
COINS OF MUGHAL PERIOD: UNHEARD ASPECTS

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ABSTRACT

Fables about historical monuments being destroyed, old stories being fabricated and genealogies being corrected to support the cause of certain rulers find enough credibility in today's era. A major chunk of our history has been lost or dissolved due to the tampering of artefacts and sources throughout this journey. However, taking cue from William Ernest Henley's words, "Under the bludgeoning of chance, my head is bloody, but unbowed", we can always bank upon some sources to guide us through the enigma of our past. Coins are one among these sources and just like the poem *Invictus*, coins have passed the test of time and amendments. In spite of being struck by the winning ruler, coins of contemporaries never lost its value. Similarly, irrespective of the era or century, coins will always remain a valuable source for our history. However, the value increases if its Mughal coins and strolling through the archives will hopefully add more sweetness to its historical significance. Like a kaleidoscope that offers different visions from different perspectives, the aim of this paper is to find out novel dimensions in the ever existing topic and enlightening the readers with the relevance of Mughal coins in the 21st century.

Keywords: Mughal, Coin.

I. INTRODUCTION

The year A.H (Anno Hegirae) 936 paved way for a phenomenal change in the numismatic studies of our country. That was the year when the first Mughal mint was established in Agra by Babur. Since then, Mughal coins have seeped into the land of Saptasindhu and thereby becoming an integral part of all the people living here. Based on the relentless research conducted on Mughal coins since the last 200 years, we have decoded the Mughal History in an unrivalled manner. Having said that, the aim of this paper is to delve deeper and understand the difference in the facets and dynamics of these coins. A thorough study of these coins and the elements that contributed in its making definitely gives us a different perspective on the society, polity and economy of the medieval times. Do these coins represent only the economy or is there a hidden narrative that is yet to be decoded? Can the Mohur's edges depict something that the Shihansha's weight couldn't? Keeping in mind the vastness of the topic, maximum attention will be given to the unchartered collections and comparison between some important rulers.

The coins of Babur, Akbar, Shahjahan and Jehangir have all been a part of India's richest phase in terms of archaeological evidences and economy. Hence, it becomes really important to understand the nuances of the coins that were minted. Unlike humans who die even when alive, coins have the ability to revive entities that were once thought to be dysfunctional. Mughal Coinage displayed ingenuity and innovation in terms of designs and minting procedures. Mughal coin designs came to maturity during the reign of the Great Mughal, Akbar. Novelty like ornamentation of the background with floral scroll work were introduced. One can hardly imagine the late medieval Indian economy without Mughal administrative, fiscal and monetary reforms. The Mughal state was able to extend its power and influence further than any of its predecessors in all three of these areas. Nonetheless, Mughal rule over the political and economic spheres was never complete: the Mughal state was always the result of a series of compromises between imperial objectives and the Indian environment's resisting elements.

II. COINS OF MUGHAL ERA

"To express the most difficult matters clearly and intelligently, is to strike coins out of pure gold." - Emanuel Geibel.

1. BABUR

In 1483, Zahir-ud-Din Muhammad, also known as Babur ("tiger" in Persian), was born as a prince in Ferghana (now in Uzbekistan). On his father's side, he was a descendant of Timur ("Tamerlane") and Jenghiz Khan on his mother's side. For a ruler with such a rich heritage of warrior ancestors, revenue isn't necessarily a quality that

can be inherited naturally. Yet, Babur was instrumental in consolidating the Mughal economy and coinage. Babur became ruler of Ferghana at the age of 12. He conquered the famous central Asian trading city of Samarkand a few years later, only to lose it, along with his small empire, to more strong warriors. Because Babur penned the Baburnama, a very open and beautifully detailed autobiography, we know a lot about his life. It is believed that Babur's early coins originated in Afghanistan. It was called Mithqal or Ashrafi. This was a gold coin dated about 1523 CE. The importance of the coin is revealed by the fact that it was sold for over \$120,000 USD in a Swiss auction. Babur's written daughter, Gulbadan Begum describes the heaviest recorded gold coin. Babur had a gold coin produced immediately after the battle of Panipat, weighing "three imperial sers, that is 15 sers of Hind," and sent it as a gift to his court jester Asas, who had left behind in Kabul, according to her memoirs. He was overjoyed when he hoisted the Ashrafi in his hands, and he pranced around in joy, repeating, "No one shall take away this Ashrafi from me." No one!' concludes Gulbadan Begum in her journal. His coins followed the pattern of the coinage in Kabul at that time. On one side or the other, the thin Babur coins are usually quite flat. In India, silver coins, popularly known as Shahrukhi were issued under Babur and these coins were named after the Central Asian ruler Shah Rukh. The Shahrukhis were thin broad-flanged coins with the Sunni Kalima or credo in the center and the names of the first four caliphs surrounding it on the obverse. The king's Islamic name and titles appeared on the reverse, along with the date in the Hijri era and the minting town's name. The mint names on the reverse help us understand the actual extent of each ruler's domain. After the arrival of Babur, Indian coinage underwent a considerable change. "With some notable exceptions pictorial devices cease to appear on Indian coins. The inscription, which comprises the King's name and titles, the date in the Hijri era, and the place of striking or mint are now making their first appearance on Indian money on both the obverse and reverse of the coin."

'Kalima- The Declaration of faith in Islam', was another new feature which finds its origin in the era of Caliphs from Syria. However, the currency got prominence under the Mughal rule and this concept was adopted by various independent rulers. Interestingly, a few research paper highlights the influence of Hinduism in these coins too. The earlier rulers had to retain certain Hindu elements because a violent break with the past would have created economic tension. The use of Nagri script and the Sanskrit translation of Kalima were necessary to make the coins more acceptable for all the subjects.

"A spinning coin, still balanced on its rim, may fall in either direction." - Annie Proulx

2. HUMAYUN

Unlike his father, Humayun did not have the privilege of understanding the administrative and economic dynamics during his reign. By the time he became the emperor there developed internal conflicts and he was forced to leave India because of a humiliating defeat imposed by an Afghan Warlord, Sher Shah Sur. However, Humayun regained his throne in the year 1555 and he found himself a very stable economic structure left by Sher Shah Sur.

The gold mohur, the silver rupaiyya, and the copper dam or paisa were a few coins introduced by the Suri Empire. A mohur was equivalent to 15 rupees, and one rupee was equal to 46 daam, but the market value of gold, silver and copper fluctuated freely. In Persia, sources reveal that Humayun was encouraged to accept the Shia faith. Therefore, some later coins issued by the Mughal from Kandahar proclaims Shah Tahmasp as his overlord and features the Shia Kalima.

Coins do not bear the names of the mint but it is known that Humayun had his mints in Agra and Lahore. The Shahrukhi was a light silver coin weighing 4/5 grams but a rare type of silver coin weighing 9 grams was also issued by Humayun in the eastern part of Bengal.

"Just like old librarians, old coins are often more valuable than they appear at face value." - Kate Klise

3. AKBAR

"From reasons for auspiciousness, and as a chance to distribute presents upon the poor, his majesty is weighed twice a year. Several artefacts are put in the scales." - Abul Fazl, Ain-i-Akbari. Taking cue from Abul Fazl's words on Akbar it can be said with absolute conviction that Akbar was a special ruler. Various historians have glorified him for all the right reasons. However, Akbar should also be credited for his coins. Unlike his contemporaries, Akbar's coins are marked by secularism. Many of his coins feature Swastika, a Hindu symbol, as well as the

word "Kalima." There were also gold half mohurs depicting Rama and Sita. Moulana Ali Ahmed, one of the most skillful engravers was appointed by Akbar for minting his coins and he took personal interest in coinage. Akbar's Jaljalal type coins had ilahi dates on them, and many of them also included the Persian month of issuance. Specialists believe that Akbar might have struck almost ten thousand different types of coins, some of which were produced using handcrafted dies. Based on the designs, it's likely that the same calligrapher and die-makers were responsible for minting coins from a certain region.

Symbols on Coins of Akbar

Symbolism is an integral aspect of Akbar's coinage and are popular for the depiction of various animals. A gold mohur from Agra mint and a rupee from Berar mint carried a Duck on its obverse. A commemorative coin carried a Hawk that was minted after the victory over fort Asirgarh. A fish was featured in the Kalpi type coins and coins from the Hazrat Delhi Mint carried a tortoise. The Surya and the Trishu appears on one of the rupees from Hissar Firooza mint.

Gold coins of Akbar

Gold coins reached its zenith during Akbar's reign and were issued in differential weights and denominations. Sihansah was the heaviest of them all and it was equivalent to one hundred and one lal jalali mohurs or thousand rupees. Aftabi, Atma binsat, chagul, lal jalali, ilahi, rahas, and Adl gutka were coins of smaller denominations several auctions that claim a huge bounty for these coins are conducted worldwide.

Kalima set of coins were minted from the very beginning. The obverse featured "Kalima" in between the four caliphs. Reverse occupied the name and title of the ruler with a sacred wish and the date of mint. The gold coinage of Akbar underwent another substantial modification in the thirty-first year of his reign. The Ilahi creed inscription "Allah-hu-akbar jaljallah" substituted the Kalima set of coins. Five mohur gold coins of Akbar weighing around 53.9 grams were recently auctioned. In AH 985, Akbar put forth the idea of issuing square shaped coins which took a very long time to be implemented. Excluding the uniquely shaped mehrab coins, all others were circular in shape.

Silver coins of Akbar

Humayun followed the footsteps of Babur when it came to silver coins. Some silver coins named Shahrukhis weighing four grams and copper coins weighing eight to nine grams were issued too. Sher Shah Suri was the creator of rupaiya silver coin. A novel copper coin called Dam was also introduced by Sher Shah.

This Dam was later continued by Humayun, Akbar and other Mughal emperors. Humayun kept the coinage system introduced by Sher Shah Suri when he took control.

Unlike gold coins that were issued at a later stage, silver coins were issued right from the initial years of Akbar's reign. As per records, the earliest silver coins of Akbar were minted from the year AH Nine sixty two (962). Square shaped silver coins were issued in AH. 985.

The silver rupee was further divided into smaller denominations, ranging from a half rupee (Darb), a quarter rupee (Charn), and a twentieth rupee (Suki) weighing roughly 0.45 grammes. The obverse of the Ilahi silver coins of Akbar displayed "Allahu Akbar" at the top and "Jale Jalaluhu" at the bottom. Two interesting silver rupees were minted in the year from AH 987 from the Ahmedabad, Tandah and Lahore mints of the Jaljalala types which instead of "Allah-u-Akbar" bore the slogan "Akbar-u-Allah". Akbar wanted to check the reaction of the society and wanted to associate divinity with his personality. He refrained from issuing these coins from the capital city of Fatehpur as it could have possibly led to opposition from the orthodox elements.

Copper coins of Akbar

When Akbar came to power, he was a young man, and Bairam Khan was in charge of the state. Although silver coins received considerable attention, locals adapted copper coins to include Akbar's name. Hijri dates were replaced by Ilahi years in the final 20 years of his regime. The earliest copper coins struck by Akbar were comparable to those struck by Humayun. The obverse featured the name of the mint along with 'Falus', which literally meant money. "Tanka Akbar Shahi" or "Neem tanka Akbar Shahi" took the role of Falus (half tanka). The copper dam was introduced later and was associated with Akbar's system of weights. The Akbar dam weighed twenty grams and was exchanged at forty per rupee. The Akbari unit of weight "Ser" was fixed at 30

dams. Adhelah, Paulah and Damri were the fractional unit of coin. The copper coins of Akbar also featured the 'Swastika Symbol.'

In compared to other Mughal monarchs, this great emperor's coinage was seen as very inventive and artistic. Some of these are collected by coin collectors all over the world. A series of coins were minted by Akbar from the Agra mint which bear denominational terms in the legends. The denominations of one, half, and quarter rupees are called as 'Rupaya,' 'Darb,' and 'Charan,' respectively. In his descriptive account of Akbar's kingdom and governance, *Ain-e-Akbari*, Abul Fazl has corroborated these terms. This has proven to be the earliest mention of the term 'Rupaya' on a coin and the series is thus historically important delivering a numismatic context to the denomination. Rupaya developed to become the 'international currency' of the Indian Ocean region, and it is now used as India's national coin denomination.

Apart from that, the instance of a coin bearing the word 'Rupaya' was from the Ashmolean Museum collection, which is dated Khurdad 47. However, a coin was discovered that predates this by a month – Ardibehisht was the month before Khurdad – and therefore replaces the Ashmolean coin as the first instance of the term 'Rupaya' appearing on a coin. In the legend of Khurdad, Shahrewar and Di, all coins with the term 'Rupaya' are included in the last line, below the mint-name. However, this coin has it at the top. Because of these features, it is a very significant coin.

Mughal imperial coins were of unprecedented quality and quantity. The silver coins of Mughal era are known for its standard. Mints located throughout the empire struck coins to the same standard which were maintained from the reign of Akbar to the breakup of the Mughal Empire. In her paper titled 'The Reforms of the 16th century and Akbar's Administration', Marie Martin points out that Akbar's coins were based on Sher Shah Sur's coinage and monetary reforms. A special discounting and demonetizing system for silver coins was followed by Akbar. It must be noted that during and after Akbar's reign, no alloys were used. The coinage metals being as close to the pure element permitted. According to Dayell, "Mughal currency had currency." On his death, Akbar left behind ₹7 crore worth of silver coins and his holding of Mohurs were valued at ₹6.27 crore.

4. JEHANGIR

After the reign of Akbar, the Mughal kingdom probably became the richest in the world. While describing a certain person, Harsha Bhogle had once said, "He is almost a different entity, lost in his own perfection." Similarly, Jehangir creates an interesting juxtaposition in the history of Mughals coinage and hence is one of the most popular and sought after coins. The coins were so unique and scandalizing that these were lost to the biases of the society. Jehangir's coins are known for creating a romantic sensation in the numismatic world and the following examples will justify the cause.

Portrait type coins

The pictorial depiction of 'living things' is considered taboo in orthodox Islam. Since Qutubuddin Aibak's reign, all Islamic rulers in India, only used calligraphic inscriptions on their coins. With his 'portrait' coins, Jahangir defied precedent and became the first Islamic emperor to do so. Coins with portraits of his late father, Akbar were issued immediately after his death in November 1605 and even before his own coronation. Then, much to the chagrin of the orthodox Islamic clerics, between 1611 and 1614 CE, he went on to mint coins bearing his own portrait, a bold move at the time. There existed different forms of portrait coins. Some portrayed Jahangir resting his hand on a balcony, while some showed him holding a cup of flower. He is also seen seated cross legged on the throne with a Lion on the reverse. Interestingly, these were not commercially available coins but it was distributed as commemorative coins by Jehangir.

Zodiac type coins

Jahangir commissioned one of the most mesmerizing and rare coins, called zodiac coins. These coins were very ornate. According to Tuzk-i-Jahangiri, Jehangir felt like replacing the dates and months by the figure of the corresponding constellation. An attractive series of gold and silver coins representing the twelve zodiac constellations were also issued. Interestingly, each of these original designs are portrayed in the original edition of *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*. However, there is a back story to these coins as well. In her book 'Nur Jahan: Empress of Mughal India', professor Ellison Banks, a historian from Trinity College, Connecticut, points out that it was the influence of Nur Jahan which made Jahangir mint these coins.

Nur Jahani coins

By 1623, Nur Jahan had gained complete control of the kingdom, and to further solidify her position, she began issuing coins in her name. These coins were called 'Nur Jahani coins'. These coins were issued from imperial mints at Ahmedabad, Agra, Lahore, Allahabad, Patna and Surat. These Nur Jahani coins bear a couplet: "ZI HUKM SHAH JAHANGIR YAFT SAD ZEWAR BA-NAM NURJAHAN BADSHAH BEGUM ZAR" (Owing to the order of emperor Jahangir, gold attained a hundred beauties when the name Nurjahan Badshah Begum was imprinted on it) Coins issued at Ahmedabad and Kabul mints before Jehangir's formal coronation are known as "Salimi" coins. He issued gold and silver coins featuring forty six types of poetic legends. Amends were made to the design, shape and legend of the coins. He issued round and square shaped muhars of 200 to 215 grains weight. Initially, Kalima was imprinted on the obverse of the coins along with his name.

5. SHAH JAHAN

Remembered by historians as the champion of love, Shah Jahan is popular in history for a lot of positive things. After a dramatic succession battle, Prince Khurram, later known as Emperor Shah Jahan, ascended to the throne. Shah Jahan meaning the 'King of the World' was a title taken by Prince Khurram himself. With his creativity and ideology, Shah Jahan gained a reputation as an artist par excellence.

Right after the accession, Shah Jahan immediately forbade the use of coins bearing the name of Nurjahan and images of zodiac signs. Death penalty was imposed on the offender. All of these coins were melted and returned to the mint. Therefore, these coins are extremely rare. The usual practice of Kalima was followed by Shah Jahan too. Within a circle or square, he inserted Kalima inscriptions. Apart from a variety of gold and silver coins in square and octagonal shapes, Shah Jahan also issued special coins of Nisar and half Nisar for presentation. Since idolatry was prohibited according to the religion, Shah Jahan used calligraphy to design his coins. The religious sentiments, as well as the emperor's name and title, were all etched on the little space of the coin in a very elegant and precise manner. The excellence of Persian calligraphy mesmerized the audiences till date.

There was an unusual coin minted by Shah Jahan in the Balkh region that was only discovered in the 1990s and confirmed textual records of Shah Jahan's campaign in Balkh.

He was imprisoned by Aurangzeb after which Aurangzeb captured the throne and assumed the title of Alamgir. He was a champion of Islam. Fearing the defilement of the coins, he refrained from using the Kalima on the obverse. To make up for this whim, Aurangzeb earned his title on the obverse along with the names of the mint, the year and a couplet on the reverse of the coin. New mints were started at Bijapur, Ahmednagar and Solapur from where he struck gold and silver coins. The square shaped coins of Shah Jahan as well as the silver Nisar coins were continued.

III. CATALOGUE

1. BABUR



Fig 1: Silver Shahrukhi

Fig 1.1: Silver Shahrukhi

Babur's Silver Shahrukhi with Kalima on obverse and name, title of the Emperor along with mint name on reverse

2. HUMAYUN



Fig 2: Humayun Copper coins



Fig 2.1: Silver Shahrukhi

LEFT: Humayun (1st reign 1530-1540 AD), anonymous copper coins (2), Champanir mint, AH 942, 13.82g and 4.75g respectively. Obv: Arabic legend Zarb Fateh Champanir. Rev: Arabic legend Fi Tarikh Sanah and AH date in numbers.

RIGHT: Lahore Mint, Silver Shahrukhi (Mithqal), Obv: Arabic legends, The Kalima Shahada within an inner circle, the four Caliphs' names in the margins.

Rev: Arabic legends "Muhammad Humayun Ghazi" in a mihrab-shaped cartouche, "al-sultan al-a'zam" at the top & mint name Lahore at the bottom, 4.9g, 26.15mm.

3. AKBAR



Fig 3: Gold Illahi Mohur



Fig 3.1: Gold Illahi Mohur

Akbar's Gold Illahi Mohur from Lahore Mint with Illahi credo on obverse and date Illahi 39 Tir Month on Reverse.



Fig 3.2: Square Rupees

Mughal Empire, Akbar (1556-1605), square Rupees (9), Ahmadabad (5), AH991, 992, 994 (2), 995, Fathpur, AH989, Jaunpur, AH988, Urdu Zafar Qarin, alf (1000)

4. **JEHANGIR**



Fig 4: Gold Mohur

Fig 4.1: Gold Mohur

Weight: 10.73 gm. Diameter: 21 mm Die axis: 1 o'clock. Deer standing right within radiate circle. Persian legend in four sections: zar zewar dar Agra ruye yaft az Jahangir Shah Akbar Shah



Jahangir (Muhammad Nur-ud-din Salim), 1605-27, Gold mohur, Ajmer; Weight: 10.83 gm. Diameter: 21 mm Die axis: 1 o'clock. Jahangir enthroned, holding wine goblet /Radiate sun, surrounded by legends in four compartment AH date 1023 (= 1614-15 CE), regnal year 9

5. **SHAHJAHAN**



Fig 5: Silver Khani

Fig 5.1: Silver Khani

Shah Jahan (Shahab-ud-din Muhammad Khurram), 1628-58, Silver khani or shahrukhi, Balkh. Weight: 4.16 gm. Diameter: 25 mm Die axis: 12 o'clock



Fig 5.2: Gold Mohur

Fig 5.3: Gold Mohur

Shah Jahan's Agra Gold Mohur dates A.H. 1042 (1632-33 A.D.) with Kalima on obverse and names and title of the Emperor including Sahid-e-Qiran Sani on reverse.

6. AURANGZEB



Fig 6: Silver Rupee

Aurangzeb's Silver Rupee of Itawah mint dated A.H. 1102 (1690--91 A.D.) Regnal Year 34 with poetic legend replacing the Kalima in praise of Aurangzeb on obverse.



Fig 6.1: Gold Mohur

Jahangir's Libra Gold Mohur issued in A.H. 1033 (1624-25 A.D.) with image of Libra on obverse representing the month 'Dii' in Persian Caledar (left image) and reverse legend with date, mint (Agra) and regnal year 19 (right image)

IV. CONCLUSION

The paper began with a verse from William Earnest Henley's poem and to abide by the rule of circle we must end with one too. The relevance and importance of coins in understanding history has been discussed quite extensively by various historians, scholars and numismatic experts. As students of history and creators of the future, it is important for us to understand the causes of some actions that paved way for the dynamic history of our nation. Every coin has a story to tell and it is our job to decipher the most relevant narrative. After this research, it can be concluded that Mughal coins are reflective of a ruler's mindset and the empire's stability. With the help of Mughal coins we can also predict the philosophy of the state and the ideology that it stood by. Kalima became a major source of information and was successful in constructing some path breaking assumptions. However, one must take care while rating some coins as these sources can often be one dimensional and will need several other aspects to support their cause. Mughal coins have survived the challenge of time and have found ways to trickle down into our present currency system with slight modifications. While symbolism is not a major part of Indian currency, the value system and names have found a permanent place in this system. More than the coins, the situation of mints also answer a separate set of mysterious questions. The type of casting, die and melting methods also shed light on the technological developments during the Mughal era. Mughal period is remembered in history for being one of the richest phase of Indian history and the coins have done justice to that. To even imagine the circulation of impure gold coins in today's time is impossible but the great Mughal leaders ensured that the economy was in healthy state without compromising the state exchequer. Overall, it was a golden phase in India's history and these coins have strengthened the evidence. The Government of India must start new initiatives to conserve these rare coins and preserve everything keeping in mind the future generations to come. No matter how old these coins turn out to be, the menace of the years shall find and find them unafraid.

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