

# Islamic Calligraphy in Coins of Kerala

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In general Arts of Muslims in Kerala can be dividing into two. Performing arts and Visual arts. Performing arts consist ritual arts like *Daffumuttu*, *Aravanakkali* and *Oppana* and folk arts like *Kolkkali* or *Kolattam*.

Idoltry and making images being a taboo among the Muslims of Kerala in visual art category only calligraphy art is practiced.

In Kerala, Islamic calligraphy is seen mainly in Muslim mosques and in tombs. Writing Quranic verses beautifully on mosques can traced back to the time of Malik-ibn-dinar (7<sup>th</sup> AD) in Kerala. The remnants of this art form can also be seen in the mosques of the succeeding period's tombs, coins, *Holy Quran*, book and documents related to Islamic religion.

Various Islamic sects of Kerala had their own contributions in the propagation of this art form. Calligraphy literally means writing beautifully and ornamentally. In Islamic world Calligraphy is the visible expression of the highest art of all the Muslims. It is the art of the spiritual world. It is considered as the most venerated form of Islamic art because it provides a link between the languages of Islam. The art in the form of sculpture and painting especially in the model of human is avoided by the Muslims throughout the world because *Quran* strictly prohibit the making of figures and idol worship (*Quran, sura2 Bakara 51-54*). But the art of calligraphy is permissible because it ultimately perpetuate the word of god-the *Quran*. In fact this art is considered as essential for the propagation of religious beliefs and sentiments of Muslims and it had the direct approval of the holy text itself. In the chapter xcvi- 4 of *Quran* it is mentioned that *Allah* directly taught the mankind to use the pen and write *Quran* beautifully. Calligraphy became one of the most highly prized arts of Muslim world around 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century of Hijra era when the rulers of Muslim world went totally against all plastic and pictorial art.

Calligraphic decoration was a conspicuous one to Kerala Muslims. So great was the charm of the Arabic script it was adopted for not only for decorating Islamic monuments but also for legends on coins like the coin of Arakkal Rajas of Kannur, British east India company, Silver coins and *Parvathi panam* of Travancore.

Calligraphy works are seen on coins issued by Arakkal rulers of Kerala. The coins belonging to 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century bear Persian legends written in thuluth script. The obverse legend-Bi-l-hijrati as sina, and year (*Hijara*) is issue Reverse *Al Waliu-l-mulk Ali Raja* meaning the guardian of the kingdom Ali Raja. "Thuluth has an ornamental role. It was in use in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and is seen in association with the Kufic script. Thuluth means one third. It is said that the script name was derived from the principle of a third of each letter being sloping".

British East India Company coin issued from North Kerala has Arabic legend 'T99' indicating the year of issue. Reverse shows Arabic letters with Diwani script. "Diwani script is a cursive style Arabic script. The outstanding character of Diwani script was its ability to be used as both decorative and communicative script".

A remint coin of Rejent Rani Parvathi of Travancore dynasty has calligraphy work of Naskh script. It is an uncirculated pattern rupee known as Parvathi panam. Language of its legend is in Tamil Malayalam. “Naskh is a cursive script and was more often used for casual writing. This script has round letters and thin lines and it shows a transition from features of Kufic script. Naskh was in use in between 5<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> century. Almost all printed material in Arabic is done in Naskh”.

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