

Comparative Survey of the Coins of the Shah Dynasty

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1. INTRODUCTION

The entire coinage of Nepal is classified into three groups as described below :

- (1) The coins of the Lichhavis (A.D. 464 -A.D. 1008);
- (2) The coins of the Malla dynasties which reigned contemporaneously over the three kingdoms of Bhatgaon or Bhaktapur, Kathmandu or Kantipur, and Lalitpur, or Patan, all in the Kathmandu Valley, (A.D. 1566-A.D. 1765)
- (3) The coins of the Gorkha dynasty, founded on the unification of whole of Nepal by Prithvi Narayan Saha Deva, in 1768 A.D. and which continues to the present day.

2. PREVIOUS WORK

The Nepalese numismatics in the very beginning was noticed by the European and oriental scholars. Amongst them, the name of J.F. Fleet in the field of discovery, study and publication of the Nepalese coinage, is noteworthy. Similarly Prof. Bendall, Sir Alexander Cunningham, Marsden, Klrkpatrik, Prof. Rapson, Vincent A. Smith, Dr. Hoernle and Macdovall deserve special mention for their respective contributions in the field.

But much of the credit should go to Walsh who has produced a scholarly work on the entire coinage of Nepal

under the headline "The coinage of Nepal", in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Great Britain and Ireland*, 1868.

K.P. Jayaswal, Percival Landon, Sylvain Levi and Rahul Sankrityayan have also thrown considerable light on the various aspects of the coinage.

Among the modern historians who have utilized the numismatic data are B.R. Acharya, B.C. Sharma, S.B. Gyawali, D.R. Regmi, D.R. Bhandari and Luciano Petech. The last mentioned scholar has contributed a research article in his book 'Nepal' with the help of H.G. Banerjee, Keshar Bahadur K.C., the editors of 'Itihas Samsodhan Mandal', S.M. Joshi and C. Valdetaro have also interpreted the different aspects of the historical significance of the coinage.

But most of them have confined themselves to the ancient or medieval coinage of Nepal and have made only a general survey of the coinage rather than dealing with the subject purely on numismatic grounds.

On the coinage of the Saha dynasty, which is the latest in the series, much of the credit goes to Walsh and Satya Mohan Joshi who have made a detailed general survey of this part. But neither work satisfies the needs of the numismatists comprehensively. Walsh's book only covers

upto Prithvi Vira Vikrama and thus gives no idea about the later numismatic developments. Joshi's book, *Nepal Rashtriya Mudra*, is in the Nepali language and the first book of its kind to give detailed information of the coinage from the beginning to the present day. But it does not satisfy the curiosity of the numismatists in general owing to a few shortcomings. First, it lacks a scientific classification, and the descriptions are general. Secondly, its utility is limited to the boundaries of the country because of the language of the book. A booklet has also been published by the Guidance Ministry of His Majesty's Government of Nepal in Nepali with the title 'Nepal Rashtriya Mudra Ra Hamro Samskriti'

Two more catalogues have also come into light in recent years. One of them has been published by His Majesty's Department of Archaeology and the other was by His Majesty's Mint Department, but neither of them supplies the basic weight and size of the coins and the type and individual descriptions are deficient from the numismatic point of view.

3. SURVEY OF SAHA COINS

A. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

An attempt has been made in the following lines to present an objective study of the coins as comprehensively as it has been possible for the author. The survey of the Saha coinage in general deals with minute observations of the coins from the days of Surendra Vikrama Saha Deva to His Majesty, the present King. The inclusion of the coins of the present king in this article was essential to show the comparative development and the best specimens of the scientific and mechanical process. Moreover, the latest coins also give complete nationalistic glimpses. From metal point of view also, they mark a change. The coinage, therefore, in his reign reaches its zenith and can be compared

with any European or oriental coinage.

The Saha rulers of Nepal did not merely imitate their ancestors but also attempted new experiments, and that is why we find many interesting attempts at beautiful new designs and varieties.

The coins cover different denominations comprising the **Double Mohur** (conventional name of two or one rupee), **Mohur** ($\frac{1}{2}$ of a rupee), **25 paise** (Suka), **20 paise** (Pachanni), **12 paise** (Tinanni), **10 paise**, **5 paise** (weighty coins of five paise were called as 'Dhuake', which existed till recently), **4 paise**, with a hole in the centre, **2 paise**, **1 paise** and **Chandan**, ($\frac{1}{4}$ of a pice, the lowest denomination in the currency of Nepal which existed till recently).

Different types of coins in gold, silver, copper, and brass have been issued in the names of these kings and their queen consorts. Gold issues (Double patla, Tinanni and fukkdam under their conventional names are all in Hanuman Dhoka Numismatic Museum) are rare as were only issued on some special occasions. Only silver, copper and brass issues are otherwise available. Only few varieties have been considered here just to show the variations in the context of the evolution of our coins. Special care has been taken to show the weight and size of a coin.

In some of the denominations of the same value, the weight and size show a remarkable change. We can take for instance a 5 paise coin of 1977 V.S., i.e. A.D. 1920—weight—17.690 gm., size—13.00 c.m. and a 5 paise coin of 2011 V.S., i.e. A.D. 1954 weight—3.882 gm.; size—2.25 c.m. (both are copper). Later on the brass issues also seem to be in circulation from 1999 V.S., i.e. A.D. 1942 (See Two paise coin of 2000 V. S. i.e. A.D. 1943) It is an alloy of 70% copper, 20% nickel and 10% zinc and even one and the same denomination consists of purely copper, cupronickel and brass. German silver coins of 5 paise as a

substitute for 5 paisa bold were introduced in 2000 V.S. i.e. A.D. 1943

In silver issues also the base silver is used in later times, as seen in the one-rupee coin of the late king Tribhuvan, 2005 V.S. (i.e. A.D. 1948). It was an alloy of 33.33% Silver (Ag) and 66.67% copper (cu), which continued upto 2013 V.S. i.e. A.D. 1956. The coins of H.R.H. Gyanendra has also the same metallic composition. (2007 V.S. i.e. A.D. 1950).

The recent currency of king Mahendra and queen Ratna Rajya Lakshmi Devi (coronation issues) are made of cupronickel which has the following composition of alloy: 75% copper, 25% nickel.

The above changes in metals reflect the economic transitions of the country. In the medieval period, the Malla kings were rich in silver because of the authority of coining money for Tibet. But during the time of the Saha rulers Tibet could not supply the silver because of so many reasons and thus we get the effect of it in the silver issues gradually. Prithvi Narayan Saha tried to reform the mixed silver currencies of the last Malla rulers by bringing in the pure silver currencies, but his wishes were not fully implemented later on owing to many practical difficulties. In copper, the changes might be due to the effects of World War II and the subsequent rise in the value of copper. All reasons lead us to confirm the view for the brass issues

In the field of the techniques of minting coins also, the Saha rulers of Nepal introduced considerable changes from time to time. The old medieval technique of striking dies with the help of the hand was noticed for the first time during the time of king Prithvi Vira Vikrama when the use of 'Panidhiki' (conventional name of the watermill) was introduced. The coins manufactured by 'Panidhiki' look quite regular and handsome. It is, however, during the time of king Tribhuvan that the mechanical device was introduced in 1889 V.S., i.e. A.D. 1932

In hand-made coins it seems that no particular attention was paid to adjust the die as it is evident from those coins which were manufactured upto 1889 V.S. i.e. A.D. 1832. Likewise, it encouraged the forgers also to adopt corrupt means. The writer of this article has found some forged specimens while scientifically examining the coins minutely. But since the introduction of mechanical device die adjustments with necessary precautions have been strictly regulated.

B. OBERSE AND REVERSE DEVICES

Let us now discuss the legends, symbols and other descriptions from the numismatic point of view.

The occurrence of 'Sri Sri' and 'Sri 5' before the deities, kings and queen consorts has got sacred importance in the Hindu Doxology. The meaning of 'Sri' has got different importance according to the status of an individual. It may indicate a source of supreme power for the deities, and for the kings and their queens it may be an indication of sovereignty vested with all power and a national link of unity. It is a honorific title given to an individual. It may be noted here that 'Sri 3' before the name of Rana Prime Ministers was in practice till 2007 V.S. i.e. A.D. 1950 and for the Saha monarchs we find 'Sri 5' from the beginning which is still in practice. It is a mark of respect, the honorific par excellence and the highest of its kind in the country.

The coins of the Saha kings are dated in the Saka era upto Prithvi Vikrama Saha Deva's silver coins of 1823 S.S. i.e. A.D. 1991 but his copper coins of 1950 i.e. A.D. 1893 are in Vikrama Samvat and hence the start of this era can be marked from here. At that time in most of the states in India the Vikrama era prevailed. It may probably be due to reasons of convenience that Prithvi Vikram Saha Deva made this change. Anyway, the medieval Malla era was abandoned during the reign of the Saha rulers.

The occurrence of the legend "Nepal Sarkara" and "Gorakha" "Sarkara" on the coins (e.g: one paisa coin of 1950 V.S. i.e. A.D. 1893 and 5 paisa coin of 2011 V.S. i.e. A.D. 1954) may be interpreted as the Government of united Nepal and the Government of Gorkha, the ancestral and original home of the Gorkha (Saha) kings.

The Saha kings gave place to their own deities 'Sri Gorakha Natha', the patron deity of the Gorkhas and 'Sri Pasupatinatha' along with 'Sri Bhavani' which they owe to the Malla kings. The occurrence of the new deities indicate their own religious significance. It can be marked here that previously 'ti' of Pasupati was long (see one paisa coin of 1965 V.S. i.e. A.D. 1908) but after the date 1981. V.S. i.e. A.D. 1924 it is used as a short 'ti'.

The Saha kings have used the symbols of the sun and crescent on their coins throughout as they claim to have descended of both the solar and lunar races. The position of the sun and crescent on coins is always to the right and left respectively, except in one solitary coin of Sri 5 Prithvi Narayan Saha of 1676 S.S. i.e.A.D. 1754. It is said that this coin was issued from Nuwakot before he finally made Kathmandu his capital. Unlike the usual position of the sun and the crescent in all other Saha coins, this coin has the crescent to the right and sun to the left respectively.

This anomaly may be attributed to a mistake on the part of the engraver. This specimen can be seen in the collection at the Hanuman Dhoka.

The trident and sometimes the trident tied with damaru emblems of Lord Pasupati (Siva) and Vajra may indicate the influence of Saivism and Buddhism respectively in the country, being equally indicative of the Co-existence of Hindus and the Buddhists alike. It is well known that Nepal has been a great centre of religious toleration, where both Hindu-

ism and Buddhism have flourished side by side and influenced each other throughout the ages.

The coins reflect this spirit of syncretism as do many other aspects of Nepalese culture. The Saha kings consider themselves as the devotees of Lord Vishnu and hence the occurrence of the emblems 'chakra' (discus) gada (club), sankha (conch-shell), is in every sense justified. It must be noted here that the Nepalese people still consider the Saha kings as the incarnation of Lord Vishnu. The depiction of foot-prints on the two paisa coins of 1992 V.S. i.e. A.D. 1935 is interpreted as the charana of the Gorkha deity, Sri Gorakha Natha, also.

The crossed khukris, the national weapon of the Gorkhas, may signify the unity of the integrated nation, and are therefore, of great significance. The depiction of khadga (sword) with wreath on coins may stand as the emblem of Sovereignty.

The occurrence of the unique coin showing the portrait of the head of king Tribhuvan wearing the national cap as a commoner marks a new era in the entire series of the coinage of Nepal. The Himalaya mountain and the paddy ears may indicate the geographical aspect and prosperity of the country, respectively.

The human palm (probably female?) and kalasa on the 5 paisa coins is another change introduced later on.

The next remarkable change in the coinage of Nepal was made during the early reign of king Mahendra, when the coronation sets with 'The Crown' (Sripancha) as its obverse were circulated. The depiction of the crown with the pure Sanskrit legend Subha Rajya bhisheka on the coins was made for the first time and it reminds us of the Gupta coins of ancient India.

The recent issues of different denominations i.e. 10 paisa, 2 paisa and 1 paisa coins of

2023 V.S. i.e. A.D. 1967 marks the coinage system from different numismatic angles. First, they represent our national symbols like the cow, the flower Gurasha (rhododendron) and the bird 'Danhe' (pheasant). Secondly, careful attention has been given to the size and lastly, aluminium has been used for the first time for 5,2 and 1 paisa denominations in the history of Nepalese coins. They are the specimens of the latest techniques of the mechanical process.

Religious designs like *Chatuskona*, *ashtakona*, *swastika* with ornamental floral designs on the whole Saha coinage in general and particularly the later issues are in every way a clear reflection of Nepalese cultural taste and tradition.

C. SOME INTERESTING FEATURES

Some extremely interesting features of the Saha Coinage to the present are—

(i) The use of the term "Double" for the higher denomination is purely an original creation of the Saha kings.

(ii) The Saha kings gave up the Newari script and adopted the Devanagiri script in its place.

(iii) The Saha kings abandoned the old Indian system of 64 paisa for a rupee which existed during the Malla period and introduced the decimal system i.e. 100 paisa for a rupee, which was indeed a progressively revolutionary step in the evolution of coinage.

(iv) The conversion of the old weighing and measuring techniques of the coins into grammes and centimetres is another scientific milestone in the history of the Saha coinage.

Thus the coins of unified Nepal have reached its present stage through different phases and have attained a uniform pattern on the lines of the most modern practice in developed nations but strictly on the traditional principles of the country.