

Portuguese Coinage – A Cultural Transition

Swapna Samel

Birla College, Kalyan (Maharashtra)

Email: drswapnasamel@gmail.com

The evolution of coinage in India is almost coeval with its recorded history going back almost to the period of Buddha. Coins played a great role in the reconstruction of the history of Goa also. The Portuguese were the first European nation to gain concessions in India. From the landing of Vasco da Gama near Calicut in May 1498, until the appearance of the Dutch and English, they held the monopoly of trade between Europe and India. They took Goa in 1510, Diu in 1534, Daman between 1538-45 and finally Salsette and Bombay.ⁱ

The pre-Portuguese history of Goa still remains a happy ground for the conjectures of orientalist whose convictions seemingly grow firmer in inverse proportion to the insufficiency of evidence. A whole array of ancient and medieval rulers of Goa have been presented by the inscriptions. The **Bhojas, Shilahararas and Kadambas** followed each other from the third to the thirteen centuries. During the intervening period prior to the arrival of the Portuguese in the sixteenth century, Goa was a bone of contention between the Muslim and Vijaynagar rulersⁱⁱ. As prosperous trading centre during some happier times under the Kadambas, Goa certainly witnessed a variety of coins and these were accepted for what their metal content was worth. The brisk commercial activities demanded it. There were gold coins of Vijayanagara known as *Vaharas, Pratapas or Pardaos and Fanams and Dinars* of Egypt and *Mohurs of the Mughals*. The exchange rate was *varaha* equal to two *dinars* or two *pratapas* or twenty *pratapas* or twenty *Fanams*. The Portuguese called *Pratapa* and *Varaha* as *pagoda de oura*. In comparison with *Dinar*, *Varaha* was smaller in size but thicker and had the engraving of two wild boars on one side and certain letters on the other side. There were silver coins like *Tara, Bargany or Barakani, Gadyanakas, Nishkas and Fanas*. Coins of smaller denominations made of copper like *Visduddu, Rubo, Panchdomddio, Dombddi and Zoitole or Jitals*ⁱⁱⁱ were used by common people. There was hardly such a thing as legal tender.

Composition and weight were determining factors. Legend and marking were least important^{iv}. With the exception of the relatively numerous coins that have survived of the Kadambas period, there is little to be said specifically about Goa coinage during the rest of the pre-Portuguese times.

When Albuquerque entered the city of Goa for the first time in February 1510, there are reasons to believe he ordered the minting of coins at the request of the local population, in order to attend to needs of the trade. The Mint established for this purpose, no doubt had to suspend the issue when the Portuguese lost Goa three month later, and begin again in November the same year, when the city was re-conquered.

Although some of the coins issued by this viceroy are well known, all the varieties of the types that went into circulation are not clearly understood but supposed to be generally along the prevailing local system of standards and weight, bearing adopted western designs. The extent of the Portuguese coinage in India and the East can be appreciated better by going through the record of the various issues of their mints and also the circumstances that led to many and at times unexplained, changes in the types and denominations of these coins during nearly four centuries of Portuguese rule.

Right from the time of the conquest of Goa in 1510, when Alfanso de Albuquerque established the first mint in India and introduced such alien denomination as the *gold manael and the copper leal and cepaica*, one can go through all these issues as also issues from various other mints they established in India, Colombo and Malaca. These comprise a period of no less than sixteen reigns including sixty years of an important numismatic period when the three Felipes of Spain successively ruled Portugal [1580-1640]^v. It was during their time that some entirely new types of coinage were adopted and some odd values issued and then hurriedly withdrawn. These and other circumstances, such as the arbitrary issue of coins by some local governors have contributed the virtual disappearance of some specimens.

As a part of his plans Albuquerque inaugurated a mint in Goa in 1510. Significantly the first gold issue was named manael after the reigning monarch of Portugal. Mints were established by the Portuguese in **Goa** [1510], **Malacca** [1511], **Cochin** [1530], **Ceylon** [1598], **Bassein** [1611], **Daman** [1611], **Chaul** [1646] and **Diu** [1684]^{vi}. While Goa supplied the bulk of the needs of the entire Estado da India, individual mints issued coins for local use. To date

1,777 types of coins issued by these mints have been recorded and studied. They include 174 gold issues, 595 of silver and the remaining copper, kalhai and tutenag. The coins were struck with die and hammer and the demand for them among collectors is enhanced by peculiarities other than technical perfection of manufacturing.

The subject of the Portuguese coinage in India is involved in much obscurity; its history is more vague and undefined than that of either the Greek or Roman coinage. The issue of coins by the viceroys and often by the officers of the mint, without any intervention on the part of the viceroys or governors-general was conducted in the most unsystematic, not to say capricious fashion. The coins not seldom bore impresses, effigies and legends which had no connection whatever with the reigning monarchs of the period when they were issued^{vii}. These whimsical variations both in types and in the standard of money are in themselves enough to cause no little confusion in the study of Indo-Portuguese numismatics.

The history of the foundation of Goa mint in 1510 is given at length in the commentaries do Grando Alfanso Dalbequerque, or *'The Commentaries of the great Alfonso Dalboquerque'*^{viii} compiled by Braz Daboquerque. Accordingly *Timoja*, a hindu chieftain of Honawar, who being at enmity with the Muhammad an ruler of Goa had induced Alfanso to conquer that city of Goa, went to Alfanso along with group of merchants to Alfanso and begged him to grant a permission for minting some money and to order the price of gold and silver to be raised to prevent their exportation. The deputation repeated the request. Finally Alfanso with the consultation of his captains order that the money should be produced in a befitting style. Soon many coins were minted the mint at Goa and the meeting of the merchants captains and noble persons were called in the large hall of Sabaio's palace. Alfanso told them that, having given orders to mint gold, sliver and copper coinage according to the arrangements that had been made it was fit to make it public by proclamation being read to the people throughout the city. In order to make new money current in Goa Albuquerque, the great viceroy decreed in the name of the king of Portugal that from that day henceforth no one should keep any of the coinage of the Muhammad an king in his house, nor make use of it under severe penalties; but whoever had any should carry it to the mint and get it exchanged for him with that of the king of Portugal's. The decree went on saying that whoever should

break these regulations should incur legal penalties according as the Viceroy should think fit to impose him^{ix}.

The coins vary in time and space, either in their intrinsic value or legal and relative value, which produce certain confusion. The first Portuguese coins of gold known in Goa were of two species namely ***cruzado or manael and half cruzado or half manael***. Both the denominations had on one side a cross of the order of Christ and on the other side the emblem of king Manuel [coat of arms]^x. During the reign of Manuel coins were minted in Lisbon, Porto, Evora, Ceuta, Goa, Cochin and Malacca. The place where they were minted was shown in the reverse of each coin. The coins were not smooth and properly proportioned as they were struck with die and hammer.

The second type of gold coins were minted in Goa under Governor Gracia de Sa. It was called ***samthome or pardau samthome***^{xi}. It was so called because it had the image of the Apostle St Thomas, patron saint of India on one side and on the reverse the coat of arms. It has purity of 20.5 carats and weighted 193.25 grams^{xii}. Two more gold species that were minted in Goa were ***xerafins and meio xerafins***. The word *xerafim* is a derivation of the Arabic word ***ashrafi***. One *xerafim* was about 460 grams and was equal to 5 *tangas*.

Albuquerque had also minted silver coins, they were known as ***espera and half espera***. On one side of it was engraved the Greek letter A and on the other side was the royal coat of arms. At the end of the 16th century another type of silver coin known as ***bastiao or pardau xerafim*** was minted in Goa^{xiii}. *Patecoons, Saotomes, tanga* were the other silver coins minted during Portuguese rule in Goa. ***Pagodas*** minted on the mainland were of inferior quality. The merchants, foreigners and the Muslim traders exchanged the inferior pagodas for the gold coins minted in Goa.

Bazarucos or leais were the copper coins which Albuquerque had minted. The *bazarucoa* also had the engraving of the Greek letter A on one side and the royal coat of arms on the other. Each *bazaruco* was further divided into 4 parts and each part was called ***cepayguas***. Joa Coutinho minted in Goa *bazarucos* of 30, 20, and 10 denominations in silver was weighting 19.77 grams a, 13.20 grams and 6.61 grams, respectively^{xiv}.

A Government order of 1870 closed down the mint in Goa as the coins minted here were not as perfect as the coins minted in British India. The respective value of each coin was more or less the following

1 Cruzado or Maneol = 12 Xerafins of silver

1 Xerfins or Pardao = 5 Tangass of silver

1 Tangas = 4 Barganis or 5 Vintens or 60 reais

1 Vintem = 15 Bazarucos or 12 reais

1 Bargany = 24 Bazarucos or 24 reais

1 Saotome = 14 Tangas or 26 reais

1 Pagoda = 13 Tangas

1 Pataca = 8 Tangas

During this era of the first Portuguese coins of India highly influenced by the existing ones, the equivalents should have been the following^{xv}

Gold Manoel or Cruzado = 480 reais

Gold Meio Manoel = 240 reais

Silver Esfera = 40 reais

Silver Neia Esfera = 20 reais

Copper Leal or Bazaruco = 2 reais

Copper Dinheiro = 2/3 de real

Copper Cecaica = 1/2 de real

Leal = 3 dinheiros = 4 cecaicas

FINDINGS-

It has been seen from the above discussion that only the coinage of Mohammedan king was forbidden from being current, for the coins of the Hindu princes of Southern India were always in use in Goa from the day of its conquest to the time when they became rare. Among

these may be specified the golden *pagodas* and other were *fanaos* or *panams*, being gold coins of minute size.

Secondly Albuquerque's scheme of coinage was avowedly adoptive; there is nothing original in either in their weight standard or in his nomenclature. He simply gave old Portuguese names for new coins and for size and weight took for his models the coins he found in circulation in Goa amongst the native of the country, a procedure similar to that Muhammad bin Kasim. He named his gold coins *cruzados*, they were eventually denominated Manoes in honour of then reigning monarch D. Manoel.

Thirdly the silver coin was equal in weight to a *bragani*, probably *bargab*, which in Hindustani means a partition or share and is equal to two vintins Portuguese. These coins were called *esperas*, **corruption of *esferas***, i. e. spheres. They were probably called *esperas* in contradiction to the gold coins called *esferas* struck by king D. Manoel in Portugal, bearing on the one side the device of a sphere. On the other side it bore the Latin inscription **Mea or mine** intending thereby to prove the right he had acquired for it.

The copper coins called *dinherios and leaes*. The word *dinheiros* when used in the singular is a generic name for all kinds of money and although in this case it was used to designate a very small coin. These were meant replace the native coins of the corresponding size and weight called *bazarucos and zoitoles*.

Albuquerque had established a mint in Goa in 1510. His intention was to replace all the existing coins. The new coins were circulated in Goa and its dependencies. The metals used to make the coins were gold, silver, copper and later in 17th century, calaum or tutenaga which was a metal imported from china and was susceptible to oxidation. Goa received a constant supply from Central Europe and Japan. The constant availability of these metals made possible to mint coins of various denominations. Thus it goes without saying that a study of Indo-Portuguese numismatics can give us useful insight into the hard realities of that period and of the Portuguese rule

REFERENCES

- ⁱ F. Pridmore, *The coins of the British Common wealth of Nations to the end of the regin of George VI*, part 4, India Vol I, East India Company Presidency Series, [1642-1836], Spink and son Ltd, London, 1975m p. xii.
- ⁱⁱ Saryu Doshi [ed], *Goa, cultural patterns*, Marg publication, B'bay, 1981, p.97
- ⁱⁱⁱ Sen Surendranath, [ed], *Indian Travels of Thevenot and Careri*, Part II, The Voyage Round the world: Indonesia, New Delhi, National Archives of India, 1949, p270 and also Correa Gadpar, *Lendas da India*, Pert I, Coimbrz, Imprensa da Unversidada, p. 73
- ^{iv} Saryu Doshi [ed], *Op.cit*, p.98
- ^v Hobson-Jobson, *A Glossary of Kindred Terms, Etymological Historical, Geographical and Discursive*, Oriental Publication, New Delhi, P. 676.
- ^{vi} Saryu Doshi [ed], *Ibid*.
- ^{vii} J. Gerson DA CUNHA, *Contribution to the study of Indo-Portuguese Numismatics*, Artticles XXII, 19th July, 1879, p. 267.
- ^{viii} *Ibid*, p. 404.
- ^{ix} *Ibid*, p.268.
- ^x *Ibid*, p.404
- ^{xi} Nazareth Carmo Jose Maria, *Numismatica da Indo-Portuguesesa*, Impresa Naciona, Nova Goa, 1896, p.10
- ^{xii} P. D. Xavier, *Goa, A Social History*, Rajhans Offset, Goa, 1993, p. 17
- ^{xiii} On one side of it there was the figure of st. Sebastian and on the other side was engraved a bundle of arrows. This silver pardau was equivalent to 300 reis.
- ^{xiv} Aragao. A. C. Texeira de, *Descricdo Gerale e Historica das Moedeas Cunhadas Nome dos Reis Regeniese Governadores de Portugal*, vol, III, Lisbon Fernando Machado, 1880, P.209
- ^{xv} Saryu Doshi [ed], *Op.cit*, p. 98.