

QUEENS AND COINS OF INDIA

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True that the women occupied a very high position in the society of ancient India. History bears innumerable examples to justify this factor. But seldom we come across the name of the queens on the coins of India, issued by sovereign rulers of different dynasties of different period.

Queen Naganika, wife of king Satakarni of Satavahana dynasty, is perhaps the earliest person in history of India whose name has been associated with the king on the coins. The inscription at Nanaghat in western India records the donation made by the Satavahana king Sri Satakarni and his queen Naganika at the celebration of different sacrifices (30 B.C.). The donations were in coins (Karsapanas). The Satavahanas had trade relation with the Roman Empire. The Roman empire supplied the base metals for the native currency. The periplus mentions the importation of silver. One inscription from Junnar records the guild of barriers. This is the unique evidence from Junnar. It was likely that king Satakarni melted down the Roman silver coins at Junnar and coined his Karsapanas. Silver coins of Satakarni-I and Naganika from Junnar have proved that they were issued on the occasion of Asvamedha sacrifice.

The Satavahana kings generally used the name of their mothers as their initials. Kochiputra Satakarni, Kosikiputra Satakarni, Gotamiputra Satakarni, Vasisthiputra Satakarni, Pulumavi. These are some of the names of Satavahana kings that we find both in inscriptions and coins. 'Kochi', Kosiki, 'Gotami', 'Vasisthi' these king mothers were certainly the crowned queens of the dynasty. This evidence provides sufficient strength to the fact that the queens played pivotal role in the administration of the state.

The Gupta rulers were famous for issuing gold coins of various types and motifs. Portraying the king and the queen on the obverse of the coin is one of the remarkable motifs among them. Happy married life which the Gupta kings usually enjoyed is reflected in these coins. Such coins were issued by Chandra Gupta-I (319-350 A.D.), Samudra Gupta (350-370 A.D.), Kumara Gupta-I (415-450 A.D.) and Skanda Gupta (455-467 A.D.).

Besides great political significance the Chandra Gupta-Kumara Devi type of gold coins have great social and religious significance. According to Altekar, on these coins Chandragupta-I is shown offering a marriage ring or Sinduradani to his beloved queen in a relaxed mood and homely atmosphere. The coins of Kumara Gupta-I bear a touch of romanticism. On the obverse the king is seen offering a bunch of flowers to his queen. On the Asvamedha type of gold coins issued by Samudra Gupta and his grandson Kumara Gupta-I, we find their queens with Chamara before a sacrificial post participating in the

religious life of their royal husbands. In these coins the name of Datta Devi and Ananta Devi, the crowned queens of the said monarchs have not been mentioned, of course. During the rule of Bhaumakaras (8th-10th century A.D.) of Toshali and Utkala, six queens namely Tribhuvana Mahadevi, Prthvi Mahadevi, Gouri Mahadevi, Dandi Mahadevi, Dharma Mahadevi, occupied the throne. The last four queens ruled successively. It is a strange and rare evidence in the entire history of India. No dynasty has ever presented so many women as ruling heads. The inscriptions of this period invariably mention the coin-name rupya, rupaka, or rupyaka which reveals the use of metallic money especially of silver. The Anugul copper plate grant of Dharma Mahadevi of the said dynasty mentions rupaka as ruka in an abbreviation form.

Somala Devi, queen of Chahamana dynasty of Sakambhari, issued coins in her names. She was ruling in 13th century A.D. On her coins either a bull or a horseman is seen on one side. The other side shows the queen moving on horse-back with the legend "Sri Somala Devi" in Nagari script.

Didida, the Hindu queen on Kashmir had issued coins in her name. She belonged to Vappadava dynasty which continued from 1172 to 1338 A.D. The coins issued by her were combination of mixed metal of gold and silver. They were called white metal coins or Electra coins.

Being the single woman ruler of Sultanate period the name of Jalaluddin Razia (1236-40 A.D.) remains distinct in the history of mediaeval India. A notable feature of the coins of Razia sultana is that she did not place her name on her coins but retained name of her father. The only indication that the coins were issued by her is the date and the word nusrat in the last line on the reverse.

During the reign of Mughal Emperor Jahangir, the real power was exercised by his queen Nurjahan. She was virtually the ruler of the Empire towards the last part of his rule. She proclaimed herself defacto authority through the coins that were issued thence forward from Agra, Ahmadedbad, Akbarnagar, Allhabad, Kashmir, Lahore, Patna and Surat. The coins contained a couplet which meant (By order of Shah Jahangir gold attained a hundred beauties when the name Nur Jahan Badshah Begum was placed on it). These coins continued till the end of Jahangir's reign (6th November, 1627 A.D.). But as soon as Shah Jahan came to the throne he imposed death penalty for the use of these coins and ordered that they should be returned to mint and melted and for this reason, these coins are extremely rare and prized by the collectors.

Mention may be made of some coins issued in the names of three queens of king Siva Simha (1714-1744 A.D.) of Assam. The names of these queens were Phulesvari (also known as Paramarthesvari) Ambika Devi and Sarasvati Devi. The names of these queens were placed on the coins, it is said, to set at nought a prophecy, that his reign would be short. Sivasimha declared his queens, one after another, to be the rulers with all the

legal rights including issue of coinage. Sivasimha and his consort Paramarthesvari issued a few extremely rare coins which are square in shape and bear a Persian legend and the distiches employed on them are a close imitation of the coins of the Mughal emperors.

By 1834, the rule of East India Company had extended almost all over the country. So the necessity of a uniform coinage was felt by the company. Gold, silver and copper coins were issued with the bare head of king William IV and his name on the obverse. In 1840, the gold and silver coins were issued in the name of queen Victoria. On these the head of the queen was introduced with the legend Victoria Queen on the obverse. In 1858, Queen Victoria assumed authority over the Government of India. In 1862, a new series of coins of all denomination and in all three metals were issued with changed devices. Now they had the bust of the Queen wearing an imperial crown and a richly embroidered robe.



GAJALAXMI (REV)



**CHANDRAGUPTA-I/
KUMARADEVI (OBV)**

The English administrators in India conceded the right of striking money only to thirtyfour states. Of these thirtyfour, only sixteen states - Alwar, Bharatpur, Bikaner, Bundi, Dewas, Dhar, Jaipur, Jai Salmer, Jhalwar, Jodhpur, Karauli, Kachwan, Kisangarh, Kotah, Kutch and Tonk replaced the Mughal Emperor's name by that of Queen Victoria's name with her title. Bharatpur added her effigy. The legend bearing the name of the Queen on the coins of these states are not uniform. While all followed the old practice of the Persian inscription, Bundi placed the name of Queen Victoria in English and also used the Christian date.

With the advent of democracy the term queen sounds absurd, irrelevant. But it is to be admitted that, the women have contributed immensely to the growth of modern Indian civilization. In literature, social service, science and technology, spiritual analysis - their role is remarkably significant. So also in field of politics they have left a distinct imprint. The representation of effigy of Indira Gandhi, the first Indian Woman Prime Minister on coins is a thing of recent past. She remained executive head of this vast land for several years. Who knows the Indian coins will bear the bust of some other woman in near future as the head of the representative form of Government !

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