

**SUDRA WAS ARTISAN AND LABOURER****Balbir Singh Jamwal, Ph. D.***Principal BKM College of Education Balachaur, District S.B.S Nagar (Pb)**Scholarly Research Journal's is licensed Based on a work at www.srjis.com*

In this article, an attempt has been to find out that sudra was artisan and labourer. Sudra was deprived from the education. This Varna was created by the upper varnas for their benefits. Remnant food was given to him. Untouchability rule was implemented on him. He had to work hard to earn his bread of two times. He has to face very hard punishment on any minor mistake. The upper varnas was created sudras as fourth varna. The social, and economic position of the sudra was very miserable. Gradually sudras learn various skills and had become artisan. The lawgivers were permitted Art and Craft the sudras when they feel to earn their livelihood through the sources of three higher Varnas. There are more evidence of artisan in Vedic and later Vedic literature. But in the mauryan and post Mauryan literature and epigraphic sources reflected the idea of social and economic changes during this period. Kautilya and Gautam focused that sudras were labourer and Artisan. Gautam informed us that sudras could live by practicing mechanical arts. Kautilya provided that, amongst others, women of sudras caste can be employed as wending spice. Athasastra evidence regarding the employment and wages of the articians in so far as they throw light on the general position of the sudras. A.C. Basham is one of the opinion that the Artisan and craftsmen used to sold their product at door of his worship direct to purchaser. G.M. Borgard Levin stated that the wood-carving flourished in Mauryan epoch.

Introduction

Gautam informs us that the *Śūdras* could live by practising mechanical arts.¹ It seems that sections of the *Śūdra* community worked as weavers wood workers, smiths, leather dressers, potters, painters etc. Although these crafts are mentioned in the early Pali text.² The artisan numbers of the *Śūdra Varṇa* played an important role in the agrarian, economy of the Mauryan period. Workers in metal not only made axes, hammers, saws, chisels etc, meant for the carpenters and smiths, but also supplied agriculture with plough shares, spades and

similar employment.³ Which enabled the farmers to provide surplus food for people living in the towns. The urban life and the thriving trade and commerce, which appear for the first time in Northeastern India during the period, could not have been possible without considerable amount of commodity production by the artisans.⁴

The Santoparva emphasizes that the *Śūdras* servant must be maintained by masters of there high *Varnas*.⁵ But it repeats the old rule that he should begin worn out umbrellas, turns, beds and seats, shoes and fans and turn clothes by the twice born.⁶ *Śūdras* artisans maintained their importance. The earlier lawgivers permit arts and crafts to the *Śūdras* only when they feel to earn their livelihood through the service of the three higher *Varna*, but this condition is now waived⁷ and handicrafts are included in the normal occupations of the *Śūdras*.⁸ These crafts are defined by Brahaspati as working in gold, base metals, wood thread, stone and leather.⁹ The Amarakara list of craftsmen, which occurs in the *Śūdras Varna*, gives two names each for general Artisans, heads of their guilds, garlands makers, washer man, potters, brick layers, weavers, tailors, Painters, armoires, leather workers, **blacksmith**, shell-cutters and workers in copper.¹⁰ The list gives four names for gold smiths and five names for carpenters.¹¹ Amara also includes players on drums, water, flute and vina,¹² actors, dancers and tumblers in the *Śūdras Varna*. Thus it is suggested that all Varieties of art and crafts were practised by *Śūdras*.¹³

Arthaśāstra evidence regarding the employment and wages of the artisans in so far as they throw light on the general position of the *Śūdras*, reference has already been made to the artisans who were mobilized by the state to help agriculture. Many others seem to have been employed by the State in weaving¹⁴, mining¹⁵ storekeeping¹⁶, *Manufacturing* of arms, mental work etc. In the early period artisans such as weavers appear in the employment of the gahapatti, but now they are employed in large numbers by the state. It is further stated that people of the *Śūdras* caste and artisans *Manufacturing* waisted threads, bamboo, mats, skins, armor, weapons and scabbards should be allotted their dwellings to the west of royal palace.¹⁷

The specialization of Arts and Crafts was promoted by many factors. The first is the knowledge and use of raw materials and discovering of tools. Indian Artisans made progress through trial and errors and brought nature increasingly under the control of technical device. The second factor is in the guild organization with its plan of practices of heredity and apprenticeship. The Father handed down his skill and life long experience to his son and a new entrant into the guild, had to go through a courses of training under the guidance of a master before he qualified himself for the profession. Third the expansion of market, and fourth the protection and patronage of the state.¹⁸

Term Shilpin is of a wide connotation and it includes within its ambit various crafts, skills and occupations. The term Artisan (Shilpin) is generally used in the sense of one who is passed of practical skill about a particular trade on occupation, belonging to skilled in Art.¹⁹ Artisan in early India was not an isolated Institution, in social hierarchy he belonged to a general class of Artisans or craftsmen engaged in various carfts. Historically, therefore, his position or status and his craft has to be related to a kindred group of the artisans and their occupations. Different group of artisans are together in one general group called shilpin. There are faint references to some type of artisans guild and organization even in vedic literature and by the time of the composition of *Arthśāstra* and Smrtis, guilds of Artisans existed in important Indian town. We have no definite evidence which shows the social and economic status of Artisan in pre-*Mauryan* period. There are ample evidence of Artisans in Vedic and later Vedic literature. But the *Mauryan* and *post-Mauryan* period literature and epigraphic sources reflected the idea of social and economic changes during this period, and social and economic status of Artisans between this period. The contemporary literature and inscriptions are sources of most of our direct information for this period. This was the period of foreigners' penetration into India and flourishing trade between India and outside world, which contributed immensely to mercantile activity. The penetration of the foreign people like the Bactrian, Greeks, the shaka, the parthians, and the Kushana etc.

It is not quite clear how artisan was remunerated in the pre-*Mauryan* period. It indicates that some artisans were attached to big households, this can be said of the royal barber and royal potter and also a few craftsmen attached to big merchants, and smiths and carpenters lived in their own artisans villages, which were situated in the vicinity of towns. Obviously, artisans living in sub-urban villages found their own raw material and produced their own commodities, which they took to the town and markets for the use of both the urban and rural folk. A.C. Basham is of the opinion that the Artisans and craftsmen used to sold their product at the door of his worship direct to the purchaser. Normally each craft or trade was concentrated in a separate street or bazaar, where the craftsman had his workshop, staff and home.²⁰ He further states that there are many references to crafts in RgVeda which are referred to jewellers, goldsmiths, metal workers, blacksmiths and potteries.²¹ Many specialized groups of traders and craftsmen are described as living. At all times the work of the Indian Craftsmen, however primitive and simple his tools, has been admired for its delicacy and skill.²²

Leather work was one of the earliest materials which was used by primitive man to furnish his household including the kitchen where the utensils used were of the skin of

animals. Leather shoes and boots were, however, in common, use in ancient India and they have been frequently referred to in our ancient texts. It is evident from the *Arthśāstra* that there were enough stores of leather articles in the city and town and replaced by fresh supplies.²³ Leather trade with Rome reached its peak during first two centuries of the Christian era, making western deccan under Satavahana rule an immensely prosperous region. The number of crafts and artisans. The increased and the influence and authority of guild increased. Among the traditional 18th guild, figures of leather workers, who performed an important category of artisans especially in urban areas. Commodity production of wide variety of leather articles must have centralized to their material well-being and leather workers are formed bestowing gift to the Buddhist monks and monasteries and tax to the king.²⁴ It is also evident from the Ramayana, that the animals skin were used for covering chariots.²⁵ The occupation of a leather workers was held disruptable in all quarters. *Manu* assigns working in leather to the mixed castes of Karavara and Dhigvara.²⁶ This Karavara again is said to be begotton by Carmakara on a Nisada women.²⁷ He incidentally refers to leather works.²⁸ It shows that the leather work had become an important craft during our period of discussion.

Weaving is one of the most ancient crafts of India and a flourishing trade during the period of our discussion. We may examine the *Arthśāstra*'s evidence regarding the employment, protection, control and wages of the artisans. Kautilya throws light on the position of weavers, who were mobilized by the state to help agriculture, and they seem to have been employed by the state.²⁹ Kautilya states that the weavers should increase the weight of the threads (supplied to them for weaving clothes) in the proportion of 10 to 11 by seeking the thread in rice-grual. They, should, otherwise, not only pay either a fine equal to twice the loss in threads equal to the whole yarn but also forfeit their wages.³⁰ *Manu* suggests that weavers, who constituted a very important section of Artisan³¹ was proficient in the art of weaving all type of clothes made from the materials such as cotton, flax, wool, silk etc. He speaks of excellent clothes made of these materials.³² It is evident from the Rāmāyana that the weaving industry was carried to its perfection. We find references to beddings decorated with gold.³³ As the funeral procession of the Dasharatha proceeded to the cremation ground, garments were freely distributed among the people.³⁴ On the message of Sita King Janak gave blanket, silk or Linon garments and ordinary as dowry to his daughter³⁵ and she gave away all her best garments to Brāhmana and other servants.³⁶ The influence of the Chinese silk coming through the North-Western and North-Eastern trade ruits must have given an impetus to the

domesticated silk industry in India and there is no wonder that the Indian silk along with better variety from China was reaching Rome in the early period of the Christian era.³⁷

Thus, it indicates that the weavers during this period had attained a very high degree of proficiency in their crafts is attested to by some references, in *Manu Smriti* which referred to excellent clothes. Both Cotton and silk has for centuries been woven by the weavers of India, and there is hardly a technique, or art in fabric making that was not known to the craftsmen of the India. India was probably the first to perfect weaving and her marvelously woven tissues and sumptuously wrought appeared are probably older than the Kautilya and code of *Manu*. There are references in our ancient texts from which we can conclude that the weaving was carried to a high state of excellence. Cotton, silk and woollen stuffs were in common use when our great epics were finally composed.

The blacksmith seems to have been among the busiest metal workers in ancient India, who were concerned with making the object of iron, which made farming easier to farmers. They used to make farming and handicraft tools,³⁸ such as ploughshare, razors, axes etc. The production of farming dependent largely on black smiths. *Manu* mentions that blacksmiths were engaged in making agricultural implements, arms and ornaments.³⁹ Even Jataka stories records the tools made of iron, people coming from the neighbouring village to have razors, axes, ploughshare and gods made of iron.⁴⁰ The Mathura Kankall Tila Java image inscription refers to *Lohakara* and *Manikara*,⁴¹ which indicates the prosperous condition of iron work in the *Kushana* period. So, the most important craftsman in metal was undoubtedly the blacksmith. The *Arthśāstra* gives us some idea of iron ores used at that time.⁴² Many iron objects indicate the influence of pre-roman world of the early Christian period. Bacteria, Shaka and Parthian influences have also been traced there. Even the tools which are generally least effected exhibit some foreign touch.

In ancient India the carpenter held an important place in the social life of the village and was called Sutradhar on the holder of Suthradhar line. He used to make chariots for the warriors, and was also by profession a driver of chariots both in peace and war. There are many references to this class in *Manu Smriti*; it is referred to an important class. *Manu* has given lots of references to wood and object made of this material which clearly shows that they were made of woodcraft. The trade in wooden things was flourishing during the *Maurya* period, and it is also evident that many plough, sword, carts were made of wood and artisans were engaged in wood workings.⁴³

On account of the perishable nature of wood, we have however, no surviving remnants of the past-glories in wood-carving, but from the accounts coming down to us in

various historical and literary works, we can safely assume that wood decoration as applied to architecture has for a long time been a very popular and highly developed art in the ancient India.

G.M. Borgard Levin states that the wood-carving flourished in the Mauryan epoch. This was brought out by excavation of the palaces of the Mauryan rulers in Pataliputra.⁴⁴ He further noticed that in a village there were at least five groups of carpenters, craftsmen including carpenters.⁴⁵ It is evident in Pānini that a village had a carpenter (grama-taksha) who worked by day in customers' houses and a (kanta taksha) a carpenter who had a workshop of his own.⁴⁶ Patanjali mentioned a special class of high carpenters who seemed to have been directly linked to the king's officials.⁴⁷ Some epigraphic refers to carpenters; thus an inscription of Kanishka⁴⁸ records a lady who belonged to the carpenter class.⁴⁹

We find many references to architect in Ancient texts. There are some direct evidences of architect in *Manusmriti*⁵⁰ and arms and weapons were made by the armourer.⁵¹ This indicates that this institution was prevalent too in Ancient India. Kautilya mentions that a salary of 200 panas should be fixed to *Vardhaki* 'Chief Architect'.⁵²

Kautilya suggests that washerman should wash clothes either on wooden planks or on stones of smooth surface. Washing clothes elsewhere should not only be punished with a fine of 6 panas but a compensation equal to the damages.⁵³ Archaeological evidence bearing on textile industry is sparse, but some epigraphs attest to the existence of dyers. These classes formed another important occupational group.⁵⁴

Ivory work was also one of the important art. The Ramayana refers to some articles made of ivory, such as, altars, seats, legs of bedstands, pillars and window made of ivory.⁵⁵ The presence of artisans working in Ivory or Dantakara is attested by beautiful ivory objects of Indian origin found in Bagram in Afghanistan. A few objects have been also found in various parts of the country, and Banaras was an important centre of Ivory carving.⁵⁶

Indian people display their sense of gorgeous and artistic taste in their golden jewellery, which is not fabricated as the richest and rarest materials but wrought like wire with all the elaborateness, delicacy and splendour of design within the reach of art. Popular tradition takes the story of Indian Jewellery right back to the dawn of human history, and there are many references to jewellery in our ancient texts which support the tradition. Kautilya states that the goldsmith lived in the rich quarters of the city,⁵⁷ and goldsmithery reached on a high level of development. Royal Jewellery workshops were strictly controlled by the state.⁵⁸ The goldsmith seems to have settled in the town where he could cater to the demands of fashion and luxury of the richer folk and he is not found settled in exclusive

village like a blacksmith.⁵⁹ Much of the Jewellery has survived and is amply represented in the bas-reliefs of temples and Stupa to show the shape and the size of the ornaments.⁶⁰ Some references to Jewellery in the Ramayana are clearly mentioned, like diadem, golden diadem, bedecked with golden gems and golden bracelets of woman.⁶¹ In *Ramayana* Sita is represented as arrayed in Jewellerys butterflies and other bright ornaments in her back hair. Her ears are resplendent⁶² with gems. She has bracelets and armlets on her wrists and arms; a golden zone bends her slender waist and golden anklets her well shaped ankles.⁶³ *Manu* speaks of precious metals, like gold out of 35 to 40 passages in *Manu* bearing metals. Even 16 refer to gold and goldsmith.⁶⁴ It was the goldsmith who was proficient in the art of minting gold coins and that *Manufacturing* weights and measures for weighing gold and silver.⁶⁵ An inscription refers the term Savarnkar (Goldsmith). Thus it indicates the prosperous condition of goldsmith in the Kushana period.

In ancient India, Indian were the masters potters of the world, who have worked in clay to produce a remarkably beautiful style of pottery. It is also the highest antiquity. Perhaps no feature of Indian art has such a long tradition of artistic achievement as our pottery. Although a higher development of the art of pottery has been confined mainly to the making of Jars, flowers vases, bouts and similar other earthen objects.

In all these modes of pottery, the Indian potter invariably maintains inviolate beauty of form, harmony of colouring and surface decoration, together with the project unity of purpose without a seeming premodification as if the works were the creation of nature rather than of art.

We have direct references to potters in our texts. *Manu* mentions many articles made by the potters, which was the important institution of that time.⁶⁶ And it is evident from the *Mahābhārata* that potters made earthen pots with clay and the wheel just as in the present day as in the countryside of India.⁶⁷ The Ramayana refers to the pots such as *Sthali*, *Kumbhi* and *Karambhi*⁶⁸, full of curd and some other liquor posts, which were made by the potter.⁶⁹ A guild of potters is referred to in one of the inscription, from Western-India.⁷⁰ Potters prepared pottery of diverse shape and use, human and animal figures, toys-carts, toy-bricks and tiles.

The whole of our country is full of magnificent buildings and stupas built and adorned with carved stones of exquisite craftsmanship. The evolution of a distant class of stone for building purpose, which happened sometimes during the Mauryan period. Before the *Mauryans*, monuments are scarce and evidence meager and it has been surmised that the wood ivory, and other materials of perishable nature must have been in use for art-activity. In this activity the Takshakas Vardhakis and Karmakars must have played an important role

with the coming of the stone for building. These artisans, might have transformed their techniques to suit the new requirements.⁷¹ In the working of stone on a large scale, India is attested by the enormous monolithic columns of the Mauryan period. Many of these bear Ashoka inscriptions, but it is not certain that they were made and created by him; some may have existed before his time.⁷² The skill of the stone cutter of the age could not be surpassed. The monolithic columns of fine-grained sand-stone, some of which exceed 40 feet in height, exclusive of the separate capital are marvels of technical execution. The art of polishing hard stone was carried to such perfection that it is said to have become a last art beyond early medieval period.⁷³

Manu refers to the class of oilman, who used to produce oil. Physicians undertaking medical treatment without intimating (to the government). The dangerous nature of disease should be fixed with first amercement if the patient dies.⁷⁴ The growth of the disease due to negligence on indifference of a physician should be regarded as assault.⁷⁵ Kanilya suggests that a band of musicians should stay in a particular place during rainy season. They should not do much loss to any one otherwise they can be punished with fine of 12 panas. Same rules were applied to drummers-drum-player and other mendicants.⁷⁶ *Manu* mentions a team Snataka (barber) which was allowed to offer food to Brāhmana.⁷⁷ Some inscription refers to the term *Gandhaka*⁷⁸ performer in Mathura inscription, and lawgivers mentions oil workers.⁷⁹

Kautilya provides that, amongst others, women of the *Śūdras* caste can be employed as wendinger spice. It is further said that those who are employed as procurer of water for bathing, shampooers, bed makers, barbers, toilet makers, water servants, actors, dancers should keep an eye on the private character of the officers of the king. Evidently most of these seem to have been *Śūdras*.⁸⁰

Concussion

After the deep study, I came to this conclusion that sudra was labourer and artisan in the early India. Importance was given to sudras as artisan in the Mauryan period. Sudras were servant of upper varnas. In the beginning, their lives were very miserable. Slowly and slowly they learned to earn two times of bread .After the more practice they became skilled men. The literary tradition reveals that they had to face so many problems to become artisan.

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