

Coins as Historical Texts: Authority and Economic Thought in Medieval Mewar (9th–16th Century)

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Abstract: Coins have traditionally been viewed from the perspective of facilitating exchange or the exercise of dynastic power. This current paper seeks to examine the medieval coins of Mewar from the perspective of historical texts conveying the idea of power, legitimacy, and the economy. The study seeks to explore the idea of power through the legends, scripts, and symbols found on the coins of the medieval period, ranging from the ninth to the sixteenth century. The study seeks to locate the medieval coins of Mewar in the broader regional network of trade and political interaction in western India.

Keywords: Medieval Mewar, Numismatics, Political Authority, Monetary Economy, Coin Legends and Symbols.

Introduction

The coins, therefore, embody a very important material resource for the study of the political and economic history of early and medieval India. Unlike written history, which is normally the product of the writer's own views and intentions, the coins offer significant information through their legends, scripts, weight standards, and symbols. These offer a direct testimony to the authority that issued them and the economic context in which they were used. Thus, the history of the coinage of early and medieval India has been understood by historians as not only a system of exchange but also as a historical record. D. R. Bhandarkar and P. L. Gupta, for example, have stressed the importance of the study of the coinage for understanding the history of dynastic authority and the flow of money.

In regional terms, specifically in western India, the history of Mewar offers an important key for an analysis of the relationship between coins, power, and economy. Between the ninth and sixteenth centuries, the region saw the consolidation of Guhila and then Sisodia rule, as well as an intensification of regional political relations with other powers, including Gujarat and Delhi. These were accompanied by the development of regional trade routes that linked Rajasthan with other regions of western and northern India. As John S. Deyell has clearly demonstrated in his studies of early medieval economies, coins can reflect broader regional economies of exchange.

Yet, despite this importance, the coins associated with medieval Mewar have often been analyzed mainly from a descriptive numismatic perspective. There are many studies of the identification of the coins, their material, or their dates, but the implications of the meanings conveyed through the legends and symbols have not been explored. The legends and symbols on the coins have not been used casually. They have been the choices through which power has been articulated in the process of everyday economic activity.

An analysis of these coins as texts provides a more meaningful interpretation of their role in medieval society. The legends, scripts, and symbols engraved on Mewar's coins can be seen as statements about power and economic relations. Therefore, an examination of these features, as indicated by their circulation, provides a perspective on how coins functioned as both a means of economic exchange and as a symbol of power. Thus, the role of

coinage provides a vital perspective on the relationship between power and economic relations in medieval Mewar.

Sources and Methodology

The current study is dependent mainly on numismatic sources, supplemented by epigraphic materials, regional histories, and contemporary historical literature. The principal source of numismatic materials is coins, since the legends, scripts, composition, and symbols found on coins offer direct access to the ruling power that issued the coins and the economic context in which they were used. Numismatic studies of Indian coins have revealed that they do not merely function as economic tools but also serve as historical artifacts that retain information on political power structures and economic systems. Researchers like P. L. Gupta and D. R. Bhandarkar have emphasized the significance of the legends and icons found on the coins for the identification of the ruling authorities and the evolution of regional traditions of coinage.

Besides the coins, the study has also been influenced by the historical traditions that have been preserved in the regional chronicles of Mewar. Works such as "Veer Vinod" by Shyamal Das have been very helpful in understanding the political framework and historical traditions of the region. These works, although prepared at a later stage, have been very helpful in understanding the context in which the history of the region unfolded.

The epigraphic materials have also been helpful in understanding the economic context of medieval Mewar. The epigraphic materials dealing with the history of donations, temple endowments, and business activities have been helpful in understanding the history of the functioning of the economy and the use of the currency. The historians of Rajasthan, such as Dasharatha Sharma and Reema Hooja, have emphasized the need to use literary, epigraphic, and material sources to reconstruct the history of the region.

From the methodological standpoint, the present paper follows an interpretative approach, considering coins as texts. This means that the coin legends, scripts, and symbols are interpreted for what they may mean, focusing on the political power and legitimacy they may convey. Moreover, the circulation patterns and the monetary framework within which the coins were used are also considered. By using numismatic, textual, and epigraphic sources, it is attempted to understand the coinage of Mewar during the medieval period, both from the perspective of power and economic exchange.

Coinage and the Expression of Political Authority in Medieval Mewar

The right to coin money has traditionally been closely associated with political power in pre-modern societies. The act of coining money has been not only an economic activity but also a visible expression of political power. Coins have been extensively used in the economy and, therefore, have carried the name, title, and symbols of the issuing authority to the larger sections of society. It is for this reason that the history of coinage has been traditionally understood to be one of the most visible expressions of political power. P. L. Gupta, in his studies of coinage in India, has noted that the right to coin and circulate currency has been an important aspect of political power in many regions of early and medieval India.

The case of Mewar, therefore, offers the context in which the growth of regional power under the Guhilas and later the Sisodias provided the framework for the coinage to assume symbolic proportions. From the ninth century onwards, the rulers of the region gradually expanded their hold over the regions beyond the Aravalli range. In such a context, the need to assert political legitimacy had to find expression through various forms, and the coins did emerge as a visible expression of the power of the ruler, which could reach the larger sections of society through the economy and pilgrimage centers, where the impact of other

forms of royal communication could not reach.

Possibly the most important aspect of the use of coinage as a symbol of authority relates to the legends found on coins. The use of a ruler's name and title on a coin serves as a declaration of authority and sovereignty. Such legends do not merely establish the authority behind the coinage but also serve to legitimize the authority in the course of routine economic activities. D. R. Bhandarkar, in his discussion on the significance of coin legends in the study of Indian numismatics, states that the use of royal names and titles on coins often indicates the political aspirations of the ruler.

In many regions of medieval India, the legends found on coins also indicate the cultural and political environment in which the ruler functioned. For instance, the use of scripts and languages often reflects the overall interface between the ruler and neighboring political entities. In western India, the use of both Sanskrit and Persian traditions in the administration also impacted the use of legends on coins. Such a study offers a valuable insight into the overall interface between the ruler and the larger political environment.

The symbolic imagery found on coins was also an important factor that contributed towards the exercise of power and authority. For example, religious symbols, royal emblems, and other imagery commonly found within the cultures of the time were often found on the surface of the coins, thereby providing legitimacy to the power and authority of the issuing government. Essentially, such symbols helped link power and authority with other commonly found cultural traditions, thereby facilitating the integration of the image of the ruler with other commonly found social and religious beliefs. In this manner, coins not only served the purpose of facilitating economic exchange but also helped convey power and authority through the symbols and imagery found on the surface of the coins.

Thus, if one were to consider the coinage found within the medieval period of Mewar, it may be noted that such coinage was likely used for the articulation of power and political authority. For example, the symbols and legends found on the surface of the coins likely conveyed messages pertaining to power and legitimacy, thereby facilitating the embedding of power and authority within the economy through the medium of coinage.

Symbols, Script, and the Language of Authority

Besides the fact that they bore the names of the rulers, coins were also imbued with authority through the symbols and writings they bore. These symbols and writings were not necessarily for aesthetic reasons but were, rather, the product of calculated decisions that sought to associate political authority with cultural legitimacy. In many parts of medieval India, rulers sought to associate themselves with the people by using symbols that were easily recognizable and understood by the people, such as those associated with religious and dynastic symbols. These symbols were easily recognizable and were likely to have helped to associate the authority of the rulers with the cultural and social traditions of the people.

The use of certain scripts by the rulers could also have had important implications for the authority they sought to impose. The use of certain scripts could have been important, considering that they were closely associated with administrative and cultural traditions. In some parts of medieval India, such as western India, the use of certain scripts could have been important, considering the diverse nature of the political authorities that operated in the region. These authorities, which operated through warfare, diplomacy, and trade, were likely to have sought to demonstrate their authority and flexibility through the use of certain scripts.

Symbols featured on the coins also served to reinforce the notion of legitimacy. Often, religious motifs, sacred emblems, or familiar cultural symbols were used as a visual state-

ment that sought to connect the ruler with the tradition of power. Historians of Rajasthan, including Dasharatha Sharma, have noted that the political culture of the Rajputs was marked by the use of religious symbolism to reinforce the notion of royal authority. The use of such symbols on coins was to extend the symbolic connection to the realm of economic exchange.

Through these features-legends, scripts, and symbols-coins conveyed a complex set of meanings that went beyond the simple economic purpose of the coin. They were a concise statement of authority in circulation. An examination of these features allows coins to be read as a text that not only goes beyond the economic but also as a means to understand the political authority of the medieval Mewar Kingdom.

Coin Circulation and the Economic Landscape of Mewar

Coins were more than mere emblems of power; they also traveled and revealed the pulse of the economy. The movement of coins revealed the vibrancy of the economy, the flow of goods, and the integration of the region with others. Medieval Indian economy did not have a neat boundary; money traveled from place to place—through routes of trade, routes of pilgrimage, and routes of bustling markets. Therefore, coins are a window to the economic activities of a region.

For the region of Mewar, the geographical position was such that the region was a crossroads for the routes connecting Rajasthan with Gujarat, Malwa, and Northern India. These routes facilitated the movement of goods such as textiles, metal goods, agricultural products, and horses, thus connecting the region with the wider economy of Western India. Scholars have observed that as the routes of trade developed, the markets expanded, and money became a part of the economy as a means of exchange. According to John S. Deyell, who studied the early medieval monetary systems, the expansion of coinage also indicates the development of the routes of trade and the integration of the economy.

Therefore, the coins that were used in the region of Mewar and beyond reflect the larger economy of the region. The need for a strong means of exchange was felt in the towns and sacred sites; coinage fulfilled that purpose and enabled economic activities across diverse groups. However, the popularity of certain coins also indicates the trust people had in the ruler who issued the coins. Therefore, there is a clear connection between the ruler and the economy.

Thus, if the movement of coins is considered a means of economic integration, the region of medieval Mewar was closely connected with the wider economy of Western India.

Coins and Economic Thought in Medieval Mewar

Coins did not just facilitate the movement of value; they also reflected the underlying presupposition of the economy's construction and the nature of the market. The presence of coins in a particular region often implies a particular level of monetization of the local economy. Medieval India witnessed the presence of metallic currency along with the rise of trade routes, bustling towns, and the growth of commerce. According to John S. Deyell, who analyzed the medieval economy of early India, the expansion of the circulation of coins parallels the rise of the regional economy.

In the context of the kingdom of Mewar, the analysis of the usage of coins and the process of circulation should be understood in the context of the broader economy. The kingdom of Mewar was connected to the trade routes of Gujarat, Malwa, and northern India, which were themselves hubs of economic activity. The expansion of the market and the growth of the economy helped to create a sense of economic activity. The rise of the economy also helped to create a sense of importance of coins in facilitating the process of eco-

conomic activity. The process of the issuance of coins helped to create a sense of credibility among the people. The standardized weights, the distinctive symbols, and the legible legends helped to create a sense of credibility. According to the numismatists of India, like P. L. Gupta, the credibility of the coins helped to create a sense of confidence in the economy.

Therefore, the analysis of the usage of coins in the medieval kingdom of Mewar should be understood in the context of the broader economy. The presence of coins in the medieval kingdom of Mewar helped to create a sense of connection between the political economy and the broader economy.

Conclusion

The medieval Mewar coins, therefore, are not only important indicators of trade, but they are also mini-containers of power, identity, and the manner in which money and goods were being moved around. If one were to look at the coins closely, they would not only come to know about the manner in which the rulers were exercising their power through the daily commodities that were being shifted from one market to another, but they would also come to know about the manner in which the ruler's legitimacy and sovereignty were being established through the coins themselves, as the act of issuing a coin also became an act of sovereignty.

The flow of coins, therefore, not only helps us to come to know about the manner in which the regional markets were functioning, but they also help us to come to know about the manner in which the region of Mewar got integrated with the regional markets of western India. The trade routes that were being established between Rajasthan, Gujarat, Malwa, and northern India had actually laid down a landscape through which the medium of coins had become an important aspect of trade. The study of the coins, therefore, not only helps us to come to know about the manner in which the economy of medieval Mewar functioned, but they also help us to come to know about the manner in which the power and economy were being interconnected through the medium of coins. The study of the coins, therefore, helps us to come to know about the manner in which the political economy of the region had been functioning from the ninth to the sixteenth centuries.

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