



Cover Page



COMMEMORATIVE COINS OF VIJAYANAGARA RULERS

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The Vijayanagara Empire was established by Harihara-I and Bukkaraya-I in 1336 CE. The Vijayanagara Empire was ruled over by four dynasties i.e., Sangama, Saluva, Tuluva and Aravidu dynasties. The emergence of Vijayanagara Empire heralded a new phase in the development of the coinage and currency system in the history of South India.

The Vijayanagara monarchs had a separate department of mints of coins. The main mint was located in Hampi. The Vijayanagara kings issued a large number of coins in different metals like gold, silver and copper. However the silver currency is rare. Most of them embossed the images of gods and goddess, animals, birds and state emblem etc.

Besides, regular coins issued for economic purpose the issue of commemorative coins by the dynasty has placed them supra viz other dynasties. Commemorative issues have their own place in numismatics as such issues are very rare. The issues of commemoration coins to religion and it even over triumph in wars and ends up in personal gratification.

Commemorative coins were issued by Devaraya-II and Srikrishnadevaraya. special coins were made in commemoration of occasion like triumphs over the other kingdoms.

Devaraya-II

The elephant symbol may have been adopted by the Vijayanagara rulers for it is symbolic of majesty. Devaraya-II had a special fascination for elephants. The credit for introducing the elephant type of coins goes to Devaraya-II in Vijayanagara empire. "This elephant device appears to have been taken from Ganga Gajapati"¹. The title *Gajabentekara* is well known. He was interested in elephant hunt as evidenced by phrases like 'pleased to institute elephant hunt' etc., in his inscriptions. Many coins show symbols like a wild elephant in a threatening attitude, or a man fighting with the elephant. The elephant type of coins of Devaraya-II are shown in a linear circle an ornamented elephant² moving to left with an uplifted tail in the gold coin and linear circle with a hanged tail in the silver coin. Copper coin has linear circle surrounded by circle of dots, an elephant carrying a royal sword with sun, moon and Kannada letter "De" (Devaraya) above the Elephant.



Gold



Silver



Copper

Subsequently, Mallikarjuna, Vijayaraya-II, Vira Narasimha, Krishnadevaraya, Achyutaraya, Sadasivaraya and Tirumalaraya-I.

A gold coin of Devaraya-II found in the *Srivari hundi* (box of offerings) of Tirumala. This coin has, on the obverse, a moving elephant which is caparisoned and ornamented. The reverse has the Nagari legend *Pratapa Devaraya*.



Cover Page



Sri Krishnadevaraya

Krishnadevaraya was the great ruler among the Vijayanagara rulers. After the conquest of Orissa, he visited Tirupati temple and performed the *Kanakabhisheka* to Lord Venkateswara and for this purpose³ he minted gold coins with portrait of the Lord Venkateswara on the obverse. That these were not just ordinary coins is proved by the fact that their weight was more than the double of the ordinary standard gold coins. The Venkateswara type of coins of Krishnadevaraya weighs 120 grains against the ordinary *gadyanas* of 52 grains. That this is not an isolated event is attested to by the fact that other kings Ramaraya, Sri Rangaraya I, Venkatapathiraya I, Venkatapathiraya II, Venkatapathiraya III and Sri Rangaraya III continued this tradition of the Venkateswara type of coins. These types of coins were minted in gold and copper metals.

Sri Venkateswara commemorative coins of Krishnadevaraya period are shown below.



On the obverse side of the coin is shown Lord Venkateswara standing to front with a tall *kirita* and upper and lower cloth and ornaments. The right back hand holds the *Chakra* and the left the *Sankha*. The right front hand is in the *danamudra*⁴ and the left rests on his hip and points to his feet as the place of refuge for all devotees. Above the image of the Lord Venkateswara is an ornamental *torana* or arch with a lion is face at the keystone supported by two *Makaras*. The arch is born by two ornamental star-shaped pillars, the lower parts of which are covered by planks. The God stands on a ground which is supported by a lotus⁵. Sri Rangaraya I, Venkatapathiraya I, Aliya Ramaraya, Venkatapathiraya II, and Sri Rangaraya III also followed this tradition with small variations, but they issued normal size of *gadhyana* weight only.

The Krishnadevaraya brought the image of Krishna from Udayagiri, after its conquest of Orissa, he minted coins containing the image of divine baby Balakrishna with a conch to his left and discuss to the right on the obverse⁶. These type of coins were issued by Krishnadevaraya in gold.



The figure of Lord Baby Balakrishna is depicted on the obverse of the coin. The Lord Baby Balakrishna is shown in a sitting posture, with the left knee completely bent and slightly raised to facilitate his hand to rest over it; his right leg is also completely bent and placed touching the left leg to enable the deity to sit at ease. The Lord Baby Balakrishna is shown holding a lump of butter in his right hand, whereas, the left hand is shown resting on the left knee. To the left of Lord Baby Balakrishna is *sankha* and to the right is *chakra*. The Lord wears various ornaments like ear-rings, a girdle of gingles, armlets, bracelets and anklets.

The Lord Baby Balakrishna motifs on the coins of Krishnadevaraya reflected his love for the Lord Krishna *avatars* and are regarded as one of the most comprehensive incarnations ever assumed by the Lord Vishnu. The iconographical features of Lord Krishna are well portrayed on the coins. They are outstanding as pieces of art.



Cover Page



The history has recorded that Timmarasu was responsible for the accession of Krishnadevaraya to the Vijayanagara throne. He was elevated to Prime Ministership and enjoyed a redundant status. Krishnadevaraya performed *Kanakabisheka* to Timmarasu. To commemorate these great event special copper coins were issued in which the Kannada legend “Krishnadeva” on the obverse and “Timmarasaguru” on the reverse was inscribed. This is the unique coin in every sense has the name of the emperor and his Prime Minister appears rarely.

Tirumalaraya I changed the deity on his coins, and also he changed the capital to Penukonda after the death of Sadasivaraya. He changed his protecting deity from Virupaksha to Sri Rama; it is evidenced by his coins. His coins contain on the obverse Sri Rama with Sita and Lakshmana. Tirumalaraya I was the originator of the Ramatanki coins which were most popular in South India in Post-Vijayanagara period. Tirumalaraya I issued Lord Rama-Sita and Lakshmana type of gold coins.



On the obverse of the coin is depicted Lord Rama seated on a throne with Goddess Sita on his left thigh with standing Lakshmana behind Rama in an attitude of devotion and he has a bow in his right shoulder. Lord Rama is represented with a tall *kirita* with his right hand in *abhaya mudra*⁷ symbolizing his hand of benediction and protection.

The reign of Tirumalaraya I synchronized with the revival of worshipping Sri Rama⁸. Tirumalaraya *varahas* bear on the obverse a group which evidently stands for the coronation of Sri Rama with Sita and Lakshmana. These coins give an insight of the revival of Rama worship⁹. In the sphere of Vaishnavite worship, Lord Rama played a vital role in Vijayanagara sculpture.

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