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# Indo-Portuguese Coins: A Preliminary Review

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**Abstract:** Portuguese were the first among the Europeans to get footage in India. They took advantage of the internal rivalry existed among the local rulers over trade and this helped them to slowly establish forts and colonies in different parts of India. Their tactical approach paved way for them to get substantial leap in trade and commerce, making them economically powerful to start minting coins. Minting coins was not only a fiscal necessity of their government, but also a *Fatah-namah* – a declaration of their success in establishing the supremacy for smooth trade. Coins were minted in gold, silver, copper, tin and *tutenag* throughout the Portuguese territories. Minting coins continued till the Anglo-Portuguese treaty signed in AD 1880. This treaty made the Portuguese coins in India obsolete and the English Rupee and Anna system came into existence as the only legal tender. The paper deals with the Indo-Portuguese gold coin *Cruzado*, silver coins *Esparas*, *Xerafin*, *Tanga*, *Rupia* and *Pardaos*, copper coins *Bazarucos*, *Atia*, *Tanga*, *Reis* and *Dinheiro*, tin coin *Roda* and *tutenag* coin *Reis*. Their denominations, emblems and legends are discussed.

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**Keywords:** Indo-Portuguese Coins, Kerala, Trade, Mints, Denomination, Emblems, Legends

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## Introduction

The intense desire of the Portuguese to discover an ocean route to India and establish supremacy over water resulted in Vasco-de-Gama landing at Panthalayani Kollam in Kozhikkode (Calicut) in Kerala in AD 1498. They, thus, became the first among the Europeans to land in India.

In Kerala, their main purposes were trade and propagation of Catholicism. The internal rivalry then existed over trade among the local rulers and the excellent strategy adopted by the Portuguese helped them to soon get solid footage in Kerala soil. Portuguese could hold dominion over Malabar coast within a short time. They built a fort in Kochi (Cochin) in AD 1503. Soon they expanded their territorial ambitions and in 1510 they established a colony in Goa and in succeeding years in Diu, Bassein, Damen, Chaul and Hugli.

They exported pepper, coconut, areca nut, palm sugar, jaugary, cinnamon, clove, ginger, nutmeg, amber, musk and precious stones from their colonies and in return,

they paid goods, cash and copper. When trade and commerce made big strides, they started minting coins in Portuguese states of India. The first mint was established in Goa in 1521 and it functioned till AD 1869. They started mint in Cochin in 1527 and it produced coins up to AD 1578. Other mints established in Bassein remained active from 1611 to 1731, in Diu from 1611 to 1864, in Daman from 1611 to 1139 and in Chaul from 1644 to AD 1740.

Though coins were minted in gold, silver, copper, tin and tutenag, silver and copper were the common materials used for making Indo-Portuguese coins. Gold coins were a very few in number. Tin and tutenag coins were extremely rare and most of them were lost for ever because of corrosion. For about 370 years, Indo-Portuguese coins had been in circulation and around 17<sup>th</sup> century AD, Portuguese began to lose their hold over power and trade because of the influence of other European powers like the Dutch and the English. By 18<sup>th</sup> century AD, only two mints, one in Goa and another in Diu, were left in the hands of the Portuguese as other mints were forcibly abolished by the Dutch. Anglo-Portuguese treaty signed on 18<sup>th</sup> March 1880 made the Portuguese coins in India (Figures 1.1 – 1.20 and Table 1) obsolete and subsequently, English Rupee and Anna system came into existence as the only legal tender throughout the Portuguese territories in India.

## Indo-Portuguese Coins

### Gold Coins

*Cruzado or Manoel*: Portuguese in India issued a very few Gold coins. There was only one type of Gold coin known as Cruzado or Manoel. It got its name Cruzado from the cross depicted on the reverse. This cross commemorated participation of the king in the crusade against the Turks. The name Manoel was in honour of the king Manoel I (D’Cunha 1883:21). This gold coin has globe on the obverse and cross on the reverse (Figures 1.1 and 1.2).

### Silver Coins

Silver coins known as *Esperas*, *Xerafins*, *Tanga*, *Rupia* and *Pardaos* were issued by the Portuguese in India.

*Esperas*: Originally *Esperas* were gold coins struck by the king D. Manoel in Portugal with the value of semi Cruzado. In Portuguese India, *Esperas* were struck in silver. *Esperas* got its name from *esperes* – the sphere on the reverse. Silver *Esperas* had the word MEA which meant ‘half’ or ‘mine’ depicted under a large crown on the obverse and a large sphere on the reverse.

*Xerafin*: *Xerafins* were issued from Goa. The term *Xerafin* was also written as *Xeraphin*, *Xerafine* or *Zeraphin*. It probably got this epithet from the Persian ‘*Ashrafi*’ (D’Cunha 1883:36) which was a Persian gold coin. It could be also from ‘*Xarafos* (*shroff*)’ meaning a money changer (Mathew 1989:141). *Xerafin* had coat of arms on the obverse and

effigy of St. John or St. Sebastian on the reverse (Figures 1.3 and 1.4). Another variety of Silver Xerafin had coat of arms on the obverse and a cross with figures of date in angles on the reverse (Figures 1.5 and 1.6).



Figure 1.1 – 1.20: Indo Portuguese Coins

**Table 1: Details of Indo Portuguese Coins (Figures 1.1 – 1.20)**

|      |  |
|------|--|
| 1.1  | Obverse of Indo-Portuguese gold coin Cruzado with globe  |
| 1.2  | Reverse of Indo-Portuguese gold coin Cruzado with cross  |
| 1.3  | Obverse of Indo-Portuguese silver coin Xerafin with Coat of arms   |
| 1.4  | Reverse of Indo-Portuguese silver coin Xerafin with effigy of St. John or St. Sebastain                    |
| 1.5  | Obverse of Indo-Portuguese silver coin Xerafin with Coat of arms   |
| 1.6  | Reverse of Indo-Portuguese silver coin Xerafin with cross with figures of dates in angle                   |
| 1.7  | Obverse of Indo-Portuguese silver coin Tanga with Coat of arms   |
| 1.8  | Reverse of Indo-Portuguese silver coin Tanga with value  |
| 1.9  | Obverse of Indo-Portuguese silver coin Rupia with head of monarch with value of coin                       |
| 1.10 | Reverse of Indo-Portuguese silver coin Rupia with Coat of arms with mint marks                             |
| 1.11 | Obverse of Indo-Portuguese silver coin Rupia with effigy of king surrounded by inscription                 |
| 1.12 | Reverse of Indo-Portuguese silver coin Rupia with Rupia in a wreath of leaves                              |
| 1.13 | Obverse of Indo-Portuguese Copper coin Pardaos with Bust of King   |
| 1.14 | Reverse of Indo-Portuguese Copper coin Pardaos with Coat of arms   |
| 1.15 | Obverse of Indo-Portuguese Copper coin Bazarucos with Coat of arms   |
| 1.16 | Reverse of Indo-Portuguese Copper coin Bazarucos with Cross with horizontal bar or sphere                  |
| 1.17 | Obverse of Indo-Portuguese Copper coin Tanga with value  |
| 1.18 | Reverse of Indo-Portuguese Copper coin Tanga with sphere with inscription                                  |
| 1.19 | Obverse of Indo-Portuguese Copper coin Reis with Crown IV in branches, dates and counter marks             |
| 1.20 | Reverse of Indo-Portuguese Copper coin Reis with three crossed arrows with D and B letters and value below |

*Tanga*: Tanga was another type of silver coin. Possibly Tanga received its name from the Indian word 'tanke' or Sanskrit word 'tank' which meant a stamped coin (D'Cunha 1883: 38), a mint or from Tankh, a coinage introduced by the Patan sultans of Delhi in 14<sup>th</sup> Century AD (Freig 1917: 236) Tanga had coat of arms on the obverse and value 'Tanga' written on the reverse (Figures 1.7 and 1.8).

*Rupia*: The silver coin Xerafin dobrado (double Xerafin) was issued by the Portuguese in 1666 AD. Afterwards it happened to be known as Rupia. The word Rupia was first introduced by Sher Shah Suri in India (Gupta 2000:119). The term was later adopted by the Mughals. There were different varieties of Rupia. In some cases head of the reigning monarch and value of the coin were seen on the obverse and coat of arms and mint marks on the reverse (Figures 1.9 and 1.10). There were silver Rupias with effigy

of King surrounded by inscription on the obverse and RUIPIA GOA (name of mint) or RUIPIA written on a wreath of leaves on the reverse (Figures 1.11 and 1.12).

*Pardaos*: Pardaos were silver coins issued by John V for the Portuguese India. It had the bust of the king on the obverse and coat of arms on the reverse (Figures 1.13 and 1.14).

### **Copper Coins**

Portuguese had issued a series of copper coins like Bazarucos, Atia, Tanga, Reis and Dinheiro.

*Bazarucos*: This coin had coat of arms, some times, with abbreviation of the mint places like G-A (Goa), B (Bassein) and D&B (Diu and Bassein) on the obverse. A cross with horizontal bar or sphere, or a cross with four figures of the date in angles were marked on the reverse (Figures 1.15 and 1.16). Bazarucos were also known as Leal.

*Atia*: Atia carried coat of arms on the obverse and cross with four figures of the date in angles on the reverse (Figures 1.17 and 1.18).

*Tanga*: The term Tanga was previously used for silver coins. In 1787 Tanga was also made in copper. So there were Tangas in both silver and copper. Tanga had the value written on the obverse and sphere with inscription on the reverse (Figures 1.19 and 1.20).

*Reis*: Reis had crown, roman numeral indicating the King (e.g. IV), date and counter marks on the obverse and three crossed arrows with abbreviations of mint names (e.g. D and B) and value below on the reverse.

*Dinheiro*: Dinheiro was a common name used for all coins. So Portuguese in India called it Dinheiro Cepayqua. This was the smallest copper coin. It depicted sphere within a circle on the obverse and letters at angles on the reverse.

### **Tin Coins**

*Roda*: Roda is the tin coin issued by the Portuguese in India. Roda meant wheel. The coin got the name as it resembled St. Catherine's wheel. St. Catherine was the patron saint of Goa (D'Cunha 1883: 24). The coin had coat of arms on the obverse and representation of wheel on the reverse.

### **Tutenag Coins**

*Reis*: Tutenag is an alloy of lead and Tin and the coin Reis was made of this alloy. Reis carried coat of arms on the obverse and cross with expanded ends and numerals of date at angles on reverse.

### **Conclusion**

Numismatic history of Portuguese was vague and not well defined. This was mainly because of the fact that Viceroys and officers of the mint issued coins which were of

their own personal liking. There are no written documents on the early periods of Indo-Portuguese coins.

Available material evidences of coins indicate that silver and copper were the metals mainly used for Indo-Portuguese coins. Coins belonging to the duration from 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries are scarce when compared with those belonging to 19<sup>th</sup> century. Minting coins was not only a fiscal necessity of the then government of Portuguese, but also a *Fatah-namah* – a declaration of success or victory to establish supremacy for smooth trade.

Emblems like globe, effigies of kings and saints, and coat of arms reflected the projected self esteem of the Portuguese. Globe symbolized their desire to conquer the world and effigies of saints reflected their unquestioned faith in Catholicism. Saint Philip, St. John and Thomasleeha were the divinities depicted on Indo-Portuguese coins. Effigies had no connection with the reigning monarchs and so whimsical variations were observed both in type and standard. Diversity is observed in the depiction of symbols like crowns and shields (see Figures 1.3, 1.7 and 1.10) Crosses were depicted on the coins with and without expanded ends. Crowns presented as part of coat of arms varied mainly in size and decorations, so also shields.

Heads of the kings were always portrayed in profile. They were not represented on coins issued after AD 1912. Legends on the coins were given in Greek and Latin. Indian native languages were never used in the coins. Coins often indicated the mint towns. (e.g. B for Bassein, D or D&O for Diu, G or G-A for Goa and M or M-A for Malaca). There were no mint marks on the coins issued from Chaul and Cochin. Abbreviations were also used to indicate denominations (e.g. T and A for Tanga).

Fragmentary informations (D’Cunha 1883, Freig 1917, Mathew 1989 and Gupta 2000) available are indicative of many lacunae in our knowledge about Indo-Portuguese coins. Specific periods and their chronology, reasons for the selection of effigies, scarcity of coins in gold, tin and tutenag etc. could not be properly assessed because of these knowledge gaps. This underscores the need for a comprehensive study on various aspects of the Indo-Portuguese coins.

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