



COIN TERMS IN THE INSCRIPTIONS OF VIJAYANAGARA RULERS

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The epigraphs of the Vijayanagara period are written in four languages viz. Sanskrit, Kannada, Telugu and Tamil. These epigraphs contain very valuable information on various aspects of the Vijayanagara coins and currency system. Unfortunately so far this data has not been pressed into service by the numismatists for understanding the coinage of Vijayanagara period. A detailed understanding of the sub-texts will throw light on the economic dimension of the Vijayanagara coinage as it is evident that fifty percent of the Vijayanagara inscriptions refer to the coins as medium of exchange in several transactions.

The epigraphs of the Vijayanagara period furnish most important and descriptive information about the varieties of coins. Coins are distinguished on the basis of the mints, symbols, metals, and their values. The names of the coins like *Gadyana*, *Varaha gadyana*, *Dodda gadyana*, *Pratapa gadyana*, *Kati gadyana*, *Rekha gadyana*, *Rekha gatti varaha gadyana*, *Kathari ankusha gadyana*, *Kula gadyana*, *Hittuvali gadyana*, *Samudaya gadyana*, *Dodda varaha*, *Ghatti varaha*, *Sudda varaha*, *Chakra varaha*, *Hanumantharaya varaha*, *Venkatapatiraya varaha*, *Gandikota varaha*, *Sanna pratapa*, *Mada*, *Pana*, *Honnu*, *Hana*, *Kati honnu*, *Gajabentakara hon*, *Bele*, *Ruka*, *Tara*, *Panam* and *Kasu* etc., are furnished by the inscriptions and literary works. The *gadyana* was the most popular coin of the Vijayanagara period.

Naming the coins after the mint place was also followed during the Vijayanagara period. Coins were named after the mints located at Barakuru, Mangaluru, Tirupati, Adoni, Tadipatri, Gutti, Nellore and Madurai. Barakuru and Mangaluru were the provincial capital of Tulunadu during Vijayanagara period. The *gadyanas* that were minted are referred to as Barakuru *gadyana* and Mangaluru *gadyana* respectively¹. Adoni (Adavani) and Tadipatri had mints where the gold *honnu* was minted and is known by a Kannada work *Manaumiyachaupada*. *Hons* minted at Gutti called Gutti *honnu* is known from the same work². Some coins bear the letters *Ne* and *Ma* on the obverse and they are presumed to represent Nellore and Madurai which were important places during the Vijayanagara period.

Gadyana

Gadyana was a most popular coin during the Vijayanagara period. The epigraphs are mentioned variously as *gadya*, *gadyana* and *gadyanaka*, whereas, in Vijayanagara inscriptions the coin *varaha*, *varaha-gadyana* i.e. *gadyana* with *varaha* emblem on it was mentioned. Curiously it is not found mentioned in the inscriptions of the early period. The coins *gadyana*, *varaha* and *mada* were of the same value and were more popular during this period³.

Varaha gadyana

Varaha gadyana was the most popular coin during the Vijayanagara period. Generally *varaha* and *gadyana* denoted the same coin of gold, but in the epigraphs of this period, the term *varaha gadyana* is used frequently to indicate equal in weight and value. It is generally accepted *varaha* and *gadyana* are synonymous. *Varaha* of the earlier period though made of gold, did not contain the emblem of *varaha* except in the case of the Chalukyas of Badami. Later, *varaha* became the name of a gold coin even though it did not contain a boar on it. However, the Vijayanagara rulers issued *gadyana* coins with boar on the obverse⁴.

The term *varaha-gadyana* is found in many inscriptions of the period. For example an inscription of 1386 CE of the time of Harihara II referred to a grant of 60 *varaha-gadyanas* to an individual⁵.

Another inscription of 1514 CE., belonging to the time of Krishnadevaraya from Kahalli near Mysore, mentions the total revenue of the village as 130 *gadyanas* and 2 *varahas*⁶. Another inscription of 1532 CE of the time of



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Achyutaraya refers to 1350 *varaha-gadyanas* as the gift for the services rendered in the temple⁷. *Gadyana* as a coin was used in revenue transactions, such as sale of land, payment of tax, gift in cash to temples etc., *Varaha* as a coin was used in transactions of social nature such as a gift in religious ceremonies like *upanayana*, and marriage etc but a detailed study of the inscriptions of the period does not support this view. Hence the above conjecture of the exclusive significance attached to *gadyana* and *varaha* cannot be accepted. It appeared that the *gadyana* slowly lost its importance as compared to *varaha*.

DODDA GADYANA AND CHIKKA GADYANA

*Dodda gadyana*⁸ and *Chikka gadyana* literally mean 'big' or large *gadyana* and 'small' *gadyana*. It is not known if the adjective 'dodda' refers to the size or the weight of the coin. The ordinary *gadyana* of the Vijayanagara period weighed 52 grains. However, Krishnadevaraya minted a special type of *gadyana* in honour of Lord Venkatesvara of Tirupati which weighed 117 grains, and it is generally referred to as 'double *gadyana*' or a 'double *varaha*'. Hence, it may be surmised that double *gadyana* coin, became famous as *dodda-gadyana*. The normal *gadyana* coin measured about half an inch in diameter, whereas, the double *gadyana* measured three fourths of an inch. The word *Chikka-gadyana* refers to the ordinary *gadyana* which is smaller in size as well as lesser in weight⁹.

PRATAPA GADYANA

Pratapa gadyana and *Pongadyana* referred to combination of *varahagadyana*. *Pratapa* as a coin was introduced by Harihara II¹⁰. On the obverse of the coin, the legend *pratapa* was followed by the name of the king. It was half a *gadyana* in value and weighed 26 grains. These types of coins became famous as *pratapa gadyana* in course of time. Similarly *pon* or *hon* was a coin and was equal to the *gadyana* or *varaha* in value and weighed 52 grains. Though, the significance of the combination *pon gadyana* cannot be understood without any further detail from the inscriptions.

An inscription from the Srikalahasti temple is traced to Krishnadevaraya dated 1511 CE refers to 850 *pon* was gifted to the god Srikalahastisvara¹¹. Another inscription from the same place got carved out by Achyutaraya dated 1538 CE refers to 60 *pons* gifted to the temple¹².

KATI GADYANA

The word *kati* is used not only with *gadyana* but also with other terms like *kati-hon*, *kati-hana* and *kati-varaha*. The literal meaning of the word *kati* is 'one fourth' and hence, *kati-gadyana* should be taken to mean one fourth of a *gadyana*. In fact gold coins of the period weigh 52, 26 and 13 grains and obviously the *kati-gadyana* weighed 13 grains. As coins of this weight are found in plenty, it may be inferred that *kati gadyana* was quite a popular coin during the Vijayanagara period. Some examples may be cited to illustrate this point.

An inscription dated 1406 CE which belonged to Bukkaraya II refers to *kati-gadyana* five times in different contexts¹³. In first occurrence the word is written fully as *kati-gadyana* but in later references it is simply abbreviated as 'KaGa'. This also reflects the popularity of the coin. But one thing that cannot be explained is the reference to huge number of *kati-gadyanas* instead of expressing the same in terms of *gadyanas*.

Another inscription of the time of Mallikarjuna refers to an annual income of 1697 *katigadyanas* to *SankaraBharati*¹⁴. In the above case, 1697 *kati-gadyanas* are equal to 424 *gadyanas* and 1 *kati-gadyana*. But it is not mentioned so in the inscription and this is difficult to explain.

Ardha kati-gadyana also occurs in epigraphs of the period and obviously it is referred as half of a *kati-gadyana* or one eighth of a *gadyana*. This is mentioned in an inscription of the time of Achyutaraya dated 1542 CE¹⁵. This epigraph registers a payment totalling to 67 and half *katigadyana* was made to an individual.



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REKHA GADYANA

The exact significance of this coin is not clear. It is found mentioned in one of the inscriptions from Kalahasti belonging to the reign of Achyutaraya. It records the grant of annual total revenue amounting to 4500 *Rekha-gadyanas* for various specified offerings to the god Kalahatisvara¹⁶.

REKHA-GHATTI-VARAHA-GADYANA

This is used as a synonym of *gadyana* in one of the inscription from *Chinna-Ahobalam*. It belongs to the reign of Sadasiva and is dated 1552 CE. It records the gift of a village, which was sold for 500 *Rekha-gatti-varaha-gadyanas* and paid into the temple treasury of the god Ahobalesvara. Since *Varaha* and *Gadyana* are synonyms, we may take this coin as *Rekha-gatii-varaha* or *Rekha-gatti-gadyana*. In Telugu *gatti* means 'strong' and hence this may denote a coin of sterling quality¹⁷.

CHAKRA GADYANA

During the Vijayanagara period, reference to coins by the symbols they contained was resorted to. There is a reference to *Chakra-gadyana* in an inscription of the period¹⁸. Literally it means a *gadyana* with a *chakra* on it. However, it has to be noted that no Vijayanagara coin contains exclusively a *chakra* on it. But '*chakra*' is found along with other, symbols like *sankha*. The gold coins of Harihara II showing Lakshmi-Narayana and Lakshmi-Narasimha contain *sankha* and *chakra* as attributes. A copper coin of Tirumalaraya contains on the obverse a *sankha* to the left and a *chakra* to the right.

This coin was found mentioned in the Vijayanagara inscriptions. Obviously it bore the *Sudarsana-chakra* emblem and hence came to be known as *chakra-gadyana*. *Chakra-varaha* is another name by which this coin is referred to in inscriptions¹⁹. An inscription from *Chinna-Ahobilam*, belonging to the reign of Sadasivaraya is interesting in that it mentions *rekha-chakra-gadyana* and *chakra-varaha* as synonyms²⁰.

KATHARI ANKUSA GADYANA

The term *kathari* means a 'dagger' and *ankusa* is a 'goad'. *Kathariankusagadyana* was mentioned in an inscription of Harihara II from Puttige and dated 1389 CE²¹. The inscription states that Mudiya, the watchman was to be paid *kathari ankusa gadyana* as his salary. *Kathari* and *ankusa* both are generally associated with elephants; it is quite likely that this coin refers to the *gadyanas* issued by Devaraya II. Though a *dagger* has been sighted on these coins, *ankusa* has not been seen on these coins²².

KULA GADYANA – HITTUVALI GADYANA - SAMUDAYA GADYANA

The terms like *kulagadyana*, *hittuvali gadyana* and *samudayagadyana* are mentioned in inscriptions. These names of the coin with the taxes were also in practice during the Vijayanagara period. An inscription from Gubbi of the time of Harihara II mentions *kula gadyana* and *hittuvali gadyana* as taxes. Similarly, *samudayagadyana* was a tax to be paid by the *samudaya* or group of villages²³.

DODDA VARAHA

Dodda varaha literally meaning 'double *varaha*' and it contains 117 grains minted by Krishnadevaraya, as against the ordinary *varaha* of 52 grains. In both weight and size it was a big (*dodda*) *varaha* as it weighed 117 grains and measured 0.75 in diameter. In order to distinguish this coin from the ordinary *varahas* of 52 grains and of 0.45 in diameter, this term *dodda varaha* was used in the period. An epigraph of the time of Sadasivaraya refers to a gift of 35 *doddavarahas* as interest on 350 *varahas*²⁴. It is of importance to note that the principle is mentioned in terms of *varahas*,



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whereas, interest is mentioned in terms of *doddavarahas*. As already observed in the case of *dodda gadyana*, *dodda varaha* is also a 'big' *varaha* perhaps referring to the double *varaha* coin minted by Krishnadevaraya.

GHATTI VARAHA

In Telugu *ghatti* means 'strong' and hence this may be denoting a coin of superior quality. *Ghatti varaha* can be literally translated as 'solid *varaha*' but this does not help us in understanding the real nature of the *varaha* referred to. There is also another expression *nijaghatti varaha* where *nija* is used to emphasise the point that it is *ghatti varaha*. An epigraph of the time of Sadasivaraya dated 1552 CE refers to a gift of *ghatti varahas*²⁵. Another epigraph from Suttur near Mysore of the time of Tirumalaraya also refers to gift of 40 *ghattivarahas*²⁶. The same epigraph was also referring to *ghatti gadyana* and from the context it appears that both refer to one and the same coin.

SUDDHA VARAHA

The term *suddha varaha* means 'pure *varaha*'. Obviously, it refers to the percentage of gold content in it. In the absence of any analysis of gold content in Vijayanagara coins, it is difficult to understand the term. However, epigraphical evidence throws some light on it. An inscription of the period refers to three different gold contents of the coins as eight, eight and half and nine²⁷. It is also known from Barbosa that gold coins were rather 'base'. The inspectors of coins always carried a touchstone to test the fineness of the coins. From these references, it can easily be surmised that, fineness of gold coins differed. Hence the term *suddha varaha* refers to those coins which had the highest percentage of gold content in them.

CHAKRA VARAHA

Chakra varaha is obviously the same as *chakra gadyana* which contained a *chakra* on the *varaha* coins. However, it has to be noted that *chakra* appears in the hands of the deities on the *varaha* coins and not as an independent symbol²⁸.

HANUMANTHARAYAVARAHA AND VENKATAPATIRAYA VARAHA

Hanumantharaya varaha and *Venkatapatiraya varaha* are those coins which contained the image of Hanuman and Venkatesvara on them. Coins with the image of Hanuman was minted the rulers like Harihara I, Bukkaraya I and Venkatapatiraya I²⁹. Krishnadevaraya introduced the practice of minting the portrait of Venkatesvara and this was continued by the later rulers Sri Rangaraya, Venkatapatiraya I and Venkatapatiraya II.

GANDIKOTA VARAHA

Gandikota varaha is the coin minted at Gandikota a famous fort, now in Cuddappah district of Andhra Pradesh. It is evident that there was a Vijayanagara mint in Gandikota³⁰.

SANNA PRATAPA

Sanna pratapa literally means a 'small *pratapa*'. It is known that *pratapa* was half of a *gadyana*. This presupposes the existence of a big *pratapa* different from the *sanna pratapa* or small *pratapa*. It is mentioned in an inscription dated 1477 CE³¹ refers to the purchase of a house by paying 400 *sanna pratapas*.

MADA AND MADAI

Mada was a popular gold coin throughout the Andhra Country. During the medieval period, a number of inscriptions mention *mada* and *gadyana* as synonyms. Some inscriptions from Srikakulam district refer *mada* and *nishka*



as synonyms. In the Sanskrit portion of epigraphs the coin is mentioned as *nishka* while the Telugu portion refers to the same coin as *mada*³².

The kings of Vijayanagara minted *Mada* type of coins also. But their use was limited as compared to *varaha* and *gadyana*. An inscription of 1386 CE issued during the period of Harihara II records the sale of a land for a sum of 200 *Singayamadas*³³. Another epigraph of the time of Devaraya II describes the cost of construction of a dam as 300 *singaya madas*³⁴. As the word, *singa* literally means a lion, it may be surmised that these *mada* coins might have had lion on them. Achyutaraya *mada* is mentioned in an inscription of the time of Sri Rangaraya I, dated 1578 CE from Bellary District of Karnataka³⁵. This is a Telugu inscription. It mentions the sale of a land for 84 *Achyutaraya mada varaha gadyanas*. Obviously, this reference shows that it was a *gadyana* and as the people of the area are more familiar with the term *mada* (in Telugu), this term has been used.

It is suggested that *dharana* was another name of *mada* which was more popularly known as *Purana*³⁶. In a couple of inscriptions from Andhra, *dharanam* is mentioned as a fraction of *mada*³⁷. But their relative value is not given in the inscription. One of the inscriptions of Sadasivaraya, dated 1545 CE from Anantapur district recorded the gift of one *mada* and one *dharanam* per month for maintaining a perpetual lamp³⁸.

Mada was a gold coin current in olden days and was also known as *Pon*. An inscription from the Srikalahasti, belonging to the Devaraya, a *pon* was equal to a *pagoda*. In one instance, it is said to be equal to a *varaham*³⁹ and in another instance, to 10 *panam*⁴⁰.

PANA

Pana coin seems to have been introduced by the Western Chalukyan kings. This coin became more popular during the Vijayanagara period. It is stated that *Pana* was a gold coin; ten *Panas* were equal to one *Gadyana*⁴¹.

HONNU and HANA

Honnu and *Hana* are referred to in many Vijayanagara inscriptions. An inscription from Chikkanapura in Gundlupet taluk dated 1412 CE refers to a transaction in which 270 *hanas* are said to be equal to 27 *hons* 27 *honnu*⁴². From this it becomes clear that one *honnu* was equal to ten *hanas*. It is generally believed that *honnu* is a gold coin. An inscription dated 1405 CE, belonging to the reign of Devaraya records that on the representation of the temple priests, king Vira Devaraya I, confirmed the gift of the village Tammadivarahalli and the income of 25 *Honnus* derived from the *Kanika* realized from the Sivaratri festivals formerly made Kamnannodeya and Chikkodeya to god Mallikarjuna at Chandragiri and recorded that 20 *Honnus* that were being paid to the place till then be remitted to the temple. The Vijayanagara inscription refers to *bellihonnu* meaning silver hon. This is really interesting. The inscription of Krishnadevaraya period, referred to a series of transactions in which silver *honnu* was referred⁴³. Perhaps in this context, *honnu* was simply used in the general sense of a coin, and not a particular coin itself.

The word *hana* in Kannada refers to money in general as well as a particular coin. It is not known in what way this coin was different from either a *pratapa* or a *hana*. *Hana* is also mentioned along with taxes like *manehana* and *nogahana*⁴⁴. An inscription from Ummattur dated 1416 CE refers to *honnu hana*⁴⁵. Tirupati *hana* is either a coin minted in Tirupati or the coin with the god of Tirupati on it embossed portrayed⁴⁶.

KATI HONNU

The word *kati* occurs in Kannada literary works as a small coin. The word *kati* means 'one fourth' and *honnu* is equal to a *gadyana* or *varaha*, and *kati honnu* means one fourth of a *varaha*. *Kati honnu* is mentioned in an inscription of the time of Krishnadevaraya dated 1515 CE.⁴⁷ It refers to the visit of Sringeri Swamiji to Hampi and the gift of two villages Hayyuru and Honnagalli which yielded 362 and 150 *kati honnu* respectively. In that case it becomes difficult to



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understand the necessity of mentioning 362 *kati honnu* which could have been better expressed as 90 and half *hons*. Hence it may be surmised that *kati* should have had some other significance also which we are not able to understand at present⁴⁸.

GAJABENTEKARA HON

Gajabentekara hon literally means a *hon* of elephant hunting type. *Gajabentekara* is the title of Devaraya II of Vijayanagara and his coins contain similar title with an elephant on it. This coins containing the legend *Gajabentekara* and *Gajagandabherunda*. Hence these coins were referred to as *gajabentekara* coins by the common people. Thus this is a good example for a coin being referred to by its legend on it⁴⁹.

BELE

Bele coin is mentioned rarely in the inscriptions of the Vijayanagara period. An inscription of the time of Harihara II, dated 1382 CE refer the taxes to be paid to Dandanayaka Muddappa at the rate of one *bele* per *gadyana*⁵⁰. As the income is described as *suvarnadaya*, it becomes clear that *bele* was a gold coin.

RUKA

Ruka coin was quite popular in the Andhra area right from the eight century CE. It continued to be used in the Andhra during the Vijayanagara period. An epigraph from Nellore dated 1531 CE , refers to a gift of 90 *rukas*. Another inscription from the same place of the time of Achyutaraya, dated 1535 CE., refers to a fine of 12 *rukas*⁵¹. A solitary reference from Bangalore in a Telugu inscription of the time of Achyutaraya refers to a local levy of one *ruka* on the occasion of the *namakarana* ceremony⁵². In the absence of more data, it is not possible to identify this coin *ruka* and its relative value. Perhaps it was a gold coin.

TARA

Silver coins are rare in the Vijayanagara period. *Tara* is the only silver coin. An inscription of the time of Devaraya II dated 1424 CE refers to a land transaction in which *Tara* is mentioned but it does not state that it was a silver coin⁵³.

Tara coin is rarely found in the inscriptions during the Vijayanagara period⁵⁴. According to some Kannada inscriptions, it was 1/16 of *pana*⁵⁵. An inscription from Anantapur district seems to suggest that *Tara* was a fraction of a *Ruka*⁵⁶. It records the gift of four *Rukas* and four *Taras* for maintaining a perpetual lamp. This inscription probably belongs to the later Vijayanagara period⁵⁷.

PANAM

Panam is referred to in some inscriptions and literary works as a copper coin. It is difficult to distinguish between the copper and gold *Panam* as found in the inscriptions. According to *Parasara Madhaviya*, *Pana* was a copper coin⁵⁸.

A small number of records and epigraphs from Pudukottai region belonging to the Vijayanagara period mention different types of *panams*. In fact, there is a strong tradition of Viraraya *panams* throughout South India. But it has not been possible to identify this Viraraya of this tradition. However, it has been surmised that *panams* minted by Harihara II with Hanuman on the obverse and the legend *Vira Harihara* on the reverse. The records from Pudukottai also mention *gulikaipanam*, *rasi panam*, *chakra panam* and *adura panam*⁵⁹. It is difficult to understand the meaning of these terms.

An inscription from the Srikalahasti, belonging to the reign of Devaraya II dated 1435 CE., It refers to the *panam*. Its average weight was 5.28 gms, and one *gadyana* was equal to 10 *panam*⁶⁰. Another inscription from the same place which belongs to Krishnadevaraya dated 1514 CE., refers 1,000 *panams* donated to the temple⁶¹. Another inscription from



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the same temple which belonged to Achyutaraya dated 1532 CE., refers to 4,000 *panams* gifted to the temple maintenances⁶². An inscription from the same place which belonged to Achyutaraya dated 1537 CE, refers to 440 *panam* gifted by the king to the temple⁶³. Besides, an inscription from the same place which belonged to Sadasivaraya dated 1554 CE refers to 100 *panams*⁶⁴.

KASU

Kasu which was widely current in Tamil country did not seem to be in much popularity in Andhra prior to the 14th century. A glossary given in the Nellore District Inscription Volumes explains *kasu* as a coin of gold, silver, and copper. The copper *kasu* was about 1/20 of a penny. The term *kasu* as copper coin occurs in an inscription of the time of Achyutaraya dated 1531 CE. It mentions the local levy as one *kasu* per load of paddy and grains⁶⁵. Another inscription from Cheruvu Belagallu in Kurnool District which belonged to the reign of Sadasivaraya dated 1568 CE. It gives a list of gifts made to the god Rajarajesvara in the context of which the coins Varaha and *kasu* are mentioned. However, no details regarding to the value or metal of the coin are specified. Another inscription from the same district and belonging to the same date suggests that *kasu* is a fraction of *hana*⁶⁶.

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