

## The Guild System

A guild is an association of craftsmen in a particular trade like textile workers, masons, carpenters, carvers, glassworkers, or any other. It is formed to protect the interests of the members.

The guilds were formed by experienced artisans in their field of handicrafts. They were called master craftsmen. Usually the guilds were founded by free independent master craftsmen. Before a new employee could rise to the level of master, he had to go through a training period during which he was first called an apprentice. They were bound to work for the master craftsman for a specified time during which they could learn the craft. They got no wages except lodging and boarding facilities from the master craftsman. After this period, he could rise to the level of journeyman i.e., day labourer entitled to wages on daily basis.

### Master Craftsmen

- Owned his own shop.
- Trained Apprentices
- Ran the guild.

### Journeyman

- Worked for any master for wages
- knew most of the skills of the trade
- Could become a master if he demonstrated great skill (masterpiece) & had enough money to afford guild fees & buy his own shop.

### Apprentices

- Worked for a single master for housing and meal
- Learned the skill of the trade.
- was young, generally under 20.
- Served a set time.



## Functions of Guilds :

- i) Social Organization - Each guild was a social organization which acted like a mutual benefit society. During this era, people were identified with their family, guilds and villages. Their structure was stable, secure, integrated and practical.
- ii) Economic Organization - The guild regulated the wages paid to workers. They also controlled the technology of production, quantity of production, pricing and distribution of products etc. Together they regulated the entire local economy.
- iii) Professional Organization :- They regulated the work relationships of the artisans through a graded system of apprentices, journeymen & masters. These occupational level had different functions and responsibilities towards each other and towards larger communities.
- iv) Political and religious organization - The guild elected the town representatives before the king.

## Characteristics of Guild System:

- i) Artisan or craft guilds were formed by artisans engaged in the same line of industrial activity.
- ii) The guilds were located generally in a town or a village. The membership of a guild was compulsory to operate in the concerned town or village.
- iii) The main aim of these guilds were:
  - a) To protect the interest of the members.
  - b) To ensure implementation of various rules and regulation formed by town authorities.
- iv) The guilds used to elect 'wardens' in order to regulate their working.
- v) The members of the guild were expected to produce quality goods only. Any deviation from standard business practices could attract punishment from the guild.
- vi) The guilds were responsible for the welfare of their members. The sick & disabled members were looked after and financially weak members were helped by the guild.



## Types of guild :-

There used to be two kinds of guilds -

- i) Merchant Guild
- ii) Crafts Guild.

i) Merchant Guild : A merchant Guild was an association of merchants engaged in trade in a particular locality. The purpose of a merchant guild was to enforce equality of opportunity for the members, to protect their interests, to avoid competition among members and regulate the conduct of its members by prohibiting unfair practices.

ii) Crafts Guild : It was an association of the skilled artisans engaged in some occupation. It regulated entry to craft, prescribed standards of workmanship and regulated the conduct of its members.

## Reasons for decline of Guild System

- i) Rigid outlook of craftsmen. They did not like to introduce changes.
- ii) Restriction on the entry of new members to the guild.
- iii) Lack of commitment among the guild members.
- iv) Development of new towns without guilds.
- v) Opposition from journeymen who developed grievances against master-craftsmen.
- vi) Gradual rise of middlemen who could gain control over the trade.