanas.

With the establishment of the British rule, the guilds fast declined and European merchants and their Indian agents entered into direct contracts with craftsmen and began advancing money, raw materials and other facilities. They
provided marketing facilities. They dictated patterns and designs and were interested in quick turnover and the result was a sharp decline in workmanship and artistic and commercial value of the products and they could no longer maintain their supremacy in the markets at home and abroad.

Industrial Revolution in Britain brought a radical change in the state of economic and commercial relations with India. With the emergence of factory system which worked with new inanimate sources of energy and a huge number of workers, and on the principle of division of labour. Thus Britain had to look to India for marketing manufactures and securing raw materials, minerals and foodgrains to feed its factories and a fast growing number of workers.

With the rise of the railways, the importance of waterways declined and a number of centres of handicrafts situated on river banks ceased to be commercially significant.. The trade of the city has now diminished owing to the opening out of new lines of railway in the districts north of the Ganges… with the decline in commercial importance of these places, craftsmen concentrated there lost buyers and gradually migrated to villages to eke out a living.

Cities like Delhi, Murshidabad, Patna, Dacca, Lucknow and so on became politically much less important after the establishment of British rule and this adversely affected the fortunes of craftsmen. British government responsible for the decline of indigenous industries, leading to the process of de-industrialisation and growing pressure of population on land.