

SAIVA SYMBOLS IN VIJAYANAGAR EMPIRE

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ABSTRACT

The term ‘*Numismatics*’ is normally associated with the avocation of collecting coins. The study of coins also places an important role in archaeology. Coins are useful because they are normally issued by a governing authority and hence constitute a form of official document. Coins have revealed the existence of cities and even kingdoms that are not mentioned in the old literary histories. Even when an ancient society is known from other sources, coins can be helpful in various ways. The designs on coins revealed something of the societies, religion or mythology and reflect the evolution of its art. The only indication of prominent persons of ancient times looked like is provided by the portraits on coins. This kind of information is obtained from coins by the scientific techniques of description and classification. Scientific procedure involves assaying the metallic content of a coinage over a long period of time in order to obtain information about the economic history of the society. This study on Vijayanagar coins reveals the growth of Hinduism and its condition during the Vijayanagar period.

Keywords: Numismatics, Vijayanagar Coins, Religion, Symbols, Hinduism

Hinduism:

Hinduism has been the faith of millions since the days of the Vedas. The rituals and rites, ceremonies and vows prescribed in Hinduism are all directed to the promotion of the well-being of all the worlds.

The Vedas have been identified, from time immemorial, as the fountain head of all Hindu culture. The Hindus have a treasure house of knowledge in the form of four Vedas, viz. Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda and Atharvaveda. The Rigveda, Yajurveda and Samaveda deal with gods and sacrifices, the Atharvaveda deal with man, his protection from harmful adversaries, welfare in life and similar aspects. The end of the Vedas contains philosophical preaching's called the Upanishads or Vedanta.

Vedic religion was one of the aspects of Vedic Civilization which include ideals, society, education, economic life, languages and literature, arts and philosophy, medical sciences, polity and other sciences. Vedic religion was a guiding principle for the conduct of individual life. The fundamentals of Vedic religion comprise certain unshakable beliefs. They include belief in divine power endowed in different gods and goddess as Brahma as Creator, Vishnu as Protector, Siva as Extinguisher of the universe, besides the goddess Sarasvati, Lakshmi, Parvati, Lalitha, Sun, Moon, Ganapati, Kumara and deified spirits dwelling in rivers, hills, fire, water and earth and so on.

South India witnessed great heights in political and cultural fields which it had not witnessed earlier and hence the Vijayanagar period is referred to as the 'Golden Age of South Indian history'. This appellation is justified on the basis of the rich variety of gold coins which were issued by the kings of this dynasty. Majority of the historians have agreed that the aim and purpose of the foundation of this empire was to bring back the glory of Hinduism and Hindu dharma.

During the Vijayanagar period, sage Vidyanaraya revived the lost glory of the Vedic and Puranic religion which suffered a lot, almost to the point of extinction, as a result of repeated Muslim invasions over the southern kingdoms. As the guru or teacher of the Sangama brothers Harihara I and Bukka I, he inspired them to establish a new kingdom first at Anagondi and later at Vijayanagar in A.D.1336.

In a short period, it grew into a mighty empire, which lasted more than three centuries under the patronage of great rulers, viz. two Hariharas, two Bukkas, two Devarayas, two Narasimharayas, Krishnadevaraya, Achyutadevaraya, Sadasivaraya, Venkatapathiraya and others. The Vedic Puranic religion flourished in all its aspects and Vedic studies, rituals, art, architecture, regional languages, literature, fine arts, ayurveda, the philosophical ponderings as contemplated by the sage Vidyanaraya all thrived.

Vidyaranya invited eminent scholars in the Vedas and Sastras from all over the country by offering them agraharas or villages as grants. In the Kraku grant of Harihara II dated A. D. 1376 it is mentioned that one Agrahara was given to 63 Brahmanas well versed in the Vedas. During the Vijayanagar period the sacrificial dharma was intended for Vedic scholars and household rituals took first place for the common man visiting temples and undertaking pilgrimages, enjoying entertainment through folk art, participating in academic activities etc. which played a large role in propagating Vedic religion among the people of all classes, in an Agamic way.

The religious conditions of the period were such that it gave an opportunity for all religions to thrive on their own accord without hindering the promotions of other religions. Saivism and Vaishnavism, the two major religions of south India which had uneasy relations in the earlier period, now flourished side by side. Grants to Saiva and Vaishnav temples were given alike. Some rulers were more inclined towards Virasaivism of Basavanna. The only religious misunderstanding during this period was between Jainas and Sri Vaishnavas but it was amicably settled by Bukka I.

Another important factor was the harmonious development of the three schools of Vedanta, viz. Advaita, Dvaita and Visistadvaita during the period. Vidyaranya of the Advaitamatha of Sringeri, Madhvacharya of Dvaitamatha and Vedanta Desika of the Visistadvaita received equal respect and regard from Vijayanagar rulers though Vidyaranya was the spiritual leader of the foundation of the Vijayanagar Empire. Tolerance of different schools of spiritual thoughts was reflected in the coinage of the period.

Coins are one of the prime materials, apart from sculptures, to know the religious history of a region. The Vijayanagar coins were intact even today because of the symbols of gods and goddesses. The sculptures representing various gods and goddesses and the symbols of worship on the walls and in the pillars' temples of Vijayanagar period certainly helps us to know the religious history of the period.

Saivism

Hinduism is distinctly different from other religions because of holding an incomparable form of Monism in accompaniment with the idea of other deities as subordinate to the non-dual Supreme Spirit. Every cult of the Hindus gives a particular name to this Supreme Spirit, holding all other gods and goddesses as His or Her agents.

Saivism is the religion of such a cult which holds Lord Siva as the Supreme Spirit, pervading the entire universe with His bigger form. Unfortunately, the history of this cult from pre-historic times down to the early centuries of Christian era is somewhat obscure.

The people of Mohenjadarо worshipped a male deity who may be regarded as the proto type of Siva. He is represented as seated in a yoga posture, surrounded by animals and as bearing three visible faces with two horns on two sides of a tall head-dress. During the Vijayanagar period significant changes occurred in the fortunes of Saivasects. Bhikshavritthi Mathawas the sole institution which influenced the rulers of Karnataka and Andhra.

The patronage to the Sri Kalahastisvara Temple by the rulers of Vijayanagar especially by Krishnadevaraya, Achyutaraya and Sadasivaraya was held in high esteem. With the lavish gifts of these benevolent kings, the temple undoubtedly reached its height of glory. The very fact that Achyutaraya chose Sri Kalahasti for celebrating his coronation shows his reverence towards the deity Sri Kalahastisvar.

The above references show how the rulers of Vijayanagar patronised Saivism. This is also reflected on their coinage. In the year 1976, some Vijayanagar gold coins were found in a pot in the Chinna chowk village of Kadapa district. The different types of coins are found in this hoard bearing the gods and goddesses like Uma-Maheswara, Balakrishna, Lakshmi-Narayana and Lord Venkateswara which were issued by Sri Pratapa Harihara, Krishnadevaraya, Sadasivaraya and Sri Rangaraya I.

Siva Parvathi Type

Siva Parvathi or Uma-Maheswara types of coins are generally represented Lord Siva and Parvathi. These types of coins were issued by Harihara II, Devaraya I, Devaraya II, Krishnadevaraya and Sadasivaraya. Lord Siva first appeared on the coins of Harihara II. Lord Siva as Virupaksha, the Lord with the terrible eye was the patron deity of all the Vijayanagar rulers. This type of coins was issued in three metals i.e., gold, silver and copper.

Gold Coins

These types of gold coins were issued by Harihara II, Devaraya I, Krishnadevaraya and Sadasivaraya. Harihara II, the Sangama ruler, issued Siva Parvathi type of gold coins with slight variations. On some of the gold coins, on the obverse side Siva is

shown seated in padmasana on lotus with goddess Parvathi on the left lap. Both of them are wearing kirtas and other ornaments. Siva is shown with four arms. One of the left hands he holds the trident while the other hand is around his consort's waist, one of the right hands (upper right hand) he holds the *damaru* while the other lower right hand is in the abhaya mudra, the symbolic of promising prosperity and protection to all.

Head of Lord 'Siva's above the head are the Sun and Moon, probably the symbols of the desire that the empire should last till the sun and moon lasted. A slight variation is found on some other coins of Harihara II. In this case the right hand of the God holds *parasu* the battle axe in place of *Damaruka*. On a single coin of half Pagoda type issued by Harihara II at Kadapa taluk also figures Siva Parvathi symbol. Devaraya I was the next ruler who issued Siva Parvathi type of gold coins. Three hundred and eight gold coins issued by Devaraya I of Uma-Maheswara type are in the Hyderabad Museum.

On the obverse of the first type coins the god and goddess are shown seated in padmasana posture. Lord Siva is represented with four hands holding *Parasu* and *Damaruka* in two hands, keeping the rest of the hands in Abhaya mudra and in the embracing posture of the goddess. Both Siva and Parvathi are shown wearing kirtas. In the second type Lord Siva and Parvathi are shown with archaic dress and ornaments. Siva is shown holding a *Parasu* in his right hand and a *Mrigain* in his left hand.

Krishnadevaraya of Tuluva dynasty issued Siva Parvati type of coins. His coins also are similar to the coins of the Harihara II, except Lord Siva and goddess Parvati are seated on raised pedestal. The goddess Parvati is shown with two hands normally kept in the act of affectionate gesture to Lord Siva. Both the god and goddess are well adorned with kirtas and archaic dress and ornaments. Sadasivaraya was the next ruler who issued Siva Parvati type of coins. On the obverse of the coin is shown Lord Siva with his consort Parvati seated on a raised pedestal. Both the deities wear kirtas and ornaments. Siva holds a *damaru* in his right hand.

Silver Coins

Silver coins were issued by Harihara II and Devaraya I. Harihara II coin, on the obverse side, shows Siva and Parvati seated. Goddess has folded her hands in *anjali* posture. Devaraya I was the next ruler who issued Siva Parvati coins. His coins are similar to those issued by Harihara II.

Copper Coins

These types of coins were issued by Devaraya II. On the obverse of the coin is depicted the figures of Siva and Parvati seated on a raised pedestal. Parvati has folded her hands in Anjali posture.

A careful study of the above coin types of Siva Parvathi enable to draw the following conclusion. The god and goddess are shown in a sitting posture. The goddess Parvati is seated on the left thigh of the Lord Siva. Both are well adorned with kirita. On all the issues the Lord Siva is represented with four hands; Trisula and Damaru are the attributes shown normally in the hands of the Siva. It is observed that one of the hands is invariably kept in abhaya mudra, while the other is in an act of embracing the goddess. The goddess is shown with two hands normally kept in the act of adoring her Lord. On the most of the coins the Sun and Moon are represented on either side of the head of the Lord. These coins exhibit considerable artistic skill in the representation of the deities. In modelling, in posture and in anatomic details they are pleasing and charming.

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