

Wages of Labour and Revenue in Medieval North Indian Economy: A Numismatic Study of the Payment Methods (circa 1193-1605 CE)

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Abstract: *Currency as a medium of exchange was not new to the land of Indian sub-continent. Usage of it had well been observed in the arenas of disbursement of payment, medium of transmission since primordial time. After the emergence of Dehlî and the other regional sultānat-s the usage of base metal currencies had been increased in leaps and bound manner. After the invasion of Anîr Taîmûr Sôâhdeb-e-Qirân in AH 801/1399 CE Dehlî and its adjoining territories had underwent through a heavy scarcity of precious and base metal coins. The scholars such as John S. Deyell, Frank Perlin had considered the base metallic coinages (billon and copper units) as the 'real' or 'noble currency' for the common populace of Hîndûstân; because the gold and silver coins had largely been treated as species which served the purpose of the nobility and gentry sections to park their surplus wealth. However, up-to a great extent the scarcity of the low valued currencies had been pacified by the monetary policies of the regional sultānat-s like Jaûnpûr, Khândesh, Mâlwa, Gujarat, Bengal, Bahmanî and its five successors. And, in Delhî, the monetary circulation up-till the lowest strata had been aggravated through the uprising of Bahlol Lodî in Rabî' al-Awwal, Al-Hijrah 855 / April, 1451 CE. In this article I am going to re-examine the monetary policies orchestrated under the Sûr-s and the Moghûl-s. During this particular conjuncture of time it was expected that a sizable amount of the revenue and taxes to be submitted in the forms of cash, not in kind. The quantitative and qualitative data available from hitherto, mostly based on the primary sources, are going to seek to frame the argumentative discourse of this article.*

In this article I have preferred to use the contemporaneous Arabic and Indo-Persian terminologies prevailing in the arena of money market. Alongside with it some numismatic jargons have also been used, such as "billon", which supplements with a satisfactory explanatory note. Unlike following the popular trend to write a plural form/ *jama'* of a singular Indo-Persian word (*mufrid*) through adding a 's' as a suffix, I have somewhat a better solution. As an example, from an ideal grammatic point of view the plural form of the word *tâanka* should be *tâanka-hâ*. However, in main text I would rather prefer to write '*tâankas*, instead of "*tâankas*"; it is just for the sake of

a constant remembrance that the word '*tòanka*' has its distinct origin and we can not sporadically come up with a new form of word which has no basis in it and factually or grammatically error.

Since the earliest days of second phase of urbanisation (circa 6th century BCE) the usage of coins as a medium of payments could well be speculated in the Indian sub-continent. Due to the presence of an inherent notion of the usage of a scarce metallic unit as a medium of exchange, the barter system as a parallel economic module, had always been deprived in major localities (such as in the *Mahâ-janapads* and *Upa-janapads*, as been recorded in Pânîni's *Ashtâdhyâyî*). However, since the primordial time of its invention the precious metallic coinage (in gold and silver) has always been treated as species, not as a medium of daily exchange in terms of small scale transactions. Hence, the necessity had been felt to launch base metal coins; which comprised the metals such as billon, copper, brass, potin, lead and tin. After the decentralisation of Gupta administration and economy the north, western and central India had undergone through a massive starvation of the white metal which was mesmerizingly penned down by John S. Deyell in his work, *Living without Silver*¹. It was primarily lingering around the period from circa 750 to 1250 CE.

The Monetary System of the Chahamânas of Lâlkot and their Political Successors

The crisis for pure silver *drachms* was tried to encounter with the profuse production of *Jitals*.² A *Jitâl* was chiefly an alloy metal, an intentional mixture of silver and copper (weighing 32 *ratôis* or 3.2-3.5 grams); thus in the terms of alchemy it used to be called a billon. These *Jitals* were commissioned to achieve the noble goal to monetise the lower economic strata of the society. In the domain of numismatic studies these *Jital* series is popularly reckoned as "Bull and Horseman type" coins due to the presence of both these motifs on the obverse and reverse respectively. The credit as the inventor of this series is vested with Samanta Deva, a Hindû Shâhî ruler of circa 8th century CE. However, a close study of this series augments many names of the ruling authorities, whose names have been mentioned in Sharda script. A very important addition to the historiographical narration of the history of base metal coinage in early medieval India was the scholastic production of Robert Tye and Monica Tye.³ Comprehensive divergence cataloguing of this series augments the information about its zonal circulation areas. However, at the tenure of Samanta Deva the "Bull and Horseman type" coins held their prestige because of their higher purity in silver. Thus, as being expected, these *Drammas* (as it was known in hitherto) of Samanta Deva obtained the higher purchasing power than their fellow contemporaries⁴ Hence, it should not be a matter of surprise that this variety was severely copied by almost each and every local fiefdoms of early medieval India. The Chahamânas of Delhi (Lâlkot

and Râi-Pîthorâ) and Ajaymerû (Ajmer) were not an exception of this trend.

At the time of advent of Islamic rule in this sub-continent initially they preferred to refuge to existing monetary systems. As a supporting explanation of the aforesaid statement one can examine the coinage of Mu'izz al-Dîn Muhàammad bin Sâm 'urf Muhàammad of Ghor [AH 589-602/1193-1206 CE]. In their homeland (Ghor and its adjoining areas in Afghanistan) the Ghurids preferred to imitate middle eastern monetary system. But a catastrophic disparity in terms of weight standard and metrology revealed their reluctance and unattentive attitude to fetch a universal standardisation.⁵ On the contrary, from the early days of their territorial occupation in India, the Ghurids had expressed their utmost concern about standardisation and unification of currencies. As it have already been discussed, the Ghurids had copied the "Bull and Horseman type" *ġitòals*. However, they had given another name to it, *Dehlîwâl* [weighing 32 *rafîs*/ 3.2-3.5 grams].⁶ Moreover, most of the early Mumluk Turk rulers had preferred to issue *Dehlîwâls* both in Arabic (mainly for the circulation in Lahore) and Shardâ script (as a legal tender chiefly in Delhi and its adjoining areas). This shows their overzealous attitude to fit in themselves in the psyche of common masses through using the basic tool of daily exchange, the cheap coins. On the other hand, just to spread an awe about their gesture towards the indigenous nobility and gentry classes, Muhàammad of Ghor had imitated the half gold *Sîvarna* unit (weighing 40 *rafîs* 4.1-4.3 grams) of the Gahadavalas of Qannaûj-Kashi and the Yadavas of Trîbhûvangîrî (Bayâna).⁷

At the conjuncture of time in late thirteenth and early fourteenth century (1296-1320 CE) the Dehlî *sulţanaţ* had witnessed its remarkable territorial expansion under the command of the *Khalġîs*. The zeal for better control upon the new conquered lands had pushed the ruling elites of Delhi to manifest the circulation of money into the hinterlands. The urge had tried to be pacified through establishment of new mints at different parts of India.⁸ The next vital issue that needed to be resolved was the exchange rates amongst different metallic denominations. However, there was no prescribed norm in this regard. It was rather merely dependent upon the condition of the money, local demand and rates of that particular metal etcetera. Still with the help of sporadic examples from the contemporaneous records we have somehow managed to endeavour a tentative exchange rates which is closest to the reality. As for example, the value of a gold *tòanka* was equivalent to 10 silver *tòankas*. 60 *Dehlîwâls* [which since the tñure of Balban reckoned as *Gânî*] comprised to a silver *tòanka*.⁹ In his commendable work *Dravyaparîksha*, Thakkur Pherû, the mint master of the capital mint Dehlî during the regime of Quţb al-Dîn Mubâarak Shâh (*Al-Hijrah* 716-20/ 1316-20 CE), had jorted down a comprehensive metrological report on the coinage which was in vogue. His account advocated in favour of the fact that the brief period of Quţb al-Dîn Mubâarak witnessed approx 70 varieties in 44 denominations. This clearly indicates the urge for heavily monetise the society. However, this noble aim

had touched the zenith when Fakhr al-Dîn Muhàmmad bin Tughlaq (AH 725-52/ 1325-51 CE) was holding the throne of Dehlî. The most mischievous experimentation of him could be seen in stamping promisory currency. This venture was undertaken after observing the successful circulation of Chao currency in China. To be precise, the scarcity of silver had tried to be managed through a promisory money which was equivalent to 48-50 *gânîs*, as it claimed.¹⁰ The message for its acceptancy was firmly given in Arabic: *nin aṭā' as-Sulṭân faqad aṭā' ur-Rahðman* [He who obeys the Sulṭân only obeys the merciful (Allah)]. The entitled mints for the production of promisory currencies scattered all over his domain.¹¹ Wide scale distribution of the mint-towns advocated in favour of the zeal to monetise the entire *sulṭanatò* up-till the lowest strata of ecomic transactions. Mostly the revenue and other kind of taxes were being paid in billon and copper; whilst for the sake of large scale disbursement silver *tòankas* were preferred. For an example, in the tenure of *Dehlî sulṭanatò* the non-Muslîm peasants were asked to submit more land revenue (*kharâj*). In some silver *tòankas* of Iltòutòmîsh it was clearly mentioned that these coins were struck through the colletion of *kharâj* from the *kâfers* (non-believers) of Qannûj: *dòuriba hazâ-us-Sikka min kharâj Qannûj wa kufr*]. Similar kind of mischievous action had carried forward by Muhàmmad bin Tughlaq had issued the "legal Dirham" [*dirham shara'î*] to pay the pilgrim tax.¹²

When Delhi and its adjoining areas were starving for currencies in between 1388 to 1451 CE, the other parts of India were enjoying adequate monetisation under the regional *sulṭanats* such as Bengal, Gujarat, Jaunpur, Kashmir, Khandesh, Madurai, Malwa, Bahmani and its successors i.e. Ahmadnagar, Bijapur, Berar, Bidar and Golkunda. Moreover, the far South was doing much better in the terms of economy, money market, metrology under the command of Vijayanagara Empire. What is important to be mentioned here is that for the convenience of low scale transaction this area had always preferred light weight gold coins. These were *Fanam* (weighs 0.35-0.38 g.), *Prathâpa* (1.6-1.7 g.) and *Varâha* (around 3.5 g.).¹³ The *Varâhas* were also reckoned as *Hûns* which obtained a very high regard among the populace for its maximum purity.

Monetary policies under the Moghûls¹⁴

By and large the monetary policies of Akbar (*Al-Hijrah* 963-1014/1556-1605 CE) was built up upon the ashes of *Sûrs'* monetary system. The structural reforms in ec the mileu of onomy, done by Farîd al-Dîn Shçr Shâh (AH 945-52/1538-45 CE)¹⁵ was so humangous that it created an internal demand for a drastic monetary reform. Shçr Shâh preferred to confine his monetary ventures into bi-metalism, silver and copper with its multiple denominations. The success of his new economic policy had echoed its viability in the psyche of the common masses. The hegemony was so firmly rooted in the memory of the khalq of Hindûstòân that even today knowingly or unknowingly we are using the words like *Rûpiya*, *Pâisa* which were the brain-child of Shçr Shâh.

Secondly, to fetch the aspiration to build a *naqadî* economy all over their territory the Sûrs had spread a network of mint-towns; the number of which could be counted till 36.¹⁶ These mint-towns had played the quintessential role of today's currency chests under Reserve Bank of India. The issues like transition of revenue, large scale disbursement of payments etcetera were also a matter of prime concern of these mints. Thirdly, the fixed weighing standard of both the metals had paved the way of complete trust of the masses which was absent since 1519 to 1530 CE. The impact of Sûr coinage was so deep that even Humâyûn could not elude it. On the verge of dismissal of his second ruling period (AH 962/ October, 1555-January, 1556 CE) Emperor Humâyûn had no choice but to succumb in front of the Sûr standards. However, the Moghûl numismatics had found its destiny when Akbar was at his office.

The matter of the fact was Emperor Akbar got enough time to experiment with the monetary system which passed into his hands from his predecessors. Nothing surprise that Abû'l Fazl would use ample eulogical praises for the "coinage of the Glorious Empire" [*daûlatò-e-jâwid*]. In another words, prolonged fifty years rule of Akbar was a farrago of endless variety of denominations in all three metals—gold, silver and copper. The silver *rûpiya* had been approved as the standard unit for maintaining the archival records of Moghûl court. Although in *Â'in*, Abû'l Fazl had rendered the amount of *jama'* and *hòsòil* of revenue collection of each province in copper *dâms*. Presence of *dâm* with its multiple and fractional denominations¹⁷ made daily small scale transactions more easier and convenient. Usually 40 *dâms* were equivalent to 1 silver *rûpiya* (weighs a *tolâ*, which varied 11.20-11.44 grams) and approx 10 *rûpiyas* valued 1 gold *muhar*. However, the actual value of a particular denomination was slight lesser than its face value because it included the minting cost and signiorage. A *tòâzaa sikka* (a newly struck coin) always had the high purchasing power than a *khazâna sikka* (issued by previous rulers). A *Khazâna* was subjected to *batta* (discount), the rate of which ultimately depended upon the will of local *Sarafs* (ex-chequers), but the discounted amount could not exceed the total sum of minting costs and signiorage.

Notes and References (Endnotes)

1. Deyell, John S., *Living without Silver: The Monetary History of Early Medieval North India*, Oxford University Press, 1987
2. The Hindûshâhîs of Ohind and Kashmir, the Chahamânas of Ajaymerû and Delhi, the Hephthalites in the Eastern Rajasthan, the Western Châlukyas in Gujarat and few small regional principalities in the central India were largely liable for coining this billon units
3. Tye, Robert and Tye, Monica, *Jitals: A Catalogue and Account of the Coin Denomination of Daily Use in Medieval Afghanistan and North West India*, Isle of South Uist, 1995
4. Such as the billon units issued by the Hephthalites in Eastern Rajasthan, Western Châlukyas and Solankis of the Gujarat and Saurashtra, some local issues from Ujjaini etcetera

5. In Afghanistan the coinage of the Ghurids was chiefly bi-metallic; gold *Dînâr* and silver *Dirham*. The weight of gold *Dînârs* varied from 2.5-17.5 grams (and even more); whilst the silver *Dirhams* were weighing between 3.5 to 6.1 grams. For more details see Goron, Stan and Goenka, J. P., *The Coins of the Indian Sultanates*, Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, 2001, pp. 9-12, 15-19
6. The mosque inscription of Quwwatu'l Islâm [literary "the cupola of Islam" as it was known since 1850s] in Quṭb Mînâr complex rendered an estimate of expenditure in "Dehlîwâl" which was spent after building that particular mosque
7. Goron, Stan and Goenka, J. P., *Ibid*, pp. 15-17
8. Till the year of 1296 CE the capital mint of Dehlî was solely responsible for the production of silver *tòankas* [the gold *tòankas* had started to be coined from the period of Nâsir al-Dîn Mahòmûd (AH 644-664/ 1246-66 CE)]. However, few exceptions to this norm did exist; a list has given below:

List of the Sulṭâns	List of the Mints (Excluding Dehlî)
Shams al-Dîn Ilṭuṭmîsh	Sind
Nâsir al-Dîn Mahòmûd	Badâûn
Ghîyâs al-Dîn Balban	Khiṭṭa Alwar, Naîmûr, Sulṭân-pûr
Âlâ' al-Dîn Muhòammad Shâh (Khaljî)	Dâr-ul Islâm, Dçoğîr, Sulṭân-pûr

9. *Yek Gânî* (One Gânî) had ever remained as an imaginary unit. In reality *Do Gânî* (Two Gânî) was the lowest denomination in billon
10. The *tòankas* issued from the mint Daûlatâbâd claimed: "*Muhâr shud tanka panjâ gânî dar rozgâr banda-e-Ummîdwâr Muhòammad Tughlaq*". Whilst the other mints had used the word "Râ'ij" of "Pânjâ gânî"
11. Eight mints with thirteen epithets had carried out this entire operation, these were: Dâr-ul Islâm, Hazrat Daûlatâbâd, Takhtgâh Daûlatâbâd, Dâr-ul Mulk Dehlî, Shahr Dehlî, Takhtgâh Dehlî, Darra Dhâr, Iqlîm Tughlaq-pûr 'urf Tirhut, Iqlîm Lakhnaûti, 'Arsah Satgânû, Dâr-ul Mulk Sultân-pûr, Takhtgâh Sultân-pûr
12. In the period of Moghûls this idea was once again rejuvenated in the regimes of Aurangzîb (AH 1068-1119/1658-1707 CE) and Farrukh Siyar (AH 1123-1131/ 1713-1719 CE).
13. Girijapathi, M., *The Coinage and History of Vijayanagara Empire*. 1414 Orthographically speaking (*Isòtlâhòât-e-'Ilm-e-hjâ'*) "Moghûl" is somewhat an apt transliteration of the Persian word "*Moghûl*" that had been frequently referred and used by the British administrative officials, writers throughout the time span of British India. I would also like to go with this adaptation.
15. 1538 CE should be treated as the very year when Shçr Shâh had made his first step to attain independence through conquering the Gaûr, the then capital of Bengal. But he had gleaned his maximum success through repealing the last Moghûl threat in battle of Bilvagrâm (Qannûj) in Muharram, AH 947/ May, 1540 CE.
16. Goron and Goenka, *Ibid*, p. 92
17. Such as *Nisòfi* (1/2 *dâm*), *damrâ* (1/4 *dâm*), *damrî* (1/8 *dâm*), *Jital*, *Yek tankî*, *Do tankî*, *Châu tankî*, *Nîm tanka* (*dâm*) and *tanka* (double *dâm*)