

Wage Structure of Artisans and Labourers: Western Rajasthan (17th-18th Century)

Shabir Ahmad Punzoo^{1*}¹Ph.D. Scholar at CAS, Department of History, AMU, Aligarh, IndiaDOI: [10.36347/sjahss.2023.v1i104.001](https://doi.org/10.36347/sjahss.2023.v1i104.001)

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***Corresponding author:** Shabir Ahmad Punzoo

Ph.D. Scholar at CAS, Department of History, AMU, Aligarh, India

Abstract

Review Article

Our study examines the wages of artisans and labourers during the medieval period of India with special reference to 17th-18th century Western Rajasthan. During the study period, the artisans were paid in the form of naqd (cash), jinsi (kind), and hawalgi (advance). The study under review also reveals the value of currency. Our research compares the purchasing power of wages by showing the prices of basic commodities.

Keywords: Artisans, Wages, Basic Commodities, Western Rajasthan.

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INTRODUCTION

While dealing with the economic condition of artisans, it is necessary to go through their wages. Travellers say that the wages of artisans were low and that no uniformity was maintained in Mughal domains. Pelsaert writes that in Agra forty days were often counted as one month. Five to six *takas* (per day) were given to carpenters, masons and ironsmiths as observed by Pelsaert [1]. He mentions that workmen, small shopkeepers, and servants used to get low wages. Goldsmiths, painters, embroiderers, carpet makers and weavers earn only five to six *takas* or about one-fifth of a rupee per day [1]. He writes that Prince Khurram used to give high wages to artisans. Gardeners, potters, and washermen earn three to ten rupees per month as observed by Hawkins [3]. The bearers of *palkhi* and umbrella get two rupees per month [4]. The lives of

artisans were not good, and the majority of the labourers had bad conditions as they earned only a bare subsistence, as noticed by Bernier and Moreland [5]. The low standard and un-economic position of artisans is also highlighted by De Laet [6].

In *karkhanas* (workshops) we see a different picture as wages were paid according to the work of artisans and they felt safe here [7]. They were paid regularly in *karkhanas* in the form of cash/*naqd* (like *dam*, [8] *taka*, etc.), kind/*jinsi* and advance/*hawalgi* was also provided to them. For buying material from market, amount was given to workers. The skilled artisans in *karkhanas* hired labourers for their help [9]. Hired workers were paid in the form of *taka* (see table 1).

Table 1: Wages of hired labour (*majur*) [9]

Number of <i>majur</i> (hired labour)	Rate per unit	Wages in <i>taka</i>
30 <i>nafar</i> (men)	2	60
18	2	36
22	2	44
8	1.25	10
20	2	40
4	1.25	5

This table shows us that thirty workers (employed for making weapons) were given sixty *takas* according to 2 *dar* (rate per unit). Similarly, forty-four

takas were given to twenty-two workers for making weapons. In *karkhanas*, we find that the artisans were employed for a fixed period of time like carpenter

Rahman of Jodhpur for four months and Hakim for six months (Rs. 6 was his monthly income) [xⁱ]. In *topkhana*, we find seven ironsmiths were given Rs. 40 for nine days. Similarly, ten ironsmiths who were working in *topkhana* were given Rs. 22 for twenty-five days. Carpenter Govardhan Das was given Rs. 4 for twenty-five days and Rs. 34 and *annas* 4 were given to twenty-three carpenters for twenty-five days. It shows us a difference in wages, but it was basically specialization as already mentioned, workers were paid according to their work and skill. Carpenters and ironsmiths were also hired by private parties and their wages ranged from 3 ½ to 4 *takas* daily [xⁱⁱ]. A group of *sangtarashs* were called for construction purposes at Jodhpur from Nagaur. Skilled stone-cutters were given Rs. 7 and unskilled workers (who helped them) Rs. 3 monthly [xⁱⁱⁱ]. They were hired by a private party and paid on a daily basis. For example, twelve *silawats* were hired for 48 *takas* [x^{iv}]. It means each one of them received 4 *takas*. In 1669, the wages of skilled and unskilled ironsmiths were *dham* 25 and *dham* 6 respectively [x^v]. The wages of skilled and unskilled carpenters were *dham* 37.50 and *dham* 6 (per day) in 1669 [x^{vi}]. Similarly, the wages (per day) of skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled construction workers were *taka* 2, *taka* 1 *dam* 12.50 and *dam* 6 respectively [x^{vii}]. Unskilled labourers were given less wages as compared to the artisans and their wages ranged between Rs. 2 to Rs. 3 per month [x^{viii}].

Sometimes, they were paid in kind. For example, the labourers employed for construction purposes in the palace at Kota, were given 200 grams of

jawar daily [x^{ix}]. Workers were also paid in advance (*hawalgi*). For instance, in 1737 A.D. Nathuram got Rs.1 and *taka* 5 for eight days and Niryamu got Rs. 2 and *taka* 2 for eight days. Similarly, carpenter Hakim was given Rs. 36 for six months in advance to meet the marriage expenses of his daughter [x^x]. It seems that artisans were employed for a certain fixed period of time as carpenter Rupa of *Topkhana* was employed for four months on the occasion of his son's marriage [x^{xi}]. On the occasion of his daughter's marriage, he was employed for ten months [x^{xii}]. Likewise, tailors named Dulo and Asa were recruited in the *khema-khana* (tent workshop) and were given Rs. 10 each for the marriage of their son and daughter respectively [x^{xiii}]. But it should be kept in mind that in eighteenth century, the importance of ironsmiths increased to a great extent due to intense warfare and they were employed on a large scale in *karkhanas* for making weapons, so their wages increased. In the eighteenth century, ironsmiths were receiving Rs. 5. 50 to Rs. 6 per month [x^{xiv}].

So far as the building construction work is concerned, the actual work was done by *Mi'mar* [x^{xv}]. A number of artisans were working under him like *gilkar* (clay worker), *silawat/sangtarash* (stone-cutter), *khati/durudgar* (carpenter), [x^{xvi}] *khishtmalan* (bricklayer), *beldar* (used to dig foundations/ditches), *khisht puzan* (brick burners) and *ahak puzan* (lime burners). We get plenty of information about construction workers from various sources [x^{xvii}]. Their daily wages ranged from 2 *dams* to 7 *dams* (except for the *Mi'mar* whose salary was high), see table 2.

Table 2: Wages of Artisans associated with construction work [x^{xviii}]

Category of Artisans	Wages
<i>Silawat/Sangtarash/stone-cutter (sadahkar or plain stone-cutter)</i>	5 <i>dams</i> per <i>gaz</i> of stone
<i>Silawat/Sangtarash (naqqash/carver)</i>	6 <i>dams</i> per <i>gaz</i>
<i>Arah-kash/sawyer of sisum wood</i>	2 ½ <i>dams</i> per <i>gaz</i>
<i>Arah-kash of nazhu wood</i>	2 <i>dams</i> per <i>gaz</i>
Helper of <i>Arah-kash</i>	2 <i>dams</i> (daily wage)
<i>Khishtmalan/Bricklayer</i>	3 to 3 ½ <i>dams</i> for common work and 4 <i>dams</i> if worked for construction of walls of fortresses. For all other walls, 2 <i>dams</i> per <i>gaz</i>
<i>Beldar</i> (spademan)	2 ½ <i>dams</i> per <i>gaz</i> for digging foundation. ½ <i>dam</i> for digging ditches
<i>Mimar</i>	12 to 26.60 <i>dams</i> per day

Mi'mar was paid a salary between 12 and 26.60 *dams* per day during the period of Aurangzeb [x^{xix}]. The highest daily wage received by an artisan of building construction work was 7 *dams* and the lowest was 2 *dams* [x^{xx}]. On the other hand, the piece wages

varied between 100 *dams* to ½ *dam* per *gaz*. So, it is clear that in *karkhanas*, the artisans were receiving wages according to their work, specialization and working days. For the value of currency see table 3.

Table 3: Value of Currency [xxx]

S.No.	Currency	Value (equal to)
1.	1 Kauri	3 broker kauris
2.	1 Dam	3 kauris
3.	1 Damri	10 kauris/3 dams
4.	1 Chhadam	6 dams
4.	1 Dhela	4 damris/12 dams
5.	1 Paisa	25 dams/64 kauris/2 dhelas
6.	1 Takka	50 dams/2 paisa
7.	1 Anna	2 takas/4 paisa
8.	4 Anna	8 takas/16 paisa
9.	1 Rupee [xxxii]	16 annas/64 paisa
10.	1 Gold Mohr	15 rupees

While examining the *bahis* of Bikaner, we find that the rulers contributed to the constructional activity by employing and engaging numerous artisans and labourers. Mention has been made of alterations, renovations, and repairs of different apartments like Badal Mahal, Phool Mahal, Karan Mahal, Anup Mahal, etc. In *kamthana bahis*, the original figures are mentioned in the form of *taka* and *dam*. They have been calculated in rupees, *annas* and *paise* [xxxiii]. But it is important to note that the value of *taka* in rupee varied between 16, 17 and sometimes 18 [xxxiv]. In eastern Rajasthan, the value varied between 14, 17.50 and 18.50 [xxxv]. So, it is hard to find out the wages of professional groups. Generally, the wages of artisans and labourers (engaged in construction work) between 1650-1750 were fixed as *annas* 4 to *anna* 1 and 2 *paise* (for artisans) and *annas* 2 to *anna* 1 and 6 *paise* (for labourers). Lime workers received wages from *annas* 3 to *annas* 2 and 6 *paise*. Low wages seem due to abundance of labour (high birth rate or population

influx) [xxxvi]. During 1761, the wages of labourers increased (*annas* 4 to superior labourers and *annas* 3 to ordinary ones) [xxxvii]. *Luhars* also received *annas* 4. We also find reference of female labourers who were getting 2 to 3 *paise* as daily wages. Generally, they were given grains from 2 to 4 *chhatakas* [xxxviii]. Skilled artisans who had specialization in specific jobs were given high wages. For instance, well-known artisans from Jaipur and Deccan were provided *annas* 10 per day whereas local artisans were given *annas* 4 in Bikaner. *Bahis* of Bikaner (*Lekha* and *Jama Kharch*) dated 1670 and 1757 subscribe to the fact that superior labourers received *annas* 3 and ordinary ones received *annas* 2 daily [xxxix]. In Kota and Jaipur, superior artisans earned *annas* 8 to 6 per day while as ordinary artisans received *annas* 2 to *anna* 1 [xl]. We can compare the purchasing power of wages by showing the prices of some essential commodities like *gur*, oil, clothes, *bajra* and *moth*. See table 4.

Table 4: Prices of basic articles [xli]

Name of Articles	Price
Gur (per <i>seer</i>)	<i>Annas</i> 4
Moth (per <i>maund</i>)	Rs. 1
Oil (per <i>seer</i>)	<i>Annas</i> 3 to 4
Bajra (per <i>maund</i>)	Rs.1 and <i>Annas</i> 2
Coarse Cloth (per ten yards)	Rs. 2 to 3.

By this price structure we assume that it was hard for minimum wage earners to earn their own subsistence in terms of the consumption of staple diet. To meet the food and other necessities of their family, their earnings could not be sufficient. But supplementary payment to labourers in kind met their requirements to some extent.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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ⁱⁱ *Ibid.*, p.60.

ⁱⁱⁱ Hawkins, *Voyages*, ed. C.R. Markham, London, 1878, p. 420.

^{iv} *Ibid.*

^v Francois Bernier, *Travels in the Mughal Empire (1656-68)*, tr. A. Constable, revised V.A. Smith, London, 1891, (rpt. Low Price Publication, Delhi, 1968), pp. 228-29; W.H. Moreland, *India at the Death of Akbar: An Economic Study*, Low Price Publication, New Delhi, 1962, pp. 187-88.

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^{vii} Verma Tripta, *Karkhanas Under the Mughals: A Study in Economic Development*, Pragati Pubs., Delhi, 1994, p. 123.

^{viii} Forty dams were equivalent to Rs. 1. Syed Ali Nadeem, Rezavi, 'Mughal Artisans at Work and at Home', in *In Search of Vishwakarma, Mapping Indian*

- Craft Histories*, ed. Vijaya Ramaswamy, Primus Book, New Delhi, 2019, pp. 162-185.
- ^{ix} *Kamthana Bahi*, Bikaner, no. 4, A.D. 1755; See also K.N. Chaudhuri, 'The Structure of Indian Textile Industry in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', *IESHR*, vol. XI, 1974, p. 181; Tek Chand Bhar, *Bahar-i Ajam, 1739-40*, vol. II, Munshi Nawal Kishor, Lucknow, 1916, p. 54.
- ^x *Sanad Parwana Bahi*, Jodhpur, no. 9, 1772 A.D., p. 12, f. b; *Kamthana Bahi*, Bikaner, no. 4, A.D. 1755.
- ^{xi} *Sanad Parwana Bahi*, Jodhpur, no. 1, V.S. 1821/A.D. 1764; *Sanad Parwana Bahi*, no. 11, 1771 A.D., p. 14.
- ^{xii} *Sanad Parwana Bahi*, Jodhpur, no. 9, 1772 A.D., p. 12, f. b.
- ^{xiii} *Sanad Parwana Bahi*, Jodhpur, no. 19, 1707 A.D., p. 47.
- ^{xiv} *Kamthana bahi*, Bikaner, no. 4, A.D. 1755.
- ^{xv} M.T. Sethia, *Rajput Polity, Warriors, Peasants, and Merchants (1700-1800)*, Rawat Publication, Jaipur, 2003, pp. 252-53.
- ^{xvi} Ibid.
- ^{xvii} Ibid.
- ^{xviii} B.L. Gupta, *Trade and Commerce in Rajasthan*, Jaipur Pub. House, Jaipur, 1987, p. 29.
- ^{xix} Ibid.
- ^{xx} *Sanad Parwana Bahi*, Jodhpur, no. 11, 1771 A.D., p. 14.
- ^{xxi} *Sanad Parwana Bahi*, Jodhpur, no. 9, 1769 A.D., p. 42, f. b.
- ^{xxii} *Sanad Parwana Bahi*, Jodhpur, no. 13, 1773 A.D., p. 64, f. b.
- ^{xxiii} *Sanad Parwana Bahi*, Jodhpur, no. 9, 1769 A.D., p. 82, f. b.
- ^{xxiv} *Sanad Parwana Bahi*, Jodhpur, no. 11, V.S. 1828/A.D. 1771, p. 14.
- ^{xxv} *Mimar/Muhandis* used to prepare the *tarhi* (drawing of plan). See Abul Qasim Namakin, *Munshaati-i Namakin*, MS, Aligarh Collection, Maulana Azad Library, Aligarh Muslim University, fol.133(b), cf. Syed Ali Nadeem, Rezavi, 'Mughal Artisans at Work and at Home', in *In Search of Vishwakarma: Mapping Indian Craft Histories*, pp. 162-85.
- ^{xxvi} For carpenter, Abul Fazl uses the term *durudgar*. See Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbar* (henceforth *Ain*) ed. Nawal Kishore, vol. I, Lucknow, 1882, p. 117. Muhnot Nainsi uses the term *khati* for carpenter. See Muhnot Nainsi, *Marwar-ra-pargana-ri-Vigat* (henceforth *Vigat*) ed. N.S. Bhati, Rajasthan Prachyavidya Pratishthan, Jodhpur, 1968, vol. I, pp. 391, 496-97; vol. II, (1969), pp. 9, 83-86, 223-24 and 310-11.
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- ^{xxviii} *Ain*, vol. I, pp. 117-18; Syed Ali Nadeem, Rezavi, 'Mughal Artisans at Work and at Home', in *In Search of Vishwakarma: Mapping Indian Craft Histories*, pp. 162-85. See also, Nishat Manzar, *Urban Wage Earners in Seventeenth Century India: Artisans, Labourers, Service Providers and Entertainers*, Manohar, New Delhi, 2021, pp. 301-352.
- ^{xxix} Ibid.
- ^{xxx} Ibid.
- ^{xxxi} Jibraeil, *The Revenue Manual of Rajasthan (Seventeenth-Nineteenth Centuries)*, Manohar, New Delhi, 2021, pp. 423-429; Nishat Manzar, *Urban Wage Earners in Seventeenth Century India: Artisans, Labourers, Service Providers and Entertainers*, pp. 397-402.
- ^{xxxii} One Rupee consisted of forty dams as mentioned by Syed Ali Nadeem Rezavi, 'Mughal Artisans at Work and at Home', in *In Search of Vishwakarma: Mapping Indian Craft Histories*, p. 165.
- ^{xxxiii} Amount has been calculated in old currency (16 annas = 1 Rupee).
- ^{xxxiv} Anjali Chatterjee, 'Wage Structure of Artisans and Labourers Engaged in Constructional Work in Medieval Rajasthan (A.D. 1670-1761), A Case Study of Bikaner State', *PIHC*, 1985, vol. 46, pp. 316-325.
- ^{xxxv} S.P. Gupta and Shireen Moosvi, 'Weighted Price and Revenue Rate Indices of Eastern Rajasthan (1665-1750)', *IESHR*, 1975; S. Nurul Hasan and S.P. Gupta, 'Prices of Food Grains in the Territories of Amber (1650-1750)', *PIHC*, 1967, p. 366.
- ^{xxxvi} Anjali Chatterjee, 'Wage Structure of Artisans and Labourers Engaged in Constructional Work in Medieval Rajasthan', pp. 316-25.
- ^{xxxvii} Probably, it was due to shortage of labour caused by Maratha inroads in neighboring states or due to famine in Bikaner.
- ^{xxxviii} For females, a lower wage rate can possibly be explained by the fact that a female worker generally belongs to a family group with at least one male earner as its head as observed by Anjali Chatterjee.
- ^{xxxix} *Lekha Bahi*, Bikaner, V.S. 1727/A.D. 1670, p. 311; *Jama Kharch Bahi*, Bikaner, 1757 A.D., p. 240.
- ^{xl} *Bhandar No.1, Basta No. 47*, V.S. 1815/A.D. 1758, File No. 11, V.S. 1750/A.D. 1693, cf. Anjali Chatterjee, 'Wage Structure of Artisans and Labourers Engaged in Constructional Work in Medieval Rajasthan', pp. 316-25.
- ^{xli} *Lekhe re Bahi*, V.S. 1727/A.D. 1670, p. 56; *Kamthana Bahi*, V.S. 1808/A.D. 1751, no. 2, pp. 4-6. See also B.L. Gupta, *Trade and Commerce in Rajasthan*, pp. 184-97; Anjali Chatterjee, 'Wage Structure of Artisans and Labourers Engaged in Constructional Work in Medieval Rajasthan', pp. 316-25.