



COINS IN VIJAYANAGARA EMPIRE

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ABSTRACT

The foundation of Vijayanagara Empire is an epoch-making event in the South Indian history. It combined in itself, the areas of the Telugu, Kannada, Tamil and Malayalam people. During this period South India witnessed a radical change in the political and cultural field. After the Gupta dynasty, the Rayas of Vijayanagara were the first to issue gold coins in large numbers and denominations. Hence this period is referred to as the 'golden age of South India'. It shaped the destiny of the South Indian people for three centuries. It was the last important Hindu kingdom in South India.

KEYWORDS: *political and cultural field.*

1. INTRODUCTION :

The Vijayanagara Empire was established by Harihara I and Bukkaraya I in 1336 A.D. with the advice of sage Vidyanaraya. They were the sons of Sangama and hence, their dynasty was named after him. The successors of Harihara I and Bukkaraya I ruled up to 1486 A. D. and gave place to the Saluvas under Narasimha. Narasimha and his family ruled from 1486 to 1505 A. D. Then came the Tuluvas to the Vijayanagara throne. In this dynasty, Sri Krishnadevaraya was most outstanding emperor of the Vijayanagara empire for over three hundred years during 14th to 17th centuries and their rule lasted up to 1570 A.D. Then came the Aravidu dynasty who ruled up to 1685 A.D. Though the dynasties were different, all these four dynasties ruled over a major part of South India, with variations in the extent of empire.

Coins are one of the main sources to know the history of mankind. To avoid the inconvenience of barter system, coins emerged all over India. The earliest coins in India were the Punch marked coins. Generally, these coins are dated from 6th century B.C to 5th Century B.C. which was issued with natural symbols. After the Punch marked coins, a visible change occurred during the time of Indo-Greeks, as the coins were marked with portrait symbols. Later, indigenous rulers started issuing their coins with inscription primarily written in Brahmi script. During the time of Guptas, issuance of the coins reached its zenith. This tradition was followed by the succeeding dynasties like Cholas, Kakatiyas, and Hoysalas etc. Coinage of India was primarily marked by pictorial devices either in the form of gods and goddesses, natural figures and the inscriptions on coins are rarely found. But in the medieval period, a great change took place, discarding the pictorial devices on the coins and a new language (Arabic) was introduced on the coins and this tradition gradually developed in North India. Finally it spread to almost all the parts of the country and it is known as Islamic tradition.

2. COINS IN VIJAYANAGARA EMPIRE:

The emergence of the Vijayanagara Empire heralded a new phase in the development of the coinage and currency system in the history of South India. The Vijayanagara period witnessed important changes. They continued the old tradition of India, where pictorial devices became the major feature of the coinage. Earlier coinage had Brahmi, Kharosti, Devanagari and Arabic scripts. But Vijayanagara coins contain legends in three scripts i.e., Devanagari, Kannada and Telugu. The richness of gold coins, the innumerable types of gold and copper coins, the rich variety of symbols, the diversity of gods and goddesses, appropriate legends in various scripts and the technical superiority of the coins deserve special attention. No doubt South India had a well-established coinage tradition by the time the Vijayanagara Empire was born but, the sudden developments were noticed during the period which gave the coinage of the period a unique place. Harihara I and Bukkaraya I, the originators of the Vijayanagara kingdom, had the coinage of the Hoyasalas, Kakatiyas and the later Pandyas for their model. Naturally, Harihara I and Bukkaraya I derived great inspiration from the Hoyasala coins which indicated religious significance and purpose so close to the hearts of the founders of Vijayanagara. Even the names of the coins of the Hoyasalas such as gadyana, pana, haga, visa, bele were literally lifted by the Vijayanagara rulers.

The Vijayanagara monarch had a separate department in charge of minting of coins. The main mint was located in Hampi. The Vijayanagara kings issued a large number of coins in gold, silver and copper. However, the silver currency is rare. Most of them embossed the images of gods and goddesses, animals, birds, state emblem etc. Special coins were made in commemoration of occasions like triumphs over other kingdoms. The names of the gold coins were gadyana, varaha, mada, pratapa, kati, ponnu, haga and pana. Silver coins are called tara, and the copper coins were called jital or kasu. On the reverse side most of the coins king's name was inscribed. The Saluva rulers did not issue any type of coins, because of little span of their rule but the remaining Vijayanagara rulers issued a vast and varied number of coins.

PREVIOUS WORKS:

The findings of the Vijayanagara coins have been published in the form of catalogues, monographs, articles and journals. The most important among the catalogues is the one prepared by N. Ramesan, entitled *A Catalogue of the Vijayanagara Coins of the Andhra Pradesh*, Government Museum, Hyderabad, 1962. He catalogued all the Vijayanagara coins found in the Andhra Pradesh Archaeological Museum at Hyderabad. After a brief introduction, he examined each type of a coin in a chronological order wherein useful details and descriptions are furnished. This is followed by a detailed description and a detailed catalogue of 2134 selected coins of various kings. This contains the size, weight, metal content on the obverse and reverse sides. The work is well illustrated with line drawings as well as photographs of the coins. But he did not touch the cultural dimension of the coinage. Nevertheless, this is one of the most useful catalogues of the Vijayanagara coins so far published. The Government Museum at Chennai has been doing great service to the study of numismatics by publishing various catalogues on coins in the museum. In keeping with this practice, the Museum has published a catalogue prepared by N. Sankara Narayana, entitled *Catalogue of Vijayanagar Coins in the Madras Government Museum, Madras, 1977*. This catalogue is an improvement over the earlier catalogues as it includes some new types of coins. The author has discussed the political history of Vijayanagara as a background, followed by the typological description of coins. After a typological study of the coins, he has given a description of 645 coins of various kings. In addition to the details of size, weight, metal, obverse and reverse, some useful remarks are also included. The usefulness of this catalogue is increased by the details it furnishes on the obverse and reverse of each coin included in the catalogue. In his work *The Coins of Karnataka*, A. V. Narasimha Murthy devoted an entire chapter to Vijayanagara coins referring to various symbols, gods and goddesses, the legends and examined each type in chronological order. Prof. A. V. Narasimha Murthy also worked on coins of Karnataka entitled, *Coins and Currency System in Karnataka, Mysore, 1997*. It deals with the development of Karnataka coinage and currency system in a comprehensive manner of various dynasties. Making use of epigraphical and literary data to understand the system of currency is a unique feature of his work. K. Ganesh and Dr. M.

Girijapathi worked on Vijayanagara coins entitled *The Coins of Vijayanagara Empire*, Bangalore, 1997. It deals with the obverse and reverse details. Michael Mitchiner has worked on coins entitled *The Coinage and History of Southern India Karnataka–Andhra*, pt. 1, London, 1998. Dr. M. Girijapathi worked on coins entitled “*The Coinage and History of Vijayanagara Empire*”, Bangalore, 2009. This book attempts to record the coins of Vijayanagara empire from first ruler Harihara I to last ruler Sri Rangaraya III. This book contains obverse, reverse, metal, legend, size and weight of the coins. The photographs are strikingly clear.

Among the monographs, the most important work on Vijayanagara coins authored by Dr. M. H. Krishna appeared in *Annual Reports of the Mysore Archaeological Department* published while he was its editor during the year 1930-1932. E. J. Rapson wrote a book entitled *Indian Coins*, Varanasi, 1969. In this book he made an attempt to study the types and symbols of the Vijayanagara coins. One of the very early accounts of the coins of the dynasty was prepared by R. S. Panchamukhi entitled *A Vijayanagara Sex centenary Volume*, (pp.101-118). After a brief introduction, he discussed the important types of gold coins of this dynasty. T. V. Mahalingam included as appendix on the coinage of Vijayanagara to his book on Vijayanagara. A stray reference to coins found in inscriptions was also made use by foreign travelers in writing their travelogues or travel accounts. V. A. Smith in his works *The Catalogue of the Coins in the Indian Museum*, Oxford, 1974 and *Coins of Ancient India*, devoted some chapters to the study of the coins of Vijayanagara. Sir Walter Elliot, in his famous work *Coins of Southern India*, Delhi, 1975, mentioned a rare instance of the Dodda Varaha of Krishnadevaraya and under the subtitle *Last Great Hindu Kingdom of Vijayanagara* represented a good background of the political history of Vijayanagara dynasty followed by comments on the coins of Vijayanagara rulers. He described the details of obverse and reverse of the coins. T. Desikachari worked on *South Indian Coins*, (New Delhi, 1984), an important work in which a very short section is devoted to study of Vijayanagara coins.