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IN THE INDIGENOUS COPPER COINS

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INVOCATIONS THROUGH COINS: LEGENDS FOR ALLEGIANCE AND POPULAR VALIDATION IN THE INDIGENOUS COPPER COINS

Mamta Dwivedi

Extensive use of the symbols and devices has been a characteristic of Indian coinage tradition.¹ Many symbols signify *mangala* i.e., benediction and auspiciousness which can be traced back to earliest form of visual representation on pottery, coins and inscriptions. The role of such symbols and devices on coins may have been (a) to legitimise the coin issue as some devices may have served as heraldic emblems;² (b) for benediction;³ (c) economising the effort, as the symbols have the ability to convey more within smaller space.⁴ However, the introduction of inscribed coins (post 2nd century B.C.) is considered one of the important milestones in the monetary history of the Indian subcontinent. The legends enabled a more explicit representation of information and proclamation adding more to the coins than just their economic role. This paper is an attempt to discuss some of those roles by looking at some typical legends on the *janapada/gana-samgha* coins from A.D. 1st to 4th century.

For a present day scholar while the legends on a coin make their identification and attribution easy, they also open prospects of understanding the extra-economic roles of coins. There are two aspects of an inscription on a coin: (a) the inscription itself and; (b) the content of the inscription. The first aspect includes the script and language in the inscription and is useful for the scholar to identify the period of the coin's issuance and the region of its circulation through the paleographic study of the script used. The second aspect, i.e., the content of the inscription not only makes the attribution of the coin to dynasty, region and period easy, but can also be used to understand the nature of the polity, the purpose of the issue of the coin, and religious affiliations, of the issuer.

The most common aspects of content and purpose of the legends are as follows:

1. illustration of allegiance to their deity by dedication of their polity/ administration to them.
2. invocation of benediction for the community
3. popular validation

This paper is an attempt to look at a type of legend specific to the Yaudheya coins. Through the legend, community's */janapada*'s allegiance to the deity is exhibited by heralding the deity as the issuer of the coins, and thus, as the sovereign of the Yaudheyas. There are two peculiar coin types which bear such legends: (1) Allan's⁵ Class 3 coins of Yaudheyas and (2) Catresvara/ Citresvara type of Kuninda⁶ / Yaudheya⁷ coins. Both these coin types have been dated to have circulated during 2nd century A.D., in the same geographical region, i.e. Dehradun, Chakrata and Garhwal region. In case of both these type of coins, the sovereignty of the community */gana samghas* have been conferred to the deities, in whose name the coins are issued.

The silver issue of Class 3 of the Yaudheya has the legend of *Bhagavata-svaminno-Brahmanya(-) Yaudheya*. Allan explains the legend as 'Of Brahmanya (a name of Karttikeya), the divine lord of Yaudheyas'.⁸ The copper coin varieties of this type also bear similar legend, but there is no reference to the term 'Yaudheya', instead it is replaced by 'Kumarasa(sya)'. The complete legend is '*Bhagavatasvaminno Brahmanyadevasya Kumarasya*', translated by Allan as 'Of Kumara, the divine lord Brahmanya deva'. A.M. Shastri,⁹ D. Handa¹⁰ and Richard Mann¹¹ consider the term 'Kumarasa(-sya)' as an epithet of Karttikeya. Further the image of six headed deity is commonly identified as Skanda or Karttikeya. This type of coin has been attributed to the Yaudheyas on the basis of the discovery of a single silver issue of the same type with the name 'Yaudheya' on it. Another noticeable aspect of this type is that it has greater number of varieties than any other Yaudheya coin type.¹² The most common features of this type is:

Obverse: 6 headed deity, with heads placed in or pattern. The deity stands facing, with spear in right hand and left hand on the hip. The legend *Bhagavata svaminno brahmanyadevasya Kumarasya* placed between 1 o'clock to 11 o'clock.

Reverse: Deer facing towards the *caitya* (placed on either right or left edge of the coin). (*kalasa*), *srivatsa* and *svastika* symbol above the deer.

Before 2nd century A.D. the Yaudheyas are generally identified with the pre-independent Punjab region,¹³ on the basis of their references in inscriptions,¹⁴ literary accounts¹⁵ and from the geographical distribution of their older coin types.¹⁶ The non existence of any other Yaudheya coin prior to this in Dehradun, Chakrata and Garhwal region, is considered as the absence of Yaudheya occupation of this region before 2nd century A.D. It is suggested that the Yaudheyas migrated from the

Punjab region to the foothills of Himalayas in the east because of political pressure. Allan suggested that the defeat of the Yaudheyas by Rudradaman in 150 A.D. may have been the main reason for their migration eastward.¹⁷ On other hand Shastri¹⁸ believes that the Yaudheyas only came to this region because of defeat at the hands of the Kusanas. At the time of Huviska they had to leave their *Bahudhanyaka*¹⁹ region, and move towards the mountainous region to establish their supremacy.²⁰ At this time the Kunindas were in geographical proximity with the Yaudheyas, with their occupation of the region north to Ambala in the Kangra region. The Arjunayanas were situated towards the south of the Yaudheyas in the region around Agra and Mathura. A.M. Shastri,²¹ Yoganand Shastri²² and Mann²³ have noticed and acknowledged the influence of Kuninda coin style on the Yaudheya coins of 2nd century. Because of the influence of Kunindas and Arjunayanas, the Yaudheyas changed the design of their coin by incorporating the image of a deity, symbols of kine and goddess (Laksmi²⁴ or Parvati²⁵) to facilitate the easy acceptance of their coins within the existing monetary system of the region.

The possibility of a physical migration is, however, debatable. The *Yaudheyaganasya Jaya* (Allan's Class 6²⁶) type of coins issued by the Yaudheyas, which is dated to 4th century A.D., has been found in the Punjab region as well as in the lower Himalaya region.²⁷ This type had both the attributes of Class 2 and Class 3 coins, i.e. like the former the use of their community name 'Yaudheya', and the latter's iconographic representation of Karttikeya and Devasena. Considering this information, it would mean that the Yaudheyas would have migrated back to the Punjab region in 4th century A.D. This may have been highly probable. The issuance of new type of coins i.e. Class 3 coins in the northern Yamuna-Ganga doab, may have been the result of Kuninda influence but, was not necessarily the result of their physical migration to the region. Yaudheya's Class 3 issues in the northern Ganga Yamuna doab may have been the result of their attempts towards expansion of their monetary economy. For the general acceptance of the coins, it was important that the familiar designs were used.

Another case is of the Chatresvara²⁸ (Catresvara, Citresvara) type. Allan²⁹ identified the legend as '*Bhagavata Catresvara mahatmanah*', and attributed it to the Kunindas. On the basis of palaeographic study he dated the coins to have been issued by the end of 2nd century A.D. The similarity of coin design and representation of symbols with the older Kuninda coins³⁰ and common geographical region of circulation were the main reasons for the attribution of these coins to the Kunindas, specifically the use of coins of a female deity and kine, i.e. the reverse

pattern was same as that of the older Kuninda coins. Citresvara is commonly identified as Siva, and the legend translated as 'Of the divine Citresvara Mahamana'.

Altekar³¹ and Handa³² identify the Citresvara coin as one of the Yaudheya coin type because of its very close appearance to the 'Bhagavatasvamin Brahmanyadevasya Kumarasya' (Allan's Class 3) type of coin, and also the common geographical region of their circulation. It is suggested that the Kunindas may have disintegrated in the early Christian era or merged with the Yaudheyas, because there is an absence of Kuninda coin issues. While other *ganas* are mentioned in Samudragupta's *prasasti* of 4th century A.D., there is no reference to the Kunindas. Altekar considers the non-mention of the name of the ruler or the community (as in the older Kuninda coins) as a definite proof that the coin issues are of the Yaudheyas. He further suggests that there is the possibility that the Kunindas may have merged with the Yaudheyas to form a *gana*. Shastri³³ states that the conglomeration of the three *janapadas* (Arjunayanas, Kunindas and Yaudheyas) was permanent, and the Arjunayanas and Kunindas got completely merged with the Yaudheyas, to form a *samgha* that continued to be called Yaudheya because it was the most powerful and largest. He furthers this argument by referring to: the absence of the coins of Kunindas and Arjunayanas after the decline of the Kusanas, while the number of Yaudheya coins remained quite high in this period and; the inclusion of the term '*gana*' by the Yaudheyas in the Class 6 coins, that bears the legend *Yaudheyaganasya jaya*'.

The legend in Citresvara type coins heralds the deity Citresvara (Siva) to have been the issuer of the coins. The most common features of this type is:

(1) Obverse: Unicephalous Siva holding the trident with Brahmi legend *Bhagavato Citresvara Mahamanah*.

Reverse: With or without deer standing before a female figure and some subsidiary symbols (*srivatsa* and *kalasa*) on the reverse.

(2) Obverse: Tricephalous Siva seated on *Apsamara purusa* with a female figure standing to the right side of the coin.

Reverse: Deer facing towards the *caitya*.³⁴

With the introduction of this type of legend on coins the focus shifts from geographical region to personality.³⁵ The allegiance offered to the deities through their invocation on the coin issues, may have been a method to get public acceptance in a new geographical region. In the case of the two coin types mentioned above the deity is proclaimed as their sovereign. These coins, unlike their contemporary

imperial coins (of Indo-Greeks and Kusanas) and the monarchical coins of the Ganga valley do not bear the names of the king. However, the familiarity of the northern region of Ganga-Yamuna doab with the coin issues in the name of the king may have necessitated the association of sovereignty with a personality. The deity's inclusion may have had benedictory and valedictory role for the entire *gana-samgha* in their claim for identification as a sovereign polity along with the neighbouring monarchies. The issuance of coins and more importantly the acceptance of those coins for circulation within the economy provided the scope for their own political space.

NOTES AND REFERENFES

1. See J. Allan, *Catalogue of Coins of Ancient India*. British Museum, 1936. Also see J. Cribb, *The Indian Coinage Tradition: Origins, Continuity and Change*, IIRNS, Nasik, 2005; Michael Mitchiner, *The Origin of Indian Coinage*, Hawkins Publication, London, 1973.
2. A.K. Jha, Introduction, in *Coinage, Trade and Economy*, ed. by A.K. Jha, 1991, p.viii.
3. H. Sarkar, and B.M. Pande, *Symbols and Graphic Representation in Indian Inscriptions*, Aryan Books International, New Delhi, 1999, pp.2-3.
4. Yogananda Shastri, *Prachina Bharat mem Yaudheya Ganarajya*, New Delhi, 1999, p.149.
5. J. Allan, *op.cit.*, cxlviii, pp.270-75.
6. *Ibid.*, ciii, p.117.
7. D. Handa, *Tribal Coins of Ancient India*, Aryan Book International, 2007.
8. J. Allan, *op.cit.*, cxlviii.
9. A.M. Shastri, 'Some Observation on the Mandi Hoard of Yaudheya and Kuninda Coins', *Numismatic Digest*, 11, 1987, pp.40-43.
10. Devendra Handa, 'The Brahmanya Type Silver Coins and its Attribution', in *A Macro Study of Early Indian Coins*, ed. by C. Mani, Bhartiya Kala Prakashan, Delhi, 1999, pp.45-52.
11. Richard Mann, 'Yaudheya Chronology and Coinage: An Analysis', *Numismatic Digest*, 31, 2007, pp.48, 63-66.
12. For the varieties see Allan, *op.cit.*, pp.270-75.
13. J. Allan, 1936, *op.cit.*; D. Handa, 2007, *op.cit.*; Mamta Dwivedi, *Yaudheya Coins: Exploring Numismatics as a Source of History*, unpublished M.Phil. Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University, 2010.
14. Rudradaman's Ginar inscription 150 A.D. (*Epigraphia Indica*, Vol.VIII, Calcutta, Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, 1905-6, pp.45-49) Samudragupta's Allahabad inscription (4th century): Arjunayanas and Malavas, among the *pratyanta nrpati* that were made to accept Samudragupta's superiority.
15. We find very limited reference to Yaudheyas in literary sources. Their mention is found in grammatical works, plays, epics and *Puranas*. These works are considered to have spanned from the early historical period to early medieval period, i.e. from

- c. 7th-6th century B.C., to the latest text dated to 10th century A.D. See V.S. Agrawala, *India as known to Panini*, 1959, p.457; *Jaiminiya Brahmana*: 2; 113. *Mahabharata, Adiparva*: 95, 76.
16. Mamta Dwivedi, op.cit., pp.46-66, 71-77.
 17. J. Allan, op.cit., clii.
 18. Yoganand Shastri, op.cit., p.71.
 19. See Class 2 coins, that has the legend *Yaudheyayanam Bahudhanyake* (Yaudheyas of Bahudhanyake). J. Allan, op.cit., cxlvii-cxlix. Rapson (*JRAS*, 1900; p.107) had pointed out that the term *Bahudhanyaka* has a geographical connotation, which meant 'region rich in corn'. He also points out at the mention of the term *Bahudhanyaka* in the *Mahabharata* as one of the regions in western India that was conquered by Nakula. Considering it a real place mentioned in the Epic, Allan suggests that the term may be the name of a usually fertile part of Punjab, in the possession of the Yaudheyas. (J. Allan, op.cit.).
 20. Yoganand Shastri, op.cit.
 21. A.M. Shastri, 'Interesting Kuninda and Yaudheya Coins', *Numismatic Digest* 8, 1984, p.24.
 22. Yoganand Shastri, op.cit.
 23. Richard Mann, op.cit., pp.66, 67.
 24. See Allan J., op.cit., p.156.
 25. J.N. Banerjea, 1960, 'Interpretation of a few Symbols on Some Tribal Coins of Ancient India', *JNSI*, XXII, pp.43-46.
 26. Allan, op.cit., cli-cliii, pp.276-279.
 27. See Mamta Dwivedi, op.cit.
 28. In 1930, R.C. Majumdar identified the term in the inscription as '*Chatresvara*', Allan, in 1936, identified it as '*Catresvara*', and Handa identifies the term as '*Citresvara*'. It is unanimously agreed that the term refers to Siva.
 29. *Ibid.*, ciii, p.117.
 30. The Amoghabhuti type issued at the end of 1st century B.C.
 31. A.S. Altekar, *JUPHS*, Vol.XVIII, Jul, Dec, 1945, p.214.
 32. D. Handa, 2007, op.cit., 2005-06.
 33. Y. Shastri, *Ibid.*, pp.84-90.
 34. The second type has not been discussed in the catalogue of British Museum coins by John Allan. This is a relatively new type found at Mandi and is present in the collection with the IIRNS, Nashik.
 35. The inscription on Class 2 coins of Yaudheyas, dated 2nd century B.C. '*Yaudheyayanam Bahudhanyake*' (Of Yaudheyas of Bahudhanyake region) focuses on the geographical region, i.e. Bahudhanyake (identified as Punjab). However, the legend of Class 3 coins focuses on the deity of the Yaudheyas as issuers of the coin.