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A Unique Gold Coin of Maharaja Narendra Narayan of Kingdom of Kamta Cooch Behar

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The state of Cooch Behar was situated in the Terai region of the great Himalayas and the northern part of the present state of West Bengal earlier known to us as *Kamtapur*, was one of the great regional powers of North-East India, during the 16th to 18th century A.D. Following the downfall of the Kamta and Kamrup kingdoms mainly from repeated invasions by the Bengal rulers a political vacuum developed in North Bengal and adjacent western Assam. The Koches¹ under the leadership of Visvasimha son of a Koch chieftain, declared themselves independent and founded the kingdom on the ruins of Kamtapur which included the modern Cooch Behar.²

The Kingdom of Cooch Behar was unique in the history of entire North-East India in various respects and the numismatic achievement by the Koches was one of them. This glory of numismatics heritage was started by the King Nara Narayan³ (1555-87) and as the Koches worshipped Narayana as their royal deity, the currency was named as *Naranimudra*.⁴ Afterwards the subse-

quent rulers of the Koche dynasty also followed the practice of minting coins. They struck coins mainly on gold, silver and brass metal.⁵ The practice however, ended following the Anglo-Cooch Treaty of 1773.⁶ In spite of the restrictions on minting regular currency, coins were struck by subsequent rulers on various occasions. Finally the mint was permanently closed by a British order of 27th December, 1845.⁷ But even after the closure the rulers retained the right to strike one hundred one gold and one thousand one silver coins on the occasion of their coronation.⁸

The present coin in discussion was of Narendra Narayan (1847-63) and it is made of gold and it is now preserved in a religious institution of North Bengal. Before going into the analysis of the coin it is necessary to say something about the reign of Narendra Narayan.

Raja Narendra Narayan ascended the royal throne in 1847 at the age of six years in Banaras. Narendra Narayan was at Banaras when Maharaja Sivendra Narayan died.⁹ As Sivendra Narayan had

no legal heir so he took Narendra Narayan as his adopted son.¹⁰ The state was governed by Rajmata Kamteswari Devi and Brindeswari Devi till Narendra Narayan became an adult.¹¹ In 1860 Narendra Narayan took the charge of the state. During his reign he took some major steps to increase the material prosperity of his peasants and also introduced some reforms into the administration. After a short reign of four years Narendra Narayan passed away on 6th August 1863.¹²

The description of the coins is as follows :

Metal = Yellowish gold; **Size** = round; **Weight** = 6.12 gms. **Measurement** = 2.3cm.

The Obverse side of the coin is given as under :



Sri Sri Narendra Na rayan Bhup

Observe

On the obverse there are four lines. On the first line there appears the word *Sri Sri*, which is a characteristic feature of most of the *Narayani* coins. On the second line the first name of the king *Narendra*

can be seen. On the third line the word *rayan* occurs which can be completed with the last letter of the second line *Na* as *Narayan* and on the last line the word *Bhup* is present.

We may now cast a glance over the significance of the engraved words on the obverse side of the coin. The language of the engraved words is *Sanskrit* and the script is in *Bengali*. On the first line of the obverse side the name of the king Narendra Narayan is engraved with an honorary word *Sri Sri*. As because the king is a noble person so to dignify his position the Koches used to engrave the word *Sri Sri* before their name on the coins. On the Second line the first name of the king i.e. *Narendra* is seen. The name of the king is important because, it clears that the coin was minted during the reign of Narendra Narayan which was also an indication of the political independence of the king in those days. On the second and third line the word *Narayan* is present and it is the official dynastic name of the Koche dynasty. As because we all know that the Vaishnavism had a strong command over the Koche Empire, so it can be stated that the name *Narayan* (Vishnu is also known as Narayan) as their dynastic name. It also signifies that the Koches were not rigid in their religious attitude. On the fourth line the word *Bhup* signifies a person holding a



*Sri Sri Siva Chara (Ka) mala ma
(dhuka) Rasya
Reverse*

large portion of land and which ultimately carries the notion that the issuer of the coin is a King.

The Reverse side of the coin is given as under :

On the reverse of the coin in question there are also four lines. On the first line there appears the word *Sri Sri*, which is a characteristic feature of most of the *Narayani* coins. In the second line *Siva Chara Na* is seen. The word *(Ka) mala ma (dhuka)* is present on the third line. Though the engraved word on the last line is not clearly visible but undoubtedly, the word is *rasya* because it is also a common characteristic feature of most of the *Narayani* coins.

The phrase-*Sri Sri Siva Chara (na) kamala ma (dhuka) rasya-* occurring on the reverse literally means 'of the bee at the lotus-feet of Lord Siva'. It indicates that like the bees engaged in collecting honey in flowers, the Koche king used to

take refuge at the feet of the Lord Siva to drive his blessings through constant and profound devotion. This particular phrase is engraved in most of the coins of Koche dynasty. As Visvasimha I the founder of the Koche dynasty, described as the son of a mortal father named Haridasa, was allegedly begotten by Siva himself through Haridasa's first wife Hira. This is referred to in the official records of the Cooch Behar like the *Rajopakhyana*, the *Darrang Rajvamsavali*, and the *Sankaraccharita* of Ramacharan Thakur as well as in the *Akbarnama*. It points to the emergence of the concept of the divine origin of kingship in Kamata Cooch Behar. Use of honorific *Sri Sri* both before the name of the God as well as the king is also indicating the divine theory of the Koche kingship. The coins of the Koche kingdom wear not only known as *Narayanimudra* after the title '*Narayana*' assumed by the rulers, but also known as *Siva-tanka*.¹³ The relationship of Koche kings with Siva is repeatedly pronounced probably because of the fact that as the association of Siva with the people of the kingdom was very deep-rooted and old on account of his association here with the fertility of the soil and cultivation, the Koche kings consciously tried to project themselves as descended from the deity at least partially for political purpose.¹⁴

coins the rulers generally describe themselves as the "devotees of Lord Siva" as we find the phrase "*Sri Sri Shivacharana Kamalamadhu Karasya*" inscribed on the reverse side of the Koche coin. The most probable cause for this devotion is that the Koches always tried to project themselves as descended from Lord Siva. (See, Ghoshal. S.C., *op.cit.*, p. 304).

14. Roy Girijashankar, *Uttarbange Rajbansi Kstriya Jotter Puj-Parban*, pp. 12-47, Dibrugarh, 1970.