

**Numismatics and South Indian Historian****Abstract**

South Indian historians still form a small group of scholars mostly confined to south India, including Deccan, though some north Indians and foreigners can be included in this group. This peculiar position is due to the fact that outsiders are reluctant to cross over to the south of the Vindhyas because of the so called difficulty in understanding the sources which are in fourth South Indian languages, Tamil, Kannada, Telugu and Malayalam. Thus we find that the history of south India is generally confined to south India.

**Keywords:** Epigraphic, Numismatists, Seal, Chronology, Corroboration, Catalogues, Typology, Paucity, Panam, Pagoda, Gadyana, Kanam, Kalanju, Kasu, Pon, Madai, Kalanju, Appadorai

**Introduction**

As south India is very rich in epigraphic material, literally running to thousands of inscriptions, well edited and published, the historians of south India is general accepted epigraphy, rightly indeed, as the most important source of south Indian history. It is very interesting that Nilakantha Sastri considers coins also as a source of legends or inscriptions. In fact his statement is true in the case of the early period of south India, which is famous as Sangam period. A large number of copper coins of different shapes with symbols have been found in plenty; some of them contain indistinct legends difficult to read and it is often difficult to understand the real significance of these coins.

A.S. Altekar is one of the great numismatists of this country and has written extensively on the subject. But when we take up the study of his important work on the Rashtrakutas we are a bit disappointed. He has included a section on coinage as a part of the economic conditions of the Rashtrakuta empire. He does not seem to have utilised numismatics as a source of his account either of the political or even the cultural history of the Rashtrakutas. Not that he did not like to utilise numismatics but there was absolutely no scope for him to do so as he himself laments that not a single Rashtrakuta coin has been discovered. Thus the exclusion of numismatics by Altekar was by compulsion and not by choice.

Now, we may refer to some works on the history of Andhra. One of the recent works on the Kakatiya dynasty is by P.V.P. Sastry. He has a section on the sources in which he includes epigraphy, literature, chronicles and monuments. He does not mention numismatics as a source. However, he has a small section on Kakatiya coin on the basis of the title Deyagajakesari found on the seal of the Khandavalli plates of Prataparudra. However, while discussing the history of the Satavahanas almost all the historians have utilised numismatics as an important source of the political history of the Satavahanas and the feudatories like Maharathis, Mahatalavaras and Chutus. In fact almost all these writers use Puranas, epigraphy and numismatics to understand the political and cultural history of the Satavahanas.

At this point we may refer to some works on numismatics and examine the scope of history in them. The first and the foremost in this connection is Elliott's Coins of Southern India published in 1884. Though this work has become outdated, we cannot ignore the fact that Elliott's main concern was history. For every dynasty he gives a short historical introduction so that the reader can properly place his coins in terms of Chronology and Geography. Coins of Karnataka by A.V. Narasimha Murthy, published in 1975, takes into consideration the coinage of the present state of Karnataka from the earliest times to the modern period. Not all the coins can become a source of history in a uniform way because of the nature of the coins as well as the nature of the sources. Numismatics can be a dominating factor particularly in cases where epigraphic and other sources are weak. For example, the problem of Roman coins in Karnataka has to be tackled only with the help of the Roman coins found there in. But the same is not the case with the Hoysalas or the Chalukyas as we have hundreds of inscriptions throwing

**Aruna Gogania**

Lecturer

Deptt. of History,

Pt. N.K.S. Govt. P.G. College,

Dausa, Rajasthan

light on various aspects of political and cultural history.

I.K. Sarma's work *Coinage of the Satavahana Empire* belongs to a different category where numismatics is the most important source to reconstruct the political history of the Satavahanas. According to him, the rich numismatic data, while studied systematically, provided a more scientific corroboration of the epigraphic and literary accounts of the times. This clearly demonstrates that the response of a historian depends upon the extent of its use in his writing.

The next classes of writers are those who have compiled catalogues of coins. These catalogues are dynastic in nature and history is used only to identify a coin. Thus numismatic data is more important and typology dominates such writings. Coins are divided and classified on the basis of the metals. Chronology is not given due importance. However, they have a purpose which they serve faithfully. One of the excellent examples of this class of writing is Henderson's *The Coins of Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan*. This catalogue is confined to the collections at the Madras Government Museum, Madras. Each type of coin is arranged according to its mint and all the relevant details are provided. This would be most useful as a guide to collectors of coins.

The paucity of coins in south India has been compensated by the innumerable references to coins and coin-terms in epigraphs and literary works. The data obtained thus is very rich, throwing light on the techniques of minting, names of the mints, special types of issues and other interesting data. K.G. Krishnan, A.V.Narasimha Murthy and others have been working on this aspect in recent years and when completed these studies are bound to yield a better picture of south Indian numismatics. This emphasises the relation between numismatics and epigraphy as far as south India is concerned.

This means in essence that it is necessary to know the average metal content of the coins and their purchasing power. This clearly sums up his attitude towards numismatics. Naturally he discusses the media of exchange, the use of money, gold, silver and copper coins. He also mentions coins like panam, pagoda, gadyana, kanam, kalanju, kasu, pon and madai. He comments on money changers, assaying and weighing and transmission of currency. He gives

a small note on the coin Kalanju. He also gives two appendixes on madai and kasu where again he gives different varieties of these as gleaned from inscriptions. Thus to Appadorai numismatic data are just a tool in understanding the economy of the given period. This is in keeping with the trend that has already been observed.

#### **Aim of the Study**

Early historians felt that the paucity of coins has opened up new line of enquiry of numismatic studies based on epigraphy and literature. They are not simply relics of the past but the work of a king or a dynasty, and hence important historically. Data from numismatics are available in plenty, it is considered to be a basic source on par epigraphy and literature.

#### **Conclusion**

Before closing this account we may refer to Appadorai's *Economic Conditions in Southern India*, one of the rare books on economic history of South India. The main thrust of the author is the study of economic problems of south India, and hence he looks at his sources from this point of view. To him currency is not an independent entity but a subordinate aspect of the activity of the State. That is clear when he treats currency as a sub-topic like taxation in his book. To the student of economic history what really matters is the kind of coin in circulation and the value in terms of modern currency wherever it can be ascertained.

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