



**ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER**

**History**

**ANALYSIS OF COIN INSCRIPTIONS OF NIZAM SHAHI DYNASTY**

**KEY WORDS:** Coin, Inscription, Nizam Shahi, Bahmani, Dynasty, Caliph, Amirs

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**ABSTRACT**

Coins are used as a primary source of history. Although, it is not merely the study of the physical features of coins. It plays very important role in understanding history of a particular period and helps us to reconstruct the history. It is a kind of miniature history which provides us with much valuable and accurate information about the particular period. The earliest Muslim Rulers issued coins to concede local sentiments in India. But later on a very significant change has been noticed in the Indian coinage system during the medieval period which is known as **Islamic Type Coins**. The engraving of images was forbidden by faith, henceforth the obverse and reverse of coins entirely bounded with inscriptions, setting forth the kings name and titles, dates in Hijri era and mint name. Following the ancestors the Indian Sultanates also issued coins with some modification on them. The inscription on these coins generally appears in Arabic and Persian. Inscription however made these coins more informative. The study of inscription reveals that these coins offer both religious and secular messages. Religious message includes Kalima, names of Caliph, religious influence, whereas the secular message covers rulers name often with fathers name date mint etc. Rulers used high sounding titles to show themselves as obedient to Allah and champion of Islam and sometime right hand of Caliph also.

**INTRODUCTION**

It is generally accepted that the use of Arabic inscription in Indian coinage is first noticed on the coins of Amirs of Sindh during 8-9<sup>th</sup> century (Danish Moin). However, a detailed study on the coins inscription has yet to be understood in a proper perspective.

No proper study has been done in inscriptions of the coins, while there are many published catalogues and reported articles, which offers limited analysis, their primary concern is to identify and classify the coins without necessarily exploring what message the coins might convey. What messages can be learned from the coins. To answer this question, this paper will first explicate how a history specialist of religion may move toward the investigation of coins as an enhancement to the investigation of sectarianism. Although the study of coins offers a unique window into the study of sectarian movements, several important caveats must be emerging in mind while assessing numismatic information. This paper will show that the coins of the Nizam Shahi kings very clearly indicate about the sectarianism during Nizam Shahi rule.

To begin with the historian of religion may focus on the coins production, especially on what was intentionally placed on coins. According to Michael Bates "Almost as soon as coinage was invented, rulers and cities realized the utility of coins not merely as a means of exchange but as bearers of messages<sup>1</sup>. As a message bearer, which can be consider as the iconography of a coin (broadly conceived as the pictures, busts, inscriptions dates, mints information and issuing authority) illuminates to a certain extent something about those who produced it<sup>2</sup>. Beyond the practical information of date, mint, and issuer, Nizam Shahi coins contain inscription following their predecessors.

In the coins of Murtaza Nizam Shah I, Shia Shahada has been noticed that convey the sectarian identity of the coin issuer. Likewise, the inscription on the coins often includes titles such as Abdullah, Amirul Mu'mineen that make implicit claims about the issuer political and religious authority. Coins became as carriers of politico- religious messages of identity and authority, the coins of Muslim dynasties allow scholars to analyse one means by which these groups negotiated their political and sectarian / religious identities.

**Brief History**

Ahmadnagar Sultanate was a late medieval Indian Kingdom located in between the states of Gujarat and Bijapur. The

kingdom was one of the five successor states of the Bahmani Sultanate in the Deccan. In this dynasty total 11 kings ruled. The first to challenge the privileged position was **Malik Hasan Bahri** a converted Hindu, captive of Sultan Ahmad Shah Bahmani and Governor of Ahmad Nagar, in 896/1491. But he was not successful in his task, which was latter completed by his son **Malik Ahmad** and declared his independence and established Nizam Shahi Dynasty in Ahmad Nagar entitling himself **Sultan Ahmad Nizam Shah Bahri**. He defied authority at Bidar but also dropped the names of the Bahmani sovereign from the Khutbah and struck coins in his name and assumed the style of Ahmad Nizam Shah Bahri. Initially his capital was Junnar later renamed as Shivneri and in 1494 he established his new capital Ahmad Nagar. In 1636 Aurangzeb, the Mughal viceroy of Deccan annexed the sultanate to the Mughal Empire.

First ruler of this dynasty had to retrace his steps for using the title Shah. His successor Burhan-I, called himself Shah only after he was encouraged by Bahadur Shah the Sultan of Gujrat. He was the first to issue coins in the dynasty.

It should be noted that, all the disintegrated parts of Bahmani sultanate ever declared their independence and the most we can say that they took full advantage of the weakness at the centre and become autonomous in their own fief.

**Coinage of Nizam Shahi Dynasty**

The study of Nizam Shahi coinage has its own unique importance because they had issued coins only in copper. It is very significant to understand political and socio economic aspects. It is noted that almost all the kings of independent dynasties issued coins in copper metal. As a result the copper coinage helps to understand the financial position of the state and kingdom, the religious condition, trade, artistic taste of the sovereign and science of metallurgy.

The Bahmani rulers issued coins in all the three metals—gold, silver and copper. But its successors issued only in copper and 2–3 coins were available in gold.

While gold coins were issued by only two rulers during the reigns of *Murtaza Nizam Shah I* and *Burhan Nizam Shah II*, are rare issued in year 993 with the *Shia Shahada*<sup>3</sup> and yet not fully read.

Copper coins are available in large numbers. The present paper intended to glean and tap historical information from the legends, statements etc. carved on the coins. It will glean

on both religious and secular messages on these coins.

#### Religious Content on the coins:

Firstly as mentioned above that Nizam Shahi rulers issued coins mainly in copper but few gold coins had been also reported. One of the gold coin of Mutaza Nizam Shah-I (1565-1588) is noticed by Shia Shahada which ends with the expression *Ali Wali-Ullah*<sup>4</sup>. From the chroniclers it became clear that Murtaza Nizam Shah-I followed Shia faith. This is a reflection of the growing influence of the Shia faith in parts of the Deccan at the time.

#### Secular Content on the coins

The secular content on Nizam Shahi coins may be described as ruler's name, date mint, etc. Writing the name of the rulers name was one of the most common features of medieval Indian Coins. Rulers name along with his father's name was commonly found on the Sultanate coins. But in Nizam Shahi Coins this tradition is not followed. The coins bear simple legends mentioning the ruler's name, date and mint town. Another important thing to be stated here is that only names appeared on the coins are Murtaza and Burhan, and none of the other ruler's names like Ahmad, Husain, Ismaeel, Ibrahim and Bahadur did occur. Since there was more than one ruler of the same name, their coins are distinguished only by the dates and names of mint towns that they have. We get coins from Burhan Nizam Shah-I.

In their coin one thing is common in every single coin, the obverse legend, *Fi Shuhure Sanah*<sup>5</sup> meaning "in the months of year" and the date inscribed at the upper side of the coin and mint name in lower side.

The Nizam Shahi coins is attributed to the different rulers with the help of the dates and mint only. There is different calligraphical arrangements noticed.

Another noticeable coin of this dynasty are of Burhan Nizam Shah II and of Burhan Nizam Shah-III who inscribed the particular term *Gazi*<sup>6</sup> (victorious) title in obverse on coins. Burhan Nizam Shah II was the first ruler in Nizam Shahi dynasty to use *Gazi* term for himself. The legends on the coins, *Burhan Shah Ghazi* in obverse side and mint name *Murtazabad* in reverse side. These coins are very crude and rare and were probably struck in connection with Burhan's attempt to regain Chaul from the Portuguese. Burhan Nizam Shah III also entitled himself with the title *Ghazi* (*Burhan Nizam Shah Ghazi Zarb/ Fi Shuhure Sanah Daulatabad*) from the mint Daulatabad. It is astonishing to note here that the ruler being puppet under the powerful regent Malik Ambar claimed this title. It is most probable that owing to the victories of Malik Ambar against the Mughals and then Bijapur, some of the lost territories of Ahmadnagar state were recovered. Hence the ruler styled himself as Ghazi.

The coins of Murtaza Nizam Shah II are very important in the series of Nizam Shahi coinage. Murtaza II was the son of Prince Ali, one of the four rival candidates for the throne. This relationship is recognized on the coins struck at the temporary capital, Parendā - the only coin, in which the ruler's father is mentioned. The coins from the Parendā mint was crudely engraved and found in various weights. The legends on the coins, *Murtaza Nizam Shah Bin Shah Ali*. It is not clear, whether the name on the coins refers to the Sultan or simply to the Imam 'Ali' as Murtaza being one of his epithets.

We also get to know the tentative transfer of capital<sup>7</sup>, from the coins of Nizam Shahi kings. The following names of the mint towns are found mentioned on the coins;

1. Ahmadnagar or Murtaza Nagar or just Nagar
2. Burhanabad
3. Daulatabad
4. Murtazaabad
5. Parendā
6. Poonanagar (Pune)

During the reign of all these rulers, Ahmadnagar was the capital. The name Nagar refers to Ahmad Nagar, while Burhanabad often used with its epithet *Darul-Sultanat*, is the name given by **Burhan Nizam Shah-II to Bhingar/ Bhongir a nearby town to Ahmadnagar.**

It was all probable the imitation and influence of his contemporary Muslim rulers, who shifted their capital establishment, like Emperor Akbar shifted his capital from Agra to Fatehpur Sikkri like Qutub Shahi shifted from Golconda to Hyderabad. From this it is clear that there was neither outside stress nor strategic compulsion on Burhan Nizam Shah-II to shift his capital to Bhongir.

Murtazabad was the name given to Chaul in the Konkan in the reign of Murtaza Nizam Shah-I.

During the time of Murtaza Nizam Shah-II Ahmad Nagar was captured by prince Danial the son of Mughal emperor Akbar, Murtaza Nizam Shah-II Shifted his capital to Junnar and then Daulatabad. Yet Ahmad Nagar was retained as the mint name on his coins. It is evident that though he lost Ahmad Nagar but still claimed it as his coins. This shows that he claimed Ahmad Nagar as his capital though it was not under him.

The succeeding ruler Burhan-III issued coins with Daulatabad mint. Daulatabad is the famous old fortress and city of Deogiri renamed by Mohammad Bin Tughlaq of Delhi. The Nizam Shahi Rulers gave a new name to Chaul of Konkan as Murtazabad after his name.

Parendā is a town in the present day Maharashtra, it became the temporary capital of Murtaza-II after the Mughal occupation of Ahmadnagar and the capture of his predecessor Bahadur. It is given the epithet *Darul-Mulk*.

#### CONCLUSION

It is not unlikely that the Nizam Shahi rulers issued their coins in the continued traditions of the Bahmani coinage. They largely issued the copper coins from different mints of Ahmadnagar, Burhanabad, Daulatabad, Murtazaabad, Parendā and Poonanagar. Simultaneously they changed their capital due to political disturbances and from where they can peacefully manage the administration and economic activities of the state.

The study of the copper coins of the Nizam Shahi dynasty evidently shows that the bulk of its currency is in copper, except few in gold. The coins are either anonymous or bear the names of Murtaza or Burhan. As such the dates of their issue provide the testimony for their attribution to the respective rulers. These dates are specified in the *Shuhur* era.

Further, on the Nizam Shahi gold coins the Shia *Shahada 'Ali Wali-Ullah'* (Ali, the divine saint or friend of Allah) is incorporated, while on the copper coins no such legend is noted.

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#### FOOTNOTES

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