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COINAGE SYSTEM OF MANIPUR

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ABSTRACT

Coins have been an important source in the construction of a state's history. Coins are very much connected with the monetary history of a state and it helps in understanding the economic condition of a country in terms of its production and trade. It also provides detailed information about the political expansion, trade and trade routes. Earlier the Manipuri society practiced barter system to fulfill their needs. All business was carried on by means of barter or exchange. We have not been able to find any conclusive proof regarding the use of coin during the early parts of B.C.E. During the historical period the Manipuri king issued coins in various metals such as gold, silver, copper, bell metal, and so on. The coin's face value appeared to be the same as its intrinsic value. The paper is to examine the historical development of coinage system and to assess their roles and contribution in state economy during the pre-colonial period of Manipur.

Keywords: Barter, Coinage, Lupatanga, Sanatanga, Sel, Seri, Senjao

1. INTRODUCTION

Coins have been an important source of information in the construction of a state's history. It depicts about the cultural, economic, political and social status of a state or kingdom. It possesses many values to determine the reliable source of information in creating history as well as about the cultural and social life of the period including its economic condition. Coins are very much connected with the monetary history of a state and it helps in understanding the economic condition of a country in terms of its production and trade. It provides detailed information about the trade and trade routes. To carry out the function of trade smoothly, a standard currency system was required. The coins alone have enabled us to reconstruct an outline of their history and recover the names of quite a large number of their rulers. We have come across coins with the names of kings clearly engraved on them. So, an attempt is made to recreate how it worked in Manipur since ancient times.

Manipur is one of the easternmost states of India. It lies in between 23.50'N and 25.41'N Latitudes, and 93.2'E and 94.47'E Longitudes. The State was known as 'Kathe' by the Burma, 'Moglie' by the Cacharis, 'Meklee' by the Assamese and 'Cassay' by the Shans. It was known as Manipur since the 18th century C.E. Manipur was an independent kingdom in the North-Eastern part of India bordering Myanmar with a long history of its existence. Its geographical feature is unique and has both hills and plain topography. Several communities inhabit the State. Most of the populations are the Meiteis community inhabited in the valley area, while more than thirty tribes inhabit the hill areas.

The history of Manipur Meities is chronicled in Puyas or Puwaris (stories about our forefathers), namely, the Ningthou Kangbalon, Cheitharol Kumbaba, Ningthourol Lambuba, Poreiton Khunthokpa, Panthoibi Khongkul, etc. in the archaic Meitei script. The historical accounts presented here were recordings from the eyes and the judgments of the Meitei Kings and Maichous (Meitei scholars). Hill tribes have their own folk tales, myths, and legends. Their administrations were controlled by their clan chief under the supervision of the Meitei kings.

From the first century C.E., the Kingdom was ruled by the Ningthouja dynasty, founded by Nongda Lairen Pakhangba in 33 C.E. as an independent kingdom until 1891, when British India defeated this small Kingdom. In 1926, it became a part of Pakokku Hill Tracts Districts of British Burma until 4 January, 1947. During the days of the British Indian Empire, the Kingdom of Manipur was one of the princely states. By the late 1930s, the princely state of Manipur negotiated with the British administration its preference to continue to be part of the Indian Empire, rather than part of Burma, which was being separated from India. These negotiations were cut short with the outbreak of World War II in 1939. It regained its freedom on 14 August 1947 C.E. Later, on 21 September, 1949, Maharaja Budhachandra signed a Merger Agreement, merging the kingdom into India, which led to its becoming a Part C State. On 15 October 1949, Manipur was unified with India.

1.1. OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The objectives of the paper are to examine the historical development of coinage system of Manipur, to study their multiple systems of contributions, to examine the trend of their practice system, etc. of the period, and their contribution in state economy during the pre-colonial period. Study of this type involves a systematic examination of the historical materials. The situation relating to all the aspects of coinage system has been examined carefully using the primary and secondary data. An attempt has also been made to analyze the coinage system practice at different points of time before the colonial rules. The research work is an interdisciplinary approach considering various factors relating to agrarian economy which culminates the diverse disciplines like sociology, Political Science, Economics etc., along with indebt historical background.

2. DISCUSSION

The Manipuri society was self sufficient and provided all the necessities of life without any dependence on other countries. Barter system was practice to fulfill their needs. All business was carried on by means of barter or exchange. Money had come to be established as a standard of value during the Common Era, though exchange by barter was also carried on. Later, the old system of exchange by barter had passed away and the new system with its standard and token coins had come into existence. we have not come across any coins issued in the early part of the Before Common Era. The earliest coins which have fallen in our hands belong to the C.E. These coins were attributed to the Ningthouja Dynasty. Coins struck in copper, bell metal, gold and silver were in general use. They were punch marked on both sides guarantying their standard and fineness. Earliest coins contain a few symbols, but later coins mentioned the names of kings, god, place or date. The earliest coins of Manipur bear only figures, device or symbols but with few exceptions, no legend. The symbols were punched on the metal. The symbols were to guarantee their genuine and value. Their authorities might have been kings or states.

Trade and money can be thought of as twins. They are inextricably linked. Though the Barter system was considered, the use of coin caused a sudden change in the market. Because of the percolation of money in exchange and the degree of monetization of various sectors of the economy, the emergence of a predominantly barter economy is indicated.1 The system of barter had not disappeared together, but the use of coins as the medium of exchange was becoming general. King authorized the issuance of coins. He had the final say on coin minting. Because there was no financial institution in Manipur, the kings were very strict about the rules and regulations for issuing coins. The Manipuri king issued coins in various metals such as gold, silver, copper, bell metal coins, and so on. The coin's face value appeared to be the same as its intrinsic value. As a result, taking the weight of a bell metal coin did not allow it to be converted into a Sel. It was only distributed within the administrative territory. As a result, foreign trade was conducted using the barter system.2 The exchange of goods and services in the state was primarily conducted through barter until the introduction of British Indian currency into the state in 1891, which provided a new momentum to the state's trading activities and had a visible impact on the people's economic life.3

The use of coins in Manipur dates back to ancient times. Coins were used in the pre-Common Era, according to local chronicles such as Yakairol, Numit Kappa, Panthoibi Khongul, and Thirel Meiram Leeba.4 During that time, a small bell metal coin known as 'Seri Senjao' was used. It was only used in the internal market and for religious purposes.5 It is worth noting that, while a portion of their daily business was conducted with the sel, which was thought to have been in use since the reign of Maharaja Wura Konthouba (568-658).6

Different opinions regarding the origin of coinage in Manipur are there. King Khagemba established the coinage system in 1620 C.E. as a medium of exchange to facilitate trade in essential commodities.7 Other references to material evidence relevant to the subject argued that Nongda Lairen Pakhangba, King of Manipur from 33 C.E. to 154 C.E., issued coins.8 In support of his claim, T.C. Hodson claims that he was shown the Pakhangba coin by some Manipuris.9

In Manipur, coins were commonly referred to as 'Sel'. The Manipuris used various coins of various shapes and sizes made of bell metal, brass, bronze, copper, silver, and gold. There were three types of 'Sel' coins in circulation: bell metals (a copper-tin alloy), silver coins, and gold coins.10 The last two were simply referred to as 'Lupa tanga' and 'Sana tanga', respectively. Following the treaty between Jai Singh and the Britishers in 1763 C.E., the King made an immediate offer of 500 Maklee (Manipur) gold rupees, each worth 12 silver rupees.11 As a result, large-scale transactions began to use Manipuri gold coins known as Sana Tanga as a medium of exchange.

The introduction of gold and silver coins significantly improved external trade and commerce. From King Moramba to Nara Singh, gold coins were primarily minted to commemorate their accession to the throne and war victory. It was used for rewards, temple donations, and Brahmin Gosai. However, silver coins of one rupee, half a rupee, and a quarter of a rupee, introduced by King Chourajit, were issued for market exchange and foreign trade. However, Maharaja Chourajit Singh (1803-1813), Maharaja Marjit Singh (1813-1819), and Maharaja Gambhir Singh (1826-1834) issued gold and silver coins in very limited quantities.12

Chourajit Singh issued silver coin in the shape of a square with the same value and weight as the British rupee around 1815. Aside from coins, bartering for goods in the bazar was quite common during the early parts of the 19th century. However, as previously stated, small coins made of bell metal, brass, and bronze were only used for intra-country trade. These coins were classified into five types: (i) Senjao, (ii) Pheikak, (iii) Selyai, (iv) Selmakhai or Semkhai, and (v) Selkup. The dominance of the coin at the time was that two Selkhai made one Sel. Senjao and Pheikak were treated as if they were one Sel. The others are of equal worth. 400 Sel was converted into one British or Burmese silver rupee. However, the exchange rate changes from time to time. It is subject to the availability of foreign silver rupee. So, according to Dr. Brown, the equivalent of one British silver rupee in Manipuri coin was between 420 and 450 Sels. However, due to the security of local currency, its exchange was limited to 200 Sels during the reign of Maharaja Chandrakirti Singh (1835-1850). It's worth noting that the system for calculating the Sel was unusual. To give one example, two Semkhai created one Sel. However, 40 Semkhai are treated as 400 Sels.13

There was a shortage of local coins during the reign of Maharaja Chandrakirti Singh (1835-1850), which severely hampered internal trade. However, because there was no financial institution, there was no strict rule or policy for issuing a reasonable quantity of coins in relation to the state's economy; and the face value of the Sel appeared to be equal to its intrinsic value.14 By taking its weight, even old articles of bell metal could be converted into Sel.15 So, in consultation with the Raja of Manipur, the Manipur political agent did his best to solve the problem. Manipur's first copper coin was issued on this day. However, this Sel was not acceptable outside of the Raja of Manipur's administrative territory, forcing the state's internal trade to be conducted primarily through barter.16

A second attempt was made in Calcutta to mint the Manipuri coin. In 1862, Mr. Dillon, the Manipur Political Agent, also attempted to introduce copper coin into the state. However, Dillon's attempt was thwarted when the people of the state, particularly the women, once again refused to accept copper coin as a medium of exchange.17 As a result, the venture was abandoned.18

The Rajas and Nobles began to used the European goods after the people of the state began to establish relations with the British subjects, particularly after 1826, while the British subjects posted in Manipur were also required to take at least some native goods.19 Because there was no other common medium for exchanging native goods for European goods, they began to convert British India's currency into native coins and vice versa.20 Meanwhile, Raja Chandrakirti Singh issued an order for the equivalence of one silver rupee (British and Burmese) 400 Manipuri Sels.21 To compensate for the lack of local currency, the King minted new Sel made of Brass. In 1871, Major General Nuthall, the Political Agent of Manipur, attempted to mint the Sel once more in Calcutta. All of these efforts, however, went up in smoke.22 As a result, the Sel produced within the state remained the only acceptable currency in Manipur. It can conclude from the preceding discussion that the Manipuri had their currency from very early times, even before the Common Era, until the introduction of British currency following the annexation of Manipur in 1891. The use of currency subsidized the Barter System and gave their internal trade a new flavour Manipur until 1891.23 The introduction of silver coins once again provided impetus to increase foreign trade and exchange. By this time, Indian coins were also found circulating in neighbouring states, which aided Manipur's trade with the neighbouring states.24 Thus, the Sel, Manipur's native coin, was to be kept separate so that it eventually faded from the minds of the native people, forcing them to accept any currency put into circulation by the government of British India from time to time.25

Despite opposition from the native people of Manipur, particularly the women folk, to the new currency replacing the old tradition of using Sel, the Britishers suppressed them after taking over Manipur in 1891 C.E. by freely circulating Indian coins in the state as legal tender money. However, the people of the state initially accepted these coins on a provisional basis.26 Even in 1894, the people of Manipur protested the use of British coins in the state.

Later, with the introduction of British India coins, agricultural exports underwent significant changes. Manipur began to export a large amount of agricultural produce. Thus, Manipur's economy, which had been a self-sufficiency economy since antiquity, was transformed into a market economy which led to mercantilism. Manipur's valley area is a rice growing region, and rice is its main product. While trade between Manipur and the outside areas of Assam existed prior to 1891, large-scale export of rice did not begin until after 1891.27 Despite the lack of a well-developed transportation system, rice was transported there using bullocks and hand carts. This could be because, among other things, production of goods and services based on voluminous raw materials imported from outside appeared to be considered unviable while there was a scarcity of mineral resources accompanied by an underdeveloped transport and communication system.28 Historically, waterways were the most important mode of transportation and communication for the state, particularly for transporting heavy loads.

Clauses 2 and 3 of an agreement signed in 1833 between Maharaja Gambhir Singh and British India in the event of the cession of Jiri to Manipur discussed the state's trade and commerce. As a result of increased agricultural production and the introduction of British India coins in Manipur, trade and commerce with neighbouring countries increased dramatically. It also demonstrates that Manipur did not lack a coinage system when compared to other states or kingdoms, despite the fact that the coins were made of bell metal, a cheap metal when compared to gold, silver, copper, and so on. As a result, it clearly negates the fact that Manipur frequently used the barter system. It's also impossible that when coins were plentiful, people couldn't use the barter system to exchange goods. There might be some use of a barter system in certain necessities of daily life for people in villages and their markets, depending on their convenience. However, it did not appear that the barter system was used in the case of valuable items.

There would have been no long-distance trade or large-scale external trade if coins were scarce. Furthermore, the fact that during the reign of King Khagemba, revenue payment of paddy fields was allowed to be paid in cash in 1614 C.E. demonstrated that they had an abundance of cash on hand to pay for the revenue. So, people might have practiced barter system as well as coins according to their conveniences.

2.1. THE COIN MINTING CENTERS

There were five minting centers in Manipur. They are: Yiram Chapungpam, Leishangkhong, Heiyel, Hangkul, Thangga Ningthounai and Phoubakchao. According to Tampakloi Mashil, each resident of the Loi village Yiram Chapungpam, Leishangkhong, was required to pay 3,000 Sel per month, while Shoiyai was required to pay 1500 Sel per month.29 The same is true for the other four Loi villages. Since King Loiyamba's reign, those Loi villages that minted coins by royal decree had to pay the Royal court a fixed number of coins. According to Dr. N. Birchandra, the king appointed an officer named Sellungba to collect these coins on a regular basis with his other assistants, Selloi Hanjaba and Maroi.

Manipur had its own numerical system of 1000 = 80 coins. The number of coins submitted to the Royal each month could be calculated as: 3000 Sel each from the two divisions of Singlen and Soikan (divisions of Loi Village) for each person in the village. He had to make 3000 Sels for each person. If 1000 sels equals 80 coins, 3 x 1000 equals 3 x 80 coins = 240 coins per month. So, he had to pay = 240 x 12 coins = 2880 coins in a year. Similarly, every Soiyai villager had to pay 1500 Sels, which translates to 1000 = 80, 500 = 40 coins. As a result, 80 + 40 coins = 120 coins per month. As a result, he had to pay 12 x 120 = 1640 coins per year. So, if a Loi village community had a population of 100 in Singlen and Soikan divisions, and 50 in a Soiyai division, then 100 x 2880 coins and 50 x 1640 coins had to be paid to the king's treasury, totaling more than 288000. There are some references to Loi villages where people were required to pay tribute to the king. Whenever there was a throne accession in Kangla, the Loi village Kaodruk was required to pay Sel 500 as a tribute by each member of the village.30 This demonstrates that Sel was paid as tribute to the king, implying that tribute was paid in cash. However, it appeared from the puya that the other Loi villages were also paid tribute in various forms, primarily in kind but not in cash, with the exception of some other villages such as Yirom Chapungpam, Leishangkhong, Hayel, Hangkul, Thangka Ningthounai, and Foubakchao.31 In the TampakLoi Mashil, various other Loi villages had to pay tributes in kind as well as cash, i.e., Sel. But, the charges of Sel to these villages except that of the five villages mentioned were very low compared to them and they were not charged monthly. So, it can be assumed that these five villages were unique from other Loi villages and such, it can be justified that they were the coins minting villages of Manipur.

2.2. PROCESS OF MINTING

Coin minting in Manipur is dates back to ancient times. The procedure is extremely basic. Locals referred to the coin casting process as 'Selmaruheiba' (sel = coin, maru = pallet, heiba = casting). The metal was cast in a series of small cavities carved into iron plates. After cooling down, the small plate was removed for flattening. However, the rectangular one, known as 'Selmakhai' or 'Pheikak,' was minted differently. The raja coined this as needed, with goods or money exchanged. According to R. Brown, the metal is first cast in small pellets, which are then softened by fire and placed on an anvil; one blow of the hammer flattens the pellet into an irregularly round figure; another blow drives a punch with the word "sri" cut on it, completing the process.32 The metal comes primarily from Burma and is made up of old gongs, copper, and tin. Some of it is also obtained from the provinces of British India.

3. CONCLUSION

The study of coinage helped us to understand the social, political and economic history of our kingdom. The coins of Manipur evolved over time in terms of their shapes, sizes, value and weight. The system of barter had not disappeared together, but the use of coins as the medium of exchange was becoming general during the historical period. The old system of exchange by barter had passed away and the new system with its standard and token coins had come into existence. Coins struck in copper and silver were in general use. we have not been able to find any conclusive proof regarding the use of coins during the early pre-Common Era. Money had come to be established as a standard of value during the Common Era, though exchange by barter was also carried on. The practice of issuing coins bearing the legend and the superscription of the king in whose name they were issued become common. Earliest coins contain a few symbols, but later coins mentioned the names of kings, place or date. The symbols were to guarantee their genueness and value. The coinage of Manipur has played an eminent role in depicting the various ways of the development of trade and commerce in its history not only in internal trade but also the gradual journey of its external trade. The state revenues were also collected both in cash and kind for the convenience of the public. Thus coins of Manipur has enabled us to reconstruct the history of several ruling dynasties and also throw significance light on economic history, political expansion and trade and commerce; religion of the time and light on the art.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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