

# Coins and Currency System in Ancient Karnataka

- Dr.B.Suresha

Associate Professor of History  
Govt Arts College(Autonomous)  
Chitradurga, Karnataka-577501

The study of coins and currency system of South India in general and Karnataka in particular has been a neglected subject of study and research. This is not due to the paucity of coins or numismatic evidence. In fact thousands of coins of ancient Karnataka have been lying in museums and if their proper study is undertaken, a full picture of the numismatic wealth of Karnataka would be forthcoming. The works of M.H. Krishna, A.V. Narasimha Murthy are the only two works of a comprehensive nature in providing a complete and systematic account of the coinage and currency system of Karnataka. Hundreds of coins are discovered every year by way of treasure trove and they have to be studied and published for the benefit of the historians. Another source of coins is the archaeological excavations. Many coins of various dynasties have been discovered in different excavations in Karnataka like Chandravalli(Chitradurga), Banavasi(Shimoga), Vadagaon Madhavpur(Belagavi), Chikka Sindogi(Raichur), H.A.L, Yeshwantapur (Bangalore), Akki Alur (Dharwad) etc. These coins are more important as they are found in association with stratified levels and have cultural and chronological significance. They also provide a firm chronological bracket to the strata. Thus the discovery of Satavahana and Roman Coins at Chandravalli proved extremely useful to understand the chronological sequence.

Another important source for the study of coinage is references to coins and coin-terms in epigraphs. Thus Karnataka inscriptions have hundreds of references to terms of coins and the relative value of coins. This helps in understanding the system of coinage with particular reference to mints, techniques of minting, name of the coins and their descriptive details. For example, the word gadyana does not occur on any coin found so far but is found only in inscriptions. Even Kannada literary works also have references to coins which can be used for reconstructing the history of coinage. With these various reconstruct the history of coinage in ancient Karnataka.

It is difficult to say with certainty when exactly coins were first used in Karnataka. As far as the present evidences are concerned it is likely that Karnataka also followed the general pattern of North India in coinage. Nishka was the earliest coin mentioned in the Vedic literature. Though the exact nature of this term is not known, scholars believe that it represented a lump of gold of a particular weight. Literal meaning of the word Nishka as a necklace has added to further confusion. Thus we are not in a position to know the exact nature, shape and size of the term Nishka which perhaps was used as a coin Karnataka too in the remote past.

The next stage of development is seen in the presence of what are popularly known as punch marked coins. As the term itself signifies, various punches are made on a sheet of metal and each of these punches represented a symbol like dynasty, king, geography, mountain, river etc. In some cases, the guilds of trade or the bankers also punched their symbol on these coins. As the weight decided the shape of these pieces, there is no hard and fast rule regarding the shapes and sizes of these coins. As Karnataka was included in Mauryan empire as evidenced by the presence of a large number of Asokan inscriptions it is of interest to know that the Mauryan punch marked coins were in circulation in Karnataka. M. H. Krishna had made reference to some punch marked coins of the Karshapana series of fifty two grains weight. They are found here in half and quarter Karshapana denominations and contain punches of peacock, sun, bull, elephant and river.

But the most important discovery of punch marked coins in Karnataka was made at Chikka Sindogi in Raichur district. The hoard consisted of more than five thousand silver punch marked coins found in a copper pot. The copper pot contained a Brahmi inscription reading Chantasa in characters assignable to second century A D, on Palaeographical grounds. Perhaps inscription refers to the individual Chanta who was the owner of the coins found here. The shapes of the coins vary such as square, round, rectangular, hexagonal and irregular. Some more hoards have been found at Gulbarga and Raichur Districts.

At Banavasi and Vadagaon Madhavpur excavations, punch marked coins have been discovered thereby giving a chronological position of these coins in Karnataka. At Banavasi the solitary punch marked coin was found in Pre-satavahana levels. As it belongs to Mauryan typology, this shows that during the Mauryan period this coin was in circulation in Karnataka. Madhavpur have not been published. it seems to belong to the Pre- Though the coins of Vadagaon Satavahana period. The punch marked coin found in Chandravalli belongs to the middle Andhra levels. From all these evidences, it becomes clear that the punch marked coins were in circulation in Karnataka from about the third century B. C. to about third century A. D.

Satavahana coins have been reported from various places in Karnataka both as treasure trove and in excavations. These coins made of lead and potin are particularly helpful in dating the layers in excavations. Generally speaking the coins of the early Satavahana kings have not been reported from Karnataka. Coins of Gautamiputra Vasisthiputra, Yajnasri and Pulumavi are generally found here. Usually they have an elephant and legend on the Obverse and Ujjain symbol on the reverse. The feudatories of the Satavahanas such as Chutus and Maharathis ruled in Chitradurga, Banavasi, Karwar and other places. Their coins are similar to those of the Satavahanas Coins of Chutukulananda and Mudananda have been found in plenty at many places including Chandravalli and Banavasi. These coins contain the legend with the title Rajno and the reverse has the tree in the railing.

Before we study the coins of the Kadambas of Banavasi, it is necessary to refer to the commercial contacts that existed between Rome and Karnataka from the early centuries of the Christian era upto sixth century A.D. This flourishing trade contacts are known only through the Roman coins found in Karnataka. Roman merchants used to visit South India including Karnataka in search of spices like pepper and other commodities like beryl and sandal wood. And the Roman merchants paid gold and silver coins and purchased the commodities they wanted." The first discovery of Roman coins was made at Yeshwantapur in Bangalore when 163 Roman silver coins ranging in date from 23 B.C., to 51 A.D. were discovered.? The next discovery was made at Chandravalli excavations by wheeler in 1947. This coin belonged to Roman emperor Tiberius.

Then came the H.A.L. Airport, Bangalore hoard which had coins of Augustus and Tiberius. Then came the most important hoard from Akki Alur in Dharwad district . The importance of this hoard lies in the fact that this contained not only the coins of early Roman emperors but also of later Byzantine rulers and shows that trade continued upto sixth Century A.D.

The Kadambas of Banavasi are the real inauguarators of the numismatic tradition of Karnataka. They are considered as the issuers of coins, generally known as Padmatanka. These are gold coins in which the central punch has a significant padma or lotus either in a natural or in a schematic way. As this punch of lotus was made strongly on thin sheets of gold, the piece turns into a low small cup. Thus they appear unique. Unfortunately they do not have any legend and hence their ascription to the Kadambas has been doubted by some. But these coins are found in and around Banavasi in plenty and hence, numismatists have not hesitated to associate these pieces with the Kadamba dynasty. Elliot and Moraes accept this opinion. These coins have a central lotus punch in the centre with some pellets in other places. Some have many smaller punches containing flower petals or floral designs. Generally they weigh about 66 grains and are designed well. In this connection it may be mentioned that the small scale archaeological

excavation conducted at Banavasi did not yield even a single coin of this type. we get inscribed Kadamba coins, we have to be content with the idea that the uninscribed Padmatankas were the Kadamba contributions.

The Gangas of Talkad who ruled for over six centuries in southern Karnataka have contributed a great deal to Jainism and other aspects of culture. Unfortunately their exact contribution to coinage has not become clear due to the paucity of their coins. Not a single Ganga coin with the name or title of any of their kings on it has come to light. The Ganga royal emblem was caparisoned elephant as evidenced by its depiction on their copper plate seals. Taking this as the clue M. H. Krishna attributed gold and copper coins containing caparisoned elephant on the obverse as the coins issued by the Gangas of Talkad. The gold coins weigh about sixty grains and may be taken as Gadyana or Varaha. One such gold coin has a caparisoned elephant ornamented with girdles, bells, necklaces on the obverse and has a floral design on the reverse. Similar copper coins with doubtful letters have also been attributed to the Gangas. However, there is no certainty regarding their attribution.

The inscriptions of the Gangas of Talkad refer to coins Kerehalli plates of Nishka, Karshapana, Dinara and gadyana. dated 906 A.D. refers to twenty Nishkas as Nitimarga Ereganga offering to a temple. Nonamangala plates of Konganivarma refers to a grant of one fourth of a Karshapana levied as a tax. Koturu inscription of Satyavakya permanadi refers to Gadyanas of gold as part of the Siddhaya. Kukkanur plates of Marasimha-II dated 968 A.D. refers to a toll of 91 dinaras.

The contribution of the Chalukyas of Badami to the system of Coinage is really significant. The very word Varaha or Varāha is their contribution to Indian numismatics. As the royal emblem of the Chalukyas was boar, they minted gold coins with boar on the obverse and such coins were called varahas. They became so popular that the term came to be referred to any gold coin immaterial of the fact whether it contained a boar or not.

So far only the gold and electrum coins of Vikramaditya of this dynasty have come to light. They are about 120 grains (double of a Gadyana or Varaha) and have the Kannada legend, Sri Vikrama Maharaja. The other type of uninscribed coins contain decorated boar on the obverse and floral design on the reverse. On the basis of the similarity of boar on these coins and on the copper plate seals of this dynasty, these coins have been attributed to the Chalukyas of Badami,

Inscriptions of the Chalukyas of Badami also contain many interesting information on the system of coinage. They mention gadyana Suvarna, Dharana, Pana, Pala and Visa as the coins that were in circulation. Gadyana is mentioned in an inscription from the Ladkhan temple at Aihole. Suvarna, also of the value of a Gadyana, is mentioned in two inscriptions. Dharana is also mentioned in an inscription from Aihole. Its value was one fourth of a gadyana. Another inscription of the time of Pulakeshi-II, refers to Navilapon or peacock pon. Perhaps it had a peacock on it. As we know peacock was the vehicle of Kartikeya, who was a tutelary deity of the Chalukyas Lakshmeshwar inscription of Vikramaditya-II refers to a coin pana which was one tenth of a gadyana. An inscription from Durga temple at Aihole refers to the coin visa which was one sixteenth of a Pana. Actual specimens of some of these coins are yet to be discovered.

The political achievements and the economic prosperity of the Rastrakuta period was so great that one would expect a large number of gold coins issued by these rulers. But unfortunately not even a single coin of this dynasty has been found so far and hence our knowledge of the coinage of this dynasty rests entirely on the epigraphic data. The Rastrakuta inscriptions contain the names of the following coins namely, Drama, Suvarna, Gadyana. Pana, Kalanju, Kasu, manjadi and Akkam.

Kanheri inscription of Amoghavarsha-I mentions golden Drammas and distinguishes them from ordinary or silver drammas as being used in the period. Cambay plates of Govinda-IV refer to a gift of 1400 villages, the revenue of which was seven lakh Suvarnas. Suvarna was equal to a gadyana in value.

Gadyana was the most popular coin. An inscription of Indra-III mentions both gadyana and Pana. According to Altekar the weight of this gadyana was 96 grains. One Kalanju was equal to half gadyana. According to another inscription twenty Kasus were equal to seven Kalanjus and hence each kasu must have weighed fifteen grains. Manjadi was one twentieth of a Kalanju and hence its weight was two and a half grains. Twenty Akkams were equal to a Kasu and from this it becomes clear that Akkam weighed one and half grains. Gadyana was the most popular coin and Varaha had not yet become quite popular. For smaller transactions, there were smaller coins going upto Akkam which weighed just one and a half grains. Thus the period laid firm foundations for the flourishing currency system that followed during the later periods.

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