

## A Study on Animal motifs on Coins of VIJAYANGAR's Empire History

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### Abstract

*Different empires were having different coins history and their origin. The Vijayanagara Empire represents the last glorious epoch in the annals of South Indian history. The main object of the Vijayanagara Empire was to consolidate Hindu power and act as a bulwark to Muslim danger. In the due course of time and evolution of man, animals started being worshipped for their individual traits, attributes and characteristics as perceived by man in his imagination. This paper highlights the importance of animals on vijayanagar coins.*

**Key words:** Coins, Vijayanagara empire, Vahanas, Vrishabha, Jatamukuta

### Introduction

The Vijayanagara Empire established by Harihara I and Bukkaraya I in 1336 A. D. with the advice of sage Vidyanaya. The Vijayanagara Empire represents the last glorious epoch in the annals of South Indian history. The main object of the Vijayanagara Empire was to consolidate Hindu power and act as a bulwark to Muslim danger. After the Gupta dynasty, the Vijayanagara rulers were the first to issue gold coins in large numbers and denominations. They also issued silver and copper coins for business and day to day transaction. Denominations include the *pagoda*, *fanam* in gold, *tara* in silver, *pana*, *jital* and *kasu* in copper. The present paper deals with the animal motifs depicted on the Vijayanagara Coins. These coins are issued in gold, silver and copper metals.

### Origin of animal worship

In the due course of time and evolution of man, animals started being worshipped for their individual traits, attributes and characteristics as

perceived by man in his imagination. Bull symbolized strength, Elephant wisdom, Lion power, Boar ferocity, Horse nobility and so on. Seals of the Indus Valley Civilization show many animals including some mythical for example unicorn, while the Great Indian epic Ramayana is replete with animals who play an important role viz. Bear, Monkey etc. According to literature every deity is associated with some animals to represent its *Vahana* (mount). The deity even when found seated, standing reclining, has been depicted with an animal or human (*nara*) which serves as its *Vahana*. There are various animal associated with each deity which also is an identifying mark or symbol for the particular icon. The *Vahanas* are thus the symbol of power and movement.

Animals are most prolific on the coins issued by the Vijayanagara rulers. Generally the animals are portrayed on the obverse in highly prominent way, occupying the entire flan of the coin. Even obverse contained a legend, the animal was shown as more prominent. The Vijayanagara rulers issued bull, tiger, lion, elephant, boar, horse and camel types of coins.

### Bull type

Bull is the guardian of the East and a symbol of royalty right from the earliest Indus cultures. Depicting Bull on the coins was quite popular with the kings of Vijayanagara. The bull is also a much venerated animal and treated as holy. The Saivite temples frequently depict the figures of bull. The bull is known as Nandi, the *vahana* of Lord Siva, who is shown, carved along with the bull in the form of *Vrishabarudhamurthi*. Coming to the Vijayanagara period, the kings like Harihara I, Bukka I, Harihara II, Bukka II, Devaraya I,

Ramachandra, Vijayaraya I, Mallikarjuna, Krishnadevaraya, Sadasivaraya, Ramaraja, Tirumalaraya I, Srirangaraya I, Venkatapatiraya II, Srirangaraya II, Srirangaraya III were issued a large number of bull type of coins in silver and copper metals, except

Mallikarjuna all Vijayanagara rulers issued coins in copper only. These coins are generally contained within a dotted circle a fine humped bull is shown, which is moving to either left or right with bells hanging from its neck; crescent moon is shown above and a dagger in front are portrayed on the obverse of the coin. On the reverse of the coin shows either name or title of the king. The presence of bull on Vijayanagara coins shows the prevalence

of Saivism. The Saivites attach great importance to this emblem for it is the *vahana* of Lord Siva. *Vrishabha* symbolized the very essence of energy and represents the Great god Siva

The crescent moon stands for Siva as Chandrasekhara, wears crescent in his *jatamakuta*. The Sun and the Moon are sometimes reproduced as symbols of eternal duration and the success of the empire.

The above study shows that the Sangama dynasty rulers mostly followers of Saivism, the Tuluva and Aravidu dynasties were staunch followers of Vaishnavism but they also patronized Saivism. This study shows the religious tolerance of the Vijayanagara rulers.

### **Tiger type**

This type of coin was issued Harihara I only who belonged to Sangama dynasty. It was the influence of the Hoyasalas. The figure of a tiger is found on all the copper plates and coins issued by the Hoyasalas in south India. On the obverse of the coin, we find a figure of standing tiger with its face turned towards left and foreleg raised; the tail is

shown bent upwards; a crescent moon is also seen at the top of the tiger. The coins of Harihara I with Hanuman and Garuda are known. But this rare coin with the figure of a tiger and the name of the king in Kannada script is generally considered as the first copper coin issued by Harihara I during the early period of his reign.

The link between Hoyasala and Vijayanagara coinage, particularly during the periods of Harihara and Bukkaraya, is provided by the coins illustrated.

### **Lion type**

The lion symbol gained more popular because of power and might and ultimately royal dignity. Its entry in Indian art and mythology was apparently from Western Asia. The earliest coins to bear lion figures were issued by the foreign rulers, i.e., the Indo-Greek kings. However, the lion device is also appeared on the silver punched- marked coins and on few specimens of local coins. The Narasimha (half man, half lion) avatar of Vishnu is very popular. The lion slayer type gold coins of the Gupta kings show them engaged in various animated battle scenes with the lion indicating the kings strength, ability and courage. Generally on the coins, the lion is shown in a heraldic way with all the four legs resting on the ground. The tail is raised over the body. Lion can be seen in Vijayanagara art, exactly similar to its prototype of the Vishnukundins, Pallavas and Kadambas. It stands with its right forepaw raised, neck erect, and wide-opened mouth as an ornamental motif. Its tail is curled into a loop as in the case of the lion of the Ramatirtha plates of the Vishnukundins. It is possible that the Vijayanagara emperors carved it on their temples to commemorate the reduction of Kadamba monarch whose name is not mentioned by Marappa. This motif is also depicted on the Vijayanagara coins. These coins were issued by Harihara I, Devaraya II, Vira Narashimha, Sadasivaraya, Ramadevaraya and Srirangaraya III. They issued in silver and copper metals. These coins are generally contain on the obverse of the coin is shown a lion moving to left, with its tail curled on its back and forepaw raised, with sword placed horizontally above it. The entire motif is enclosed in two concentric circles

### **Elephant type**

The elephant symbol may have been adopted by the Vijayanagara rulers for it is symbolic of majesty. In the Hindu myths the elephant is the Vehicle of Indra, *Airavata*, which is declared supreme among elephants by Lord Krishna in the *Bhagavadgita*. To the Buddhists the elephant is symbolic of representing Buddha. To the Jain the elephant is held sacred for it is the *lanchna* of the Tirtankara Ajitanatha. The earliest coin with elephant on obverse comes from Vasisthiputra Pulumavi of Satavahana dynasty and also it first appeared early Nayakas of Madurai. However, it became far more popular in the Vijayanagara heartlands, in the reign of Devaraya II. His title *gajabentekara* (Hunter of Elephants) was both a reference to his love of this sport and a metaphor for his victory over the Gajapatis (elephant lords) of Orissa. Hence it is understandable that elephants would appear on many of his coins.

Elephant type of coins issued by the Vijayanagara rulers are in gold, silver and copper metals. These coins issued by Devaraya II, Vijayaraya II and Mallikarjuna, Vira Narasimha, Sri Krishnadevaraya, Achyutaraya, Sadasivaraya, Tirumalaraya I.

Devaraya II issued Elephant type of coins in gold, silver and copper metals. In his quarter *varaha* or half *partab* gold coin is seen a fine elephant moving to left. The same type of elephant is seen in his silver coin *tara*. His copper coins contained different types of elephant are seen. In one type is show an elephant moving to right. In another type the elephant is caparisoned and ornamented. The elephant itself has an uplifted tail. In another type is ornamented with neck ropes, necklaces and has a sword in its trunk. His successors are followed this tradition of issuing the elephant coins.

### Boar type

As in art and sculpture the image of *varaha* is portrayed on Indian coins. Boar is associated in Indian mythology with Vishnu's who incarnated as a *varaha*. Boar was the royal insignia of the Chalukyas of Badami. Badami and Kalyani Chalukyas issued coins using boar symbol on

their coins. But boar is rare on the coins of Vijayanagara kings. But

the term *varaha-gadyana* become a common terminology for gold coins and referred frequently in the inscriptions of Vijayanagara rulers as The boar is *Adi Varaha*, the third incarnation of Vishnu. It is interesting to find Achyutaraya reviving the old Chalukyan boar.

The coins with the figure of *varaha* (Boar) were issued by Achyutaraya, Tirumalaraya I, Srirangaraya I and Srirangaraya III. These coins are issued in copper only. On the coins of Achyutaraya the boar is moving to right, Sun and Moon above the figure are noticed. On the coins of Tirumalaraya a linear circle surrounded by a ring of dots we find a boar charging to right. The tail is uplifted. The boar has girdle ornament. This is the

only Vijayanagara coin to have a boar on it. Another type of coins is shown in a ring of dots, boar moving to right with raised tail, bristles, dagger and crescent moon above

. On the coins of Srirangaraya I was shown the *varaha* moving to right facing a *khadga* with the Sun and the Moon above.

### Horse type

In the *Rigveda* three verses are intended to be recited at *asvamedha* sacrifice. This sacrifice came to be considered in the *Puranas* as one of the highest orders though no such merit is ascribed to it in the Vedas. It was, therefore, not inexplicable that this animal continued to Vijayanagara days to be honoured as it was employed not only as an ornament or decoration but was held in genuine reverence. During the *Mahanavami* festival celebrations, in front of the many state horses during the review, went "a horse with two state umbrellas of the king and with grander decorations that the others and one of the

lesser equerries led it by the bridle". These symbols are also reflected on the coins of Vijayanagara.

This type of coins was issued by Achyutaraya, Sadasivaraya, Srirangaraya III. Achyutaraya issued horse type of coins in copper. On the

obverse of the coin is depicted prancing horse, to the left.

Sadasivaraya issued horse type of coins in copper metal. On the obverse of the coin is represented a fully galloping caparisoned horse, galloping with uplifted tail, moving to left. In between the hind and forelegs can be seen, hanging tassels of the decorative upholstery Sadasivaraya issued horse type of coins in copper metal. On the obverse of the coin is shown a man seated on horse.

### Camel type

Camel type of coins was issued by Srirangaraya III of the Aravidu dynasty and he minted in copper metal only. On the obverse of the coin is shown within a dotted circle a Camel facing to left with right leg raise.

### Conclusion

The above study shows, certain animals were however preferred and chosen over others as the Vahanas or Vehicles of the deities for their specific qualities with which each deity was associated. So while Siva as 'Pasupati' was readily identified by Nandi-Bull, Durga was known by her Lion-vehicle and Lakshmi by an elephant. Deities riding these wild, exotic and powerful beasts signaled the god's total control and domination as also their destructive ability. Animals therefore became synonymous with the power, duties, mystery, magic and myth of their deities. Various dynasties and Kings of India adopted different animals as their dynastic "lanchana" (emblems). Kadamba dynasty chose Lion as their signature emblem while the insignia of the mighty Chola Empire was a Tiger. The Gangas of Talkad opted for an Elephant whereas Vijayanagara Kings adopted a Boar. Coins of different denominations were minted by the rulers in keeping with their dynastic crests. The Republic of India adopted the Tiger as its National animal that also featured prominently in the coins issued by Reserve Bank of India (RBI) while the Govt. of India chose the Ashokan 'Lion-pillar', featuring 4 roaring Lions seated back to back, as the National Emblem of India.

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