



## Colonial Imagination and Identity Attribution

### *Numismatic Cues for Defining Space*

**Mamta Dwivedi**

Scholars have often criticised the rigidity of categorisations, methodology and techniques in the study of ancient past. Upendra Thakur remarks on this stagnancy: '[B]asic elements of historical restructuring have remained fossilised in the contributions of the early 20th century, so far as ancient Indian history is concerned'.<sup>1</sup> He further states: 'Methodologies employed by specialists have remained essentially antiquarian, confined to the decipherment and classification of material on their hands'.<sup>2</sup> Models that evolved were linear and compartmental in nature, not allowing a wider contextual analysis. Thomas R. Trautmann, in his critical exploration of colonial cultures,<sup>3</sup> questions the categories and entities developed in the colonial period. 'The racial theory of Indian civilisation', according to him, was based entirely on the construct of 'race' in the Indian context. He refutes the projection of such colonial constructs on to the distant Indian past.<sup>4</sup> A similar concern is raised by Himanshu Prabha Ray: '[I]t is crucial to address the "coloniality of power" and the rigid hierarchies imposed between

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<sup>1</sup> Upendra Thakur, 'Further Observations of Mint in Ancient India', *Indian Numismatic Chronicle*, 1962, 3(1): 68.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas R. Trautmann, *Aryans and British India*, New Delhi: Yoda Press, 2004.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216.

different knowledge systems in the colonial period and the extent to which they remain unquestioned and continue to be reproduced in post-colonial writings'.<sup>5</sup>

This essay focuses on one such issue of fixation in the study of early historical coins with colonial categories, i.e., the 'imperial' versus 'tribal' coins. Under discussion here are the types of copper coins bearing the legend *janasya*, *ganasya*, or *janapada* or the names of the issuing community. These coins, since the colonial period, have continued to be studied as 'tribal' coins. To this category the coins that are placed belong to the Yaudheyas, Arjunayanas, Sibis, Trigartas, Rajanyas, Kunindas, Malavas, and Audumbaras. On the basis of the sites of coin finds, they are placed in the western regions of the Indian subcontinent.<sup>6</sup> The territories of these communities have been identified primarily on the basis of the distribution of their coins. These coins were generally struck in copper and bronze, with some silver ones (attributed to a relatively later period). These are circular, though generally with unfinished edges. The coins are commonly die-struck, though clay moulds have also been found for some types.<sup>7</sup> However, the authenticity of the moulds is debatable. The tribal coins date from the interregnum period, between c. 2nd century BCE and c. 4th century CE.

Starting with the examination of how categories were formulated for early Indian coins by the colonial scholars, this study also traces how the colonial numismatic methods and categories have been followed and reproduced by many scholars even up to the present time — a practice that may have been the result of their unquestioning acceptance of these methods and categories. The numismatic studies

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<sup>5</sup> Himanshu Prabha Ray, 'Creating Religious Identities, Buddhist Monuments in Colonial and Post-Colonial India', *Transforming Cultures eJournal*, 2008, 3(2): 147.

<sup>6</sup> Alexander Cunningham, *Coins of Ancient India: From the Earliest Times down to the Seventh Century A.D.*, London: Quaritch, 1891. Also, see M. K. Sharan, *Tribal Coins: A Study*, Bodh Gaya: Abhinav Publications, 1972; Devendra Handa, *Tribal Coins of Ancient India*, Delhi: Aryan Books International, 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Most commonly found moulds are of the Yaudheya Class 2 with the legend *yaudheya bahudhanyake* and Class 6 with the legend *yaudheya-ganasya jayah* (J. Allan, *Catalogue of the Coins of Ancient India*, London: British Museum, 1936).

in pre-independence India may be divided into two phases: (a) collection and decipherment, from 1784 to 1900, when coins were collected through explorations, gifted or sold to museums, and dated with the decipherment of Brahmi and Kharoshti scripts; and (b) cataloguing and categorisation, from 1900 to 1947, when various museum collections were organised, classified and catalogued.

### **Beginning of Numismatography: Collections and Cabinets**

Inquiries into the Indian past by antiquarians and scholars had various motivations: they started with individual interest and treasure hunts and ultimately resulted in institutionally organised translation exercises and geographical surveys. The possible motivations for the explorations of past have been differently explained by post-colonial scholars.

Bernard S. Cohn explains that when the British established their new empire, they tried to comprehend it using their own frameworks of reference.<sup>8</sup> To the educated Englishman of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the world was to be comprehended in empirical terms. To him, the society could be comprehended and represented as a series of facts, and ‘administrative power stemmed from the efficient use of these facts’.<sup>9</sup>

The accuracy of information and facts about India that were to be collected seemed to be a responsibility that the Indologists assumed. The emphasis on the importance of empiricism may be noted in James Prinsep’s address:

What the learned world demands of us in India, is to be quite certain of our data, to place the monumental record before them exactly as it now exists, and to interpret it faithfully and literally, as the document says itself, “without exaggeration and without extenuation”.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> B. S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>10</sup> James Prinsep, ‘On the Edicts of Piyadasi, or Asoka, the Buddhist Monarch of India, Preserved on the Girnar Rock in the Gujerat Peninsula and on the Dhauli Rock in Cuttack: With the Discovery of Ptolemy’s Name Therein’, *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1838, 7(1): 227.

History, for the British, was the key to understanding how the real and natural worlds were constituted and, thus, history in the broadest sense was conceived of as a site of debate over the ends and means of their rulership in India. The British conceived the governance of India by codifying and reinstituting the governance practices that had been developed by the erstwhile states and rulers.<sup>11</sup>

While the study of history of India had its own purposes for the British, it is important to note the sources that were being used by them. The first stage of knowing about India was that of learning the local languages: learning ‘Classical’ Persian, Arabic and Sanskrit, as well as the ‘vernacular’ languages was understood to be the prerequisite form of knowledge for all others, and the first educational institutions that the British established in India were to teach their own officials Indian languages. The knowledge of languages was necessary for issuing commands, collecting taxes, maintaining law and order, and creating other forms of knowledge about the people they were ruling.<sup>12</sup> In 1770s, under Warren Hastings, ‘governmental purposes’ provided impetus to the production of Orientalist knowledge of India.<sup>13</sup> His Judicial Plan of 1772 resolved to adhere to laws in the ‘*Shaster* with respect to Gentoos’ and in the ‘Koran with respect of Mahometans’.<sup>14</sup> This was the period when the ancient texts were being ‘discovered’ and studied, and their translations were being carried out by Indologists interested in knowing about India’s past and understanding her traditions. Trautmann calls this the phase of ‘Indomania’.<sup>15</sup> For this purpose, in 1784, the Asiatic Society of Bengal was established in Calcutta under the presidentship of William Jones. From 1788, it started publishing its transactions under the name of *Asiatick Researches*. It was to appeal to all ‘naturalists, chemists, antiquaries, philologists, and men of sciences from different parts

<sup>11</sup> Cohn, *Colonialism*, p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Rosane Rocher, ‘British Orientalism in the Eighteenth Century’, in Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (eds), *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspective on South Asia*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1994, pp. 220–21.

<sup>14</sup> Bijay Kisor Acharyya, *Codification in British India*, Calcutta: S. K. Banerji, 1914, p. 153; Rocher, ‘British Orientalism in the Eighteenth Century’, p. 220.

<sup>15</sup> Trautmann, *Aryans and British India*.

of Asia' to 'commit their observations to writing, and sending them to the Asiatic Society at Calcutta'.<sup>16</sup> Soon, a museum was proposed to be established by the Society, but it could only be established in 1814. It was from then that the Society could have a repository of its own artefacts.

The second stage of colonial probing included the study of the tangible objects of past: the stone edicts of Ashoka, copper-plate inscriptions, architectural remains, and coins. Prinsep's successful decipherment of the Brahmi and Kharoshti scripts remains his unparalleled contribution to the study of inscriptions and coins. This feat of his enabled the identification of Ashoka from his edicts, and of Kushanas and many other rulers from their numismatic issues. His career with coins started with his apprenticeship under the Assay Master of the Royal Mint in London. In 1820, he reached India and was appointed first as Assistant Assay Master at Calcutta Mint and then as Assay Master at the newly established Benaras Mint, where he developed an interest in Indian culture. In 1830, with the closure of the Benaras Mint, he was recalled to the Calcutta Mint as Deputy Assay Master. His literary pursuits were the result of his stint at Benaras Mint, and, on his return to Calcutta, got him appointment to the post of Secretary of Asiatic Society in the same year. The period from 1834 to 1837 were the most fruitful for his study of early historical indigenous coins. It was in this period that he successfully deciphered the Brahmi script as well. From 1838, when he retired to his home because of ill health, and then after his death in 1840, the progress in the study of coins was adversely affected. While Prinsep was alive, the collection of coins and publication of numismatic studies by scholars was a coordinated effort, but now the scholars found and studied the coins on their own and published independently.

There were various factors that triggered Prinsep's interest in the study of inscriptions and coins. First, in 1832, after the death of Colonel Mackenzie, the museum of the Society received the duplicates of coins in his large collection through the generosity of the Government of Bengal.<sup>17</sup> This provided Prinsep a good amount of

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<sup>16</sup> These were the words of William Jones that became credo of the Asiatic Society. This was quoted on the cover page of the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*.

<sup>17</sup> James Prinsep, *Essays on Indian Antiquities, Historic, Numismatic, and Palaeographic, of the Late James Prinsep, to which are Added His Useful Tables*,

exposure to coins. Second, the new educational policy introduced by Governor General William Bentinck favoured the dissemination of Western knowledge over indigenous forms of learning, and, as a result, the flow of funds for the printing of ancient texts almost stopped. Third, since the East India Company's currency system was going to be overhauled with the coming of the new constitution, interest in the past coinage of India was natural. And this development had its greatest influence on Prinsep who, as the Assay Master at the Calcutta Mint, submitted a project proposal to the government in 1833 for reform in the weights and measures and, shortly thereafter, another proposal for the introduction of uniform coinage.<sup>18</sup> Fourth, 1830s was also a period of explorations in Central Asia by Captain Alexander Burnes, in Kabul by Charles Masson, in Punjab by Jean-Baptiste Ventura and Claude Auguste Court, and in Sarnath by Alexander Cunningham. Coins and other antiquities collected by these 'field archaeologists' and 'travelling antiquarians', as Prinsep called them,<sup>19</sup> were forwarded to Calcutta to be deciphered and explained by him.

### **Making of Collections: Surveys, Explorations and Purchases**

Alexander Cunningham started his career as a surveyor, and it was in the course of his surveys and explorations that he came across antiquities, especially coins. Throughout his writings, he showed a special interest in what he called 'the Buddhist period of India.' For studying the geography of this period, he followed the routes traversed by Alexander during his campaigns in the north-west and by the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang during his travels.<sup>20</sup> Cunningham was the first to take a definite step toward the study of ancient Indian coins. His career

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*Illustrative of Indian History, Chronology, Modern Coinages, Weights, Measures, etc.*, ed. Edward Thomas, London: John Murray, 1858, p. ix. Also, see R. L. Mitra, 'History of Society', *Centenary Review of the Asiatic Society of Bengal from 1784 to 1884*, Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and Co., 1885, p. 29.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. ix.

<sup>19</sup> Alexander Cunningham *Four Reports Made During the Years 1862–63–64–65, Archaeological Survey of India Reports*, vol. 1, Simla: Government Central Press, 1871, p. xix.

<sup>20</sup> Alexander Cunningham, *The Ancient Geography of India*. London: Trubner and Co., 1871, p. 104.

in numismatics started with his paper on certain Roman coins found in the Manikyala stupa in present-day Pakistan, in 1834.<sup>21</sup> During the early 1840s, Cunningham wrote on the coins of the Bactrian and Indo-Scythian rulers. One of his earliest endeavours in writing that later determined his style of making survey reports and discussing antiquities was the description of his visit to Kashmir, where he collected 1000 coins, mostly from the Bij-Bihara region. He describes the coins as dating from the beginning of the Christian era to the 16th century. Apart from geographical surveys, he made the first of the ethnographic surveys. He possessed more trust in the antiquities he found as sources for the study of the past, than in the ancient Indian texts. This bias is visible in the proposal he made for archaeological investigations instead of engaging only with the texts.<sup>22</sup> In view of the absence of any reference to Buddhism in the Brahmanical texts, he considered investigation in the history of Buddhism as important as that in the history of Brahmanism and, therefore, applied for permission to explore the Buddhist sites. What is important to note here is that he also proposed the creation of a centrally organised body that would introduce a system of explorations and excavations.<sup>23</sup> His endeavours resulted in the establishment of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) in 1861, of which he was appointed the Surveyor. Since then, Cunningham developed interest in the collection and study of coins. In 1860, he published a list of 65 coins available for sale or exchange.<sup>24</sup> He made attempts to ascribe regions to various coins and to classify them accordingly. His works, thus, describe the coins of indigenous origin on the basis of their local provenance or find-spots. His methods of study were very different from those of scholars before or after him. Unlike other scholars, he did not make selective collections; rather, he studied everything he found and made reference to them. In the case of tribal coins, which he ascribed to the local inhabitants, he also

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<sup>21</sup> Alexander Cunningham, 'Correction of a Mistake Regarding Some of the Roman Coins Found in the Tope Opened by M. Court', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1834, 3: 635–37.

<sup>22</sup> Alexander Cunningham, 'Proposed Archaeological Investigation', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1848, 17: 535–36.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Alexander Cunningham, 'List of Coins for Sale or Exchange', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1860, 29: 397–99.

attempted an ethnographic study of the people, whom he considered successors of those associated with the issuance of the coins.

Even though the tribal coins came to be recognised as such in the late 1830s, very little work on them in comparison to that on the imperial coins was done. This was because of the inability of the then scholars to identify and allocate them to their regions of provenance. It was only when Cunningham started his survey of various regions, especially Punjab, that he could relate the names of the communities mentioned on the coins with many contemporary communities. During his survey in Punjab, he identified many modern communities as the descendents of early tribes. For instance, he suggested the probability of the Dahmeri or Damhari as the survival of the original Audumbara.<sup>25</sup> He identified the Kunet community living in the river valleys of the Beas and Sutlej with the historical Kunindas or Kulindas mentioned in the *Markandeya* and *Vishnu Puranas*.<sup>26</sup> Further, he identified the ancient Yaudheyas with the modern Johiyas along the Bahawalpur frontier,<sup>27</sup> and the Sibis with the Saibas of the country of Saiwalika or Sivalik.<sup>28</sup> He then published a detailed study of the coins of these communities in 1891.<sup>29</sup>

Cunningham was the first to point that the ‘natives’ of India had the knowledge of coin manufacture even before Alexander’s arrival in the subcontinent. Earlier, in 1832, Prinsep had noted the absence of any ‘native’ currency in ancient India. In Prinsep’s words, ‘[T]he Indo-Grecian coins of Major Tod, are evidently *descendents* from the Bactrian coinage, from the types of which they gradually progress into purely Hindu models . . . Coinage is certainly one of the improvements which has travelled and is still travelling eastward’.<sup>30</sup> The rate of addition to the information on the Indian coins was quite slow. One reason for this was the difficulty in deciphering the legends; another was that the primary focus of the then numismatic studies was on the

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<sup>25</sup> Alexander Cunningham, *Report of a Tour in the Punjab in 1878–79, Archaeological Survey of India Reports*, vol. 14, Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, 1882, p. 116.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 129, 130.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

<sup>29</sup> Cunningham, *Coins of Ancient India*.

<sup>30</sup> Prinsep, *Essays on Indian Antiquities*, p. 5



Roman and Indo-Sassanian coins. Till 1870s, the colonial scholars believed that the Indians were ignorant of the art of coinage until the time of Alexander. It was Cunningham who in 1870s refuted this idea by citing Quintus Curtius Rufus' statement that Alexander, on his arrival at Taxila, was presented 80 talents of coined silver (*signati argenti*) by the local Raja.<sup>31</sup> These coins were later identified and studied as punch-marked coins.

There were other methods of collecting coins, as known from the writings of other coin collectors, most notably B. Tuffnel<sup>32</sup> and Charles J. Rodgers.<sup>33</sup> Tuffnel's keen interest in collecting coins is captured by the following words:

There are few more fascinating pursuits to be enjoyed by the "dweller in a foreign land", such as India, than the collecting of those records of a bygone age, which, in the form of coin or inscriptions, carry us back beyond the reach of history to ancient times, when the kings and dynasties ruled, whose very names are almost unknown to-day.<sup>34</sup>

Tuffnel, in fact, projected the interest and fascination of many coin collectors of his age. He suggested that for an interested collector it was not difficult to locate coins. Referring to the presence of coins scattered throughout the country, he states:

Every village in India contains coins — gold ones among the jewels of rich, copper ones among the rubbish of the poor — but it takes tact, patience, and practice to lure them from their lurking places. It is no unusual thing to hunt through a village without any sign of a coin, and be assured that there never were any, and yet the next day, armed with a handful of old coppers, as example of what one wants, to ferret out some prizes. To the native mind an *old* coin is of no more value than a modern one of identical weight and of infinitely less interest, and it is only when the mild Hindu realizes that for one pie that is old, he can get two pies . . . that his store is unearthed.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Cunningham, *Coins of Ancient India*, p. v.

<sup>32</sup> B. Tuffnel, *Hints for Coin Collectors: Coins of South India*, New York: Scott Stamp and Coin Company, 1890.

<sup>33</sup> Charles J. Rodgers, *Coin Collecting in Northern India*, Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1997 [1894].

<sup>34</sup> Tuffnel, *Hints for Coin Collectors*, p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 4–5.

There are two noteworthy observations of Tuffnel in the aforementioned passage: first, the ‘natives’<sup>36</sup> the ignorance of the value of old coins, or in other words, their over-familiarity with the presence of old coins in their midst; and second, the ease with which a determined and astute collector could collect those old coins.

Rodgers, a coin collector contemporaneous with Tuffnel, too, betrays his fascination with coins in his account — a fascination that, like Tuffnel’s, had to do with the association of coins with history:

In the East, history has never in many countries been written. Coins and inscriptions are the only histories . . . if the histories were written, they were often garbled. Whether the histories were written or not, it is always interesting to handle money which we know must have been in use in olden times . . . We then find that in India especially coins and inscription *make* history and do not simply illustrate it. They certainly help us to a large amount of geography.<sup>36</sup>

Rodgers suggested that one could have found old coins in the possession of local junk dealers and money changers, and at antique shops. He often found the types and kinds of coins surprising. He cultivated the hobby of collecting coins when he found some interesting coins heaped at the money changers’ shops in a local *bazaar* of Delhi.<sup>37</sup> Thereafter, his pursuit of different coins took him to other markets in Delhi, then to different towns, and subsequently to different regions. A part of Rodger’s collection was sold to the Punjab museum by him. What is interesting here is that the collection he made was hand-picked. He stated that what coins one had to choose had to be predefined. The collections made by individuals were determined by their preferences. It was generally the collections of private owners that were bought by the museums, in which case either (*a*) the information about the provenance of the coins bought was often missing; (*b*) the coins may not be representative of the complete series or varieties; or (*c*) the assessment of the volume of a monetary system from the types of samples collected was not possible.

<sup>36</sup> Rodgers, *Coin Collecting in North India*, p. 6.

<sup>37</sup> Rodger’s description of a *bazaar* that would interest a coin collector is that they were specific areas in towns or large villages near old sites. However, the only specific region he mentioned is Delhi (*ibid.*, pp. 1, 12, 13),

## Colonial Understanding of Tribes in India

The construct of tribe as a category in India, according to Susana Devalle, formed part of the self-legitimising ideology of colonialism. The category of tribe operated to catalogue the conquered population and to enable their incorporation into the colonial system.<sup>38</sup> She adds that none of the characteristics that define tribes are found in the communities that were described as tribes.

According to K. Singh, in the pre-colonial period the communities were divided into many categories, such as *varna*, *jati*, *qaum*, *kabila*, *biradari*, etc., but in the colonial period the notion of clan replaced all of them.<sup>39</sup> The colonial system introduced a binary perception whereby ‘the colonial paradigm neatly divided the world into the world of civilised and world of oppressed, of ruler and the ruled. To the British the colonial world was a tribal world’.<sup>40</sup>

One of the earliest references to the term ‘tribe’ to be found in the Indian context is in Alexander Dow’s *The History of Hindostan* (1768), a translation of the history of India written by Ferishtah, a Persian historian of the late 16th and early 17th centuries CE. In his introduction, Dow referred to the division of Indian society into four great tribes, which were further divided into castes: the Brahmanas; the Sittris or Kshatriyas; the Bise-s or Vaishyas; and the Sudders or Shudras. He equated the term *varna* with tribe.<sup>41</sup>

It may be helpful to look at how this term was understood and applied to modern communities under the British rule. One such use of the term ‘tribe’ in the colonial period was to demarcate certain communities, and marginalised groups could often be categorised as ‘tribal’. Use of the category of tribe as tool of subordination is clearly visible in the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871. Through this Act certain groups were branded as innately criminal and elaborate arrangements were made for their surveillance. The Act entailed the registration of

<sup>38</sup> Susana B. C. Devalle, *Discourses of Ethnicity: Culture and Protest in Jharkhand*, Delhi: Sage Publications, 1992, p. 50

<sup>39</sup> K. Singh, ‘Tribe into Caste: A Colonial Paradigm?’, in Dev Nathan (ed.), *From Tribe to Caste*, Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study (IIAS), 1997, p. 33.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* p. 34.

<sup>41</sup> See Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*, Delhi: Permanent Black, 2012, pp. 20, 21.

all members of such notified 'tribes' and the imposition of restrictions on their movement. It is interesting that all the provisions of the Act extended only to the territories under the governments of the North-Western Provinces and Panjab and Oudh. However, no definition of tribe was provided by the Act; rather, 'stress was laid on ethnographical theories of caste which linked profession, upbringing and background'.<sup>42</sup>

M. A. Sherring's *Hindu Tribes and Caste*<sup>43</sup> was the first general compilation of ethnographic data on caste, which became a prelude for the census that was to come. In his study, he tried to identify various 'tribes' as sub-groups of varnas. Indeed, his work slotted each segment of the entire population into one or the other tribe. The four parts of his book covers, 'the Brahmanical tribes', 'the Kshatriya or Rajpoot tribes', 'the mixed castes and tribes: Vaisyas, Sudras and others', and 'aboriginal tribes and inferior castes'. It, thus, appears that he construed the castes and jatis within every varna as different tribes.

The colonial understanding of Indian communities as tribes was also to have its reflection in the traditional categories from past. For instance, the terms *jana* and *gana* were translated as tribe in the *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, published by Monier Williams in 1872. In 1888, John F. Fleet, in his reading of the Samudragupta's Allahabad inscription, added the term 'tribe', while mentioning the epigraphic reference to the Yaudheyas, Malavas, Arjunayanas and others who were conquered by Samudragupta.<sup>44</sup>

It was only in the census reports of 1901 and 1911 that an attempt to define tribe in the context of Indian society was made by the government.<sup>45</sup> In the 1909 edition of the *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, tribe was defined in the following manner:

<sup>42</sup> John Marriot and Bhaskar Mukhopadhyaya, "'Criminal Tribes" Act, 1871: Act XXVII', in John Marriot and Bhaskar Mukhopadhyaya (eds), *Britain in India, 1967-1905*, vol. 1: *Justice, Police, Law and Orders*, London: Pickering & Chatto Publishers, 2006, p. 227.

<sup>43</sup> M. A. Sherring, *Hindu Tribes and Castes as Represented in Benaras*, London: Trubner and Co., 1872.

<sup>44</sup> John F. Fleet (ed. and trans.), *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, vol. 3: *Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings and Their Successors*, Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, 1888, p. 12.

<sup>45</sup> Singh, 'Tribe into Caste', pp. 35-36.

A tribe, as we find in India, is a collection of families, or groups of families, bearing a common name which, as a rule, does not denote a specific occupation; generally claiming common descent from a mythical or historical ancestor and occasionally from an animal, but in some parts of the country held together rather by the obligation of blood-feud than by the tradition of kinship; usually speaking the same language; and occupying or claiming to occupy a definite tract of country. A tribe is not necessarily endogamous, i.e. it is not an invariable rule that a man of a particular tribe must marry a woman of the tribe.<sup>46</sup>

It is interesting to note that the term has been so broadly defined in the aforementioned passage that it almost describes any community, even of the medieval and modern periods. It is also important to examine whether the term ‘tribal’ was used by the colonial scholars to contrast the indigenous coin issues with those of the empires, especially when almost all communities were looking to identify themselves with and trace their ancestry to a grand personage. The ‘search for empire’ drive even among the historians of the post-colonial period had its roots in the colonial method of history writing. The tendency to identify Maurya and Gupta states as empires, on the basis of evidence from texts like *Mricchakatika* and Puranas, inscriptions and coins, and to overemphasise their significance in history has almost reduced the period between the two into one of hiatus. Whatever cultural or economic phenomena could be recognised as important in the period between the two empires was attributed to ‘foreign’ influence, i.e., the influence of the Kushanas and Indo-Greeks.

### Phase of Cataloguing and Categorising

Though Cunningham never used the term ‘tribal coin’ in his surveys or coin catalogues, one finds that the term was commonly used in other catalogues. It was first used by V. A. Smith,<sup>47</sup> who considered tribes as ‘kingless’ people who held their ground in various regions from as early as 4th century BCE. The communities whose coins were identified as

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<sup>46</sup> William Stevenson Meyer, Richard Burn, James Sutherland Cotton, and Herbert Hope Risley. *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, vol. 1: *The Indian Empire, Descriptive*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909, p. 308.

<sup>47</sup> V. A. Smith, 1906, *Catalogue of the Coins in the Indian Museum, Calcutta*, vol. 1, Oxford: Clarendon Press. The tribal coins are discussed in part 2.

tribal coins are: Arjunayanas, Audumbaras, Kunindas, Malava, Nagas, Rajanyas, Yaudheyas, Sibis and Trigartas. After the publication of Smith's catalogue, other museums also invited scholars to categorise and organise their collections. Scholars who catalogued the earliest coins were H. N. Wright,<sup>48</sup> E. J. Rapson,<sup>49</sup> R. B. Whitehead,<sup>50</sup> and B. B. Bidyabinod.<sup>51</sup>

The first critique of the study of indigenous coins was by D. R. Bhandarkar,<sup>52</sup> who insisted that traditional sources also be considered in the study of such coins. He further challenged Smith's categorisation: he resented the use of the term 'tribal' and introduced the use of the term 'janapada coins' for the first time. To him, janapada was a wider and more valid term for the political scenario of early north India.

In 1936, John Allan catalogued the collection at the British Museum, London. He adopted the method of classification that had been introduced by Smith. Unlike Cunningham, who discussed coins on the basis of their locality and geographical distribution, Smith and Allan followed the method of categorising coins on the basis of their legends. It became, therefore, difficult for the later scholars to ascribe regions to coins or coin-issuing groups, the reason being that the provenance of coins was probably not even known to Smith and Allan, as they were only studying the coin collections already present in the museums. They were studying coins that were there in the cabinets of the Indian Museum, Calcutta, and the British Museum. The category of tribal coins, was further expanded by Allan to include all indigenously struck and inscribed coins. While the tribal coins in the Smith's catalogue had their geographical distribution limited to the Indo-Gangetic divide, the category of such coins in the Allan's

<sup>48</sup> H. N. Wright, *Catalogue of the Coins in the Indian Museum, Calcutta*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907.

<sup>49</sup> E. J. Rapson, *Catalogue of the Coins of the Andhra Dynasty, the Western Kṣatrapas, the Traikūṭaka dynasty, and the "Bodhi" Dynasty*, London: British Museum, 1908.

<sup>50</sup> R. B. Whitehead, *Catalogue of Coins in the Panjab Museum, Lahore*, vol. 1: *Indo-Greek Coins*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1914.

<sup>51</sup> B. B. Bidyabinod, *Supplementary Catalogue of the Coins in Indian Museum of Calcutta: Non Muhammadan Series*, vol. 1, Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, 1923.

catalogue covered coins from the entire north India, including those bearing the names of the rulers as well. It seems that for those cataloguing the early historical coins in the cabinets of various museums, there was no other option but to accept the geographical provenance of the coins ascribed by Cunningham. As expressed by Allan, ‘Cunningham’s attributions are almost everywhere followed even when his reasons for them are not on record. His long experience as a collector in India and his unrivalled knowledge of coins and their provenance make it very difficult to differ from him’.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, Cunningham’s studies in the numismatic history of early India have been so influential that there are few critiques of his meticulously culled information even by the present-day scholars. The reason for this overwhelming dependence on Cunningham’s studies is that unlike many collectors, he collected coins on-site.

### **Post-independence Numismatic Studies: The Categorisation Debate**

It is important to understand the nature of the political economy of the communities categorised as tribal, and ascertain how valid the nomenclature ‘tribal’ applied to them is and whether alternate terms that seem appropriate to the early Indian context may be applied. As mentioned in the previous section, Bhandarkar was the first to question the categorisation of such coins as tribal. While there were many later scholars who questioned the use of the term ‘tribal’, there were also those who considered it appropriate and continued to use it. Some of the major arguments over its usage are discussed in the following paragraphs.

D. C. Sircar found the term ‘semi independent’ more appropriate for these coins than ‘tribal’,<sup>54</sup> though, in his later writing, he preferred to use the term ‘post-Mauryan’ because the legends were in post-Ashokan Brahmi. K. D. Bajpai appears to have shared Bhandarkar’s preference

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<sup>52</sup> D. R. Bhandarkar, *Lectures on Ancient Indian Numismatics*, Carmichael Lectures, Calcutta: Department of Ancient Indian History and Culture, University of Calcutta, 1972 [1921].

<sup>53</sup> J. Allan, *Catalogue of the Coins of Ancient India*, p. lxxix

<sup>54</sup> D. C. Sircar, *Studies in Indian Coins*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1968, pp. 139–44, 204–13.

for the term janapada to an extent: in calling them janapada-type of coins, Bajpai pointed out that in the later Vedic texts, the term 'janapada' signifies a community or people of a particular geographical and cultural unit.<sup>55</sup> Thus, the term 'janapada' has the capability to define the peculiar nature of these communities without compromising the meaning.

The academic debate over the validity of nomenclature shifted to a common platform in 1968 and, then, in 1977.<sup>56</sup> Nisar Ahmed<sup>57</sup> contested the use of the term 'janapada'. According to him, janapada never had a monarchical connotation and preferred to use the terms 'tribal' and 'local' for republican and monarchical states, respectively. He also widened the scope of the 'local' coins by adding the city issues or *naigama* coins to them.

In 1977, Jai Prakash Singh explained the possible connotation of the term 'tribal': he pointed out that the criterion for the inclusion of coins under the label of 'tribal' did not depend on the geographical or ethnic affiliations of the issuing groups/communities. The distinguishing mark, according to him, is that the tribe wielded political power and its name is associated with coins. He further stated that there is a possibility of internal changes in the political structure of the tribe, but what is important is that the power continued to be exercised in the name of the community. He also explained why the term 'janapada' would be inappropriate: janapada, as he put, signifies 'an inhabited country'.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> K. D. Bajpai, 'The Janapada Coins: Their Terminology, Classification and Chronology', in A. K. Narain (ed.), *Seminar Papers on the Local Coins of Northern India, c. 300 B.C. to 300 A.D.*, Varanasi: Department of Ancient History, Culture and Archaeology, Banaras Hindu University, 1968, pp. 1–5.

<sup>56</sup> Narain (ed.), *Seminar Papers*; Jai Prakash Singh and Nisar Ahmad (eds), *Seminar Papers on the Tribal Coins of Ancient India, c. 200 B.C. to 400 A.D.*, Varanasi: Department of Ancient History, Culture and Archaeology, Banaras Hindu University, 1977.

<sup>57</sup> Nisar Ahmad, 'Basis of Classification Terminology and Some Problems', in Narain (ed.), *Seminar Papers*, p. 17.

<sup>58</sup> Jai Prakash Singh, 'Introduction', in Jai Prakash Singh and Nisar Ahmad (eds), *Seminar Papers on the Tribal Coins of Ancient India, c. 200 B.C. to 400 A.D.*, Varanasi: Department of Ancient History, Culture and Archaeology, Banaras Hindu University, 1977, pp.1–2.



Krishna Mohan Shrimali, in his study of the Panchala coins,<sup>59</sup> preferred the term 'janapada' for those coins bearing the names of the kings. He pointed out that, since the area of their circulation extended beyond the geographical confines of the Panchalas, the term 'local' is inappropriate. Also, these coins appear to have been issued by individual kings and, thus, the term 'tribal' for them is not applicable. He considered 'janapada' an appropriate term, as in the early Indian texts it was used for both monarchical and non-monarchical powers and implied territory as well as people. Also, in the traditional writings, janapada is a component, along with other elements, of a state or political organisation. According to him, the term 'janapada coins', while appropriate for the coins issued by the Panchalas, Mitras and Audumbaras, could also include those coins that bear the legend *janasya*, *janapadasa*, etc., i.e., of jana or janapada, viz., Arjunayanas, Sibis, etc.

Therefore, the type of coins that bear the legend *janapadasa*, along with the name of the janapada, denote the affiliation of the issuers to a heterogeneous political organisation or clan-based or even of a mixed type unit. As it is in the nature of the coins to be mobile, one can also note that these groups that issued these coins were also on the move. In the case of the Panchala janapada, there may have been an expansion or eastward shift, as is indicated by the distribution of Panchala coins. Western Uttar Pradesh has yielded Panchala coins that can be dated from c. 3rd century BCE onwards, but the janapada's territory seems to have expanded to the eastern region of Bihar and Bengal only post 1st century CE. The movement was not only of the coins, but was also of the people, as there are differences in the legends and the scripts used. Many scholars like Parmanand Gupta<sup>60</sup> are of a similar view about the Sibis, who may have been a janapada in the sense of a 'collective sovereignty' which comprised various ganas, and were on move. However, this issue in itself develops scope for raising various academic questions and undertaking more probings, as one needs to look at the purpose of coinage, as well as examine the functions of

<sup>59</sup> Krishna Mohan Shrimali, *History of the Pañcāla*, vol. 2, Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1985, pp. 3–4.

<sup>60</sup> Parmananda Gupta, *Geography from Ancient Indian Coins and Seals*, Delhi: Concept Publishing, 1989.

coins beyond their role as mediums of exchange and including the political, cultural and religious aspects of coin-striking.

Parmanand Gupta pointed out, on the basis of epigraphic evidence, that the Malavas, Yaudheyas, Vrishnis, etc., can be described as ganas. He further suggested that while they had a republican form of government in the 2nd and 1st centuries BCE, they seem to have continued to use the term 'gana' for themselves even when the nature of their polity may have changed. He agreed, to an extent, that janapada was sort of a 'collective sovereignty' that 'constituted political bodies', which may have comprised various ganas. Though he did not reject that the janapada may have depicted the collective constitution, he pointed out that they may have had a loose arrangement and organisation.<sup>61</sup>

Devendra Handa's work is one of the most comprehensive and recent studies of these types of coins. He considers the English term 'tribe' not very accurate, but because of its proximity, in meaning, to *jana* and because of its wide currency and popularity he uses it to connote the community. Further, referring to the closeness of *samgha* and *gana* to the republican structure of polity, he accepts the use of the term 'tribal' for these coins.<sup>62</sup>

Suchandra Ghosh questions the use of the term 'tribal' for the *gana-samgha* tradition.<sup>63</sup> She suggests that they were more advanced than tribes, as they possessed a governing system, issued coins on a large scale, issued inscriptions, and used seals and sealings. Therefore, she argues that the *gana-samgha* does not fit the definition of a tribe and does not agree to the use of the term 'tribal' for these communities.<sup>64</sup> The significance of identifying these coins as janapada coins

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>62</sup> Handa, *Tribal Coins of Ancient India*.

<sup>63</sup> Suchandra Ghosh, 'Migration of the *Gana-Samghas* of Punjab (2nd century BCE—3rd Century CE): The Underlying Factors', *Journal of the Asiatic Society*, 2012, 54(1): 45–54.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45. Ghosh adheres to Ratnagar's definition of tribe: '[A] tribe is not just a group of people that shares a common culture, a name, an ethnic identity and a language/dialect: more importantly, its members believe they are one people because they trace their origins to a common ancestor . . . tribal societies by and large have not developed economic systems that require writing. They have no formally constituted institutions of governance or administration' (Shereen Ratnagar, 'Who are the Tribals?', *One India One People*, November 2000, pp. 6–7).

and not tribal coins is in disassociating the coin-issuing groups from the characteristics of a tribe, since tribes ‘have no formally constituted institutions of governance or administration’.<sup>65</sup> Further, the geographic attribution of the coins suggests that the coin-issuing groups represented not only a society with an urban base but also a complex political body with certain administrative functions, most visibly that of issuing coins, which were considered valid medium of transactions within a territory. The association of these coins with the janapadas signifies their association not only with communities (people) but also with the geographical regions inhabited by those communities. Such territorialisation of the coin-issuing communities brings in the need to look at the geographical distribution of coins in their political and economic contexts, and to determine how safe it is to compartmentalise the coin-issuing groups in terms of their own specific geographic–monetary spaces.

### Geo-political Space and Distribution of Coins

The understanding of the Indo-Gangetic doab as a political and economic space in the study of early Indian history has evolved through time from its conceptualisation primarily as a frontier area with external impetuses as the major force in shaping politico-economic situations,<sup>66</sup> to a region with local cultural aspects and forces that shaped the economic and political aspects of the historical processes therein.<sup>67</sup> The consideration of regional aspects allow for a better and more nuanced understanding of regional impetuses and of the changing meanings of terms that denote socio-political and economic institutions and systems through time and across different regions. This region’s

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<sup>65</sup> Ratnagar, ‘Who are the tribals?’, pp. 6–7.

<sup>66</sup> Buddha Prakash, *Political and Social Movements in Ancient Punjab*, Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass, 1964; *Evolution of Heroic Tradition in Ancient Punjab*, Patiala: Punjabi University, 1971.

<sup>67</sup> Romila Thapar, ‘The Scope and Significance of Regional History’, in Romila Thapar, *Ancient Indian Social History: Some Interpretations*, Delhi: Orient Longman, 1985 [1978], pp. 317–31; B. D. Chattopadhyaya, ‘“Autonomous Spaces” and the Authority of the State: The Contradiction and Its Resolution in Theory and Practice in Early India’, in B. D. Chattopadhyaya, *Studying Early India: Archaeology, Texts, and Historical Issues*, Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003 [1997], pp. 135–52.

political, economic and ritual systems are currently understood to be an alternative to those of the Ganga Valley.

There is more or less a consensus among historians that the political structure in the Indo-Gangetic divide was non-monarchical. While the geographical positioning of this region has been considered the main reason for the rise of such formations, Thapar points to the need to understand the local cultural processes. In the context of the Punjab region, the cultural processes were driven by the region's economy. Thapar suggests that the region remained more dependent on trade than on agriculture, as evinced by the absence of land-grant inscriptions from the region in the post-Gupta period. If agriculture was of primary importance, there would have been records of either bringing wasteland under cultivation or of granting cultivated areas.<sup>68</sup>

George Erdosy<sup>69</sup> also perceives the *gana-samgha* as an alternate form of political organisation, principally documented in the Buddhist sources and not much in the Brahmanical ones because the decision-making procedure in the *gana-samghas* duplicated that of the Buddhist monastic order (*samgha*): instead of a hereditary ruler, leaders were elected for a limited term by the heads of families of the ruling lineage. He suggests that both the north-eastern and western regions of South Asia, where the *gana-samghas* were concentrated, were looked down upon by the custodians of orthodox Vedic-Brahmanical tradition of *madhyadesha* (literally, 'the middle-country', i.e., Ganga valley), who may thus have deliberately omitted the surviving oligarchic institutions from their traditions. He suggests that these oligarchies may be viewed as either antecedents of or alternatives to monarchies, even when these survived alongside the latter for over a millennium. The differences between the two forms, however, were limited to the political sphere. Like the monarchies, the oligarchies had a full complement of social classes, issued their own coins and supported significant urban centres.

B. D. Chattopadhyaya, too, perceives the *janapada* as a politically autonomous space. Critiquing the 'simplistic centralization-decentralization dichotomy' approach to political history, he argues for the need

<sup>68</sup> Thapar, 'The Scope and Significance of Regional History', pp. 322–24.

<sup>69</sup> George Erdosy, 'City States of North India and Pakistan at the Time of Buddha', in F. R. Allchin (ed.), *The Archaeology of Early Historic South Asia: The Emergence of Cities and States*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp. 99–122.

to understand the existence of ‘autonomous political spaces’, which were political spaces of authority and political operations within the structure of a state.<sup>70</sup> He also suggests that to consider that the janapadas or *ayudhajivis*<sup>71</sup> stagnated and did not go under any perceptible change would not be correct. He explains the process of change in these janapadas by way of making two arguments. First, he shows that the early historical settlements in Punjab tended to show a growing hierarchical pattern: while their total number may be around 250, the urban centres among them would be only about a dozen. This, according to him, shows the process of convergence of resources at a limited number of centres and of emergence of nodes. Second, he points out that the gana-samghas initially had warfare as their major and traditional means of subsistence, but later became part of a vast commercial network which characterised the economy of north India in general, under the rule of Indo-Greeks, Scytho-Parthians and Kushanas. He further suggests that with the changing economic relations, the political organisation of the gana-samghas also underwent changes. These gana-samghas were no longer political organisations to be found in the Ganga basin alone, i.e., the *mahajanapadas* that emerged as monarchies, but were very peculiar to the Punjab plains, some pockets of Rajasthan and the Himalayas extending till Garhwal. He contends that though the Indo-Gangetic divide was part of an extensive network of linkages that spanned from Gandhara in the north-west to the Ganga basin in the east, it still was a zone that remained distinct from both.<sup>72</sup>

While the non-monarchical janapadas and gana-samghas of the Indo-Gangetic divide are considered by some scholars as exceptions to the Brahmanical notion of state, i.e., the monarchical state, Chattopadhyaya’s argument may suggest that the conceptualisation

<sup>70</sup> Chattopadhyaya, ‘“Autonomous Spaces” and the Authority’, p. 144.

<sup>71</sup> The *ayudhajivis*, literally those who practiced warfare for living, lived in the north-western region. Their earliest mention is in Panini’s *Ashtadhyayi* (see V. S. Agrawala, *India as Known to Panini*, Lucknow: University of Lucknow, 1953, p. 475). These groups inhabited the Indo-Gangetic divide and Punjab plains and probably took up trade as an important economic activity.

<sup>72</sup> B. D. Chattopadhyaya, ‘Geographical Perspectives, Cultural Change and Linkages: Some Reflections on Early Punjab’ in Chattopadhyaya, *Studying Early India*, pp. 59–61.

of autonomous and semi-autonomous political spaces was well embedded within the Brahmanical political theories, particularly in the concept of *dharmā*, interpretable as rule or law. Pointing to the possible difference between the political approaches of the Ashokan *dhamma* and the Brahmanical *dharma*, Chattopadhyaya foregrounds the possible effect of these two in terms of state structure. While he sees the Ashokan *dhamma* as unifying and homogenous, the Brahmanical *dharma*, according to him, could best stand for accommodation which denotes multiplicity. Brahmanical *dharma* correlated with various segments of society and was variously constituted, for instance, by the concepts of *gramadharmā*, *shrenidharmā*, *kuladharmā*, *nigamadharmā*, etc. The Brahmanical *dharma* in the context of state, according to Chattopadhyaya, provides a scope for the accommodation of a multiplicity of political spaces and authorities. Indeed, ‘the king or the apex authority was enjoined to take cognizance of and maintain these *dharmas*’, by the Brahmanical texts.<sup>73</sup> Further, the nature and constitution of the apex political body did not remain similar under the rule of different dynasties, i.e., the Mauryas, Kushanas, Guptas and other early medieval kingdoms; therefore, it would be incorrect ‘to suppose that the relationship between the changing structures of the limbs of state would have remained static in history’.<sup>74</sup>

The possible autonomy of the *gana-samghas* of the Indo-Gangetic divide is also pointed out by Bhairabi Prasad Sahu, who, however, considers their autonomy as the result of their non-acceptance of the Brahmanical political institutions.<sup>75</sup> He suggests that the dominance of the *gana-samgha* political system in the Punjab plains did not provide space for the Brahmanical political institutions to flourish. Brahmanical ideology, to him, acquired a sub-continental identity largely through the spread of ‘Vedic-Shastric-Puranic’ ideas. The non-adherence of the *gana-samghas* to the Brahmanical political thought allowed them to survive as a socio-cultural organisation in the Punjab plains from the Mauryan times through the Kushana period and beyond, though with weak property rights in land.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Chattopadhyaya, ‘“Autonomous Spaces” and the Authority’, pp. 142, 143.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 147–48.

<sup>75</sup> Bhairabi Prasad Sahu, ‘Brahmanical Ideology, Regional Identities and the Construction of Early India’, *Social Scientist*, 2001, 29(7/8): 3–18.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 10–11.

The use of the term, 'janapada coins', thus, refers to the coin-issuing character of the janapadas or gana-samghas. Such categorisation developed and emerged when scholars brought to consideration varied processes at work in the Indo-Gangetic divide where the janapadas or gana-samghas thrived, such as the economic condition of the region in terms of flourishing trade; political autonomy of the region with divided centres of political activity instead of a centralised monarchy; and the autonomy of the region's religious tradition that was different from the Brahmanical tradition. All the arguments allow one to understand the context in which intensive monetisation may have emerged. However, the question that still remains is whether the autonomy of these groups can be safely interpreted as the autonomy of the monetary system, or in other words, if, as janapadas, the coin-issuing groups had monopoly over coin-issuance in their domains.

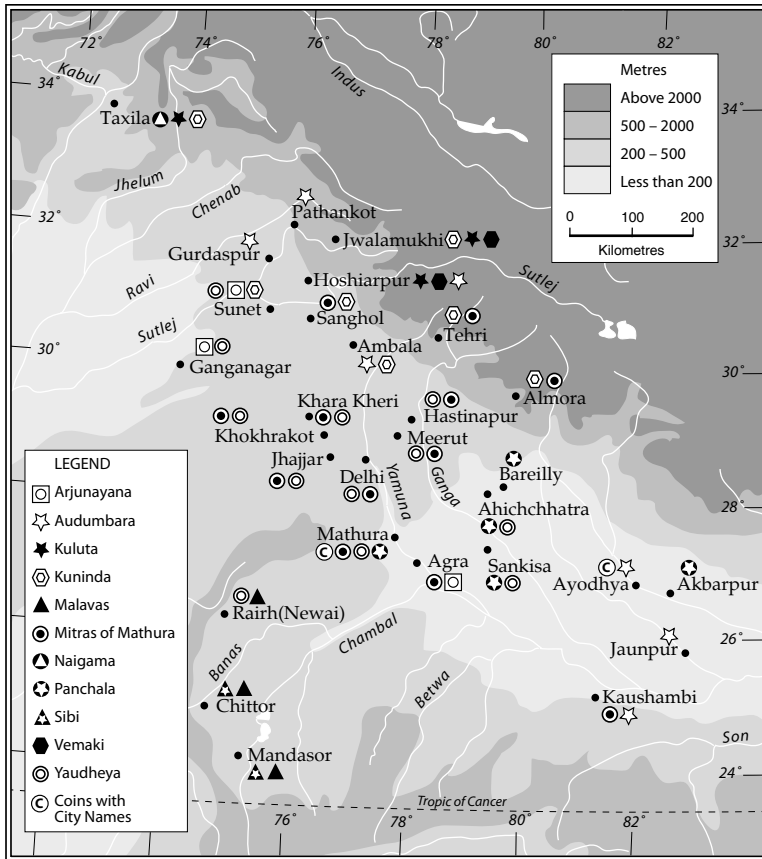
In this essay, an attempt has been made to plot the geographical profile of the region by plotting the find-spots of janapada/tribal coins. While being limited to tracing the geographical spread of the various types of janapada coins, the exercise does not overlook the fact that the region (Indo-Gangetic divide), as well as the time period (2nd century BCE–4th century CE), also witnessed the circulation of Indo-Greek and Kushana coins. This overlap in the area and the period of circulation of the janapada coins and the coins of Indo-Greeks, Kushanas and other monarchical states gives scope for more elaborate study for future. Map 8.1 shows the sites that have yielded at least more than one type of inscribed coins that have been identified to date. Even at sites, such as Pathankot, Gurdaspur, Jaunpur, Akbarpur, and Bareilly, where only one type of janapada coins has been found, the Kushana or Indo-Greek coins are also present in considerable numbers. The presence of a variety of coins from a particular region shows that the possibility of parallel use of coins issued under different communities and authorities may not be denied.

Taxila, considered as one of the most important centres of trade in early India, is marked, in the archaeological record, by the discovery of a large number of coins of different types that have been described in detail by John Marshall.<sup>77</sup> Among the large number of inscribed coins found were a number of Greek, Scytho-Parthian, and Kushana coins, as also local (*naigama*) coins and tribal/janapada coins of the

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<sup>77</sup> John Marshall, *Taxila: An Illustrated Account of Archaeological Excavations*, vol. 2, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1951.

**Map 8.1 Sites with More Than Two Types of Identifiable Inscribed Coin Finds (2nd Century BCE to 4th Century CE)**



Source: Prepared by the author

Kunindas and Kulutas.<sup>78</sup> Another prominent site is Mathura that has yielded, apart from the local Mitra coins, city coins of Ujjain (carrying the Ujjaini symbol), Panchala coins and a single Yaudheya coin — all kept at the Mathura Museum.<sup>79</sup> Besides these two, there is a large

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 750–842.

<sup>79</sup> Aruna Sharma, *History of Mathura, c. 200 BC – 300 AD*, Delhi: Om Publications, 2006, pp. 189, 191.



number of sites that have yielded coins through surface digging or explorations. For example, from Ganganagar, coins of the Arjunayanas and Yaudheyas, along with some unidentified coins, have been found.<sup>80</sup> From Hoshiyarpur,<sup>81</sup> coins of Taxila and some janapadas, viz., the Kulutas (Kangra), Rajanyas and Audumbaras, have been found. These sites have also yielded Indo-Greek and Kushana coins.

Such a clustered distribution pattern suggests a common circulation area for the coins of different janapada/gana-samgha/tribes, and thereby questions the idea of an exclusive sphere of circulation for one coin-type and the long-established notion of coin-issuance as the sovereign right of the state. This pattern also raises the possibility of circulation of various inter-linked coinages within a single a monetary system, or even the possibility of various monetary systems at work in this region.

## Conclusion

Coins constitute a distinctive source for the study of history, as they, like inscriptions, have aspects of an artefact and a text. However, when removed from its context a coin can be interpreted variously. It may be noted that the use of texts for the study of the Indian past and the use of artefacts, including coins, had been quite different in the colonial India. In the case of the former, the Western scholars could not work without the assistance of the 'native' intelligentsia (Brahmin pundits and Muslim ulema). However, in the case of the interpretation of objects like coins and inscriptions, these scholars did not feel the need for assistance from Indians, since the knowledge of ancient Indian scripts like Brahmi and Kharoshti had been long lost; or even if they did, there was no use in taking such assistance. As a result, the Indian scholars got involved in the study of coins quite late. The large number of Indo-Roman and Indo-Scythian coins captured all the attention of the Western scholars in the colonial period because of their aesthetic appeal and the curiosity to reconstruct the chronology of early Indian

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<sup>80</sup> *Indian Archaeology, 1971–72: A Review*, ed. M. N. Deshpande, Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1975, p. 70; *Indian Archaeology, 1975–76: A Review*, ed. B. K. Thapar, Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1979, p. 73.

<sup>81</sup> *Indian Archaeology, 1969–70: A Review*, ed. B. B. Lal, Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1973, p. 31.

political entities through these coins. However, to some post-colonial scholars, the neglect of indigenous coins by colonial scholars seem deliberate. As Dilip K. Chakrabarti states, '[W]estern Indology is an essential by-product of the process of the establishment of Western dominance in India'.<sup>82</sup> Their methods of reconstructing India's ancient past were motivated by the underlying feeling of Western superiority. While the 'othering' of 'natives' has been a common point of critique of colonial studies, Darryl Wilkinson has added the idea of 'othering' of things.<sup>83</sup> He argues that when objects, i.e., artefacts are studied, they are primarily used as a medium for the 'othering' of people associated with them. One has to not only identify the content of the statements and studies made about an artefact, but also the technique and method that were thought appropriate for the production of knowledge about it. One has to, therefore, be cautious in using the terminology and categories adopted by the colonial scholars for the study of artefacts, as those had their own purposes.

The cataloguing and categorisation of coins are very important stages of numismatic study, but what needs to be emphasised here is that the process of study has been restricted to these stages. In the Indian context, the study of coins primarily remains dominated by a sort of dialogue between the colonial and post-colonial scholarship and among the post-colonial scholars intended to establish more appropriate and befitting nomenclature and categories for the coins. This is reflected in the two issues discussed in this essay so far: the categorisation of coins in the colonial period, and the study by various post-colonial scholars of how valid or invalid this categorisation is. There arises, then, a possibility of strict compartmentalisation of the coins whereby the interrelationship among different types of coins or their role in the larger monetary system gets ignored. By larger monetary system what is implied here is the sphere of transactions constituted by the linkages between indigenous and non-indigenous coinages and the monetary systems which they were a part of.

It is noticeable that the texts contemporary with these coin-issuing communities do not distinguish between the coins on the basis of the

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<sup>82</sup> Dilip K. Chakrabarti, *Colonial Indology: Sociopolitics of the Ancient Indian Past*, Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1997, p. 1.

<sup>83</sup> Darryl Wilkinson, 'The Apartheid of Antiquity', *World Archaeology*, 2011, 43(1): 26–39.

issuing authority, nor do we come across any reference to the monetary systems of the Mauryas, the Kushanas, or any other dynasty. The references to money in the texts often include the mentions of denominations and weights, which may have been the method of identifying the coins in early India.<sup>84</sup> The emblem of the issuing authority served to vouch for the originality of the coins but possibly not help in their identification. For instance, in the *Gautama Dharmasutra*, we come across terms like *masha* of *sisa* (lead) to be paid as fine<sup>85</sup> and instances of fines in *krishnala* for different offences.<sup>86</sup> In the *Arthashastra*, the mode of payment and money-transfer are *pana*, *mashaka* and *kakini*, which are distinguished on the basis of their weight and metal used.<sup>87</sup> Shailendra Bhandare also distinguishes the coin-types mentioned in the *Arthashastra* on the basis of their four denominations, and calls the system ‘quadri-denominational’.<sup>88</sup> There appears to have been an easy acceptance and use of different types of coins in the pre-colonial India, until the early 19th century. The coins were identified on the basis of their weights and hardly on the basis of their issuing authorities. The only attempt that was made to establish a standardized or uniform coinage was by the British. One does not find the categorisation of coins in the texts on the basis of the issuer but that of the metal content. Nor does one find any reference to terms for denoting the coins as ‘imperial’, ‘regional’ or ‘tribal’. The large number of copper coins that

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<sup>84</sup> Edward Thomas (*Ancient Indian Weights*, London: Trubner and Co., 1874) carried out a study of the traditional weight standards referred to in various *Dharmashastras*. Cunningham (*Coins of Ancient India*), too, discussed the traditional weight standards of Indian coins. Also, see P. L. Gupta, ‘Numismatic Data in the Arthashastra of Kautilya’, *Journal of Numismatic Society of India*, 1960, 22: 13–37; Shalendra Bhandare, ‘From Kautilya to Kosambi and Beyond: The Quest for a “Mauryan/Açökkan” Coinage’, in Patrick Olivelle, Janice Leoshko and Himanshu Prabha Ray (eds), *Reimagining Aåoka: Memory and History*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012, pp. 101–06.

<sup>85</sup> *Gautama Dharmasutra* 22.23, in Patrick Olivelle (trans.), *Dharmasåtras: The Law Codes of Åpastamba, Gautama, Baudhåyana and Vasistha*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 116.

<sup>86</sup> *Gautama Dharmasutra* 12.8–16, in Olivelle (trans.), *Dharmasåtras*, p. 98.

<sup>87</sup> R. P. Kangle, (trans.), *The Kautiliya Arthasåstra*, part 2. Bombay: Bombay University, 1965, p.181.

<sup>88</sup> Bhandare, ‘From Kautilya to Kosambi’, p. 104.

are identified as the janapada or the 'tribal' coins by modern scholars may have been in circulation even beyond the respective territories of their immediate issuing authorities, on the basis of the metal content and the value ascribed to them, without much hassle, and along with the Kushana coins. The last inference can be corroborated by the finds of coins of different janapadas along with those of the Kushanas, thereby indicating a frequent overlap in their areas of circulation. It is important to question whether the territorial boundaries of monetary systems were as clearly demarcated in early India as we understand them today, especially when the coins of different issuing authorities have been found either in close proximity or, often, together.<sup>89</sup> There is a need, thus, not only to relook at the categorisation of coins but also to study coins in larger monetary spaces and not just territorial spaces.

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<sup>89</sup> There are many sites in the Indo-Gangetic doab, from where coins of different types have been excavated. For instance, the coins of the Kunindas, Yaudheyas and Mathura kings dated between 1st and 3rd centuries CE were found at Kurukshetra (*Indian Archaeology, 1970-71: A Review*, ed. M. N. Deshpande, Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1974, pp. 15,16; *Indian Archaeology, 1971-72*, pp. 23, 24; *Indian Archaeology, 1972-73: A Review*, ed. M. N. Deshpande, Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1978, pp. 12-13); from the excavation of Purana Qila, the coins of the Mitras of Mathura and of the Kushanas were found in the stratum belonging to Period II (*Indian Archaeology, 1955-56: A Review*, ed. A. Ghosh, Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1956, p. 14); from Hastinapur, the coins of the Mitras and Yaudheyas, along with the imitations of the coins of the Kushana king Vasudeva, dating from the period between 2nd century BCE and 2nd century CE were found (B. B. Lal, 'Excavations at Hastinapur and other Explorations in Upper Ganga and Sutlej Basins', *Ancient India* 1954 and 1955, 10 and 12: 5-151); and from Ganganagar district, the coins of the Yaudheyas (*Indian Archaeology, 1971-72*, p. 70) and Arjununayans (*Indian Archaeology, 1975-76*, p. 73) were found.

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