

# OPIUM MONEY

THE KACHCHA COINS OF THE

GREATER MALWA

INDIA



Original Work by

**BARRY**

**TABOR**

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## FOREWORD

The body of works is a collection of articles, some published others just notes, prepared by Barry Tabor of Cambridgeshire. Barry was an astute collector of coins of the great Sub Continent over many years. He was also a writer on Indian numismatics. Barry often brought a fresh view to areas that had either been under researched or had shown structural inconsistencies in presentation.

Unfortunately for numismatics he is now lost to the cause. Presenting alternative views to the currently held ideas is often fraught with danger and those who do so are often the subject of unbridled criticism and it is often only for criticisms sake. Barry's major collection is now dispersed.

Fortunately some of his research has been saved. Along with the publication of the many coming works of Tariq and Needham, the completed works to be formally published by the great Indian publisher Manohar Publishers, [tn research](#) will publish over time many of the notes made by Barry on various aspects of Indian numismatics. [tn research](#) will also publish research by others that may not be considered "main stream" enough to be formally published by our publisher or work that requires further cooperative research before such publishing.

The loss of Barry to numismatics is a major blow. Many other writers have much to offer and publish but feel constrained by real or perceived pressures from the numismatic community at large. They fail to make their precious work available to all. The time is long overdue for these researchers to throw off these perceived constraints (and often the fear of unwarranted criticism) and publish for all the numismatic community to benefit. [tn research](#) offers a pathway for this to become a reality.

Arthur Needham

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## Introduction

It may seem a little strange to those not involved in Indian numismatics why papers written on a highly contentious and enigmatic section of Indian coinage would be published at all. However within the breadth of these works lurks the hidden spirit of the Indian trader and business man. In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century the Honourable East India Company (EIC) had worked its way up the Ganges Valley from Bengal to be in control of most of that region. Outposts were held in other areas ostensibly for trade but the control of all of the great sub-continent held the hearts and minds of those who drove the forward. India was a land of great wealth and that wealth could be converted for the betterment of both the EIC and Britain.

The opium poppy had been introduced into India perhaps some time in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The great Akbar ensured it was providing solid and growing revenue for the empire. However by the time the EIC was gaining control international trade with the countries further east was an established. The greatest and possibly the most exploitable market was China. The EIC was a great opportunist and exploiter. Britain had a problem with trade with China. The balance was in China's favour and the settlement in silver became a drain on Britain's finances despite the industrial revolution beginning to give the great financial strength to Britain that made it the financial powerhouse of the world.

China could be exploited and the product to exploit it was opium made from the poppies grown on the plains of the Ganges where it had been grown for centuries. The opportunity was seized and the EIC rushed into the Chinese market through its ventures in the south. There was question about legality because the trade was illegal. Legality or otherwise rarely stood in the way of an opportunity to be seized by the EIC. The EIC had a production source and a market that it could exploit and nothing in reality could stop it at this time.

Within India the EIC brought British order to systems that it neither understood nor wanted to understand. It was the British way or nothing. All the systems were reformed including the currency system or at least the currency system within the provinces in India directly controlled by the EIC. However following a series of wars in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century various other forms of governance controlled large areas of India. Although now technically subservient (for want of a better word) to the EIC this multitude of large and small states frequently did what they please in certain areas.

Within the opium trade the EIC believed it help complete sway in India and was reinforcing its premier

supplier position in China. But even in the early 1800's some of India including the central inland west was largely unexplored, unmapped and despite various treaties uncontrolled or more to the point uncontrollable in certain aspects of their day to day activities. It was in this area and to be more precise in the greater Malwa region that the monopoly on opium supply in India held by the EIC was effectively challenged. Appended to the introduction are three maps displayed in high definition. These maps courtesy of the David Rumsey Historical Map Collection show the progress of the EIC knowledge of these territories

(These maps are in comparative high definition and can be magnified). The first map of 1804 shows an almost complete lack of knowledge of much of the area adjacent to the EIC interests around Bombay (Mumbai) and certain other areas. The 1825 map shows a clearer understanding of the major centres and the later map is almost complete. So up until the 1820's the EIC had little practical knowledge of the greater Malwa despite having made specific treaties and divisions of power within the territory.

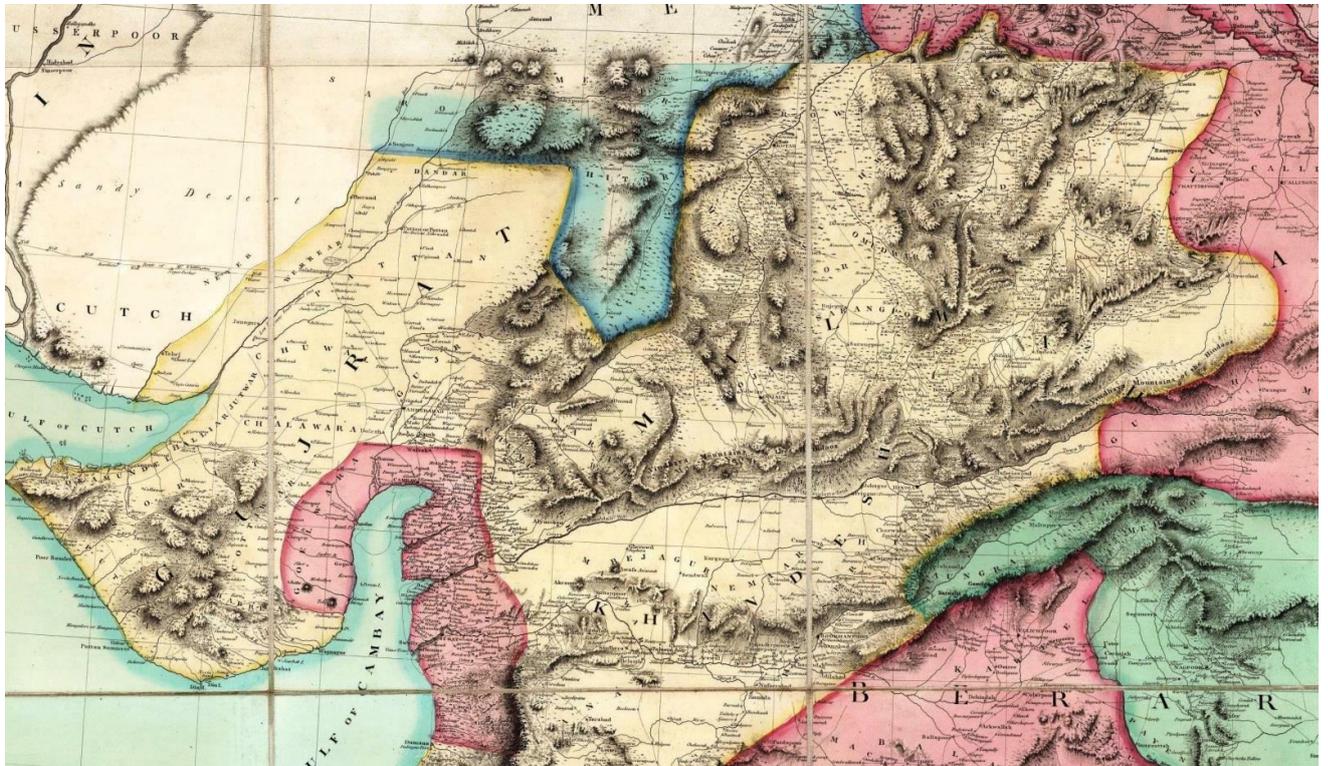
Barry tabor describes the differences between the Malwa opium trade and the fully controlled EIC trade based in the Ganges valley and Bengal. However in the comparative wilds of the Malwa where smuggling was rife (and disturbances still frequent) a number of Indian business men stepped up to ultimately control the flow of opium out of India and to China. It was these business men with century's old traditions of international trade and a comprehensive knowledge of the ways, means and pitfalls of doing business in Malwa who forged alliances with the new powers in Bombay. These new powers that included the precursor to the great Jardine Matheson group worked through the EIC system based mostly in Bombay. It was easy to transport and distribute the opium by the better known and protected highways to the major ports rather than the smuggler's roads mostly further to the north. Despite having to pay taxes there was much profit in the procuring and marketing of opium.

One such giant of the trade was Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy. Born in Bombay but introduced to the opium cotton and opium trade through the EIC in Calcutta (Kolkata) he returned home to ply his trade in opium and other commodities through judicious partnerships with emerging British companies daring to take on the EIC at their own game. The Malwar opium challenged in quantity the totally controlled EIC trade in the east. Jamsetjee became a millionaire, a knight of the British realm and later was awarded a baronetcy for his philanthropy. He was a great Indian business man.

In the wilds of Malwa despite the agreements with the EIC the coinage situation could be described, at best, as being unclear. The small semi-independent states could produce coinage in all metals but with the huge amount of money needed at the poorer end of the financial system, the peasant farmer, who existed off loans and advances made by middle men in order to coerce him to sell his end product to them was not generally provided for by the lawful mint and coinage system. It appears that people were prepared to make a quick profit out of producing copper coins or at least something that could be passed off as coinage if only on the basis of value of weight of metal in the product. The peasant farmer had few options other than to take what was offered to him in the form that was offered. Production of copper coins (or something that might resemble any coin of the time) was a simple process. The peasant farmer was kept happy and the minter made a profit. The financial wheels were greased by these coins or perhaps tokens but whatever they were they present a fascinating side to the coinage of India at a time when the EIC rode high and even later when India was in sense a British colony.

The great British system was circumvented by local need and perhaps local greed. It is these copper coins, minted in haste and in all probability on the wrong side of legality, which we investigate here. They are at best difficult and at worst impossible to make out but given

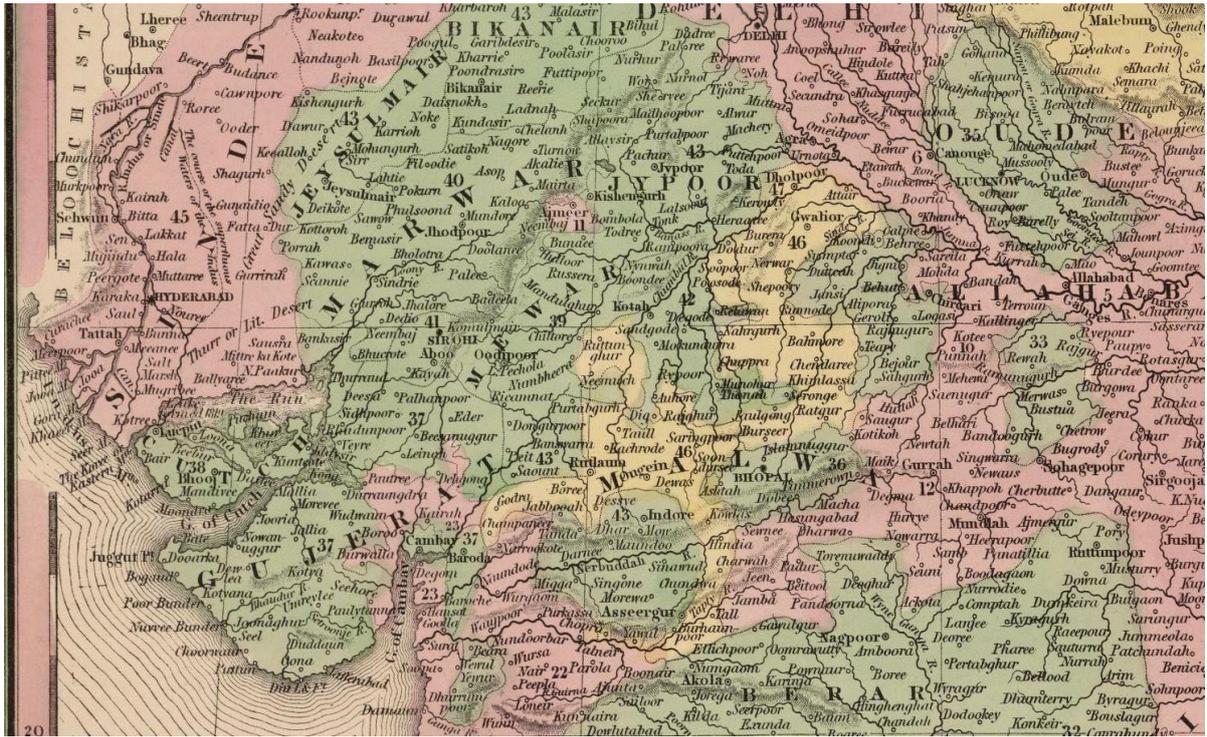
that they were at the very heart of being India at a time when such a thing was frowned upon by the British they deserve study and somehow understanding. It showed a true entrepreneur's spirit in their existence and it was an existence that was necessary to facilitate the orderly production of the opium.



1804 Official EIC Map of the Malwar



1825 Map of the Malwa



1850 Map of the Malwa

## A brief introduction to the Copper Coins of the Opium Trade in Malwa.

### The Background.

It has frequently been remarked that a prolific copper currency consisting of often crudely stamped, lightweight copper coins are found all over central India, Malwa, and beyond. Much of it is undated and bears little or nothing in the way of diagnostic or even readable legends. It mostly dates from the 1780s to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the bulk of it being attributable probably to about the middle half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A sizeable proportion of the coins are copies of earlier and contemporaneous series struck in states nearby to where these copies appear to have circulated. Because of the perceived 'defects' of being largely dateless and without meaningful legends, they have been practically ignored by students and cataloguers, and most have been treated as poorly struck specimens of catalogued Durbar Mint coins, or as forgeries, or otherwise remained unattributed. Find spots, when known, appear to indicate a mainly local circulation for these crude, lightweight coppers <sup>(1)</sup>.

There are two discernible and overlapping periods during which such coins were struck. Dated coins of the first batch are found to belong to the period of greatest empire building activity of the Marathas. Slightly different dates apply to this phenomenon in different areas, as the Maratha armies of conquest moved mainly northwards from western Deccan to Hindustan, reaching and affecting the pre-existing states at different times. At least so far as Malwa and central India are concerned, these coins, says Shailendra Bhandare "Should be regarded as a 'deep monetisation' vestige of 'Troubled Times' or '*Gardi ka Waqt*' precipitated by the Sindhias, the semi-independent barons of their courts, the Nawabs of Bhopal and various Pindari bands." Malwa history, of course, fully supports that proposition. The '*Gardi ka Waqt*', then, was caused by Maratha (mostly Sindhia) activities, and much of the resulting coinage is actually of Sindhia and closely related origin. They were clearly struck at a substantial number of mints and primitive workshops, and in many styles. Not all of them are likely ever to be fully attributable, but a Sindhia connection appears likely in many cases.

The second batch of crude, lightweight coppers, consisting of mostly Malwa issues, can be dated from about the last years of the '*Gardi ka Waqt*' until towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and are probably most common for the period from about 1820 to 1870. Shailendra Bhandare has expressed the view, with which most students appear to agree, that this veritable mountain of copper specie is largely attributable to a second 'deep monetisation' associated with the period of the greatest activity of the Opium Trade in Malwa. Again, the coins are low-grade ("Gimcrack" to borrow Perlin's term for them <sup>(6)</sup>) that are generally lightweight, badly struck copies of existing coins of Durbar mints of states in the Malwa area, or adjoining states of Rajasthan and Gujarat.

The Opium Trade, of course, involved both the Malwa and Bengal areas, as opium was an important and valuable crop in both places. For reasons that will become apparent as we examine the coins and the reasons why they were needed, the production of mountains of cheap, crude copper coins did not occur in the Bengal opium-growing areas, because it was

not needed. Nevertheless, Bengal opium production and trade has to be considered as part of the background without which the coinage cannot be understood. However, financial and monetary arrangements for it were very different in Bengal from those in Malwa. These later coins are certainly not a result of those very disturbed years of the '*Gardi ka Waqt*,' because that had all but ended with the Pindari and Third Maratha Wars of 1817 / 18.

In Malwa, the opium trade was ultimately under the control of the Sindhias and Holkars, but others - local rulers, landholders, entrepreneurs, bankers and traders were also intimately and heavily involved **(1)**. In Malwa, opium growing had started much earlier than the period under consideration, but at a much lower level of production, when the trade was also more localised and less commercialised. The early history of opium growing and trading in India and in other lands is well covered elsewhere <sup>(3)</sup>.

That trade continued at a high level very late into the late 19<sup>th</sup> and even the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, but by that time, British control over Malwa was much stronger, as it had been from much earlier in Bengal. Consequently, the Malwa financial system had also changed becoming based much more on credit and book-entries than cash, the same as in other parts of British India, including Bengal.

In an article about coins of newly discovered Sindhia mints<sup>(4)</sup> Shailendra Bhandare makes mention of this second 'deep monetisation'. It became inevitable because by far the greatest **number** of transactions in the opium trade in the Malwa area were necessarily among the lowest strata of participants in that trade hundreds of thousands of small growers and an army of the lowest, most local levels of 'middle men' – village head men and their agents. Those transactions happened in small quanta, involving only a 'small value' per transaction, but the extent to which they took place obviously demanded cheap specie on a prolific scale.

Clearly, as Amar Farooqui points out<sup>(5)</sup> many of the pre-harvest transactions involved contracts and smallscale loans, and such arrangements were often made 'through the books' rather than by cash payments. However, by far the greatest number of transactions took place when a large number of ryots each sold small quantities of raw poppy sap ('chic'). Such sales were, of course, mostly to the aforementioned lowest grade of 'middle-men' who represented the entrepreneurs who would take the greatest part of the profit. It seems that some ryots were able to maximise their take by selling some or all of their produce directly into the market at local bazaars, and this would also involve cash rather than credit transactions. At this stage, the growers needed cash, not credit, to pay for their necessities in life. For reasons that will be covered in detail in later papers, there was not much profit for most growers, and little of the money they received would have been 'saved' or 'banked', and so there was nothing to be recorded as a 'book transaction.'

The Durbar mints appear to have been unable or unwilling to provide the quantities of 'official' coinage this trade required. In India, whenever there is a perceived need and a profit to be turned, someone will soon step forward, heedless of such considerations as strict legality, and 'do the needful'. It is generally agreed **among numismatists** that this second 'deep monetisation' accounts for the enormous quantity of cheap, locally produced copper coins apparently or definitely dating from before the 1820s to after the 1860s, even now

found all over Malwa. Despite what has been suggested elsewhere, most of this output appears to have been largely 'unofficial' and produced in workshops not controlled by the Durbars of recognised states.

I stress 'among numismatists' because, as most students agree, the trade in Malwa opium was semi-legal from the point of view of the ever-vigilant British establishment, and went on behind closed doors.<sup>(5)</sup> The British were busy trying to introduce and enforce a monopoly of the Malwa opium trade for their own benefit, similar to the system they had already successfully been exploiting in the Ganges flood plains, where their control over the growing, selling, processing and trade in opium was nearly absolute. The reported very low level of literacy among most participants in the opium trade at the lowest level would have combined with the secretive nature of the transactions between the growers and traders, to ensure that very few pieces of documentary evidence would have been produced at that level. Of these, almost none could be expected to survive very long past the harvest and accounting year to which they related. Hence, although numismatists and coin collectors are well acquainted with the mountains of local, lowgrade, largely unattributed coinage reasonably assumed to have been struck to support the opium trade, historians relying on **documentary** evidence would find (have found) almost none to suggest the aforementioned 'deep monetisation' of this trade at the lowest levels. Documentary evidence relating to the opium trade at its higher levels in both Bengal and Malwa is, of course, abundant, and a number of historians have written a great deal of interesting and useful material about it. But most, having failed to notice the evidence of the mountains of physical copper coins, have assumed, almost to a man, that the trade ran mainly on credit, and that actual cash was little involved – as in Bengal. However, as Shailendra Bhandare often and rightly suggests – we should primarily 'look to the coins for the evidence.'

Virtually the only historian who has written seriously about the abundance of 'gimcrack coins' and has tried to bring this phenomenon to the notice of his fellow historians is Frank Perlin <sup>(2)</sup> who has proved to be a 'voice....that crieth in the wilderness' for too long.<sup>(6)</sup> In fact, he has occasionally been pilloried as a heretic by his peers. It is perhaps regrettable that historians talk and listen mainly to other historians, and numismatists mainly to other numismatists. More cross-fertilisation is surely called for.

Parts of 'rurban' Malwa (as defined by Mr. Perlin in the same essay) because of the ready availability of irrigation and manure, on top of the rich 'black cotton soil' and suitable climate, parts of Malwa were very important but rather diffuse centres for opium growing, and hence the starting point of much of the trade. Most of the rest of the growing and production process for Indian opium was already under British control in Bengal and Orissa<sup>(7)</sup> where quite different monetary and fiscal systems operated, as we have already noted. Here credit and book transactions were the norm, and most historians, relying on the Malwa trade being carried on in the same way, and not finding the evidence (the coins) to the contrary, have continued to believe and write about it as if it **was** carried on in the same way in both places.

Opium was also being traded out of Turkey and a number other countries, so that the Opium Trade in its totality ultimately proved impossible for the British Companies and traders, including the colonial Government of India, to monopolise, or even to properly control. In

addition, the energy and initiative of the endemic rulers, traders, carriers and port authorities were well able to hide the valuable commodity from the British authorities, who appear to have been running around like headless chickens between Malwa, Sind, Gujarat and Bombay trying to plug holes that would not stay still long enough to get a grip on. That is easy for us to 'predict' with the benefit of hindsight, of course.

## **The Coins.**

Even the several series of 'deep monetisation' coppers that have found a place in numismatic literature and catalogues (Lunavada, Sunth, Jhabua, Banswara, Jawad, 'Indore – unknown mint', Dhar, Ratlam, and so on) are incompletely and often inaccurately covered. They are certainly not as well understood as the generally over-simplified catalogues would have us believe. A glance at the published work of Dr Bhatt concerning his findings and theories regarding just a few of those series<sup>(8)</sup> quickly disabuses us of any misconceptions we may harbour in that regard. Coins from some series have been attributed to more than one state by different authorities, and some have been 'moved' between states in succeeding editions of catalogues, often on dubious and equivocal evidence, apparently - until the confusion has become worse confounded.

Many more series of cheap coppers exist, and are even less well understood, and remain virtually undocumented. The counter-stamped copper blobs of Amir Khan's estate, totally without legends or dates, reportedly struck (or rather, stamped) after it was given to him by Holkar in 1798 and before it became formalised as Tonk Native State in 1817, for instance, will come to be numbered among them, when they have been properly studied. Firm attribution is made all the harder because relatively few of the thousands of remaining unattributed copper coins lurking in dark places have dates, mint names or any other diagnostic features. However, many bear a wide range of symbols and marks, often shared by coins firmly attributed to known series and states. Frequently, newly recognised members of known series can only be attributed to them by their 'family likenesses' and such attributions have perforce to be regarded as tentative<sup>(9)</sup>. For some groups, like the Sindhia coppers of Jawad mint and a number of copper coins attributed to Lashkar mint, that situation may never change. The 'lion' coppers of Ratlam and Indore mints were copied and recopied by persons and in places unknown, until what remains of the legends is gobbledygook.

Most of the specifically 'opium trade' currency is of copper, for reasons already stated. Precious metal 'false coins' are also found. Such items can be made to the correct weight by adding more copper to the alloy but to make an illicit profit from 'false' coppers, the actual weight has to be reduced. The metal thereby saved is the profit. Therefore, being underweight is the first clue to a coin possibly belonging to this group of currency. Another is wide variation in weight. All this will be covered in greater depth in later papers.

Some coins presently attributed to Dhar, Ratlam and Jhabua bear 'four-petal flower' symbols, and this also encourage us to think we are on the right lines when we identify them with the 'opium trade,' as eye-catching four-petal flowers are not common in nature. Most species of

*Cruciferae* and *Brassicae*, for instance have flowers that are insignificant, and go practically unnoticed except by bees and botanists.

*Papaveraceae* (the Poppy family), including, of course, the opium poppy, *Papaver somniferum*, is one of very few families of plant with four-petal flowers that are showy enough to recommend themselves as symbols or marks suitable for putting onto coins. A poppy flower is obviously a suitable icon to use on coins struck mainly to facilitate the trade in raw and semi-processed poppy sap. No doubt, there are, in Malwa and Gujarat in particular, some 'thematic' collectors of coins bearing the 'opium poppy' symbol, and I would appreciate hearing from them. Perhaps certain other marks found on Native State copper coins from Malwa and central India could be identified with Poppy seed-pods, or the tools of the trade.

I mentioned above that there is, scattered among the official records of some states including those of the Marathas and the British, and in some travellers tale, a number of helpful bits of information about various aspects of the opium trade, and the production and passing of 'false coins' in several places. These excerpts are mainly brief, but from them we can begin to sketch out the picture. Some speak of quantities of cheap, crude coins produced at a number of places close to copper mines and to the big markets in agricultural areas where the sap was grown, collected, processed and sold. Some of these little bits of data contain clues as to who were involved in its production and who profited. It is to that specific evidence, and to coins of specific determinable origins that we shall look in the papers that are to follow.

## References.

1. These coins and their background have been discussed in conversations with a number of interested students, including Shailendra Bhandare. Some of what has been said and written is embedded in this text. Shailendra's valuable input is hereby gratefully acknowledged.
2. Perlin, F 'Money Use in Late Pre-Colonial India' – in 'The Imperial Monetary System of Mughal India' John F Richards (Ed.) Oxford University Press, 1987, reprinted New Delhi, 2000.
3. Booth, M. 'Opium – a history'. St. Martin's Griffin, New York, 1996, and Simon & Schuster, GB, 1998.
4. Bhandare, S. 'Jamgaon, Harda and Khachrod – Three New Mints under the Sindhias of Gwalior.' JONS number 197 p.28. (Autumn 2008).
5. Farooqui, A 'Smuggling as Subversion' New Age International Press, New Delhi, 1908, p. 8 et seq.
6. Holy Bible. Isaiah 40:3.
7. The British unsuccessful attempt to create and then maintain a monopoly in this lucrative trade, and the successful determination of Indian rulers and merchants to prevent this from happening, is a fascinating study in its own right. But it is not the subject of this study.
8. Bhatt, Dr S K, 'The Coinage of the Native States of Central India'. Academy of Indian Numismatics and Sigillography, Indore 1985.
9. Compare, for example, to Jankoji Rao and Jayaji Rao copper coins of Lashkar mint.

## Theories of Kachcha-ness

Examining and describing the coins of Malwa and central India, including *kachcha pice*, is laborious, though relatively simple, but explaining and cataloguing them is more problematical.

There have been a number of general and specific theories emerging regarding them, some of which could happily co-exist. A short list of the suggestions made following the publication of my last exploratory paper in JONS (Journal of Oriental Numismatic Society) no. 203, follows. The list is short but the implications are far-reaching, and one or more of them could help us to catalogue the coins. Some of these suggestions are mutually antagonistic, but others might be applicable in some areas but not in others. They might overlap in their effects, both in time and space. Testing them against several of the series would be a first step towards 'classifying' and cataloguing the coins.

### 1. 'Coins from each mint became more kachcha with time.'

This proposes that, including Ratlam and Sailana, all Malwa mints produced pukkah copper coins to begin with. As time wore on, the several pressures described in the first paper caused them all to reduce standards, some more than others. In most cases, only the earliest products can be described as pukkah, and the later ones became increasingly *kachcha*. Hence, when cataloguing them, generally speaking, the nearer to 'proper standards' a coin is, the earlier it was probably struck.

This theory appears plausible for some mints like Dewas, Mandsaur and maybe Jhabua, and could be a tenable and practicable starting point for making a catalogue for some mints, but it appears not to be the whole answer. Discovering whether there were purely *kachcha* mints working alongside them, striking copies and imitations of the pukkah pice of many places, near and far, may be a difficult task.

### 2. 'Kachcha coins are derived from 'pukkah' coins, but were struck in separate mints.'

'Unofficial' workshops like those described in the first paper, in Ratlam and Sailana states, are, according to this theory, a completely separate group from the official mints, and both kinds continued to strike their respective classes of coins during several or many years, and some of them probably did so from first to last. Perhaps it became necessary for official mints to reduce standards to stay in business, but they remained official and their issues were all pukkah. A variation of this theory (call it 2b.) might be that kachcha coins all derive from pukkah coins and many of them were struck in the same mints that were producing the coins from which they were copied. This would necessitate that the 'false coin mints' of Ratlam and Sailana were engaged in production of both *pukkah* and *kachcha* coins. Nothing in the known 'evidence' would appear to rule out this possibility.

*Kachcha* pice of 'original stamp' are clearly not direct derivatives (copies or imitations) of the products of any of the official Malwa mints, and could have been struck anywhere. From his considerable local knowledge, Dr Bhatt suggests Dhar to be the place that struck them. It therefore appears possible that this theory holds the key to some series.

### **3. 'The further you stray from an official mint, the less like the coins of that mint, and the more like those of the next mint along the road the locally used coins get.' ('Ripples on a pond' effect.)**

According to this explanation, *kachcha* coins are those from village workshops in the 'no-mans-lands' between official mints. This would call for Malcolm's utterance to be literally true – that almost every village had a workshop producing *kachcha* pice with little circulation beyond that village.

This idea therefore envisages a number of official mints (the ones listed in catalogues, or maybe just the big city mints like those at Ujjain and Indore) striking *pukkah* coins, with production facilities for *kachcha* pice liberally interspersed between them. The latter would be producing coins copied from, or intermediate in design between those of the official mints, and later of 'original stamp' as well, all more or less related to two or more of the proper mints closest to them. This closely fits with Dr Bhatt's ideas about the Dhar state coinage.

There would need to have been an awful lot of *kachcha* mints to make this work – Dr Bhatt proposed 5 official mints for Dhar state alone just to explain what I have called 'hybrid' coins. There appears to be little evidence for such a large number of long-running *kachcha* pice mints in Malwa, or that so many mints would have escaped the notice of the British writers and record keepers. Although this idea fits in with the known coinage in some places, and with Col. Malcolm's somewhat jaundiced description, it seems very unlikely to be applicable universally and literally in the whole area.

Certainly, there are 'hybrid' coins that speak plainly of having been struck for use in border areas or by two or more populations, but they are the minority. The 'intermediate' mints striking them probably were not numerous, and there is no reason to propose that they were not the same few 'false coin mints' that struck the rest of this coinage.

When the states under discussion are as small as most Malwa states, there appears to be no overriding requirement that a separate mint would be needed to cater to the 'needs' of each of a number of border areas, all of which would be only a few miles from the nearest state mint and even closer to other border areas. Concentration of manufacture at just a few mints in each state would certainly be more efficient from the point of view of the consumption of expensive resources, and this consideration would probably have imposed limits on the number of *kachcha* mints on economic grounds alone – an important consideration in an industry where cost-saving was so clearly a very high priority.

#### **4. 'All coins from this area, except those from the big-city mints are kachcha.'**

This postulates that mints such as Indore and Ujjain were the only ones striking pukkah coins, and all products of the remainder are kachcha. Of this, there is reasonable doubt. This theory postulates that none of the Malwa coins require to be considered or listed with pukkah coins, which are the ones generally catalogued.

That could be true only if the description '*kachcha*' could be stretched to fit all the coins from almost all the mints, including many like those listed in the last paper, which have every appearance of being *pukkah*. As shown, there appear to be proper, standard '*pukkah*' coins from all or most of the known and catalogued mints, even the very small ones, and such coins probably make this idea untenable in respect of most of the known Malwa series.

This appears to be possibly the least likely theory to have widespread application, except, perhaps in the later years of this period. Even Malcolm's contention that 'all' coins in the area are of very low standard is clearly somewhat overstated for effect. He was, after all, trying to get 'something done about' what he saw as a major problem for English commerce and profits, and the intended supremacy of British type coinages.

#### **5. 'All Durbar mints struck pukkah coins at first, but these quickly became outnumbered by kachcha copies and imitations of their products from unofficial mints.'**

In this case, the most pukkah of the coins we find would be mainly those that were struck first, and for later coins we must postulate that the unofficial mints, and possibly also the official ones all struck lighter cruder coins as time went by, until the issues of all mints were exclusively kachcha. This clearly overlaps with theory 1 above.

The idea is difficult to prove or disprove, as we cannot put firm dates on most of the issues, and it must clearly be applicable to some extent. We know about Ratlam and Sailana 'false coin mints', and there may well have been other similar workshops or groups of workshops elsewhere in Malwa. However, the close resemblance of many of the *kachcha* pice to official coins suggests that there ought to have been *kachcha* pice mints copying coins from just about every official mint in the area. If there were a lot of them, as noted above it is somewhat unlikely that only two of them attracted the attention of British officials. The alternative – that a few mints struck a wide variety of *kachcha* coins – looks more feasible. On the other hand, Malcolm did say that nearly all the coinage of the area was (in effect) *kachcha*, and its manufactories widely spread. The undisputed fact that *kachcha* pice are so much more numerous in Malwa today than the corresponding pukkah coins could be seen to support this theory, but it is equally in tune with others.

## 6. 'The whole lot are kachcha.'

One step further than Number 4.

Proponents of this view believe that all the issues of all Malwa mints except Ujjain and Indore are *kachcha*, right from the start. It is their view (I hope I am not misrepresenting them) that this is exactly what Col. Malcolm meant when he was describing the local Malwa coinages as unfit for purpose. This theory does not allow for arguing that some of the Malwa mints started by striking *pukkah* coins, and that standards and coins at some or all mints became worse with time. It postulates that no *pukkah* coins were ever struck at the Malwa mints, except at Ujjain and Indore.

The comments under 4 above also apply here, but more so. This idea appears to be too extreme, in its literal form, to allow for so many apparently standard quality coins that have certainly been struck in the area, even if we assume them to have been the earliest.

In other words, the evidence of the coins does not appear to support this theory, because so many of the coins from mints other than the ones at Ujjain and Indore are decently engraved, properly struck, contain the correct amount of metal and bear dates and / or mint names. Their very nature is evidence that they were struck in a properly controlled fashion at official local mints.

### **Possibilities.**

When all the scant evidence is considered, it is probable that we will find that the reasons for most of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Malwa coins looking as they do is a combination of a number of factors. For now, I stand behind most of the things I put into the first paper. However, it would be extremely unwise to say 'Never' in relation to a change of mind in the light of new facts or better interpretations.

A tentative catalogue of a few of the Ratlam types, based on the first of the theories of *kachcha*-ness mentioned above, follows.

## **The Coins of Ratlam State, 1773 to 1857 – a brief survey and catalogue.**

### **Introduction: Malwa in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.**

During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, most of Malwa was held by Maratha clans, including the Ponwars of Dhar, the Sindhias of Ujjain and Gwalior (Gwalior only after about 1753AD), and the Holkars of Indore.

They were in theory all subservient to the Peshwa with his headquarters at Pune, some way to the south. For a long time, the Sindhias and Holkars had supplied the Peshwa's principle

armies of conquest and occupation. The Gaikwads of Baroda, another powerful Maratha clan, were just to the west in south-east Gujarat, and the Bhonsles held territory around Nagpur, a little way to the southeast. The majority of the Malwa population were Tribal peoples. It was a heavily militarised 'pressure cooker' of small states, split into even smaller sections, interspersed with parts of other small states and outlying bits of the larger ones. During the last half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and especially from about the 1790s up to about 1820 it suffered considerably from warfare, plunder and general unrest. Until their demobilisation following their complete defeat by British forces during the last Maratha and Pindari Wars, the Pindaris were also active there at various times, both as auxiliaries of the Holkars and Sindhias and, as was their wont, they also perpetrated plunder, rapine and extortion on their own account.

Since the Sindhias and Holkars were theoretically both subservient to the Peshwa, they were allies. However, they often worked to each other's detriment in a spirit of rivalry and jealousy. Both were occasionally led by underage or weak-minded rulers, and suffered from divisions caused by subversive elements within. As well as undermining each other, they usually had ambitious, powerful generals and sibling princes backed by powerful factions within both states, eager for a chance of usurping power. Partly because of the debilitating effects of such internecine hostilities, there were times during the first two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when Amir Khan was probably the most powerful single personage in Malwa. He had his headquarters in an area around Sironj that Jaswant Rao Holkar had given him as his headquarters in 1798. He was a particularly ruthless and merciless operator ('Soldier of Fortune') who frequently employed a number of the Pindari leaders and their *labhars*, to work with his own army of mainly Pathan soldiers and freebooters.

This period represented the height of the '*Gardi-ki-Waqt*' or 'Time of Troubles' for Malwa and central India. Almost the whole area had been in a state of anarchy and chaos from well before, but especially after the death of Jaswant Rao Holkar (1811AD) that continued to have repercussions even after the end of the last Maratha War.

In conformity with the generally anarchic state of affairs at the time, the means of striking copper coins was subject to little effective control outside the big city mints. According to Sir John Malcolm (1) there were only four mints in and around Malwa where decent standards for minting copper coins were kept up and where 'standard' copper specie was being produced when he began to settle the area about 1819 AD. The mints he mentioned were at Kotah (in Rajasthan), and at Indore, Ujjain and Bhopal. However, when we consider the coins themselves, he may be thought to have overstated his case, because standard weight and decently made copper coins of most Malwa mints can be found. The quality of the coins issued from mints in the places he mentioned appear to have been little affected by the chaos in Malwa, and demand for their products probably even benefited from it, as many of their coins were trusted and used (and copied and imitated) many miles from where they were struck.

Cheap copper coins of variable and unstable value from badly controlled 'native mints' were used primarily 'up-country' largely to monetise the burgeoning opium and cotton trades. They were called *kachcha*

(*'cutcha'*) pice, in contrast to the standard copper coins from properly controlled mints, which were known as *'pukkah pice'* by both the Indian and English at the time<sup>(2)</sup>. Despite the fact that these words are rarely met with in numismatic literature, they are well-established terms with a long pedigree.

The degenerate copper coins of the minor Malwa mints were described by Perlin as 'gimcrack' and by Malcolm as 'degraded' and unfit for purpose. Under the chaotic conditions that prevailed in Malwa during the *'Gardi ka-Waqt,'* and because of the continued demand for *'kachcha pice'* as opium-trade coinage that lasted for decades thereafter, many of the Malwa state mints and an unknown number of 'private' mints produced these coins specifically to meet those demands. These workshops became the 'milch-cow' of Mafia-like cartels and grasping landlords, who included many of the legitimate local rulers and their minions, numbers of whom appear to have been extremely unscrupulous and venal. *Kachcha pice* were made for use by people who cared little for 'standards' of coinage, so long as they had sufficient specie, of whatever quality, to carry on their trades and businesses. The term *'kachcha pice'* may have been applied to the whole of the production of some Malwa mints, but that description must have excluded the smaller quantities of specie struck there that matched up to the 'standard' coinage of the major mints like those at Bhopal, Indore, Ujjain and Kotah. These must surely have retained the right to be called *'pukkah'*.

In a previous article<sup>(3)</sup> I attempted to draw attention to the rather blurred lines I discerned that separate the *pukkah* from the *kachcha pice* issued from the small Malwa state mints, and some 'country mints' of the Holkars and Sindhias. The purpose of that paper was to illustrate the differences between coins that appear to belong to the two contrasting classes of coinage. Mention was made of the production of many tons of *kachcha pice* from the 'false coin' mints at Ratlam and Sailana in particular, the only such mints that appear to have been documented so far.

Some experts are of the opinion that such 'lines' between the *pukkah* and *kachcha pice* of most or all of the Malwa mints are illusory. That view has a solid foundation in the data available concerning the weights and general condition of most of the Malwa copper coinage of that time.

If that view prevails, possibly ALL the copper coinage of **Rajod, Dohad, Khachrod, Jawad and Mandsaur** (even although they were 'official' Sindhia mints), **Mehidpur and Maheshwar** (even though they were 'official' Holkar mints), **Dholera** (even though it was a 'transitional' mint of the 'Company Bahadur'), **Sailana** (including **Barmawal**), **Sunth, Banswara, Lunavada, Chhota Udaipur, Baria, Ratlam, Jaora, Jhabua, Dungarpur, Sitamau, Pratapgarh** (Deogarh), **Dewas** (Allote) and the Dhar mints of **Amjhera, Piran-Dhar, Anandgarh and 'Kukureti'**, would have to be regarded as *kachcha pice*, at least until the 1830s or thereabouts. It is an indisputable fact that until about 1820, these states often had no effective Durbars, and that no or very little 'standard' coinage appears to have been struck outside the established Durbar mints of strong and relatively stable states like those of the Holkars and Sindhias. Even these, as noted above, were not properly under the control of their governments at all times, particularly when those governments were actually at war with each other, plundering each other's territories (or getting the Pindaris to do it for

them) or sacking each other's cities. Consequently, any attempt to bring into focus those 'blurred' dividing lines between the coins of particular states and mints, between the products of 'properly constituted state Durbar mints' and 'false coin mints' and between 'standard' (*pukkah*) and *kachcha* pice may be doomed to failure in respect of all or many of the mints mentioned. Some of them, indeed, perhaps never struck any *pukkah* coins for the whole of their existence. At present, there is little agreement about these matters, but at least discussions have begun, which have presented a number of possible lines of study that may help us to codify, classify and catalogue the Malwa copper coinage. The introduction lists the first tentative theories to have emerged. The following is an attempt to apply the first of those theories to the early coinage of Ratlam State.

It can hardly be doubted that the first known coins from this mint, dating from about the middle of the reign of Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II, was a perfectly legitimate Mughal-style coinage, struck to controlled standards from properly engraved dies under the auspices of a legitimate state authority – in other words, '*pukkah pice*'. These coins bear normal legends of Shah Alam II, the mint name is properly engraved, and the coins are correctly dated. Later coins apparently issued by the Ratlam Durbar are very far from this ideal, and, from most standpoints, some of the later series might be regarded as reasonably typical *kachcha pice*. The evolution from the first case to the last appears to have taken 40 to 50 years, and can be traced through a number of coin series. Lines - even 'blurred' lines – between *pukkah* and *kachcha* coins are very difficult to trace.

The following attempt to catalogue the better-known of these series, apparently struck by or for the Ratlam State Durbar is offered to illustrate the problems encountered when we begin to tackle the problem of '*kachcha-ness*'.

### **A Very Brief History of Ratlam.**

A number of histories and ruler lists were consulted, and the accession dates given for some rulers, especially earlier ones, were not consistent, and the table below is a reasonable average.

Ratlam state was founded in 1651 by Ratan Sinh, a great grandson of Udai Sinh of Jodhpur. In conformity with his policy of 'Divide and Rule' the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan, wished to have a loyal Rajput state in Maratha-ruled and largely tribal-populated western Malwa. To this end, he took part of what is now Sailana state, gave it to Ratan Sinh, and went to considerable lengths to see that he was a successful, proMughal ruler. Ratan immediately began to build a new capital for himself, and named it Ratlam, after his own name. He was killed fighting loyally (though against his better judgement) on the side of Shah Jahan's favoured son, Dara Shukoh against Prince Aurangzeb, at Dharmat in April, 1658.

## Ruler dates according to relevant calendars.

| Rajas                      | AD                              | AH                          | MFE (+ 590/591 = AD)       | VS (+ 57 =AD)       |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|
| State founded              | 1651                            |                             |                            |                     |
| Ratan Sinh                 | 1651 to 1658                    |                             |                            |                     |
| Ram Sinh                   | 1658 to 1682                    |                             |                            |                     |
| Shiva Sinh                 | 1682 to 1684                    |                             |                            |                     |
| Keshav Das (Kesho Das)     | 1684 to 1695                    |                             |                            |                     |
| Interregnum – Mughal rule. | 1695 to 1705                    |                             |                            |                     |
| Chhatrasal                 | 1705 to 1706                    |                             |                            |                     |
| Keshri Sinh                | 1706 to 1716                    |                             |                            |                     |
| Man Sinh                   | 1717 to 1743                    |                             |                            |                     |
| Prithvi Sinh               | 1743 to 1773                    |                             |                            |                     |
| <b>Padam Sinh</b>          | <b>1773 to 1800</b>             | <b>AH 1186/87 – 1214/15</b> | <b>1182/83 -1209/10</b>    |                     |
| <b>Parbat Sinh</b>         | <b>1800 to 1824</b>             | <b>AH 1214/15 – 1239/40</b> | <b>MFE 1209/10 1233/34</b> |                     |
| <b>Balwant Sinh</b>        | <b>1824 to 29 Aug 1857</b>      | <b>AH 1239/40 - 1274</b>    | <b>MFE 1233/34 1266/67</b> |                     |
| Bhairon Sinh               | 29 08. 1857 to 27 01 1864       | AH 1274 - 1280              | MFE 1266 - 1274            | VS 1914 - 1921      |
| <b>Ranjit Sinh</b>         | <b>28.01.1864 to 20.01.1893</b> |                             |                            | <b>VS 1921-1950</b> |
| <b>Sajjan Sinh *</b>       | <b>20.01.1893 to 3.02.1947</b>  |                             |                            | <b>VS 1950-2004</b> |
| Lokendra Sinh              | 3.02 to 15.08.1947              |                             |                            |                     |

\* Lokendra Sinh entitled 'Maharaja' 3.02.1947.

In the course of the Battle of Dharmat (Dharmatpur, Fatehbad), Ratan Sinh and his Rathors did a great deal of damage to Aurangzeb's army before he was himself killed and his army decimated and dispersed. Aurangzeb was well aware that Ratan Sinh might have cost him the Mughal throne, not to mention his life, and felt ill-disposed and vengeful towards Ratan Sinh's heirs and their state. He confiscated a large portion of it, and neighbouring rulers took a lead from his royal hostility and annexed other parts to their own territories. Aurangzeb maintained his hostility towards the Ratlam ruling family almost until the end of his life. He still required them to serve loyally in his armies.

Ratan Sinh's son, Ram Sinh ruled the reduced state for 20 years before being killed in Aurangzeb's service in the Deccan. Shiv or Shiva Sinh, his successor, died without an heir, and the throne was seized by Kesho Sinh (Keshav Das) an illegitimate son of Ram Sinh. In the process, he killed a Muslim noble and alienated most of the other high ranking men in his state, which persuaded the Emperor to dethrone him. He then set himself up at Sitamau. For ten years, from about 1695 until 1705 Aurangzeb took the whole state under direct Mughal rule by what were effectively a succession of Mughal Governors, but the details are obscure. This period is generally spoken of as an interregnum. Eventually, Aurangzeb relented and placed Chhatra Sal (a son of Ratan Sinh) on the Ratlam *gaddi*. Chhatra Sal had served his Emperor well in his Deccani campaigns, fighting at Golkonda, Bijapur, Raigarh and Gingee. Finally, at Pannala, in 1706, his eldest son, Hathi Sinh (Hattehsinh) was killed.

This broke his spirit, and he retired from public life, splitting his territory between Hattesinh's son, Bhairisal

(who got Dhamrode) and his two remaining sons, Pratap Sinh (who was given Raoti) and Keshri Sinh (who received Ratlam). Disputes arose immediately between these three. Bhairisal was intimidated and quickly gave up his territory, which was re-joined to Ratlam. Keshri and Pratap fought and Pratap was killed. His sons, Man Sinh and Jey Sinh avenged his death, and Man Sinh took over Ratlam, handing Raoti (Sailana) to Jey Sinh, from whom the present Sailana ruling family is descended<sup>(4 & 5)</sup>.

The Marathas first began to be troublesome to the Malwa states during Man Sinh's reign, but at that time they consisted of isolated gangs of plundering freebooters and Man Sinh was able to drive them from his land. Man Sinh died in 1744 and was succeeded by his son, Prithvi Sinh, who was forced to pay large sums of money to keep the growing menace of the Marathas (principally Holkar) and Pindaris out of his state. Padam Sinh, his son and successor was also forced to pay for the survival of his state, which became very impoverished as a result of the haemorrhage of much of the revenues into the ever-hungry maw of the Maratha overlords. Jaswant Rao Holkar attacked and sacked Ratlam twice during Parbat Sinh's reign, and the Dhar chieftain took advantage of this, plundered much of the state and annexed more of its territory.

During the reigns of Prithvi Sinh, Padam Sinh and Parbat Sinh, Ratlam, in company with most of the other small Malwa states, was subject to almost constant Maratha and Pindari aggression, intimidation and financial extortion, and on a number of occasions the state was in danger of being totally overrun and obliterated. The Marathas relentlessly demanded tribute and 'contributions' and Amir Khan plundered the state almost at will, causing such a loss of production and revenues that Parbat Sinh was invariably in arrears with the payments he had been forced to agree to make.

In about 1815-'16, Bapu Sindhia was told to collect unpaid tribute, but Parbat Sinh was unable to pay. He felt his state to be in so much danger that he called on the Rajputs of Malwa and further afield (Sirohi in Marwar is specifically mentioned) in a 'last ditch' effort to defend his state against annihilation.

In 1817, an army of about 12,000 Rajputs gathered at Ratlam, thereby challenging Maratha suzerainty over the state. This force successfully attacked the Maratha army sent against it under Bapu Sindhia, inflicting heavy losses. They then prepared themselves for the 'return leg' of the match. By now, the Maratha and Pindari Wars were in progress and retribution was delayed. Before the Marathas had time to regroup for another campaign against Ratlam, the wars had ended in defeat for the Marathas and disbandment of the Pindaris. Further Maratha aggression was brought under British control by treaties and agreements made in 1817 and succeeding years, and effective British protection was afforded to all the small Malwa states. Sir John Malcolm was appointed Settlement Officer, and he arrived on the scene in 1819 to impose the *Pax Britannica*. Further bloodshed at Ratlam (and elsewhere) was thereby averted.

When Balwant Sinh came to the *gaddi* in 1824, he was a minor of 11 years of age, and his Durbar was guided during his minority by Col. Borthwick. When he died in 1864, his son was only two years old, and another period of regency began.

Sir John Malcolm's strong government, backed by the undoubted might of the Paramount Power, afforded

Ratlam and the other minor states of Malwa an opportunity to recover, consolidate the ruler ship of their Durbars, and introduce effective fiscal and financial management. They soon began to recover their former level of control and status, but the Malwa copper coinage did not begin to 'recover' until the 1860s and '70s. This was because the demand for cheap copper coins for the opium and cotton trades continued to run at a very high level during the 1820s and for several decades thereafter and only the *kachcha pice* mints were able to sustain the necessary level of production <sup>(3)</sup>

Probably all mints in the area took part in the degradation of the copper money. At the very least, all the authorities in the affected states appear to have contributed to, and benefitted from abuse of their own coinages.

Before the British standard coinage introduced with Government backing, and machine minted specie from some mints run by the most important Indian Durbars began to take over, many smaller mints were closed by the orders of (or under pressure from) the British, and proper standards were imposed on those that survived, including Ratlam. After about the middle of the century, demand for cheap copper coins declined, and cash was increasingly replaced by paper money and credit transfers <sup>(3)</sup>

### **Introduction to the coinage of Ratlam.**

It appears that the standard copper currency of Ratlam consisted almost entirely of paisas, with only a few half paisas. Other denominations, such as double paisas, quarter paisas, takkas, and quarter and half anna pieces were struck in neighbouring states, and all of those were probably widely used by, and their comparative values known to everybody in Malwa, even although fluctuations in values and exchange rates were reportedly very frequent. In addition, *kachcha* coins copied and imitated from those of many of the nearby states, and 'of original stamp' are extremely common all over Malwa, for reasons already mentioned. These are a source of serious confusion when attempting to describe and systematise the official standard coinages of the central Indian states, and probably explains why no serious attempt to do so has yet been made. 150 to 200 years ago, businessmen and other travellers (apparently there were few tourists in the area at that time) must have found the local copper coinages of Malwa rather confusing. They were doubtless put to great inconvenience and expense, perhaps being obliged to change some of their copper money at a discount every few miles, or risk its becoming worthless after a few miles more. Rates of exchange, if Col. Malcolm spoke rightly, were whatever the man in charge decided on the day.

Padam Sinh struck Mughal style coins, dated in the Hijra era, Parbat and Balwant Sinh's issues are of novel types, and may also bear Hijri dates, but could have been dated in the Malwi

Fasli Era. Ranjit Sinh's issues utilised both Samvat era (VS) and AD dates. These changes may have been partly to demonstrate subservience to the sovereign and paramount powers, which changed from the Mughals to the Marathas and finally the English.

### **Ratlam Coins in existing catalogues.**

Only a few of the rulers of Ratlam struck copper coins. Apart from those shown bold in the table, others may have done, but if so their coins have not been recognised. Ratlam never struck any silver or gold currency of its own. Like other small states in Malwa that did not produce their own silver coins, Ratlam used the 'Salim Shahi' rupees of Pratapgarh. It is stated in a number of places that a proportion of those coins were struck outside Pratapgarh, and Dr Bhatt informs us that the Ratlam mint was one of a number of places to have produced them. At present, there appears to be no way to distinguish the 'Salim Shahi' rupees struck at any of several predicted out-of-state mints, but variations in the way the mint name 'Deogarh' was engraved (already noted by some workers) could assist in solving this puzzle. There was probably little call for gold currency in the small Malwa states. When it was needed, it must have come from out-of-state mints, a number of which (such as Surat) were ready and able to strike it 'to order.'

In none of their entries for Ratlam State over the years since 1980, do the Krause catalogues (1) mention any coins struck between the end of Padam Sinh's reign in 1800 and the start of that of Ranjit Sinh, in 1864. The early coins of Ratlam listed there are restricted to an undated, anonymous copper coin in the name of Shah Alam II with the mint name 'Ratlam' (KM. 5) and the far more common KM. 1, with the same mint name, listed in older editions, but inexplicably removed from later ones. More recently, other coins were added, then moved to the Banswara State listing, and later returned to the Ratlam entry. The coins of Ratlam struck after the mint was re-opened in 1864 for Ranjit Sinh are the only ones properly listed in the Krause catalogues, though unlisted half paisas have been reported. In some previous years, the thin, lightweight re-strikes of Ranjit Sinh's milled paisas of 1888 AD dated VS1945 (KM.4) issued during World War II by Sajjan Sinh as emergency currency, were listed as KM4a by Krause, but they were dropped from recent editions, having been wrongly classified as non-currency re-strikes, not for circulation.

John Allan's catalogue of the Native State coins lists only those struck by Ranjit Sinh, and illustrates only the 1888 milled paisa. Mitchiner's 'World of Islam' and 'Non Islamic Series' unfortunately hardly scratch the surface of most Native States corpuses, and under Ratlam he mentions only Ranjit Sinh's coins. No other existing generally available catalogues are of any use whatsoever in relation to the Malwa states. In short, the early coins of Ratlam have been incompletely and erratically treated, despite most of them being fairly common, and familiar to collectors of Indian coins.

The single exception to the above remarks is Dr Bhatt's series of articles and books of the 1980s<sup>(6)</sup>, in which he discusses at length and in some detail the coins of the Ratlam, Jhabua and Dhar areas. He mentions and illustrates some coins attributed here to the reigns of Padam Sinh, Parbat Sinh and Balwant Sinh, but these are not dealt with systematically. The

books are no longer as easy to obtain as they once were, and in any case they have been heavily criticised as being 'muddled' and hard to understand, partly because of the order in which the coins are dealt with, the eccentric methods Dr Bhatt has used to classify them and the confusing layout of the plates. In addition, doubts have been raised concerning some of his attributions and readings of mint names. In short, they have had limited success in respect of making the Ratlam coinage of those reigns better known.

Hence, the coins of Parbat Sinh, Balwant Sinh and, to some extent, Padam Sinh have not been properly or consistently published anywhere and enquiries suggest that some of the missing types are not well known to present-day collectors. Perhaps it is appropriate to briefly re-publish the best-known coins presumed to be of those three reigns, adding a few new illustrations and some (hopefully) relevant thoughts, in an attempt to begin a systematic catalogue. That is the secondary purpose of this piece.

It is almost inevitable that any list of Ratlam coins will include some of the *kachcha* pice struck there or thereabouts, both copied from and in imitation of Ratlam *pukkah* pice. Any catalogue written with the sparse knowledge we have today will need to be refined and re-written in the light of future studies.

### **The Malwi and other Fasli Eras.**

It appears uncertain which calendar was used immediately after production of the early, Mughal style coinage – with Hijra (AH) dates - ceased in Ratlam. The dates on some coins of Parbat Sinh and Balwant Sinh, written in Nagari figures, were interpreted by Dr Bhatt as also being Hijra dates, but they could be dates of the Malwi (or Deccani) Fasli Era.

The Persian word *Fasl* relates to seasons of the agricultural year. Several Fasli Eras were introduced for use in parts of India by the early Mughal Emperors, but the first, the Sahur Era, although widely used in the Deccan, was used only on a few of the Deccani Sultanate coins. Like so many revolutionary and lasting administrative, financial and metrological introductions to India, it was a Suri invention.

Akbar introduced at least three more Fasli Eras for use in parts of northern India. The Deccani Fasli Era was introduced in 1636AD by Shah Jahan.

*Fasli calendars* were based on solar years, which were preferred in the Deccan and other mainly agricultural areas, because of difficulties with using the Muslim Lunar calendar (AH) in which dates for sowing, harvests, rent payments and so on would fall usually 10 or 11 (sometimes 12) days earlier every year. The introduction of the Hijra calendar by the conquering Mughals was creating unnecessary difficulties for the farming communities and the landowners and revenue officers, who wanted to retain unchanging annual dates for such agricultural events, and this is only possible using a solar calendar. The starting point for the Malwi Fasli Era was 12th July, 590 AD (CE) and so the addition of 590 or 591 years to the Fasli date would convert it to AD. Very few coins appear to have been dated according to Fasli calendars, the only well-known example being the Pune rupees struck under the Bombay Presidency of the BEIC and dated FE1230 to 1244 in mostly Nagari (sometimes Persian)

characters. Indore also used Fasli Era dates on certain issues **(1)**. Dr Bhatt also tells us that certain dates on Dhar coins are Fasli dates **(Dhar State Coinage p.12)**. He also tells us that the Malwi Fasli era was two years behind the 'Fasli Era Proper,' introduced by Akbar. (1266 = 1858/59: FE1289 = 1881AD on certain Dhar coins)

The Fasli year, being solar, took longer to complete than the Hijra year. Consequently, the starting date of each succeeding Fasli year, and eventually also the actual year date, moved gradually further out of synchronicity with the AH date. That is why Fasli Eras introduced earlier require more years to be added to them to equate with CE dates.

Between Fasli New Year and the end of the CE year, it is necessary to add an extra year to the FE year to equate it with the AD or CE date. In short, when converting Malwi (Deccani) Fasli dates that fall after July 12<sup>th</sup> on the Gregorian calendar (this date was changed to 1<sup>st</sup> July in 1854) add 591 years, but for earlier dates only 590 years are to be added. Fortunately, this is easier to understand than to explain!

### **Why it matters that we know which era was used for the Ratlam coins with dates in Nagari figures listed below.**

Dr Bhatt reports that the Ratlam mint closed in 1830 (Ratlam Coinage, Pt. II on p. 61) but does not cite his source. The latest date reported on the types of coins that I have attributed to Balwant Sinh's reign, in which this date falls, appears to be 1245, which, if it is MFE is equivalent to 1835 / 36 AD, but to 1829 / 30 AD if the date is AH. Therefore, if the dates on these coins are in the MFE, and the coins are indeed those of Ratlam, 1835 would be the earliest possible date for the first closure of Ratlam mint, but if they are AH, Dr Bhatt's date of 1830 could be correct. Likewise, if we use the wrong calendar to convert the dates of these (or any) coins, we shall inevitably attribute some of them to the wrong reign, and misread the evidence they offer us. The coinages of several other states may be similarly affected.

**Table of the most commonly used Fasli Eras** (modified from a table kindly supplied by Hans Herrli.)

| Name                            | Region                             | Type of year                      | New year  | To convert to AD years (2) |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|----------------------------|
| Sahur (Shuhoor, Soor) (5)       | Maharashtra (esp. Konkan)          | Solar                             | June  | Add 599 / 600              |
| Fasli                           | Hindustan proper (Upper Provinces) | Luni-solar (like Samvat year)     | 1 <sup>st</sup> of the lunar month Asan / Aswina (September)  | Add 592 / 593 years        |
| Bengali San                     | Bengal and Bihar                   | Sidereal (solar) (like Saka year) | 1 <sup>st</sup> Baisakh (in 1 <sup>st</sup> half of 18 <sup>th</sup> century: 10 or 11 April, now 14 April) | Add 593 / 594 year         |
| Vilayati                        | Orissa                             | „                                 | 1 <sup>st</sup> of the solar month Asan (September)   | Add 592 / 593              |
| <b>Deccan (Tamil) Fasli (3)</b> | <b>South India + Marathas</b>      | „                                 | <b>July (4)</b>   | <b>Add 590 / 591</b>       |

1. Indore used the Deccan Fasli era

2. The 2 numbers mean: if a date falls in the time between Fasli New Year and the 31 of December add the first number; from 1 of January to the end of the Fasli year add the second number.

3. Introduced by Shah Jahan in the 1630s. Adopted by Marathas 1637/38 AD.

4. The Madras Presidency fixed the following Fasli New Year dates: 1800-1854 AD: 12 July, from 1855 on: 1 July

5. The Shahur era does not occur on Mughal or post-Mughal but only on Sultanate coins in the Deccan.

*Certain details concerning this subject were kindly explained by Prof Amar Farooqui of the History department at Delhi University, to whom grateful acknowledgement is hereby made.*

## The 'Kachcha Pice' of Late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century Malwa.

**"Cutcha Pice:** generally means one of those amorphous coppers, current in up-country bazars at varying rates of value." 'Hobson-Jobson'. Yule, H. 1886, reprinted by Wordsworth Editions Ltd, Ware (UK) 1996, p. 287.

**"Pucka Pice:** a double copper coin formerly in use; also a proper pice (=1/4 anna) from the Government mints." Hobson-Jobson.

The Hindi word spelled 'cutcha' in Hobson-Jobson is nowadays more often and more accurately transliterated as 'Kachcha.' Its meaning is 'Not Pukkah,' a description familiar to and readily understood by speakers of most brands of the English language.

### **The background.**

It has frequently been remarked that a prolific copper currency consisting of often crudely made and under-weight coins is found all over central India, Malwa, and beyond. Much of the Malwa material is undated and bears little or nothing in the way of a mint name, date, or diagnostic - even readable legends. This currency mostly appears to have been struck during the period from the 1790s to towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the bulk of it being attributable probably to about the 1800s to the 1860s and trailing off by the 1880s.

This phenomenon was familiar to the noted historian, Frank Perlin, who discussed aspects of the nineteenth century west and central Indian economies in his 'Money Use in Late Mughal India'<sup>1\*</sup>. His work is very pertinent to our understanding of the 'deep monetisation' of the 'Rurban economies' of Malwa and we need to briefly review some remarks from that essay before we move on to the mints and the coins themselves.

The author explains the term 'rurban economies' (p. 273) as 'economies in which what are nowadays defined as principally urban functions were then much more generally dispersed within the small habitation clusters of the countryside'. In Malwa, probably more than anywhere else in India, this had become complicated by the splitting of states, and revenue rights within states by the activities of the Marathas, particularly the Sindhias and Holkars, and their subordinates. This resulted in villages and groups of villages needing to answer to a number of collectors for different fractions of the revenue, with all the opportunities for oppression, speculation and corruption this presented. This repeated division and subdivision resulted in '...the main residence and scattered possessions of one or more of the powerful family complexes, with their accumulations of rights spread through many villages and regions, but cohabiting with those of other greater and lesser holders of prebends and properties within the same villages and regions' (p. 272). Such rights varied from 'a fractional claim over the production of a field or over many villages, to the right of the whole taxation of a village, to lucrative offices, shares in those offices, to rights in market taxes and road tolls, and so forth.' This splitting of rights and functions over wide areas was also responsible for other complications, which we shall need to consider later.

The deep monetisation of Malwa that resulted from the production and circulation of huge quantities of cheap copper coins is discussed in some detail in that essay, from which some

further short extracts will help shed light on the setting in which those coins were produced and used.

Perlin states that (in 1971, when he wrote his essay) this monetisation had not been properly researched (p.236) as a result of which the (historical) literature was almost silent about it (p. 237) despite the fact that 'in sheer bulk, [the use and circulation of] copper coinage ...' must have assumed huge proportions.' On page 238, he mentions the Japanese copper bars that were being bought by Chinese traders and sold to the Dutch in the East Indies. The Dutch, in turn imported the copper into India, mainly for their coin production but also as a trade commodity. Later, both British and Indian traders brought in Japanese copper, and further north, Nepalese copper was imported into India in considerable quantities. On p. 239, Perlin confirms that the imported copper was used mainly to make copper coins, the demand for which rapidly became too high for the existing state mints to service by their traditional labour- and skill-intensive methods of production. On p. 254, he explains that 'the mint solved its problems by systematic 'gimcrackry,' that is skimping on inputs of both labour-time and skill, so reducing the cost of making the coins.' They did not, in the early years of the process, make savings by reducing the weight of metal in them, because in India, copper coins passed at the value of metal they contained, so unilaterally reducing weight would necessarily have been accompanied by reduced exchange value. Perlin tells us that the same mints that had been accustomed to making good (*pukkah*) coins later branched out into 'gimcrackry,' and this is certainly true to some extent. However, it appears from available evidence that the bulk of 'gimcrack' coins, especially in the later years, were not from state Durbar mints. Instead, most of those about which we have fragmentary documentary evidence probably came from *ateliers* set up specifically for their production by local rulers themselves, or by their servants or agents, or by farming out the rights to private individuals, and also by private mints assuming those rights on their own behalf.

He explains that this kind of activity 'can be seen in [various places worldwide] ... and in a host of astonishingly gimcrack and obscure coinages produced in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.' He puts the Indian experience into the context of '... private production of various token coinages [for instance in Western Europe] and illegal gimcrack coppers for a cash-hungry population [in England]' which had its parallel in many places in India at the time we are considering. We must add America, particularly California, to that list.

He then (p.291) further expounds on this phenomenon in India (particularly Malwa) stating that 'in central India, ... the increased activity in the textile and cotton trades, taken together with the pattern of small rurban courts (Durbars) producing gimcrack coins fuelling local markets and advance-payment systems' inevitably required and precipitated the deep monetisation with which we are here concerned. We must certainly add the opium trade to his list of agricultural and commercial activities demanding cash, particularly in respect of the enormous number of small-scale advanced payments, and payments required when the harvested, part-processed sap was sold, as we shall see.

On page 301, he echoes what has been noted by numismatists - that 'these coinages were mainly local in production and use, and were 'unlikely to meet in exchange with other coins of the same type.' (The word 'type' is here not used in the numismatic sense, and in an attempt to avoid confusion, I will be using the word 'class' of coins in this context.)

This assessment was shared by Major General (as he then was) Sir John Malcolm<sup>2</sup> when he tells us that, 'With respect to the copper coinage [in Malwa in the early 1820s] it hardly merits notice, being alike fluctuating in its value, and confined in its circulation. It consists of double pice, single pice and half pice. These are rudely cut pieces, with a show of stamp; but both this, its size, and established value, are continually changed by local officers, for the purpose of illicit profit. Excepting the Oojein, Indore, Kotah, and Bhopal pice [all of which were full-weight, 'official' Durbar mint coins that circulated freely in Malwa] which have some character, the copper circulation of most places is confined to its own immediate district or town.'

He also tells us that the exchange rate of Indore (annas, mostly available as half-anna pieces) and Kotah (takkas) coppers was about 16 'pice' to the rupee, but that the Ratlam 'pice' (being paisas and double paisas) were smaller. At Mandsaur and 'in many other places' the value of the coin was 'changed every two or three months, and the character of the coin is so deteriorated, that it will not pass two or three miles from where it was coined.'

Not all coins of this period, by any means, were of the crude, cheap ('gimcrack') character here described, as Malcolm confirms; and Perlin stresses that 'it is important to focus on the strong and significant contrast distinguishing the high quality productions from the local poor and gimcrack coinages.' He also notes that 'virtually the same kind of coin was produced by several mints, scattered over the region through which the coins circulated. This suggests much copying or imitation of one mint's output by others. This coinage can best be understood, I think, as being a class of coins that could cross very local boundaries, because they made up a sort of monetary *lingua franca* that was 'recognised' over a restricted area, no matter that it had been struck five or ten miles or more away. In this respect, Malcolm's comment about 'two or three miles' may have been an exaggeration in respect of all but the very worst coins. The habit that grew up of striking 'hybrid' coins of this class must have helped in that respect, as it was surely intended to widen the area over which the coins would be 'recognised' and accepted. More about 'hybrid' coins anon. High quality coinages, of course, were accepted at much greater distances from their mint of origin, even if only by shroffs, money changers and small businessmen. The parallel with the 'Salim Shahi' rupee of Pratapgarh, which passed current in many Malwa states that struck no or very little silver coinage of their own, immediately strikes us (Dewas, Dhar, Sailana, Sitamau and Jhabua, for instance.)

Perlin tells us that the use of 'gimcrack' techniques was taken up even by mints that had been producing higher quality coins, 'by-passing more labour- intensive and craft- intensive parts of the production line, which had constituted bottlenecks in the process, thus leading to rapid expansion of capacity and cheapening of production.' Unfortunately for the satisfactory study of this phenomenon, to the extent that this happened it has blurred the boundaries between the classes of currency in circulation, and between the mints that struck them.

The result of this rush to make cheaper and cheaper specie was that the region's copper coinages became adapted to greatly and rapidly increasing demands, and to new kinds of markets for low value coins – thus leading to the deep monetisation that evidences itself hereabouts at this period in history.

A sizeable proportion of the new, cheap coins were copies and imitations of earlier and contemporaneous series struck in states nearby to where the copies and imitations appear

to have circulated. It is those that have often been regarded as lower grade coins of Durbar mints, and it appears from the foregoing that some of them were exactly that, but most seem to have emanated from the less 'official' workshops set up for the express purpose of meeting the demands for cheaply-produced coins. Many appear to be the 'hybrids' mentioned above, having the two sides looking like coins struck in two adjacent or nearby territories, in order for these coins to appear familiar to, and encourage their acceptance by both populations. Dr S K Bhatt wrote about these coins<sup>3</sup> in relation to Dhar and neighbouring states, but his interpretation of this phenomenon differs in detail and emphasis from that which is being advanced here. In particular, he did not recognise that any of his 'Dhar' coins, or any that appeared to be from other nearby states might, in fact, be products of out of state 'unofficial' mints like those we are about to discuss.

Because of the perceived 'defects' of being largely dateless and without meaningful legends, examples of this 'class' of coins, what I have chosen to call 'copies', 'imitations' and 'hybrids,' have been practically ignored by many students and cataloguers'. Most copies and imitations have been treated as poorly struck specimens of already catalogued Durbar Mint coins, and the hybrid types as forgeries, counterfeits and mis-strikes, or simply as unattributable. Find spots, when known, appear to indicate a mainly local circulation<sup>4</sup> as we would expect, and as Perlin and Malcolm described.

Another group of cheap copper coins has been described by Dr Bhandare as being "the result of the very disturbed years of the 'Troubled Times' or '*Gardi ka Waqt*' precipitated by the Sindhias, the semi-independent barons of their courts, the Nawabs of Bhopal and various Pindari bands" and which is closely associated with Maratha activities in central India. The '*Gardi ka Waqt*' ended with the 'Pindari War' and Third Maratha War of 1817 / 18, and Dr Bhandare has expressed the view, with which most students appear to agree, that the mountain of copper specie found in Malwa, and under consideration here, is largely associated with the period of the greatest activity of the Malwa Opium Trade, but there is clearly some overlap. As we have already noted, trades other than that in opium (especially cotton) and other factors are involved. As far as the opium trade itself is concerned, we shall see that huge numbers of copper coins were needed annually, from about November onwards. Firstly, many were required to fund expenditure on seed and the labour costs involved in sowing, manuring, irrigating and weeding the opium poppy crop, all of which activities are more expensive and labour-intensive for poppy growing than for any other kind of agricultural activity then practised in Malwa. Later in the farming year (typically from March to June) even greater quantities of cash money were needed for buying the harvested and partly processed poppy sap from the growers, by the first level of 'middle men.' At the higher (wholesale and bulk sales) levels of the opium and other trades, much more money was involved in far fewer individual transactions, and silver and gold coins, bills of exchange and hundis were the normal media for those transactions.

P. P Kulkarni points out<sup>5</sup> that there were also a large number of silver 'false coins'<sup>6</sup> in circulation at this period, most of them considerably debased. These can, with confidence, be described as counterfeits or forgeries. They were called into existence not by a shortage of specie so much as by the desire for illicit profits by private individuals. Our concern in this study is only with the copper coins.

In other parts of India, coins of this class serviced the needs of the markets in general, because too frequently the required quantity of specie was not being supplied from the Durbar mints. This shortage of 'official' copper coins was noted in respect of British India up to about the 1830s<sup>7</sup>. The Presidency mints did not strike the kind or quantity of copper coins that the markets in Awadh, ex-Rohilla and ex-Bangash territories demanded, and this local need did encourage the production of much 'false money.' This came about as a result of an entirely different set of circumstances from that in Malwa, which was discussed in depth in a paper by the late Kenneth W Wiggins.<sup>8</sup>

