From *Kori* to Taka



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The history of coins – this might be reminiscent of a boring coursework that you were forced to take in college. How interesting can the evolution of a now almost insignificant mode of currency be? As it turns out, history is replete with exciting stories about the invention of the coin and its usage in the ancient world. In ancient India, for example, people had their own money trees where they could store their coins. The "tree" was a flat piece of metal shaped like a tree with metal branches attached to it. At the end of each branch was an ancient Indian coin, a round disk with a hole in the centre. So whenever there was any need for money, all one needed to do was break off the coin from their money tree. Sounds quite ingenious, doesn't it?

The Star Magazine had earlier run a story on Md Noorul Islam, a renowned archaeologist and coin collector, whose collection of ancient coins is inspirational. Islam also helped Associate Professor Bulbul Ahmed and Professor AKM Shahnawaz, both of the Department of Archaeology of Jahangirnagar University by giving them permission to access his private collection for their book 'Coins From Bangladesh.' The book, published by Nymphea Publication in collaboration with Standard Chartered Bank, Bangladesh, presents a fresh perspective on the history of numismatics in Bangladesh.

In the foreword of the book, Dr Rezaul Karim, retired Keeper of the Dhaka National Museum, writes that like India, Bangladesh too is heir to a rich legacy in the matter of coins. Coins are first said to have invented and used in the 7th century BC. Bengal didn't take too long to catch up, as the oldest coins of Bengal, those made during the Janapada settlement, date back to the 5th to 4th centuries BC.

"The unique place of coinage in contemporary history is universally recognized. Even where contemporary history is conspicuous by its absence, coins play still a greater role. Much of the unknown information on the ancient and medieval history of Bengal has been made known through the study of coins or stone inscriptions," writes Karim.

When coins were first invested in the Indian subcontinent, several small states (Janapadas) and large states (Maha Janapadas) took to the task of creating punch-marked coins. Every state ensured that their coin would not have the same look and feel as those invented by other states. Thus, you'll find that the coins of various Janapadas differed from each other in form, weight, fabric, symbology, and quality of metal. For example, the Lauhitya Janapadas coins, which were probably invented during 6th century to 3rd century BC, generally have four to five symbols on them. While the symbols depicted on the coins changed over time, the sun, which could signify