Chapter-V
The foundation of Vijayanagara Empire is an epoch-making event in South Indian history. South India witnessed great heights in political and cultural fields which it had not witnessed earlier and hence it is referred to as the golden age of south Indian history. This appellation can easily be justified on the basis of the rich variety of gold coins which were issued by the kings of this dynasty. Majority of the historians have agreed that the aim and purpose of the foundation of this empire was to bring back the glory of the *Hinduism* and *Hindu dharma*.

During the Vijayanagara period, sage Vidyaranya revived the lost glory of the *Vedic* and *Puranic* religion which suffered a lot, almost to the point of extinction, as a result of repeated Muslim invasions over the southern kingdoms. As the *guru* or teacher of the Sangama brothers Harihara I and Bukkaraya I, he inspired them to establish a new kingdom first at Anagondi and later at Vijayanagara in 1336 A. D., In a short period it grew into a mighty Empire, which lasted more than three centuries under the patronage of great rulers, viz. two Harihararayas, two Bukkarayas, two Devarayas, two Narasimharayas, Krishnadevaraya, Achyutadevaraya, Sadasivaraya, Venkatapatiraya and others. The *VedicPuranic* religion flourished in all its aspects and *Vedic* studies, rituals, art, architecture, regional languages, literature, fine arts, ayurveda, the philosophical ponderings as contemplated by the sage Vidyaranya all thrived. Vidyaranya initiated a great project for writing the *bhashyas* (commentaries) on the four *Vedas*, viz., the *Rigveda*, *Yajurveda*, *Samaveda* and *Atharvanaveda*.

The religious conditions of the period were such that it gave an opportunity for all religions to thrive on their own accord without hindering the promotions of other religions. *Saivism* and *Vaishnavism*, the two major religions of south India which had uneasy relations in the earlier period, now flourished side by side. Grants to *Saiva* and *Vaishnava* temples were given alike. Some rulers were more inclined towards *Virasaivism* of Basavanna. We do not hear of any quarrels between the followers of this faith and other. The only religious misunderstanding during this period was between *Jainas* and *Srivaishnavas* but it was amicably settled by Bukkaraya I.
Another important factor was the harmonious development of the three schools of Vedanta, viz. Advaita, Dvaita and Visistadvaita during the period. Vidyaranya of the Advaitamatha of Sringeri, Madhvacharya of Dvaitamatha and Vedanta Desika of the Visistadvaita received equal respect and regard from Vijayanagara rulers though Vidyaranya was the spiritual leader of the foundation of the Vijayanagara Empire. Tolerance of different schools of spirituals thoughts was reflected in the coinage of the period.

Coins are one of the main sources to know the history of mankind. To avoid the inconvenience of barter system, coins emerged all over India. The earliest coins in India were the Punch marked coins. Generally, these coins are dated from 6th century B.C. to 5th Century B.C. which was issued with natural symbols. After the Punch marked coins, a visible change occurred during the time of Indo–Greeks, as the coins were marked with portrait symbols. Later, indigenous rulers started issuing their coins with inscription primarily written in Brahmi script. During the time of Guptas, issuance of the coins reached its zenith. This tradition was followed by the succeeding dynasties like Cholas, Kakatiyas, and Hoyasalas etc. Coinage of India was primarily marked by pictorial devices either in the form of gods and goddesses, natural figures and the inscriptions on coins is rarely found. But in the medieval period, a great change took place, discarding the pictorial devices on the coins and a new language (Arabic) was introduced on the coins and this tradition gradually developed in North India. Finally it spread to almost all the parts of the country and it is known as Islamic tradition.

The emergence of the Vijayanagara Empire heralded a new phase in the development of the coinage and currency system in the history of South India. The Vijayanagara period witnessed important changes. They continued the old tradition of India, where pictorial devices became the major feature of the coinage. Earlier coinage had Brahmi, Kharosti, Devanagari and Arabic scripts. But Vijayanagara coins contain legends in three scripts i.e., Devanagari, Kannada and Telugu. The richness of gold coins, the innumerable types of gold and copper coins, the rich variety of symbols, the diversity of gods and goddesses, appropriate legends in various scripts and the technical superiority of the coins deserve special attention. No doubt South India had a well-established coinage tradition by the time
the Vijayanagara Empire was born but, the sudden developments were noticed during the period which gave the coinage of the period a unique place. Harihara I and Bukkaraya I, the originators of the Vijayanagara kingdom, had the coinage of the Hoyasalas, Kakatiyas and the later Pandyas for their model. Naturally, Harihara I and Bukkaraya I derived great inspiration from the Hoyasala coins which indicated religious significance and purpose so close to the hearts of the founders of Vijayanagara. Even the names of the coins of the Hoyasalas such as *gadyana, pana, haga, visa, bele* were literally lifted by the Vijayanagara rulers.

The Vijayanagara monarch had a separate department in charge of minting of coins. The main mint was located in Hampi. The Vijayanagara kings issued a large number of coins in gold, silver and copper. However, the silver currency is rare. Most of them embossed the images of gods and goddesses, animals, birds, state emblem etc. Special coins were made in commemoration of occasions like triumphs over other kingdoms. The names of the gold coins were *gadyana, varaha, mada, pratapa, kati, ponnu, haga and pana*. Silver coins are called *tara*, and the copper coins were called *jital or kasu*. On the reverse side most of the coins king’s name was inscribed. The Saluva rulers did not issue any type of coins, because of little span of their rule but the remaining Vijayanagara rulers issued a vast and varied number of coins.

During the Vijayanagara period significant changes accrued in the fortunes of *Saiva* sects. Bhikshavrithi *matha* was the sole institution which influenced the rulers of Karnataka and Andhra. The inscriptions from A. D., 1320 onward at Vutukuru, Tripuranthakam, Basireddi Palli, Pushpagiri, Rayalacheruvu and Pedda Mudiyan etc.(A. D. 1551) refers to the dominance of Virasaivas. These inscriptions refer to the Acharyas, Shaddarsana Sthapanacharya Virasaiva Siddha Bhikshavrithi ayyavaru at Vutukuru, and Aghorasisvacharya Ayyavaru at Somireddi Palli (A. D. 1403). The kingdoms of Gutti and Gandikota were principal areas of influence. *Saivism* reflected on the coins of Vijayanagara rulers, i.e., Siva Parvathi, Bull and *Damaruga* symbols are found on the coins.
It is not definitely known when the *Vaishnava* religion began to be followed by the Vijayanagara royals. According to the *prapannamritam* of Ananthacharya, a celebrated *Vaishnava* work, king Virupaksha was the first Vijayanagara ruler who embraced to Vaishnavism. Though his predecessors were staunch followers of *Saivism* they followed a policy of religious tolerance towards *Vaishnavism*.

A study of the Vijayanagara coins reveals the prominence given by the Vijayanagara rulers to incarnations of Vishnu. The various incarnations of Lord Vishnu found portrayed on the coins include the *Ramatankas* of Sri Rama. Krishna had a special fascination for the Vijayanagara rulers. He was depicted on the Vijayanagara coins in the form of Balakrishna, Venkateswara of Tirupati, the Lord of Seven Hills, had a large number of kings as his devotees, among whom the Vijayanagara kings lead. The depiction of Lord Venkateswara on Krishnadevaraya’s coins is identical in appearance to the most popular god worshipped throughout the length and breadth of India.

From the artistic and technical point of view, the Vijayanagara coins show a great improvement. The art of preparing the correct mould and minting the coin is easily seen, particularly in the gold coins. Legends are very clearly seen and the details of the gods and goddesses are also clear. Generally care was taken to mint all the emblems and the legend within the flan. Another interesting feature of the Vijayanagara coins that attracts attention is the variety of legends. These legends are in three scripts, namely Kannada, Nagari and Telugu. It is of interest to note that the very first king Harihara I introduced Kannada and Nagari legends on his coins. Later rulers used Kannada and Nagari on their coins while only at the fag of the dynasty they used Telugu script. To be very precise, three rulers minted coins with Kannada legends; three rulers had Kannada and Nagari; six rulers had only Nagari and two rulers had only Telugu legends.

The legends generally included the name of the issuer or some of his titles. Harihara I and Bukkaraya I used the word ‘*Vira*’ along with their names but from the time of Harihara II, the simple adjectives was removed and was replaced by a more prestigious word ‘*Pratapa*’. The legends are generally written in two or three lines, at times with horizontal lines separating each line of the legend.
Kannada and Nagari script was inscribed on the coins of Harihara I, Bukkaraya I, Harihara II, Devaraya I, Devaraya II, Mallikarjuna, Krishnadevaraya, Achyutaraya, Sadasivaraya, Ramaraya, Tirumalaraya, Sri Rangaraya I, Venkatapthiraya I, Sri Rangaraya III, Bukkaraya II and Vira Narasimha. Vijayaraya I, Vijayaraya II and Ramaraya Venkatadri issued coins in Kannada script. Krishnadevaraya and Sri Rangaraya I both rulers were inscribed coins in Kannada, Nagari and Telugu scripts. Sri Rangaraya II and Venkatapathiraya II both rulers were issued coins in Telugu script only.

The structure of the Vijayanagara currency irrespective of the metal used for coinage was standardized. Most characteristic feature of the Vijayanagara coins is that they are all round in shape and have an image of deity or deities or animals on the obverse. The reverse is divided by lines into two or three lines with name of the king in abbreviated form. King’s name is preceded by word ‘Pratapa’ or ‘Vira’ and ends with ‘Raya’. This distinctive feature of Vijayanagara coins has been maintained in their coins by kings right from Sangama dynasty to the Aravidu and they seemed to have followed Hoyasala pattern in the design of their coins. Kannada was used on the coins of first two rulers of the dynasty and then came Devanagari script. Telugu appeared first on Krishnadevaraya coins and was commonly used on the coins of Aravidu kings who’s capital was in the heart of Andhra country. But during the territorial expansion in the south Vijayanagara rulers persisted with the coinage of previous rulers with their initials. For example when they annexed Chola territories the common Chola coin of the bull was on the obverse and the reverse had an image of a man. Vijayanagara rulers continued the same type of bull coins in the Chola territories with the addition of kings initial such as ‘Ha’ for Harihara. They did the same for Venad, Alupa and other regions also.

The Vijayanagara rulers started with the simple title ‘Vira’ along with their personal names as in the case of Harihara I and Bukkaraya I. Harihara II perhaps to distinguish his own coins from those of his predecessor Hairiharana II introduced a more honorific title ‘Pratapa’ on his coins and this practice became quite popular with almost all the kings of the dynasty. The kings Harihara II, Devaraya I, Devaraya II, Sri Krishnadevaraya, Achyutaraya, and Sadasivaraya used the title ‘Pratapa’ along with their personal names. The title pratapa is very helpful in distinguishing the coins of
Krishnadevaraya of Vijayanagara and Krishnaraja Wadeyar of Mysore; Sadasivaraya of Vijayanagara and Sadasiva Nayakas of Keladi. The absence of the title ‘Pratapa’ on the coins of Nayakas and Wadeyars is the only identifying clue in this regard.

The titles of the kings had become so famous that the people could recognize the kings on the basis of their titles. Naturally, such kings took pride in these titles and used them on their coins in place of personal names. In the case of Devaraya II was a great enthusiast and expert in elephant sports and his titles Rayagajagandaberunda and Gajabetakara had become famous. Even foreign travellers refer to them. Hence for some of his copper coins, he used only these titles and not his personal name.

Another interesting factor with regard to Vijayanagara rulers is that during their territorial expansion they respected the previous rulers pattern of coins as said above and naturally population of those areas readily accepted their coinage.

The epigraphs of the Vijayanagara period are written in four languages viz. Sanskrit, Kannada, Telugu and Tamil. These epigraphs contain very valuable information on various aspects of the Vijayanagara coins and currency system.

The epigraphs of the Vijayanagara period furnish most important and descriptive information about the varieties of coins. Coins are distinguished on the basis of the mints, symbols, metals, and their values. The names of the coins like Gadyana, Varaha gadyana, Dodda gadyana, Pratapa gadyana, Kati gadyana, Rekha gadyana, Rekha gatti varaha gadyana, Kathari ankusha gadyana, Kula gadyana, Hittuvali gadyana, Samudaya gadyana, Dodda varaha, Ghatti varaha, Sudda varaha, Chakra varaha, Hanumantharaya varaha, Venkatapatiraya varaha, Gandikota varaha, Sanna pratapa, Mada, Pana, Honnu, Hana, Kati honnu, Gajabentakara hon, Bele, Ruka, Tara, Panam and Kasu etc., are furnished by the inscriptions and literary works. The gadyana was the most popular coin of the Vijayanagara period.

Naming the coins after the mint place was also followed during the Vijayanagara period. Coins were named after the mints located at Barakuru, Mangaluru, Tirupati, Adoni, Tadipatri, Gutti, Nellore and Madurai. Barakuru and Mangaluru which were the provincial capitals of Tulunadu during Vijayanagara period. The gadyanas that were minted are
referred to as Barakuru *gadyana* and Mangaluru *gadyana* respectively. Adoni (Adavani) and Tadipatri had mints where the gold *honnu* was minted and is known by a Kannada work *Manaumiyachaupada*. Hons minted at Gutti called Gutti *honnu* is known from the same work. Some coins bear the letters *Ne* and *Ma* on the obverse and they are presumed to represent Nellore and Madurai which were important places during the Vijayanagara period.

One of the important sources for the study of the coinage of the Vijayanagara period is the accounts of foreign travellers. A large number of foreign travellers visited and spent some time in various parts of the Vijayanagara kingdom and recorded impressions on a variety of aspects such as political, social, economic and religious. Some of the travellers wrote their accounts which have become valuable sources for the study of the history of Vijayanagara. As they were acquainted with the coinage and currency of the Vijayanagara period, they recorded some interesting information on them.

Numismatic data found in the writings of the foreign travellers, who visited Vijayanagara Empire, is highly useful for understanding the system of coinage of the period. Of the large number of travellers, Nicolo De Conti, Abdul Razzak, Duarte Barbosa, Fernao Nuniz, Ludovico di Varthema, Domingo Paes, Caeser Frederick are important.

Foreign travellers, who had travelled in Vijayanagara, had mentioned about the silver coins of this kingdom. They were being referred to as *taur*, *tar*, *tara* and *tarh*. Some inscriptions refer to them as *tara*. According to Varthema, silver *tara* was equal to one sixteenth of a gold *pana*. However, Abdul Razzak referred that silver coins named *Tara* were in circulation. Silver *taur* was equal to one fifth of a gold *pana*. This should be taken as to mean that each traveller was referring to a different silver coin of the period. The *taur* of Abdul Razzak was a bigger coin, whereas, the coin described by Varthema it was a smaller coin.

The Vijayanagara was the only important and powerful Hindu kingdom which struck the round gold coins as different from the Sultans and Mughals who minted square and other types of coins. This must have been responsible for the statement of Domingo Peas that *pardaos* were minted only by Vijayanagara rulers. The Vijayanagara gold coins
generally contain legends on one side and the figures on the other. Regarding the latter, travellers differentiate a coin with one figure and coins with two figures. The coins with one figure had impression of Hanuman, Garuda, Nandi, Balakrishna, Elephant, Boar, Lion etc. The coins with two figures had images of Siva-Parvati, Brahma-Saraswati, Lakshmi-Narasimha etc. Thus their description correctly tallies with the known specimens. The other gold coin to which a reference had been made by some of the travellers is *panam* or *fanam*. *Pagoda* is also mentioned by some writers. According to Domingo Paes a *pardao* was equal to 360 *Reis*. He says the annual salary of a military officer of the high rank ranged between 600 and 1000 *pardaos*. He states that “there are men of the guard who have a thousand *pardao* pay per year and others 800 and still others 600 and more”. The Vijayanagara rulers had a well organized system of coinage as testified by the contemporary travellers.

Vijayanagara kings utilized the coins effectively for the revival of Hindu religion and culture, which faced the threat of extinction. Every Vijayanagara coin had an image of Hindu deity are the image of an animal which Hindus worships on the obverse side. The reverse of the coin has the name of the king in Kannada, Nagari or Telugu language. Even today the Vijayanagara coins are found in plenty since no one would melt are destroy a coin with the image of a Hindu god are goddess. In those days coins were the main source of communication among the masses and Vijayanagara rulers effectively used coins for revival of *Hinduism*. 