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SOME OLD MARATHA GOLD COINS: FANAMS OF
RAMA RAJA.

BY

R. SRINIVASA RAGHAVA AIYANGAR, M.A.

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SOME OLD MARATHA GOLD COINS: FANAMS OF RAMA RAJA.

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A find of two hundred coins was reported in 1908 from the village of Kiltayanur, Tirukkoilur Taluk of the South Arcot District, Madras Presidency. They were then acquired for the Museum by the Government of Madras, sixty-five of them were distributed among different Provincial Museums and hundred and thirty-four sold to the general public and numismatists. These coins were then identified as *Kali fanams*.

Kali fanams or sometimes called *Kaliyugarajan fanams* were current in Kerala or North Malabar in the early centuries of the Christian era. Elliot in his history of South Indian coins says that there were two kinds of these, one issued by Kolatnad or Cirakkal Raja and later by the Zamorin of Calicut, who to distinguish this issue from the earlier ones called them *Pudiya fanams*. Both these coins though accepted and used as a medium of exchange in Kerala or North Malabar, were not recognized as legal tender even in the contiguous province of Travancore. So in the early centuries when the means of communication was so small and the country was divided into several principalities each under separate and independent administrations it is not probable that these coins came to the Eastern district and were current there. We may fairly conclude that *Kali fanams* were never accepted or used in places other than Kerala.

Mr. Vincent A. Smith in his *Catalogue of Coins in the Indian Museum*, Calcutta, Volume 1, has included this as the coinage of Travancore State, and has brought them under gold *fanams* of 18th and 19th centuries. On page 316 he has described as follows: Obverse—A kind of dagger and other marks—Reverse—Characters not read. This coin is figured as item 10 in plate XXX (page 324).

Later in 1918 there was yet another find of eighty similar coins from Kattambatti, a hamlet of the village of Kannalam in the Gingee Taluk of the same district. In design, shape, size, weight and the character of the metal used (inferior gold 13 carats fine) these are exactly like those of 1908 find. They are almost all of them

round varying from .2 and .22 of an inch in diameter and cup-shaped. They are almost of a uniform weight from 5 to 5½ grains. Of these latter 80, 38 have on one side a figure formed by lines and dots with the sun and the moon on either side of it. On the reverse of 42 there is a legend in Devanagari Script, Rāma Rāu (रामराउ), Rāu is apparently intended for Rāo or Rajā.

Rāma Rāu as the title Rāo indicates is a Maratha name and the term (Rāo) is affixed to the names of persons eminent as soldiers, clerks, etc. The title is purely a Maratha term generally applied to ruling chiefs or kings. Paleographic evidence clearly shows that these coins were neither Pallava nor Cola ones, and we know that they were not of the Vijayanagar Empire, for these do not resemble any of the Vijayanagar coins that we know, in design, shape, weight, or quality of the metal. No viceroy of Vijayanagar appears to have issued coins in his own name. Moreover no viceroy with the name of Rāma Rājā appears to have ruled over these parts where these coins were found. The genealogy of Gingee Chiefs that is available from inscriptions No. 860 and 861 in appendix B of the *Annual Report* of the Assistant Archaeological Superintendent for Epigraphy, Southern Circle, Madras, for 1917, gives the names of several chiefs from Khemu to Rāmabhadra Nāidu who is said to have ruled in Saka 1593 (A.D. 1671). Twenty chiefs appears to have ruled between Khemu and Rāmabhadra Nāidu and even allowing twenty-five years for each chief, Khemu, the first chief, would bring us back to 1093 Saka or A.D. 1171. Further, paleographically the age of these coins has to be put later than the 16th century. It must therefore be concluded that these do not belong to the Vijayanagar period. The Mughals conquered these parts where these coins were found at the latter part of the 17th century only, but we know that the Dutch at Negapatam and the French at Pondicherry have issued coins of exactly the same description of the coins of 1908 and 1918 finds and they were current in the East Coast before the Mughals overthrew the Marathas and assumed sway. Having thus eliminated all the other dynasties that ruled over these parts, we have only the Maratha period left for fixing the origin of these coins.

Gingee which is very near the two places, from where we had two of these finds, was during this period a seat of Government and was considered a place fit enough for a viceroy to reside and rule, and

there is no other place near about these villages in the district which was at any time the seat of Government. So these must have been issued from the mint at Gingee, and we have also on record that Rāma Rājā, son of the famous Sivaji, who captured the fortress of Gingee in 1677 had continued to rule here as king and that he had issued a *firman* to the Hon'ble the East India Company who in 1690 entered into negotiations with Rāma Rājā, the Maratha chief of Gingee for the purchase of a small Fort at Devanampatanam near Cuddalore, on the site of the existing Fort St. David, and which both the French and the Dutch had previously endeavoured to buy. The *firman*¹ runs thus, ".....that the sole Government and possession of the same shall be in the said English Company and their Governors, etc., so long as the sunn and moon endures, to be governed by their own lawes and customes both civill martial and criminall, and to coyn money either under our Royal stamp or such other as they shall judge convenient, both in silver or gold....." All this clearly shows that Rāma Rājā himself had a mint of his own and issued coins in his own name. The Rāma Rājā is the same as Rāma Rāu that is referred to by the legend. The fact that some of these coins do not have any legend may go to show either that Rāma Rājā himself had copied the design from coins that were current earlier or that he himself issued first without the legend and later on added the legend to impress his own power and importance. In any case there can be no doubt as to the fact that these are of Maratha issue and that they have no manner of resemblance or relation to *Kali fanams* as was erroneously supposed.

The Fortress of Gingee² was under the sway of the famous Sivaji and his son Rāma Rājā between 1677 and 1698. Aurangzeb, the Mughal Emperor, wanted to reduce the South of India and turned his arms against the Marathas in 1683. Then Rāma Rājā fled to Gingee and that place became a rallying point for the broken Maratha forces. This was held by Rāma Rājā till 1698 when it fell into the hands of Mughals. These coins were therefore issued by Rāma Rājā, son of Sivaji, during the period from 1683 to 1698. They can be called Rāma Rājā fanams.

The lines and dots may at first sight appear to represent a dagger but from a knowledge of coins generally we know that the dagger

¹ *Gazetteer of South Arcot District*—page 42.

² *South Arcot District Gazetteer*—page 350 and footnotes under.

alone is not used. But it may sometimes be used with other emblems of royalty with the sun and moon to denote eternity. We know also that in ancient times these lines and dots were used conventionally to represent some figure or other. So I think that the lines and dots on the coins now being discussed may represent only the figure of the Rājā and this view receives ample confirmation from the Devanāgarī legend on the reverse side. We learn that coins¹ similar in design were minted by the French at Pondicherry and by the Dutch at Nagapatam with their respective bale marks on the reverse. The figure is similar to that found on coins struck at Pondicherry by the Dutch during their occupation of it from 1693 to 1698. It was thought by Colonel Pearse as Kali or Śuli of Tanjore. It is also stated that this design was found anterior to 1693 in the coins of Negapatam and the Dutch copied this design from them. He thinks that this design was extant as early as the second century of the Christian era during the period of the Guptas, but from the existing literature on the coins of the Guptas we find that no such design existed. Therefore this is a later design, but current in the Eastern districts at the beginning of the 17th century and the French, the Dutch and the Marathas might have copied it from that early design.

¹ Cf. Maugin Nahuyé—*Numismatique Des Indes Néerlandaises*—Part II, page 14.