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Currency and Commerce in Transition: A Study of Mewar (9th-16th Century)

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Abstract:

The present research paper considers the changes in currency and commerce of Mewar during 9th to 16th centuries. It specifically investigates the alterations in economic structures as a result of political and cultural changes. The objective is to trace the evolution of monetary system from barter to self minted coins to standardized coins with Delhi Sultanate influence and eventual innovations by the Sisodia rulers. This study deals with the internal developments in Mewar and its connections with neighbouring regions such as Gujarat, Malwa and Delhi and situates Mewar in the context of the medieval economic history of India. Various sources are used in the study, such as numismatic sources (coins of various dynasties), inscriptions of temples and copper plates, literary sources (Veer Vinod), as well as modern sources by historians such as Dasharatha Sharma, Reema Hooja and K.D. Bajpai. The study examines the procedures of minting, the value of coins, and the state's functions in regulating weight, measure, and taxation using these materials. The analysis reflects the gradual change from a barter system to a monetary trade system, with an increasing market system and long-distance trading routes. The findings highlight Mewar's important position as a commercial centre, showcasing its economic strength and connection to broader trade networks in medieval India.

Keywords: Mewar, Currency, Commerce, Minting, Medieval Rajasthan, Trade Networks.

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Introduction

An understanding of economic history provides valuable clues to the organization of production, exchange, and the regulation of wealth in societies. As seen in the economic history of medieval India, not only material wealth but also the political, social and cultural ties can be observed. Two important areas that historians can use to trace continuity and change in a region's economies are currency and commerce. The period from 9th to 16th century offers an interesting look at the change in economic activity, as a result of political stability, external influences and local innovation in Mewar, a kingdom strategically located in present Rajasthan.

To study the 9th century it is necessary to have a glimpse of the monetary scenario of early India and early Rajasthan. Before the 9th century, the Indian subcontinent was using mainly Gupta gold dinaras and silver coins which marked standard of monetary purity. In the post-Gupta period, however, there was a decline in organised minting, and many areas (including Rajasthan) had a barter based economy and cowrie shells were used to facilitate transactions. To trade with the Gulf, Arab-sindhi silver dinar coins started to enter the Indian mainstream in western parts of the country. By the time the Guhila dynasty started to establish itself in the 9th century the area had moved away from a broken classical monetary system towards a regional economy in disarray, and thus there was fertile ground for new local monetary experiments.

The time period of the 9th to the 16th centuries, which spans approximately 800 years, is of particular interest for three major reasons in this study. Firstly, the 9th century is the political unification of the Guhila dynasty in Mewar, shifting from a more diffuse tribal economy to a more unified state which needed a state currency. Secondly, the 16th century is a good natural break point with the Battle of Khanwa (1527) against Babur, after which Mewar's economic paradigms were thrown upside down with the introduction of Mughal economic policies. Thirdly, it is important to look at this 800 year period, since the transition from early local barter to a standardised monetary system was not a single overnight event, but a prolonged negotiation in which external shocks such as the arrival of the Tankas of the Delhi Sultanate played a role, as did internal resilience such as the innovations of the Sisodas. The longitudinal perspective is essential if one is to understand the changes in the structure of the commerce and sovereignty of Mewar.

The importance of currency and commerce in Mewar is that it has two aspects. Firstly, it served as an instrument for internal economic development. Second, it was also a means of connecting with larger inter-regional networks. It was not only the movement of money that was facilitated by the development of coinage, but also more complex forms of silver and gold. It also represented authority, legitimacy and identity. In the same way, the geographical location of the kingdom had a positive effect on commerce in Mewar, because it was an important trade route between Gujarat, Malwa, and the Delhi area.

The purpose of this research is to trace the evolution of the currency and minting system in Mewar, to analyse the evolution of commerce and markets during this period and to situate the changes in the broader field of the economic history of medieval India. The method is descriptive and analytical and both primary and secondary sources are used.

The sources are primary sources such as coins issued by the rulers of Guhila and Sisodia, inscriptions from temples and copper plates of grants and economic transactions, and literary works such as Veer Vinod. In addition, there are important interpretations and comparisons by secondary sources like that of notable historians Dasharatha Sharma, Reema Hooja and K.D. Bajpai. All these sources together provide a comprehensive picture of the economic setups in Mewar and the contributions they made to the survival of the kingdom in a wider political and cultural context of medieval India.

Historical Context of Mewar

Pre-16th century History of Mewar serves as a foundation for economic development of Mewar. Politically, the Guhila dynasty, initially ruling the region from Nagda, then in Chittorgarh, began

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their rule. The transfer of capital to Chittorgarh was a step towards security and establishment of a central power that could control the trade and communication routes (Sharma, 1990, p. 112).

During the late 13th century, a branch of the Guhilas known as Sisodia emerged, making Mewar more of a dynasty. The Sisodias, despite a constant attack by the Delhi Sultanate who wanted to dominate the key trade routes from Delhi to Gujarat and Malwa, claimed their independence (Chandra, 2004, p. 85). Mewar suffered from some problems over the years, but the strong will of the ruling family ensured a high level of independence. This independence expanded in 15th and early 16th century by Rana Kumbha (1433-1468) and Rana Sanga (1508-1527). Not only did they develop military strength but they also claimed power by controlling the economic activities and issuing coins (Ojha, 1932, pp. 210–215).

The trade and communication centres were naturally located at Mewar as a result of its location. Its rugged topography and fortified capitals ensured its security and its proximity to the ports of Gujarat, the fertile lands of Malwa and the political hubs of Delhi tied it to the trade routes. These routes facilitated the exchange of goods and ideas, and opened Mewar to external financial networks. Its mineral wealth, particularly in copper, zinc, and iron, supported an economy and the agriculture sector supplied food and surplus for regional and local markets.

The economy of Mewar was also greatly influenced by the social and cultural context. Temples, pilgrimage centres, and fairs were important centers for religious practices and trade. Art, architecture and religious institutions became more strongly supported by the royal administration which brought more wealth to these centres, creating dynamic trade and redistribution networks. Political, geographical and cultural influences combined to create the currency and trade that developed in medieval Mewar.

Phase I: Formative Local Economy and Early Monetization (9th–12th Century)

The roots of a different monetary tradition in Mewar are to be found in the Guhila dynasty in early medieval times. The coins minted by the Guhilas, based on archaeological and numismatic evidence, were probably mostly copper and silver. The coins were a symbol of political power and a need for expression of economic necessity. Copper was frequently used for everyday use, particularly in farming and local markets. On the other hand, silver was used for higher value items and was used for trade with neighbouring areas (Bajpai, 1992, pp. 55–57).

A notable aspect of these coins was their symbols and legends written in Nagari script. The legends usually contained the names or titles of the rulers and religious or cultural signs like pictographs of gods, symbols of the sun, or lucky symbols. These images were not merely for decoration but also as a way of saying "legitimate" and "legitimate sovereignty" and "legitimate divine approval." The presence of political power coupled with cultural identity in Rajput coinage of this period illustrates the linkage between the economic and religious spheres, as Reema Hooja (2006, p. 240) remarks.

The purpose of this stage is evident in the study of the Guhila coinage, and it has been the primary aim of all the local agrarian markets: to bring them into line with a central authority and give them a distinct regional identity. This goal, however, was only partially achieved. Despite their rich symbolism, the use of Guhila coins remained mostly limited to local areas. Like in the north, they did not have the general acceptance of modern Indian coins like Gurjara-Pratiharas or later when the Delhi Sultanate was established. These limited circulations indicate that although the Guhilas were able to establish a local monetary system, the coins were not yet widely used in fares and trade (Sharma, 1990, p. 88). The economy still heavily relied on barter for bulk exchanges. Nevertheless, these early coins were to become the foundation for Mewar's monetary system, and the gradual transition towards a more organized economy.

Phase II: External Shock and the Dual-Monetary System (13th–14th Century)

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The 13th and 14th centuries were the critical period in the monetary and commercial life of the state of Mewar, when the state began to be influenced by the Delhi Sultanate. The Sultanate advanced its influence over the northern part of India, leading to the adoption of new currency systems and altering the currency exchange dynamic in even the oppositional Mewar. In the commercial activities of the northwestern part of India, the use of Tankas (primarily silver coins) and Jitals (copper and billon coins) increased eventually leading to a new form of standardized exchange (Chandra, 2004, pp. 87–89). The most obvious manifestation outside of the influence was the introduction of calligraphy and epigraphic style on coins, which was of Persian-Arabic origin. The inscriptions, in both Persian and Arabic, emphasized the power of the Sultan and the legitimacy of Islamic rule politically (Goel, 2001, p. 142). The styles were also different from earlier Nagari inscriptions and religious symbols on Guhila coins, indicating a new monetary culture, transcending regional identities.

In this period, Mewar did not issue new indigenous currencies to withstand that of the Sultanate but rather the local markets were used with foreign currency. The purpose of accepting the coins of the Sultanate was to maintain the important trade routes with Delhi and Gujarat, even in the face of continued military rivalry. An examination of this adaptation shows this was an extremely successful adaptation for commercial continuity. It was easy to accept the coins issued by the Sultanates in the local markets because merchants used to travel from one place to another including between Delhi, Gujarat and Malwa, and preferred standardized coins. The coins of the Sultanates were accepted in the local markets, because the merchants used to travel (between Delhi, Gujarat and Malwa) and preferred standardized coins (Hooja 2006, p.255). This facilitated the easier trade on long distances, and helped in connecting Mewar with the caravan routes to the north of India and the western coast. It illustrates an intermingling of regional identity and broader commercial ties, and that economic obligation frequently trumped political confrontation.

Table 1: Chronological Catalogue of Key Currencies in Circulation in Mewar (9th–16th Century)

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Name/Type of Coin	**Circulation PerioD**	**Metal Used**	**Volume/Value Metric**	**Primary Use & Objective**
Early Guhila Dramma/Coins	9th–12th C	Copper & Base Silver	Low to Medium (Local)	Local daily transactions. Objective: Establish local economic authority and facilitate agrarian trade.
Delhi Sultanate Tanka	13th–14th C	Silver	High (Standardized)	High-value inter-regional trade. Objective: Facilitate trade with Delhi-Gujarat corridor due to lack of equivalent Rajput silver coins.
Delhi Sultanate Jital	13th–14th C	Copper/Billon	Medium	Everyday small trade. Objective: Filling the void of small-denomination local coins during political instability.
Sisodia Gold Coin (e.g., Rana Kumbha issues)	15th–16th C	Gold	High (Prestige)	High-value state transactions, hoarding. Objective: Project imperial sovereignty and Rajput cultural pride against Sultanate powers.
Sisodia Silver Rupee/Drachm	15th–16th C	Silver	Medium to High	Long-distance trade (Malwa, Gujarat). Objective: Boost merchant confidence and replace foreign silver coins in regional markets.

Phase III: Sovereignty, Standardization, and Economic Expansion (15th–16th Century)

Mewar came together under the Sisodia family in the 15th and 16th centuries. The rulers during this period, unlike all previous ones, provide their own imaginative designs into the coinage with a strong political and economic agenda: to establish absolute sovereignty and secure the economic losses from foreign currency. The gold, silver and copper coins were systematized by the Sisodias. Gold coins were minted and used for high value transactions and bought to represent prestige. A rarity was silver which was the preferred medium of larger transactions; copper was critical in local transactions conducted daily (Bajpai, 1992, pp. 78-80).

It was a great innovation to add Rajput symbols and legends to the Nagari script. These coins were sometimes adorned with religious and cultural motifs such as a sun image, symbols from a temple, or a deity, which helped to associate currency with religious and cultural authority. In case of Hooja this was a clear expression of the Rajput identity and independence and thus illustrates the economic and ideological functions of the coin (Hooja 2006, p. 263).

A closer look at this stage shows that the goal of the Sisodias has been met. The rulers of Mewar were capable of minting their own coins with their own symbols, asserting their independence from outside rulers and regaining power of the local markets. Rana Kumbha (1433–1468) and Rana Sanga (1508–1527) were significant periods in their reigns. To create an impression that he was the patron of religion and watchdog of the Rajput traditions, Rana Kumbha used coinage (Sharma, 1990, p. 141). Even during the political tussles, Rana Sanga asserted his sovereignty in terms of coinage (Ojha, 1932, p. 312-315). The new system of standardized, multi-metal currencies directly added to the confidence of the merchants, and helped in the local mandis (markets) to boom and successfully replacing foreign coins in transactions in the region that helped in funding Mewar's military campaign against Mughals.

Minting Techniques & Technology

This medieval minting techniques of Mewar demonstrates the production of money and its transformation in the context of political and economical changes. The hammered method was the main one used for coin making in Mewar like in many parts of India at this time. This is the method where an unengraved metal block was wedged between two engraved dies and hammered to produce the design. This caused irregular shapes and misaligned impressions of coins, but would permit rulers to produce coins rapidly and in great numbers (Bajpai, 1992, p. 91-93).

To get inscriptions and symbols on the coins, the process of die-striking was used. They were typically made from two separate dies; the upper one with the name or the title of the ruler and the lower die with the designs of religious or cultural motifs. The common features of the coins of the Mewar state were inscriptions in Nagari, solar symbols and temple emblems. The following features illustrate not only how coins were used to facilitate commerce but also to transmit political and cultural messages (Hooja, 2006 p. 270).

There is also evidence of local mint towns under the rule of both Guhila and Sisodia rulers. However, though very few details are available regarding their exact location, numismatic finds around Chittorgarh, Kumbhalgarh and Bhilwara indicate possible hotspots of minting activity related to royal power and local markets (Sharma, 1990, p. 152). These coins had been made in these centres, both for use and for trade, and connected administration with economic life.

As technology developed the minting process became improved over time. Sisodia coins of the late 15th and 16th century had more uniform weights and clear inscriptions compared to the earlier coinage. This improvement was due to the improved die engraving and quality control. Standardization and trust in currency was not only essential for increasing trust of people in the currency but also played very important role in Mewar's relationship with long-distance trade, where reliable coins were essential (Goel, 2001, p. 148).

Overall, Mewar's minting techniques were a combination of old-fashioned hammered methods and continuous enhancements, providing continuity and adaptability. The changes underscored regional confidence in money and technology's relationship to political power in the region's monetary history.

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Commerce & Market Systems

The geographical position and the connection with regional trade routes were the dominating factors for commerce in Mewar from the 9th to the 16th centuries. This was one of the most significant roads that linked Delhi, Ajmer, Chittor and Gujarat. This path connected all the political strongholds of the north and the economic hubs of the west coast of India. These were the trade routes for caravans of textiles, salt, metals, and luxury products. Mewar's fortresses, particularly those in Chittorgarh exerted duties collection as well as protection functions as regulatory centres (Sharma, 1990, pp. 160–162).

In the kingdom, trade flourished in the form of mandis, fairs and pilgrimage markets throughout the area. The capital, Chittor was the main centre for administrative and commercial purposes. Bhilwara is an example of a town that developed into a hub for textiles. The medieval period religious fairs of Nathdwara attracted the worshipers and traders, and later on it became a popular pilgrimage place for Vaishnava. The combination of religious activities and economic trade extended the reach of goods and money to transcend local boundaries (Hooja, 2006, p. 285).

Another important feature of Mewar's trade was the link between the urban and rural markets. Excess agricultural produce was transported from the villages to the mandis in towns, and artisans' produce was transported to the countryside from the mandis. This mutual exchange relationship made it possible to maintain the economy and to move the local products and goods from far away. In terms of the regional economy, there existed multiple layers with village markets feeding into larger urban markets and fairs, which connected local markets to wider networks.

One of the peculiar features of the trade in Mewar was the prominent position of banjaras, merchant and money lenders. The Banjara were groups of nomadic traders who traded in bulk commodities such as grain, salt and metal in long-distance trade. Merchants served as intermediaries, aiding local producers in their access to larger regional markets. The money-lenders were one of the most important providers of credit facilities, which were advanced for agricultural and trading purposes. Chandra (2004, p. 112) points out that these groups had an important role to play in maintaining circulation of money in an economy that was primarily agricultural, even in periods of political instability.

This arrangement gave Mewar a wide range of and an adequate number of commercial networks. The commerce in Mewar linked pilgrimage, urban markets, and rural production to long-distance trade routes, thus contributing to the internal stability as well as the connection to the broader economic framework of medieval India.

Commodities in Circulation

During 9th to 16th centuries, Mewar's economy prospered on a variety of commodities. This is a variety of the region's ecological differences, and of its trade networks. The primary sector, agriculture, was of fundamental importance, producing for local markets and export. Local markets were mainly dominated by grains, pulses and oilseeds, catering to the local village shops as well as regional mandis. The Banjaras typically carried their surplus produce to the urban areas such as Chittor and Bhilwara, where it served the needs of the people and armies (Hooja, 2006, pp. 282–283). Oilseeds and their products were especially significant, as food, fuel and for ritual purposes.

Mewar also had a large resources of minerals and metals which contributed significantly to the economy. The Aravallis were mined for copper and zinc. Salt was imported from various nearby locations, such as Sambhar. These were necessary to the local community and for regional trade. Mineral resources were also an essential strategic asset for Mewar because of minerals being needed for making coins, weapons and crafts (Sharma 1990, p. 174). These resources also contributed to the increased use of currency, as exchanges were needed for trading.

The elite economy and the military economy were affected by various imports brought into East Africa by long-distance trade. Horses of Central Asia were very expensive, being essential for the cavalry of the Rajputs. Silk, fine textiles and precious goods from the Gujarat region and the Indian

Ocean trade network were other luxury imports (Chandra, 2004, p. 117). These goods were designed for the members of the aristocracy and indicated Mewar's links with the outside world.

Mewar was also famous for her good exportation. In the fertile regions, opium was an important trade product. Stone of the Aravallis was extensively utilized for various construction purposes and was also sold for the construction of temples and forts. Local craft items like textiles and metal products too had international markets within the region (Ojha, 1932, p. 298).

In general these commodities reflect the dynamic status of basic, resource oriented and luxury trade in Mewar. Their distribution helped in propagation of the economy and also helped them in connecting with bigger commercial and cultural exchange in medieval India.

Transition to Monetized Economy

Mewar had a marked shift in its economic system from a barter-based economy to one based more on coinage between the 9th and 16th centuries. Goods like grain, cattle, and other necessities were sometimes exchanged for each other in local markets in early medieval times. The coins of Guhila copper and silver were followed by the innovations of the Sisodia rulers which provided a more reliable means for trade. As Bajpai (1992, pp. 85-87) noted, coins were a regular part of life, playing a crucial role in linking local economies with other commercial trade networks.

An important phase in this shift was the unification of weights and measures for easy calculation of the price of goods. Grants are often described on the walls of the temples and on copper plates in terms of units. This is indicative of the gradual shift to a uniform measurement of the economy (Sharma, 1990, p. 180). During the 15th and 16th century, the emphasis was laid on having regularity in taxes and trade by the Sisodia rulers. The uniformity of coin weight and inscriptions helped gain public confidence in the monetary system, which led to its utilization in both local and long-distance commerce.

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This change also relied on the tax regime enacted by the state. Duties were collected at checkpoints and market area, and octroi taxes levied on entry into towns. These tax systems were not only revenue-producing for the monarchs, but also allowed the state to assert more power over economic activity. Some products were royal monopolies because of their high values and their strategic importance, such as salt and metals. Such monopolies were prevalent in the Rajput states where rulers exercised control over important resources as a policy of economic and political management (Chandra 2004, p. 122).

So, the transition to monetized economy in Mewar was no abrupt change of barter but an evolution. The introduction of standard coinage, its control of trade, and its taxation of states introduced a more monetized system which helped maintain the internal stability of Mewar and also linked it with wider trade networks in India.

External Trade & Interaction

Location of Mewar near Delhi, Malwa, and Gujarat affected their involvement in foreign business activities. Such routes allowed for the movement of goods and imposition of transit taxes on the merchants and facilitated additional revenues and control over the trade routes (Sharma, 1990, p. 185).

The main trading partners of Mewar were Gujarati traders. In addition, the ports of Cambay and Khambhat facilitated the movement of trade goods from Mewar to the Indian Ocean. The exports included stone, minerals, and opium, while the import comprised high-quality fabrics and silks. Agricultural produce and horses were imported from Malwa, while Mewar's connections with Delhi helped open up northern markets (Chandra, 2004, pp. 126–127).

Besides, there was a link between Mewar and trade networks that brought products from Central Asia through the desert area. Importing of horses played a crucial role in supporting the efficiency of the cavalry, and thus the horse trade could be regarded both as a necessity and a tool for military activity. Caravan merchants had to pay duties at the fortifications located in Rajasthan (Hooja, 2006, p. 291).

Thus, Mewar acted as both a supplier of resources and a mediator of long-distance trade. Its connections with regional and global commerce strengthened its economy and increased its strategic importance in the political landscape of medieval India.

Discussion & Comparative Perspective

The analysis of Mewar's monetary and commercial history during the specified period can be enriched by comparing the region's economic practices with those of neighboring Rajput states or the region as a whole. Both Marwar and Malwa participated in trading and issued coins, but only Mewar consciously chose the means of using coinage as a tool of political independence. The representatives of the Sisodia dynasty, for instance, chose Nagari and Rajput scripts and signs, whereas most of their neighbors used Persian-Arabic ones (Hooja, 2006, p. 263).

As for trading, Mewar possessed certain similarities with other Rajput regions as it was based on the agriculture surpluses, markets, and handicrafts production; however, the location of the region between Gujarat, Delhi, and Malwa determined a special advantage of Mewar in terms of its position as an important trade passage. It ensured a higher level of external contacts for Mewar in contrast to some other regions that did not have such advantages (Sharma, 1990, p. 188). At the same time, Mewar differs from Gujarat since it had an opportunity to trade the interior goods rather than sea products from the coastal territories, which included mainly mineral products, stone, and opium.

This comparison highlights the relationship between political conditions and economic development since under strong rulers, including Kumbha and Sanga, both trade operations and minting processes increased, whereas in case of political instability due to relations with the Delhi

Sultanate and later with the Mughals, trade suffered and trust in currency became lower (Chandra, 2004, pp. 129-130).

Conclusion

It becomes clear that the period under review saw a gradual transition from the use of barter and copper coins used by the Guhilas to a more complex currency system that comprised various metals and was developed by the Sisodias. Although the Delhi Sultanate used standard Tanka and Jital currencies, Mewar continued functioning independently and minting coins with inscriptions in the Nagari script along with Rajput signs, thus turning coinage into both economic tool and political identity of the state.

Trade in Mewar was developing via networks of villages, mandis, fairs, and vast routes that connected Mewar with Delhi, Malwa, and Gujarat. Local bazaars were developing due to the exchange of agriculture produce, minerals, and craft. Opium and stone exports made Mewar part of wider commercial relations, whereas horses and textile were imported according to the demands of aristocracy and army.

Economic prosperity coincided with times when Mewar had powerful leaders such as Rana Kumbha and Rana Sanga; foreign interference usually disrupted trade activity. Nevertheless, when compared with other Rajputs, Mewar enjoyed certain advantages associated with strategic position and effective use of monetary symbols. Overall analysis of the period of eight centuries shows that the currency system of Mewar was a dynamic tool for economic sovereignty amidst other states rather than a mere mechanism of commerce.

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