

Women on South Asian Coins

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It is a pleasure to offer this paper in honor of the twentieth anniversary of Zeno.ru, a valuable resource to collectors and scholars alike. This paper is a testament to its value, as it draws frequently from Zeno to illustrate coins discussed here.

Some years ago, I began to wonder how many women had appeared on the coins of South Asia, the area which today includes the countries of Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. I started gathering images and ideas and started to compile a list. Along the way, I came across a paper by Jayanti Rath,² which mentioned a total of 20 queens, although only 14 of them had demonstrably issued coins, and a small webpage³ celebrating International Women's Week which mentioned 5 queens, of whom one had not been listed by Rath. However, I was discovering quite a few more, so I decided to continue my project, and this paper is the result.

To be clear, my goal is to cover only human women who have appeared on coins, not goddesses. There are many goddesses who are depicted on coins, and the subject of deities being featured on Indian coins is one on which quite a bit has been written.⁴ These are not the subject of my census.

I have discovered a total of 110 women who unquestionably could be said to have appeared in one way or another on coins of the sub-continent. Another three possibly appear on Gupta coins but it is debated whether the figures appearing on these coins are queens or goddesses. One more is supposed to be represented by one or two peacocks on certain Sikh coins, but this is hotly debated. Figure 1 presents a Table listing these 114 women. Finally, another six female names, serving as the *gotra* names of kings of the Satavahana and related dynasties, appear on coins.

In my presentation, I will divide the women and their coins into six categories:

(1) Women rulers who are depicted with realistic portraits (7),

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² Jayanti Rath: "Queens and Coins of India," *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, Vol. XLVII No. 3, 2004, pp. 11-14.

³ <https://www.mintageworld.com/story/detail/34-Women-on-Ancient-Coins/>, accessed May 14, 2020.

⁴ For example, Biswajeet Rath: *Deities on Indian Coins*, Nasik: IIRNS Publications, 1999, and Jayanti Rath: "Goddesses on Coins of India," *Orissa Review*, Sept-Oct 2008, pp 16-19.

- (2) Women rulers who are depicted with stylized portraits (5),
 (3) Women rulers who are not portrayed but are mentioned in legends (19),
 (4) Women who issued coins, but were not portrayed or mentioned in legends (7),
 (5) Women who were not rulers but are portrayed or mentioned (65-68), and
 (6) Women who were commemorated on coins after their deaths (7).

Name	Dynasty or Area	Dates
Women Rulers with Realistic Portraits		
Agathokleia	Indo-Greek	c. 135-125 BCE
Maria I	Portuguese India	1777-1816
Maria II	Portuguese India	1826-1853
Victoria	British India	1837-1901
Elizabeth II	Ceylon	1953-1957
Indira Gandhi (posthumous)	India	1966-77 and 1980-84
Benazir Bhutto (posthumous)	Pakistan	1988-90 and 1993-96
Women Rulers with Stylized Portraits		
Sugandha Rani	Kashmir	901-03 (Regent), 903-905
Didda Rani	Kashmir	958-79 (Regent), 979-1005
Somalekha or Somala Devi	Chauhan	Early 12 th century
Lilavati	Lakdiva (modern Sri Lanka)	1197-1200, 1209-10, 1211
Raziya	Delhi Sultanate	1236-1240
Women Rulers only mentioned in Legends		
Rudrama	Kakatiya	c. 1262-1289
Durgavati	Gond	1550-1564
Chenna Bhairadevi	Saluvas of Gerusoppa	1551-1607
Nur Jahan	Mughal	1624-1627
Mary II	British India	1689-1694
Rani Mangamma	Nayakas of Madurai	1689-1704
Minakshi	Nayakas of Madurai	1732-1736
Regent Queens (11) ⁵	Nepal	1687-1847
Shah Jahan Begum	Bhopal	1882-1889
Women Rulers who issued coins but were not identified on the coins		
Balla Mahadevi	Alupa	1275-1292
Ahilyabai	Holkar	1767-1795
Begum Samru	Sardhana	1778-1836
Gauri Lakshmi Bai	Travancore	1811-1815
Gauri Parvati Bai	Travancore	1815-1829
Baija Bai	Gwalior	1827-1833
Sikandar Begum	Bhopal	1860-1868
Women who did not rule but appeared on coins		
Laodike	Bactria	c. 171-145 BCE
Kalliope	Indo-Greek	c. 105-95 BCE

⁵ See Figure 20 for complete list of these queens.

Machene	Indo-Scythian	c. early 1 st century BCE
Lady Raggodeme	Indo-Parthian	c. late 1 st century BCE
Naganika	Satavahana	c. 60-85 CE
Kumāradevi	Gupta	c. 335-375
Dattadevi ?	Gupta	c. 335-375
Anantadevi ?	Gupta	c. 415-447
Mother of Skandagupta ?	Gupta	c. 456-467
Kanchaladevi	Yadava	c. 1200-1247
Queens of Tripura (42) ⁶	Tripura	1464-1931
Non-Regent Queens (13) ⁷	Nepal	1540-1709
Queen Aishwarya	Nepal	1975
Queen Mother Ratna Raja Lakshmi Devi	Nepal	1988
Queens of Śiva Simha	Assam	1714-1744
Moran, wife of Ranjit Singh	Sikh	1805
Modern Coins Commemorating Women Posthumously		
Fatima Jinnah	Pakistan	1893-1967, 2003 ⁸
Saint Alphonsa	India	1910-1946, 2009
Mother (later Saint) Teresa	India	1910-1997, 2010
Begum Akhtar	India	1914-1974, 2014
Rani Gaidinliu	India	1915-1993, 2015
M.S. Subbulakshmi	India	1916-2004, 2016
Ruth Pfau	Pakistan	1929-2017, 2018

Figure 1: List of Women Appearing in this Paper

WOMEN RULERS DEPICTED WITH REALISTIC PORTRAITS

There are just 7 women who could be said to have ruled in South Asia over the centuries and are depicted on coins with realistic portraits. Of these, two are modern and had their images placed on coins only after their deaths (Indira Gandhi and Benazir Bhutto). Of the remaining five, four were colonial queens “exercising power” at a distance, leaving only one, just one single woman, who was actively exercising power on the ground in country and was depicted with a realistic portrait. She is the first woman to make the list.

Agathokleia

Agathokleia (or Agathocleia) was an Indo-Greek queen (ruled c. 135-125 BCE) who is thought to have been the mother of Strato I and to have served as his regent in his minority.⁹ One theory is that she was the wife of Menander and that she ruled on her son’s behalf after

⁶ See Figure 41 for complete list of these queens.

⁷ See Figure 43 for complete list of these queens.

⁸ The first dates indicate the person’s life span, the second date the year in which a coin was issued in her name.

⁹ See Osmund Boppearachchi: *Sylloge Nummorum Graecorum, The Collection of the American Numismatic Society, Part 9: Graeco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek Coins*, New York: American Numismatic Society, 1998.

Menander's death. But some authors think she ruled later. In either event, she seems to have served as a regent, as she is depicted on some coins jointly with an obviously very young Strato (see coin 1(c) in Figure 2), and even the coins where she is depicted alone and which feature her name on the obverse bear the name of Strato on the reverse.



Figure 2: Coins of Agathokleia and her son Strato I

Figure 2 shows four coins that illustrate various aspects of the narrative around Agathokleia. Coin 2(a) depicts the bust of Agathokleia on the obverse and has an obverse legend that reads ΒΑΣΙΛΙΣΣΗΣ ΑΓΑΘΟΚΛΕΙΑΣ (of Queen Agathokleia). The reverse has a legend in Kharoshthī, which reads *maharajasa tratarasa dhramikasa stratasa* (of the king Strato, the savior and the just). Coin 2(b) is most interesting because on this coin Agathokleia's legend reads ΒΑΣΙΛΙΣΣΗΣ ΘΕΟΤΡΟΠΟΥ ΑΓΑΘΟΚΛΕΙΑΣ; the added second word "theotropou" being the genitive case of "god-like." So Agathokleia believed herself divine! Coin 2(c) shows Agathokleia with the very young Strato, and coin 2(d) is a coin of Strato which shows that he had caught the divine bug. The legend on the coin reads ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΕΠΙΦΑΝΟΥΣ ΣΩΤΗΡΟΣ/ΣΤΡΑΤΩΝΟΣ (of the king Strato, the savior, the manifest).

Maria I

More than 1,900 years were to pass before coins featuring the realistic portrait of a queen were minted again in the sub-continent.¹⁰ Maria I became the first ruling queen of Portugal on the death of her father José I in 1777 and, consequently, she became the ruling monarch over the

¹⁰ This section and the next depend heavily on J. Ferraro Vaz: *Dinheiro Luso-Indiano. Indo-Portuguese Money*, Braga: Barbosa & Xavier, 1980.

Portuguese colonies of Goa, Daman, and Diu. Despite the fact that the news of this accession reached India before the end of 1777, the coins minted in Goa continued to be in the name of Don José until 1781. In 1782, finally, coins featuring the portrait of Maria began to be issued, but they included the portrait also of her husband Pedro, who, although he did not have any ruling authority, came to be called Don Pedro III. Coins featuring the jugate busts of Maria I and Pedro III were minted until Pedro's death in 1786. Denominations included the rupia, the pardao (half rupee), the half pardao (1/4 rupee), the tanga (1/12 rupee) and the ½ tanga. Coin 3(a) in Figure 3 displays the rupia. Finally, in 1787, coins featuring the solo portrait of Maria, wearing a widow's veil, as in coin 3(b), began to be issued, and they continued to be issued until 1807, although Maria did not die until 1816.



Figure 3: Coins of Maria I

The explanation for this curious fact lies in the tragedy that was the last years of Maria's life. In early 1786, she began to display signs of mental illness. The death of her husband in 1786 and that of her eldest son in 1788 drove her deeper into dementia. By 1792, she could no longer function as monarch, and was declared legally insane. Her second son João was appointed Prince Regent to rule in her name. Nevertheless, the coinage continued to feature her portrait. In 1807, however, the Portuguese royal family was forced to flee to Brazil during the Napoleonic invasion of the country, and, after that time, the coinage began to be issued in the name of the Prince Regent.

Maria II

Maria II's accession to the throne was an eventful one. In 1826, the king of Portugal, Pedro IV, died. He had two sons, Pedro and Miguel, but Pedro was in Brazil, and Miguel was in exile in Austria for having plotted against his father. Pedro, being the older son, was the natural heir, but he had proclaimed Brazil's independence in 1822 with himself as Emperor. The Brazilian people did not want to reunite the thrones of Portugal and Brazil, so Pedro decided to abdicate the Portuguese throne in favor of his daughter, Maria, who was 7 years old at the time. He appointed his brother Miguel Regent, and also betrothed Maria to Miguel. Thus Maria technically became queen in 1826. Miguel, however, declared himself King upon his arrival in Lisbon in 1827. Maria was forced to flee to Paris with her mother.

Hearing of these events, Maria's father, Pedro, decided to abdicate the throne of Brazil in favor of his young son, in order to return to Portugal to protect his daughter's interests. Civil war

ensued, resulting eventually in the defeat and deportation of Miguel in 1834. Shortly thereafter, Maria was declared of age (she had turned 15) and became queen in her own right.

Technically, Maria had been queen since 1826 and there do exist coins dated 1829 (minted in the Azores), 1830 (minted in London) and 1833 (minted in Porto and Lisbon). No coins were issued in her name in the Indian colonies, however, until 1834. The first portrait coins were issued in 1839, featuring a very young looking bust (see coin 4a), replaced by an older looking (and heavier) bust in 1845 (see coin 4b). The coinage continued until 1853, when Maria died trying to give birth to her 11th child, who was stillborn. She was 34 years old.



Figure 4: Coins of Maria II

Victoria

Towards the end of Maria II's reign, another queen began to be featured on Indian coins. That queen, of course, was Victoria, who ascended the throne in 1837 and had a long reign of 63 years until her death in 1901. The story of Victoria is so well known that no further introduction is necessary here.

Befitting her long reign, and the constantly changing political climate in the sub-continent during this period, Victoria was featured in a wide range of coin types.¹¹ The East India Company had abandoned the old coinages based on the Presidency system, moving instead to a unified coinage in 1835. Thus, when Victoria ascended the throne, her image was immediately placed on the unified coinage of British India, with the first coins actually being issued in 1840. These were the so-called "continuous legend" coins, on which the phrase "Victoria Queen" was inscribed in a continuous arc above the sovereign's head (see coin 5a in Figure 5). In this phase, there were gold mohurs and silver coins in four denominations: rupee, half rupee, quarter rupee and two annas. The lower denomination copper coinage did not feature the queen's portrait. Some ten years later, the design of the coin changed slightly to the so-called "divided legend" as in coin 5b. The structure of the coinage remained the same.

¹¹ This section draws heavily on Paul Stevens and Randy Weir: *The Uniform Coinage of India, 1835 to 1947*, London: Spink, 2012.

Shortly after the 1857 war of independence (or mutiny), the British government took control of the administration of India from the East India Company and, commensurate with that new status, Victoria's image was presented with a crown (see coin 5c). At this point, even the lower denomination copper coinage started to feature the queen's portrait ... on the copper half anna, quarter anna, half pice and one-twelfth anna ... just as all coins, precious metal or base, in Britain featured the monarch's image. Interestingly, Victoria was never depicted with a crown on Britain's own coinage. Finally, in 1876, she took the title of Empress of India, and the coins reflected this new title (coin 5d). Mention should also be made of the coins of Ceylon, which the British administered separately; Victoria's portrait was featured on those coins as well (coin 5e). The denominations minted included a copper 5 cents and silver 10-, 25- and 50-cent coins.

	
<p>(a) Victoria, AR rupee, continuous legend, 11.73g, 31mm (CNG Lissner 504)</p>	<p>(b) Victoria, AV mohur, divided legend, 11.65g, 27mm (Triton XVII, lot 1065)</p>
	
<p>(c) Victoria, AR rupee, crowned portrait, 11.66g, 31mm (Zeno 246839)</p>	<p>(d) Victoria, AV mohur, as Empress, 11.67g, 27mm (CNG Sale 82, lot 1291)</p>
	
<p>(e) Victoria, Ceylon, AR 10 cents, 1.67g, 15mm (Zeno 249918)</p>	<p>(f) Victoria, Bindraban, AR rupee, 10.60g, 18mm (Zeno 176963)</p>



Figure 5: Coins of Victoria

Apart from the coins of British India, Victoria was also featured on the coins of many of the Princely States. These coins can be divided into three broad categories. The first was shortly after 1857, when a couple of states, perhaps to display their loyalty to the British, placed Victoria's portrait on their coins. The states in question were Bharatpur and Bindraban; although the Brindaban coins were also minted in Bharatpur. The portraits on these coins were locally produced and rather crude (see coin 5f). The second category of Princely State coins were the ones which featured the same portrait as the British India coins did; these coins, although officially issued by the respective States, were in fact minted at the official British mints (see coin 5g). Most of these coins were issued late in the nineteenth century and the States involved included Alwar, Bikanir, Dewas (both junior and senior branches), and Dhar. Finally, the third category of State coins were the ones which did not feature Victoria's portrait but did name her in the legends of their coins; these included Bundi (whose coins actually read "Victoria Queen" in English letters), Jaipur, Jaisalmir, Jhalawar, Jodhpur, Karauli, Kishangarh, Kotah, Kutch, Radhanpur, and Tonk. Coin 5h is an example from Radhanpur. As an aside, it is worth mentioning that the placing of Victoria's image and/or name on these coins was a consequence of British pressure. One state that resisted this pressure was Mewar; nevertheless, they issued coins that carried the legend *dosti landhan* (friends of London).

Elizabeth II

When India and Pakistan gained their independence from the British in 1947, their coinage ceased to carry the image of the British sovereign, even though that sovereign continued to be the titular head of state until the countries became republics, India in 1948 and Pakistan in 1956. However, Ceylon (as Sri Lanka was known then), which achieved independence in 1948, continued to issue some coins bearing the bust of the British sovereign, including 50-cent pieces in 1951 featuring George VI, and 2-cent pieces in 1955 and 1957 featuring the image of the new queen, Elizabeth II. These were the last colonial coins issued in the sub-continent with the images of the British monarch.



**Figure 6: Elizabeth II, Ceylon Nickel-Brass 2-cents (2.59g, 18mm)
(Lakdiva.org)**

Indira Gandhi

The last two women rulers to have been featured on any South Asian coins were both honored posthumously. Indira Gandhi, of course, is a well-known figure. Daughter of India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, she herself served two stints as India's Prime Minister; the first during 1966-77 and the second 1980-84. Again, as is well-known, she was assassinated by two of her Sikh bodyguards.

The following year, Indira Gandhi was honored by the release of a series of coins, in the 50 paisa, and 5-, 20- and 100-rupee denominations. The last one was in silver, the others in a copper-nickel alloy.



Figure 7: Indira Gandhi Cu-Ni 5-rupees (12.5g, 31mm)

Benazir Bhutto

Like Indira Gandhi, Benazir Bhutto was the daughter of a Prime Minister of Pakistan, and also served two stints as Pakistani Prime Minister, in 1988-90 and 1993-96. Like Indira Gandhi, she was also assassinated. Unlike Indira Gandhi, however, she was not assassinated while in office, but rather on the campaign trail in 2007 as she tried to win a third term as Prime Minister.

Bhutto was honored by the Pakistan government, led at the time by her widowed husband, Asif Ali Zardari, by the issuance of a 10-rupee copper-nickel coin in 2008 on the one-year anniversary of her death. The coin features her portrait along with the years of her life 1952-2007 on the obverse and the legend *dukhtar-e-mashriq muhtarma benazir bhutto shaheed*

(daughter of the east, the respected martyr Benazir Bhutto). The reverse carries the moon and star along with the Urdu legend *islami jamhoria pakistan* (Islamic Democratic Republic of Pakistan) and *10 rupia*, along with the date of issue, 2008.



**Figure 8: Benazir Bhutto 10-rupees (27 mm)
(Zeno 116350)**

WOMEN RULERS DEPICTED WITH STYLIZED PORTRAITS

There are another five women who could be said to have ruled in South Asia over the centuries and are depicted on coins with stylized or representational portraits. Their coins belong to series in which the portrait of the king had become immobilized and therefore no attempt was made to actually depict the ruler in a realistic way.

Sugandha

Sugandha Rani was a queen of Kashmir. In the year 901, her minor son Gopala inherited the throne and Sugandha served as Regent. However, Gopala died just 2 years later, as did his younger brother after a short reign of only ten days. At this point, there was no heir available and so Sugandha began to rule in her own right.



**Figure 9: Coin of Sugandha (6.42g, 18mm)
(In Trade, Ganga Numismatics)**

She ruled for only two years (903-905), at which point she voluntarily ceded power to Partha. Ten years later, an attempt was made to reinstate her but the civil war that ensued ended with the capture and execution of Sugandha.

Her coins are part of the Kashmir series, which is derivative of the Kushan type, in which a standing king is shown sacrificing at an altar on one side (here the reverse), and a seated goddess is depicted on the other (the obverse). The legend reads *śrī / suga-ndha* on the obverse and *devi* or *devya* on the reverse.

Didda

The second queen in this sequence is another queen of Kashmir. Didda was the daughter of the king of Lohara and she married the Kashmir king, Kshemagupta. Kshemagupta was a terrible king, devoting all his time and energy to wine and women, and it may be assumed that Didda took over much of the administrative load as the country's coinage was issued in the joint names of Kshema and Didda (Coin 10a). The legend on the coin reads *di / kshema* on the obverse and *gupta* on the reverse.

Kshemagupta died in 958 and was succeeded by his son Abhimanyu. The latter was a minor and so Didda served as Regent. Abhimanyu ruled until 972, but then he died and Didda successively served as Regent for three of his sons, Nandi Gupta (972-973), Tribhuvana Gupta (973-974) and Bhima Gupta (974-979). All three died after brief reigns, poisoned by their grandmother. Finally, after the death of Bhima, Didda was able to take power for herself, with the support of her lover, Tunga, a former buffalo herder. Didda ruled from 979 to 1005, issuing coins in her sole name (coin 10b) and eventually adopting her nephew Sangrama Deva to succeed her and found the Lohara dynasty of Kashmir. The legend on the later coins reads *śrī / didda* on the obverse and *deva* on the reverse.



Figure 10: Coins of Didda

Somalekha or Somala Devi

There is a Chauhan queen of the early 12th century, Somalekha or Somala Devi, the wife of the Chauhan king Ajaya, who issued coins in her own name. Why she did so is difficult to

determine, as the sources are quiet on her ancestry. But we can assume she must have been a princess in her own right to have the ability to issue coins in her sole name.

Figure 11 illustrates the two types of coins issued by this queen. The first follows the basic design of the well-known *gadhaiya paisa* type that had developed from the Indo-Sasanian coinage. On this type, there is a stylized portrait of the queen on the obverse and the legend *śrī soma / la devi* on the reverse. The second type shows the queen on a horse with the same reverse legend as on the first coin. The Chauhan kingdom was bordered by the Chalukyas and the Yaminids. The Chalukyas had issued *gadhaiya paisa* type coins and the Yaminids had their bull and horseman types. Thus the two types of Somala Devi's coins may have been an attempt to mint coin types that might be familiar to their neighbors and thereby facilitate trade.



Figure 11: Coins of Somala Devi

Lilavati

The next queen to have her stylized portrait on her coins was Queen Lilavati of the Polannaruva period in Lakdiva (modern Sri Lanka).¹² She was of royal ancestry and the wife of the great Parakrama Bahu I (ruled 1153-1186). After Parakrama's death, there was a period of turmoil in which several successive kings seized power. Eventually, however, the general Kitti seized control and, rather than taking the throne himself, he installed Lilavati as queen. A period of relative peace followed (1197-1200) but in 1200 Sahassa Malla deposed the queen and took power. Once again, there was a period of turmoil, followed by Lilavati's reinstatement as queen in 1209. Once again, she was deposed the next year, followed by another stint on the throne in 1211. Shortly thereafter, however, the Pandya general Parakrama invaded Sri Lanka and seized power. This was the last time Lilavati was mentioned in the records.

Lilavati issued the characteristic coins of the period which featured a standing king (or queen) on one side and a seated king (or queen) on the other. The reverse also features the legend *śrī / rājā / līlā / vatī* in four lines. Coins were issued in both silver and copper.

¹² The discussion draws heavily from the text in the excellent website for Sri Lankan coins, lakdiva.org.

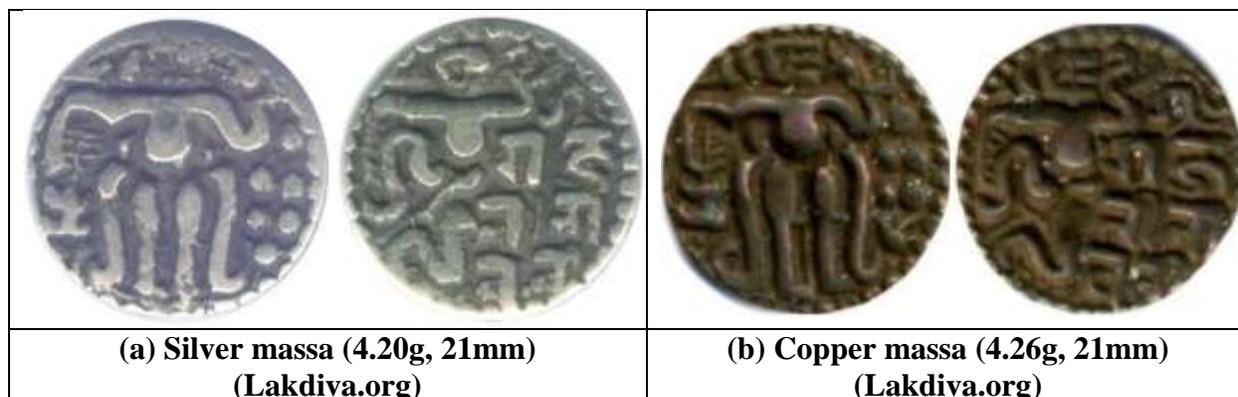


Figure 12: Coins of Lilavati

Raziya

The last woman ruler to be represented by a stylized portrait on her coins was the first female Muslim ruler on the Indian sub-continent: Razia, Sultan of the Delhi Sultanate, 1236-1240. She was the daughter of Iltutmish, who was Sultan from 1211 to 1236; her mother, Turkan Khatun, was a daughter of Qutb ud-din Aibak, who had been Sultan from 1206 to 1210. Iltutmish had been succeeded by his son, Ruknuddin Firuz, but the real power behind the throne was his mother, Shah Turkan, and she had many enemies among the nobles. Razia was able to instigate a rebellion against Ruknuddin and to win the ensuing civil war. She ascended the throne in 1236.

One near-contemporary historian of the time, Minhaj-i-Siraj, tells us that Iltutmish had appointed Razia to administer Delhi while he was away on campaign, because he didn't trust any of his living sons to do a good job. He was so happy with Razia's performance that he appointed her his successor. Whether this is true or is a story spread by Razia and her allies is hard to know for certain.

Razia's reign was short-lived, as she in turn had many enemies among the nobles. They rebelled in 1240 and Razia was defeated and executed. Her reign lasted a little over 3 years.



**Figure 13: Billon jital of Razia (3.58g, 14mm)
(Tandon collection 641.52)**

Initially, Razia issued coins in the name of her father, but, after a year or so, she started to issue coins in her own name. She issued some coins (Figure 13) in which the obverse features a stylized royal portrait of a mounted king (or queen) and the reverse carried the legend *al-sultan al-mu'azzam radiyyat al-din bint al-sultan* (the great sultan, Raziya, daughter of the sultan).

WOMEN RULERS NOT PORTRAYED BUT MENTIONED IN LEGENDS

There are 19 queens listed in this category, but some might challenge this number. Of the total, 11 are queens of Nepal who served as regents for their minor sons. The coins issued in their names, however, followed a pattern that seemed to be followed for most if not all Nepal queens. Therefore, some might argue that the coins issued in their names were not issued because they ruled as regents, but simply as queen wives of ruling kings.

Rudrama

Rudrama Devi was a queen of the Kakatiyas of Warangal, who ruled c. 1262-1289. She was the daughter of Ganapatideva, who had a very long reign c. 1199-1262. He probably died without a son and this led the capable Rudrama to inherit the throne. During her reign, she successfully defended the Kakatiya realm from numerous attacks, including one by king Mahadeva of the Yadavas of Devagiri, forcing him to pay a huge tribute in gold. This was mostly distributed among her troops. After this victory, she acquired the title *Raja-gaja-kesari* (Lion to the elephant-like enemies). Her coins, such as the gold gadyana and the silver damma in Figure 14, do not mention her name, but identify her by this title. To make her palatable as a ruler, Rudrama took the male title *rāja* and was often depicted as a male person. Rudrama is thought to have died in battle against a rebel chief.

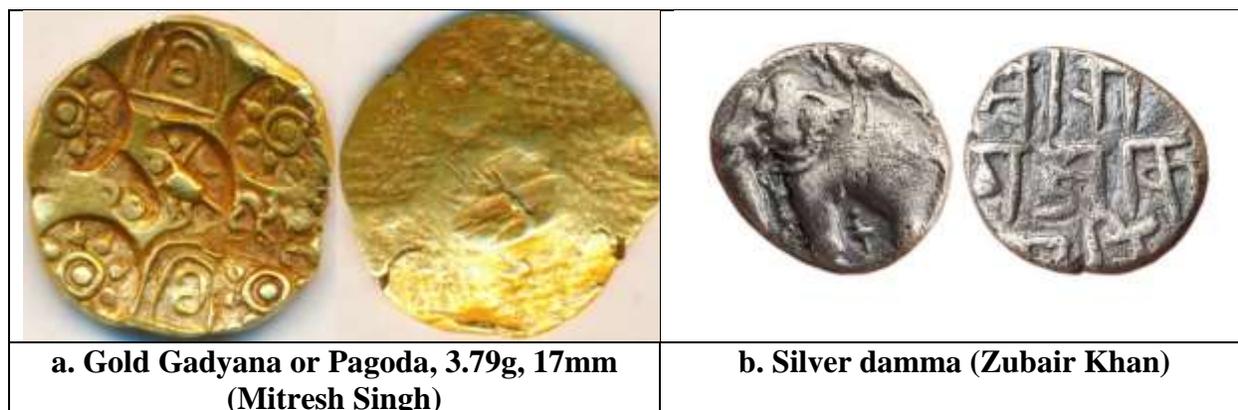


Figure 14: Coins of Rudrama

Durgavati

Rani Durgavati was the Queen of the Gond Kingdom from 1550 to 1564. She inherited the throne upon the death of her husband Dalpat Shah; she herself was a princess of the

Chandella family, the daughter of Keerat Rai. At the time of Dalpat Shah's death, her son Vir Narayan was only 5 years old; hence the need for her to assume power.

In 1556, Baz Bahadur, the Sultan of Malwa, attacked her capital but he was repulsed. Baz Bahadur himself was defeated by Akbar in 1562, who now confronted Durgavati and the Gonds. Despite her overwhelming inferiority in men and materials, Durga Devi decided to try to defend her kingdom against the mighty Mughals. After several battles, both she and her son were wounded. Staring defeat in the face, Durgavati elected to kill herself with her own dagger.

Rani Durgavati issued coins in her name. Figure 15 illustrates a small fractional paisa, where the word *devī* can be clearly seen.



**Figure 14: Fractional paisa of Durga Devi, 1.30g, 11mm
(Vishal Parikh)**

Chenna Bhairadevi

Chenna Bhairadevi¹³ was a ruler of the Saluva dynasty, which ruled as feudatories of the Vijayanagar Empire in southern Kannara, an area in the coastal parts of today's Karnataka state. Through most of the 15th and 16th centuries, two different branches of the family ruled from two different capitals, one from Gerusoppa and the other from Sangitapura. As feudatories, they enjoyed the title *mahāmaṇḍaleśvara*.

In 1551, Chenna Bhairadevi inherited the throne at Sangitapura from her sister, Chennadeviamma. Then, in 1559, the ruler in Gerusoppa, named Krishnadevarasa, died without leaving an heir. Chenna Bhairadevi, as his niece, became the ruler at Gerusoppa also, combining the two parts of the territory into one for the first time since the founder of the dynasty. She ruled until 1607, the longest reign of any woman anywhere and at any time in South Asia.

¹³ This discussion is based largely on a chapter from an unidentified Ph.D. thesis found online at https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/100719/18/19_chapter%2016.pdf

Bhairadevi was a Jain by faith, and her reign was marked by the construction of many Jain temples. She also gave grants for the construction and maintenance of Hindu temples. At the same time, her reign was also marked by considerable strife. She was in a continual struggle for control of her domain against the Portuguese, who had established themselves on the Malabar coast by this time, and also against domestic enemies in the form of the Biligi Chiefs and the Keladi Nayakas. She lost the port of Honnavar to the Portuguese but did not accept their demand to sell pepper to them cheaply. In 1570, she attempted to recover Honnavar, and it appears that this effort was unsuccessful; however, she gained the respect of the Portuguese and they eventually reached an agreement to buy pepper in quantity from her. They gave her the name “Raina de Pimenta,” or “the Pepper Queen.”

Through most of her reign, she was able to hold off the Biligi Chiefs and the Keladi Nayakas, but, in the early 17th century, the two traditional enemies forged an alliance around a marriage tie, and they defeated the Saluva forces. Bhairadevi was captured and eventually died in captivity. At this point, the kingdom passed into the hands of the Keladi Nayakas.



Figure 15: Copper coin of Chenna Bhairadevi (Raghunadha Raju)

During her reign, Chenna Bhairadevi issued copper coins such as the one in Figure 15. The coin shows a worshipful Garuda on the obverse and bears a Kannada legend on the reverse, which reads *chenna bhairāmbha*.

Nur Jahan

Nur Jahan was the twentieth and last wife of the Mughal emperor Jahangir. She was born Mehr-un-Nissa, the daughter of Ghiyas Beg, a Persian noble who served Akbar and rose to a prominent position at the court. In 1594, at the age of 17, Mehr-un-Nissa was married to Ali Quli Istalju, a Persian adventurer serving in the Mughal army, who later was given the title Sher Afgan (tosser of the tiger). Sher Afgan died in 1607, although the circumstances are not known with certainty. The widowed Mehr-un-Nissa was appointed lady in waiting to the senior-most lady in the harem, Ruqaiya Sultan Begum, who had been Emperor Akbar’s principal wife (Akbar had died in 1605, succeeded by Jahangir).

Jahangir married Mehr-un-Nissa in 1611, shortly after he happened to meet her accompanying her patroness at the palace *meena bazaar*, a specially arranged market within the

palace walls to allow the ladies of the harem to shop. Jahangir was besotted with his new wife, to whom he gave the title *Nur Mahal* (Light of the Palace) after their marriage and the title *Nur Jahan* (Light of the World) in 1616.

In the waning years of his reign, Jahangir lost himself in drink, and Nur Jahan effectively ran the administration of the empire. Her control over the affairs of state was so great that she felt emboldened enough to issue coins in her own name, starting in AH 1033 (= 1624 CE). The coins issued included gold mohurs (including Zodiac mohurs), and silver rupees, half rupees and quarter rupees. The coin illustrated in Figure 16 carries the legend *nam e nur jahan badshah begum zar / ze hukm shah jahangir yaft shud zewar* (By authority of Shah Jahangir, gold gained a hundred beauties by the name of Nur Jahan Badshah Begum). It was struck at Surat in the AH year 1034 (= regnal year 19 = 1624-25 CE).

After Jahangir died, Shah Jahan ordered all the coins in the name of Nur Jahan to be melted down, as a result of which they are quite scarce today. Nur Jahan herself was allowed to live out her life in Lahore, accompanied by her daughter (with Sher Afgan, it is not clear whether she had a child with Jahangir). She built for herself a beautiful mausoleum in Lahore and also one for her father, who was known as Itimad-ud-Daulah, and whose tomb in Agra is regarded by some to rival the Taj Mahal, for which it served as an inspiration, in beauty.



**Figure 16: Silver rupee of Nur Jahan (11.39g, 21mm)
(In trade, CoinIndia.com 692.54)**

Queen Mary II

The first British queen to appear on the coins of South Asia was not Victoria, but Queen Mary II, although her appearance was in the form only of the legend rather than a portrait. Mary was the daughter of King James II, the last Catholic king of England, who was deposed by Mary's husband – at the invitation of some of the English nobility – the Dutch prince William III. James was declared to have abdicated the throne and, in 1689, Mary and William were crowned joint rulers in Great Britain. Both in fact did wield power. Mary deferred to William in general, but William was frequently away on campaigns and, at those times, Mary ran the administration of the country. She died of smallpox in 1694 at the age of 32.

At their mint in Bombay, the East India Company initially issued coins of British design, but these were not well received in the market, perhaps because they looked quite unfamiliar. In

1693, the company began to issue silver rupees of the kind shown in Figure 17, which were made to look like Mughal coins but carried the legend “coin of English Company, struck in Mumbai during the reign of King William and Queen Mary.” As Mitchiner puts it, “these aroused Mughal displeasure and were rapidly withdrawn.”¹⁴ Eventually, Mughal style coins in the name of the Mughal emperor began to be issued in 1717.



Figure 17: Silver East India Company rupee of William & Mary, 11.38g (Zubair Khan)

Mangamma

Rani Mangamma was the wife of the Nayaka of Madurai Chokkanatha Nayaka (ruled 1659-1682). She was the daughter of one of Chokkanatha’s generals. When Chokkanatha died in 1682, he was succeeded by his (and Mangamma’s) son Rangakrishna Muthu Virappa Nayaka (ruled 1682—1689). However, Rangakrishna died young. At the time of his death, his widow was pregnant and, later that year, she gave birth to a son, after which she committed sati. The son was to become the Nayaka Vijaya Ranga Chokkanatha. Before that, during his minority, his grandmother Mangamma served as Regent (1689-1704).

During her regency, Mangamma focused on infrastructure projects: many roads and irrigation channels were repaired, and new roads, including a road to Cape Comorin, were built. During this period, Aurangzeb was making a concerted effort to conquer South India. Mangamma also issued coins in her name, such as the one in Figure 18. The copper *kaśu* shows two deities, perhaps Rama and Hanuman, on the obverse and the Telugu legend *śrī mangamma* on the reverse.

¹⁴ Michael Mitchiner: *Oriental Coins and Their Values: Non-Islamic States & Western Colonies*, London: Hawkins Publications, 1979, p. 220.



**Figure 18: Copper *kaśu* of Rani Mangamma, 3.00g, 14mm
(Zubair Khan)**

Minakshi

Rani Minakshi was the wife of Vijaya Ranga Chokkanatha Nayaka of Madurai.¹⁵ When Vijaya Ranga died in 1732, Rani Minakshi became the ruler, but her rule was short as she was captured and jailed by Chanda Sahib, the Nawab of Arcot. While in jail, in 1736, Minakshi committed suicide by taking poison and, with her death, the dynasty of the Madurai Nayakas came to an end. During her lifetime, she had issued coins in her name. The illustrated coin in Figure 19 shows a lion right on the obverse and the Tamil legend *minatchi* on the reverse.



**Figure 19: Copper *kaśu* of Rani Minakshi, 2.6g, 12mm
(after K. Ganesh)**

The Regent Queens of Nepal

For some reason, a number of queens in Nepal served as regents for their young sons and issued coins in their own name. Aside from the regent queens, a number of other queens were

¹⁵ This discussion is based on K. Ganesh: *The Coins of Tamilnadu*, Bangalore, 2002.

also named on Nepalese coins, and they will be dealt with in the next section. Here, however, we note that ten queens served as regents and were named on coins.¹⁶ Figure 20 is a table that shows the details of these ten queens. They belong to both the Malla dynasty and the Shah dynasty, and to the Kingdom of Kathmandu and the Kingdom of Patan. Thus this seems to have become a widely accepted practice. It suggests a degree of political stability and also perhaps reflects the fact that the experience with having a queen as regent was initially successful and so came to become an accepted practice.

Name of Queen	Regent for	Dates	Coins
Malla Dynasty, Kingdom of Kathmandu			
Riddhi Lakshmi Rajeshwari Devi	Bhupalendra Malla	1687-1700	AR suki
Kumudini Devi	Jaya Prakash Malla	1722-1735	AR suki
Malla Dynasty, Kingdom of Patan			
Yogamati Devi	Loka Prakash Malla	1706	AR mohar
	Vira Narasimha Malla	1709	AR mohar
Rajyeshwari Devi	Jaya Vir Malla	1709-1715	AR suki
Janani Mateshwari Devi	Jaya Tej Narasimha Malla	1765-1768	AR suki
Shah Dynasty of Kathmandu			
Rajendra Lakshmi Devi	Rana Bahadur Shah	1777-1799	AV, AR suki
Raja Rajeshwari Devi	Girvan Yuddha Vikram Shah	1799-1816	AV, AR suki
Subharna Prabha Devi	Girvan Yuddha Vikram Shah	1799-1816	AV, AR suki
Amara Rajeshwari Devi	Girvan Yuddha Vikram Shah	1799-1816	AV, AR suki
Mahamaheshwari Devi ¹⁷	Girvan Yuddha Vikram Shah	1799-1816	AV, AR suki
Lalita Tripura Sundari Devi	Girvan Yuddha Vikram Shah	1799-1816	AV, AR suki
	Rajendra Vikram Shah	1816-1847	AV, AR suki

Figure 20: Regent Queens of Nepal

Coins naming these regent queens were not issued during their regency or even their lifetimes, but rather were issued after their deaths. Coins of various denominations were issued: silver sukis (quarter mohars), silver mohars, and gold sukis; the last only by the later Shah dynasty. Figure 21 shows four such coins. The first coin is a silver suki commemorating Kumudini Devi, who had served as regent for Jaya Prakash Malla, king of Kathmandu. The coin legend reads: obverse: *śrī janānī ku*, reverse: *mudinī devī*. The second coin, featuring a different design, commemorates Mateshwari Devi, the regent for Jaya Tej Narasimha Malla, king in Patan. The legend here reads: obverse: *śrī janānī mateshwarī devī*, reverse: *śrī karuṇamaya*. The third coin is a silver suki of Rajendra Lakshmi Devi, who was the regent for Rana Bahadur Shah. The legends on the coin read, obverse: *śrī śrī bhavānī*, reverse: *śrī rajendra lakṣmī devī*. Finally, we have a coin commemorating Queen Lalita Tripura Sundari Devi, who served as regent both for her step-son Girvan Yuddha Vikram Shah and her step-grandson Rajendra Vikram Shah. The legend on her silver suki reads, obverse: *śrī śrī bhavānī*, reverse: *śrī lalita tripra sundarī devī*.

¹⁶ This section draws heavily on N.G. Rhodes, K. Gabrisch and C. Valdetaro: *The Coinage of Nepal*, London: Royal Numismatic Society, 1989.

¹⁷ Probably another name for Rajeshwari Devi.



Figure 21: Coins of Regent Queens of Nepal

Shah Jahan Begum

A curious piece of Indian history is the fact that the Princely State of Bhopal was ruled by four female nawabs during the 18th and 19th centuries.¹⁸ This phenomenon began in 1819 when the then Nawab, Nazar Mohammed Khan, died, leaving behind just one child, a very young daughter. At one of the funeral ceremonies, his young wife Qudsia Begum declared that the family's right to rule the state should be maintained and therefore asserted the right of her 15-month old daughter, Sikandar, to inherit the throne. Qudsia Begum became the Regent and ruled from 1819 to 1837. She issued coins in the name of the Mughal emperor Muhammad Akbar II, and we will see such a coin in the next section.

The throne was briefly taken by Jahangir Mohammad Khan (1837-1844) but thereafter Qudsia Begum's grand-daughter Shah Jahan Begum, who was then 6 years old, was recognized as the Nawab, with Sikandar Begum as Regent. The British had by this time taken control and decided in 1860 to place Sikandar Begum directly on the throne and she ruled from 1860 to 1868. In that year, she died and Shah Jahan Begum resumed the throne in her own right. Her rule

¹⁸ This discussion draws from Hiba Shaikh: "The Begums of Bhopal: A Dynasty of Powerful Women," viewed online at <https://feminisminindia.com/2018/05/25/begums-of-bhopal-female-dynasty/>.

lasted from 1868 to 1901, when she was succeeded by her daughter Sultan Jahan Begum (1901-1926). She was the last female Nawab as her son Hamidullah Khan succeeded her.



Figure 22: Copper Anna in the name of Shah Jahan Begum of Bhopal, 31.15g (Zubair Khan)

During the Regency and then the reign of Sikandar Begum, Bhopal's coins were anonymous, and Shah Jahan Begum continued this practice in her early years. We will see some of these coins in the next section. In 1882, however, and for the next 7 years, Shah Jahan Begum placed her own name on the coins. Figure 22 is an example. After 1897, the British removed Bhopal's right to issue its own coinage, declaring British coins the only legal tender.

WOMEN RULERS WHO ISSUED COINS BUT WERE NOT PORTRAYED OR MENTIONED IN LEGENDS

Balla Mahadevi

Balla Mahādevī¹⁹ was the wife of the Āḷupa king Vira Pandyadeva (ruled 1250-1275). When he died, their son was a minor and so Balla Mahadevi took the reins of power, probably as Regent. Her reign lasted for the years 1275-1292. According to Prabhu and Pai, she “seems to be one the most illustrious personalities of the Āḷupa dynasty. She brought stability to the land during seventeen years of her reign with many reforms that showed the strength of her character.”²⁰

Very few of the Āḷupa kings placed their names on the coins, and the same is true of Balla Mahādevī. It is reasonable to suppose that the issuance of coins, such as the gold gadyana in Figure 23 continued during her reign. The obverse shows the two-fish symbol of the Āḷupas, while the reverse bears the legend *śrī pāṇḍya dhanamjaya*.

¹⁹ The discussion here draws on Govindraya Prabhu S. and Nithyananda Pai M.: *The Alupas: Coinage and History*, Udipi, 2006.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 52.



**Figure 23: Gold gadyana or pagoda of the Āḷupas, 3.59g, 15mm
(CNG e366.78)**

Umayamma Rani

Beena Sarasan, in a 2002 paper,²¹ suggested that Umayamma Rani of the Venad kingdom (ruled 1677-1697) may have issued coins. She came to this speculative conclusion on the basis of the fact that, during this period, the two branches of Venad came under single rule. There exist coins that feature Gajalakshmi on the obverse and a reverse featuring several symbols: an *ankuśa*, crescent, conch, and *cakras*. The *cakra* was the symbol of the Chiravay branch, and the conch became the symbol of the later rulers at Travancore. Sarasan argues that these coins may have been issued at the time of the merging of the two branches, although she acknowledges that rulers other than Umayamma may have issued them. I have been unable to obtain a decent photograph of this coin type (the image in Sarasan's paper is too dark to be reproduced). In any case, since the attribution is so speculative, I merely note the possibility that there may have been coins issued by a Venad queen in the late 17th century. I did not include these coins in the counts provided in the introduction to the paper.

Ahilyabai Holkar

Maharani Ahilyabai Holkar was the queen of the Maratha Kingdom in Malwa from 1767 to 1795. She inherited the throne by special dispensation of the Peshwa after all the male claimants to the throne had died.

Ahilyabai's husband, Khanderao, was killed in battle in 1754. Her father-in-law, Malhar Rao, did not permit Ahilyabai to commit *sati*. He, in turn, died in 1766, upon which his grandson, Ahilyabai's son Male Rao, became the ruler at Indore at the age of 21. However, he himself died the following year. At that point, with no immediate male heir available, Ahilyabai petitioned the Peshwa to be permitted to take the reins herself, and he agreed.

Ahilyabai's reign was largely peaceful and she spent much of her time and energy building temples and *dharamshalas* throughout India. She died in 1795, at the age of 70, having ruled for over 27 years.

²¹ Beena Sarasan: "Late Medieval Coins of Venad," *Studies in South Indian Coins*, Vol. XII, 2002, pp. 42-47.

Coins of Indore issued during Ahilyabai's reign did not carry her name, but they carried two symbols specific to Ahilyabai, a bilva leaf and a yoni-cum-lingam symbol (see Figure 24).



Figure 24: Silver rupee of Ahilyabai Holkar, Maheshwar mint, 11.35g, 21mm (Zeno 130269)

Begum Samru

Begum Samru was a *nautch* (dancing) girl by the name of Farzana Zeb un-Nissa who, at the age of fourteen, caught the eye of a European adventurer (his precise nationality is a matter of dispute, although he was perhaps German) by the name of Walter Reinhardt. He became a mercenary in the service of the French, taking the name Summer, and came to India in the mid-18th century. Because of his dark complexion, “Summer” was turned to the French “Sombre,” meaning dark. He took up with Farzana (whether they ever married is not entirely clear) in 1767, by which time he had formed his own mercenary army. He acquired a position from Shah Alam II, and became the ruler of Sardhana, near Meerut. He had a short-lived reign, as he died shortly thereafter.

Farzana took over the administration of Sardhana and proved to be a capable ruler, heading up the army and ruling from 1778 until her death in 1836, at the age of 83. She died immensely rich and her estate is still under litigation, nearly 200 years later! In 1781, she had converted to Catholicism, taking the name Joanna. But she was known as Begum Samru, the “Samru” being a variant of her husband’s *nom de guerre* Sombre.

Although no coins were issued in Begum Samru’s name, she did issue coins from her mint Zebabad in the name of the Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II (see Figure 25). One can’t help but wonder if the large S-shaped letter dividing the AH date 1218 (= 1803-04 CE), which is the letter *kaaf* in the word *sikka*, but which appears to be inordinately large here, is a sly nod to the initial letter in the names Samru and Sardhana.



Figure 25: Silver Rupee of Begum Samru (11.06g, 23mm)
(CNG, Triton XXIII, lot 973)

Gauri Lakshmi Bai

Maharani Ayilyom Thirunal Gauri Lakshmi Bai was the daughter of the adopted sister of the Maharaja of Travancore, Balarama Varma (ruled 1798-1811). When he died, at the age of 28, there was no male heir in the Travancore royal family and so Gauri Lakshmi Bai came to the throne as the ruler. She was only 20 years old at the time and was married with one daughter, aged 2. In 1813, she gave birth to a son, Swathi Thirunal. As he was now a male claimant to the throne, Gauri Lakshmi Bai's reign came to an end and was converted to a Regency in favor of her son. The following year, she had another son, but she fell ill after the birth and died in 1815 at the age of 24.

During her reign, Gauri Lakshmi Bai appointed as Dewan the British Resident, Colonel John Munro. He launched a vigorous program of government and social reforms as a result of which the problem of corruption in government and the community of wealthy temples was brought under control. Slavery and other social ills were abolished and public health was promoted through the introduction of programs of vaccination.



Figure 26: Copper Thirakasu of Gauri Lakshmi Bai, 1.43g, 13mm
(Zeno 213097)

Although Gauri Lakshmi Bai's name never appeared on any coins, we can assign coins to her, such as the one in Figure 26, by their dates. The coin in the Figure features a lotus blossom on one side and an image of Garuda flying on the other, both with ruled and dotted circles. These coins were issued for three years between 1813 and 1816.

Gauri Parvati Bai

Gauri Parvati Bai was Gauri Lakshmi Bai's sister. She was only 13 when her sister died, but, as the oldest member of the Travancore royal family, she became Regent for her nephew Swathi. She remained Regent until 1829, when Swathi turned 16 and ascended the throne in his own right.

During the regency of Parvati Bai, Travancore made great strides in social progress. Perhaps the most important was the declaration in 1817 that education was the responsibility of the state. Many other social reforms were also undertaken.



**Figure 27: Copper *pampukaśu* (1-cash) of Gauri Parvati Bai, 0.6g, 9mm
(Zeno 213099)**

Figure 27 shows a coin produced during Gauri Parvati Bai's regency. Again, her name does not appear on the coin, but we know from the date (991 of the Malayali Era = 1816 CE) that it was issued during her reign. It was known as *pampukaśu*, because "*pampu*" refers to the serpent seen on the coin.

Baija Bai

Baija Bai ruled the State of Gwalior as Regent from 1827 to 1833.²² Her husband was Daulat Rao Scindia and he died in 1827 without a male heir (his son with Baija Bai had died as a child). An 11 year old relative of Daulat Rao, named Mukut Rao (later known as Jankoji Rao Scindia), was chosen to succeed him, while Baija Bai was installed as Regent until the heir could attain majority.

Baija Bai used her position to amass a huge fortune, mostly through the taxation of opium which was produced in great quantities in Malwa. When Jankoji Rao turned 18, Baija Bai tried to declare him incompetent so as to hold on to power, but the British did not support her and she

²² Thanks to Abhay Agrawal for sharing with me his unpublished paper on Baija Bai and her coins; he drew substantially from Jan Lingen and Kenneth W. Wiggins: *Coins of the Sindhias*, London: Hawkins Publications, 1978.

was forced to move to Agra. Jankoji Rao died in 1843 and Baija Bai attempted a comeback but she was unsuccessful. Jankoji Rao's adopted heir, Jayaji Rao, was enthroned the same year. Baija Bai attempted to remain relevant in Gwalior politics but all her attempts were thwarted by the British. She eventually died in 1863.



Fig 28: Coins of Baija Bai Scindia (Abhay Agrawal)

During her period of Regency, Baija Bai introduced the letter *śrī* as her signifying symbol on the coinage of Gwalior. Whether she was comparing herself to the Goddess Lakshmi, or simply invoking her, is unclear. Jankoji Rao continued the tradition of placing a symbolic letter on the coinage; in his case the letter was *jī*. Baija Bai's coinage (see Figure 28) included coins in gold, silver and copper.

The Begums of Bhopal

We have already seen in the previous section a coin of Shah Jahan Begum of Bhopal, who issued coins in her own name. Two of her female predecessors also issued coins, but not in their own names.²³ Qudsiya Begum, who ruled as regent for her daughter Sikandar Begum from 1819 to 1837 (AH 1235-1253) issued coins such as the silver rupee in Figure 29a, which were in the name of the Mughal emperor Muhammad Akbar II. Some people believe that she issued coins in her own name, because there are Bhopal rupees such as the silver rupee in Figure 29b

²³ I am particularly indebted to Jan Lingen for clarifying the complexity of the Bhopal coins. Our task was made even harder by the existence of a coin with the *qudsi* legend, shown to me by Zubair Khan, which had the date 1193. As Jan assured me, this was too early to make any sense; the date would be an error perhaps for 1293.

where the obverse legend reads *1271 sanat hijri qudsi* (year 1271 Hijri Qudsi). Now the word *qudsi* means “pure” or “holy” and so the legend could be noting the purity of the silver. More likely, however, it modifies the word *hijri*, indicating that the year is 1271 of the holy calendar.²⁴ At the same time, it may also be a clever pun, a subtle salute to Qudsia Begum. This coin, issued in 1271, is the earliest Bhopal coin to carry this legend, and of course it was issued some 18 years after the end of Qudsia Begum’s regency. In fact, this coin was issued during the brief reign of Shah Jahan Begum with Sikandar Begum as her Regent.

Coins, such as Figure 29c, were also issued during the reign of Sikandar Begum, who was installed on the throne by the British in 1860 (AH 1277). This coin, dated H. 1279, and carrying the *qudsi* legend, was clearly issued during Sikandar Begum’s short reign. She died in 1868.

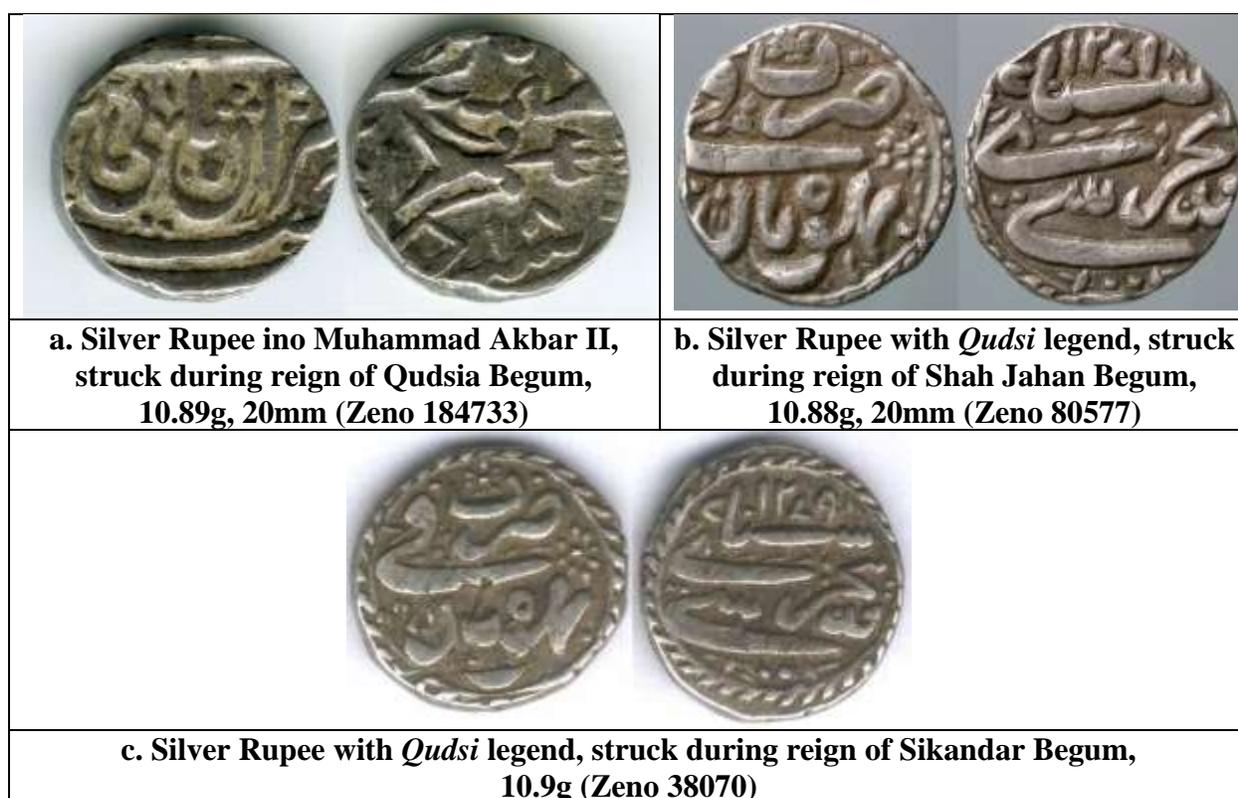


Figure 29: Anonymous Coins of the Begums of Bhopal

WOMEN WHO DID NOT RULE BUT APPEARED ON COINS

Our next category is women who never ruled directly but who appeared on coins, either portrayed or mentioned in a legend. The number of women in this category is somewhat ambiguous. There are three Gupta queens listed here as possibilities because it is not clear whether the figures depicted on these coins are meant to be queens or goddesses. And six of the “women” listed here are actually just female names used to identify the *gotra* to which the king

²⁴ This usage of the word *qudsi* is known from around this time in other contexts.

belonged, a practice used by the Satavahana kings and related dynasties. The implied matrilineality seemed worthwhile to record here.

Laodike, mother of Eukratides I

The first woman to appear in any form on a coin of South Asia was Laodike, presumed mother of the Bactrian and Indo-Greek king Eukratides I (ruled c. 171-145 BCE).²⁵ Eukratides issued coins on which his helmeted image appears on the obverse with the legend (in Greek) *Great King Eukratides* and the jugate portraits of a couple, presumed to be his parents, appear on the reverse, along with the legend *Heliokles and Laodike*. Of particular interest in these portraits is that, while Heliokles is bare-headed, the bust of Laodike features a diadem, indicating that she was of royal blood.

We know from the Roman historian Justin that Eukratides was a usurper, in other words, he was not a scion of any of the previous kings of Bactria. We also know that he seized the throne of Bactria and that he was opposed in this effort probably by several kings, including Agathocles. Now Agathocles had issued a series of commemorative coins, declaring his legitimacy as king of Bactria, claiming a descent from Alexander the Great and several previous Bactrian kings. The coin commemorating his parents may have been an attempt by Eukratides to proclaim *his* dynastic claim to the Bactrian throne. Since Laodike is portrayed with a diadem, we can conclude that she was of royal blood, and the natural assumption would be that she belonged to the Seleucid royal house. The name Laodike was particularly common among Seleucid royalty, starting with the mother of the founder of the dynasty, Seleucus I Nicator. Several Seleucid princesses that we know of were named Laodike. Since the Bactrian kingdom had been established by the secession of Diodotus from the Seleucid empire, Eukratides may have been indicating that, as a scion of the Seleucid royal house, his claim to the Bactrian throne preceded that of Agathocles and other Bactrian kings.



Figure 30: Silver tetradrachm of Eukratides I, featuring portraits of his father Heliokles and his mother Laodike, c. 171-145 BCE (17.00g, 31mm) (Tandon collection 58.4)

²⁵ This section draws from Osmund Bopearachchi: *Sylloge Nummorum Graecorum, The Collection of the American Numismatic Society, Part 9: Graeco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek Coins*, New York: American Numismatic Society, 1998.

Kalliope

Kalliope was presumably the wife of the Indo-Greek king Hermaios (ruled c. 105-95 BCE). We know nothing about her except what we can infer from the coins. She appears on coins jointly with Hermaios, as in Figure 31a. Although she is in the background, we can see that she wears the royal diadem, which suggests she may have been a princess in her own right. The Greek legend reads (coin of) King Saviour Hermaios and Kalliope. The reverse shows a king (Hermaios?) mounted on a horse prancing right, with a Kharoṣṭhī legend that is the exact translation of the Greek legend on the obverse of the coin.

Figure 31b is an interesting coin; it is a silver tetradrachm of Hermaios. Kalliope is not mentioned in the legends, which read (in both Greek and Kharoṣṭhī): (coin of) King Saviour Hermaios. The reverse of the coin features Zeus enthroned. The interesting part of the coin is the obverse, which features a mounted figure on a prancing horse, much like the reverse of the Hermaios-Kalliope coin in Figure 31a. However, the figure on the horse is clearly female, as we see in the detail of the figure in the inset: a bosom is clearly visible. Mitchiner²⁶ had identified the figure as that of the king, while Boppearachchi calls the figure “Reine Amazone.” But one couldn’t be blamed for wondering if it might represent Kalliope. Perhaps she had died by the time this coin was issued and Hermaios wanted to commemorate her.

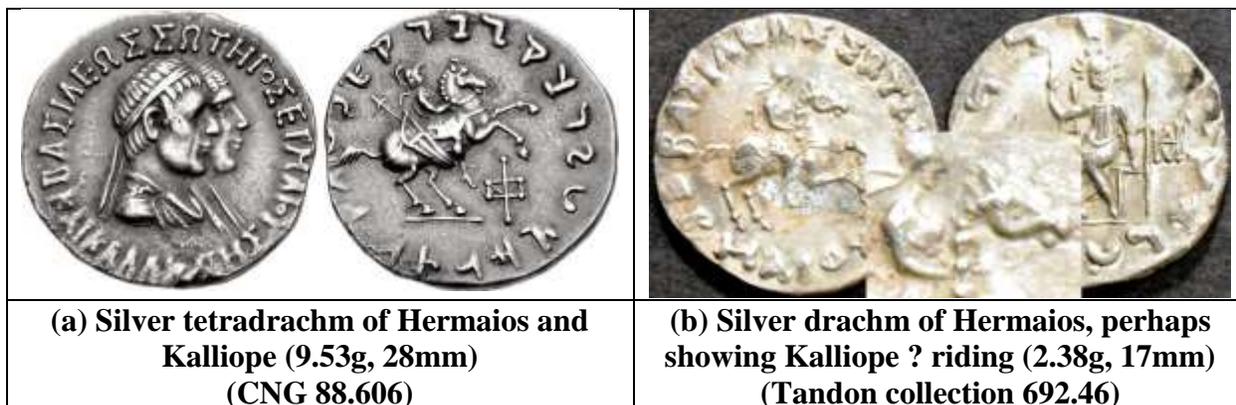


Figure 31: Coins of Hermaios and Kalliope and of Hermaios

Machene

There is a unique silver tetradrachm of the Indo-Scythian (or possibly Indo-Greek) king Maues which features a queen named Machene on the obverse. The queen is seated on a throne and wears a mural crown in the manner of a city goddess. The Greek legend reads ΒΑΣΙΛΙCCHC ΘΕΟΤΡΟΠΟΥ / ΜΑΧΗΝΗC (of the god-like queen Machene). The reverse shows a standing Zeus holding the goddess of victory Nike in his outstretched right hand with a Kharoṣṭhī legend around *rajatirajasa mahatasa / moasa* (of the great king of kings Maues). Thus the reverse legend is not a translation of the Greek legend on the obverse as it normally is, but names the king Maues.

²⁶ Michael Mitchiner: *Indo-Greek and Indo-Scythian Coinage*, Vol. 3: The Decline of the Indo-Greeks, London: Hawkins Publications, 1975, p. 228.



**Figure 32: Silver tetradrachm of Maues, featuring the queen Machene (8.91g, 27mm)
(CNG Triton XIV.442)**

Who might this queen Machene have been? One might naturally suppose that she was the wife of Maues, but Senior has argued²⁷ persuasively that she was more probably his mother. First, note the Greek legend, which echoes the legend used by Agathocleia on her coinage (see Figure 2). Remember that Agathocleia had served as Regent for her son Strato, so the choice of the “god-like” epithet seems to indicate a similar relationship. Further, the figure of Machene appears by itself on the obverse, where only she is named. On the coins which Hermaios issued with his (presumed) wife, they were presented with conjoined busts. Thus Machene must have been in a position superior to Maues. Senior suggests that she may have been a direct descendant of Agathocleia and that Maues came to power at least in part due to this family connection.

Naganika

Naganika was the wife of the Satavahana king Satakarni I, who ruled sometime in c. 1st century BCE. Naganika was the daughter of the Maharathi chief Tranakiya. We know of her because she is mentioned in the Naneghat inscription as the one who performed certain sacrifices and gave away large amounts of *dakshina*. Her silver coins carry her name *naganikaya*, with Satakarni’s name inscribed below. On the reverse is the traditional Ujjain or Satavahana symbol (see Figure 33).

²⁷ R.C. Senior: *Indo-Scythian Coins and History*, Vol. 1, Lancaster: Classical Numismatic Group, 2001, p. 27.



**Figure 33: Silver coin of Naganika, 6.79g
(Girish Sharma Collection, ex-Rajgor Auction 30.15)**

Lady Raggodeme

In the late 1st century BCE, or possibly even early in the 1st century CE, the Indo-Parthian king Tanlis Mardates (or Tanlismardates ... it is not clear that Mardates was a title or the second part of his name, although it is worth remembering that a common name among Parthian kings was Mithradates) issued very interesting coins on which one side carried the portrait of a woman, presumably his queen (see Figure 34a).²⁸ The portrait shows the lady's head facing right, wearing a veil, with a legend that reads, in Greek letters ΠΑΓΓΟΔΗΜΕ ΚΥΡΙΑ (Lady Raggodeme). On the other side of the coin is the right-facing portrait of the king with the legend ΤΑΝΛΙΚ ΜΑΡΔΑΤΗΣ (Tanlis Mardates). Lady Raggodeme must have been an important woman to merit portrayal on a coin; perhaps she belonged to the Parthian royal house.

We do not know the dates of this king. But the idea for placing the queen's portrait on the coins may have come from a similar type (the only one in the entire Parthian corpus) in which the Parthian king Phraataces placed the portrait of his wife, and mother (!), Musa, on coins (Figure 34b). Those coins were issued c. 2 BCE – 4 CE, so the Raggodeme coins may have been issued contemporaneously or shortly thereafter.



Figure 34: Coin of Lady Raggodeme and Related Parthian Coin

²⁸ Once again, this discussion draws heavily from R.C. Senior, *ibid.*, p. 106.

Queen Mothers of the Satavahana Kings

After the reign of Satakarni, the Satavahana kingdom was ruled by a succession of kings who included a matronymic on their coins.²⁹ Thus, for example, Satakarni's successor, Pulumavi, issued coins with the legend *rajno vasithiputasa siri pudumavisa* (King Sri Pulumavi son of Vasishthi). Many authors thought that this meant that the name of Pulumavi's mother was Vasishthi, but Shailendra Bhandare has argued that this represented her *gotra*, or matrilineal lineage. Thus, Bhandare argues, the legend actually indicates that Pulumavi's mother belongs to the Vasishthi *gotra*.

Following Pulumavi, a number of other kings included this type of matronymic on their coins. Although these coins do not include an actual woman's name in the legend, the fact that they do include matronymics (as opposed to the patronymics seen on the coins of the Western Kshatrapas and the Paratarajas) led me to decide to include them in this paper. After all, their inclusion suggests that women had a powerful status, as witnessed by the coin in the name of Naganika, the wife of Gautamiputra Satakarni. Interestingly, no coins of Satakarni include a matronymic.

Figure 35 shows coins of seven Satavahana kings who did use matronymics. All the coins show the king's bust right on the obverse, surrounded by a legend in Prakrit, written in Brahmi letters. The reverses all have some symbols as the central devices – a *chaitya* and an Ujjain symbol, with a sun and moon above and a wavy line, probably representing a river (the Godavari?) below – with a translation of the obverse inscription in Telugu around. The kings are the following:



²⁹ This section and the next draw from Shailendra Umakant Bhandare: *Historical Analysis of the Satavahana Era: A Study of Coins*, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Mumbai, 1998 and Wilfried Pieper: *Ancient Indian Coins: A Comprehensive Catalogue*, Mumbai: IIRNS Publications, 2021.

	
<p>c. Silver drachm of Vasisthiputa Shiva Pulumavi, 2.39g (Mitresh Singh Collection)</p>	<p>d. Silver drachm of Vasisthiputa Khada Satakani, 1.80g, 15mm (Tandon Collection B1.003)</p>
	
<p>e. Silver drachm of Vasisthiputa Vijaya Satakani, 1.68g, 15mm (Tandon Collection 545.05)</p>	<p>f. Silver drachm of Gotamiputa Yana Satakani, 1.68g, 15mm (Tandon Collection 368.20)</p>
	
<p>g. Silver fraction of Madariputa Pulumavi, 0.70g, 10mm (Tandon Collection 651.12)</p>	

Figure 35: Coins of the Satavahana Kings featuring matronymics

- a. Vasisthiputa Siri Pulumavi
- b. Vasisthiputa Siri Satakani
- c. Vasisthiputa Shiva Siri Pulumavi
- d. Vasisthiputa Khada Satakani
- e. Vasisthiputa Vijaya Satakani
- f. Gotamiputa Siri Yana Satakani
- g. Madariputa Siri Pulumavi

In addition to the silver drachms, a number of base metal coins in copper, potin and lead were also issued by the Satavahana kings and other matronymics are seen, including Vasisthiputa Siri Chhimuka and Gotamiputa Satakani.

Queen Mothers of Other Dynasties

There were a number of other minor dynasties within the gambit of the Satavahanas which also issued coins that carried matronymics in their legends. These included the Maharathis, the Mahabhojas, the Hiranyakas, the Anandas and the Kuras of Kolhapur. We see legends such as

maharathi kosikaputa mitadeva
vasithiputa somadeva
gotamiputa agimitanaka
sadakara sudassana mahabhoja mandava kochhiputa velidata
haritiputa chutukulananda satakani
haritiputa sivalananda
vasithiputa mahasivalananda
rajno kosikaputasa heranakasa siri kuturakhadakamasa

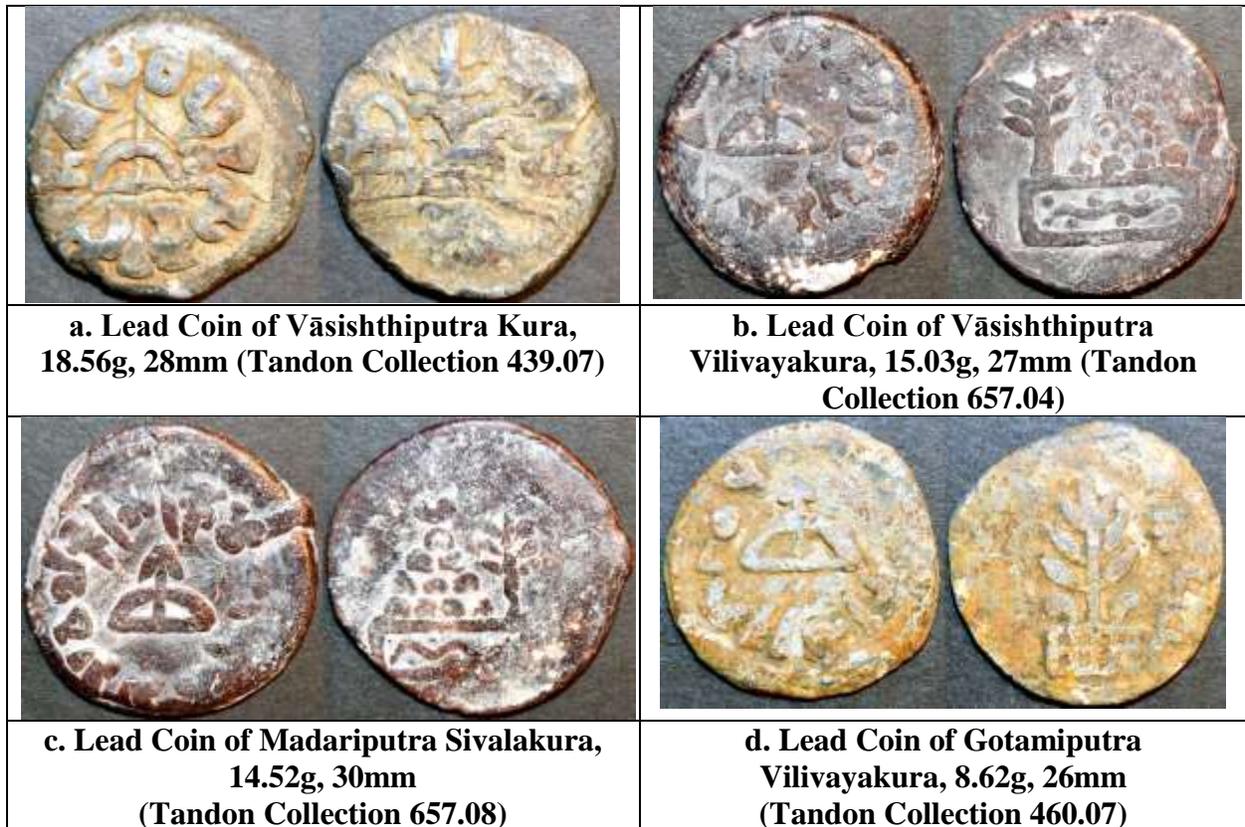


Figure 36: Lead Coins of the Kuras of Kolhapur, featuring matronymics

Many design types prevailed. Figure 36 illustrates four coins of the Kuras of Kolhapur. These coins all carry a bow and arrow in the center of the obverse, surrounded by the Brahmi legends, respectively:

rajno vasithiputasa kurasa
rajno vasithiputasa vilivayakurasa
rajno madariputasa sivalakurasa

rajno gotamiputasa vilivayakurasa

The reverses feature trees, *chaityas*, and rivers. Other kings are also known for this dynasty.

Readers would have noticed that there are just a small handful of *gotras* represented in all of the coins featuring matronymics. They are *vasithi*, *gotami*, *madari*, *kosiki*, *kocchi*, and *hariti*. All of these coins date from the first and second centuries.

Kumāradevi, mother of Samudragupta



Figure 37: Gold dinar of Samudragupta with images of his parents, Chandragupta I and Kumāradevi, 7.63g (Mathura Museum #906)

The famous King and Queen type of Samudragupta (ruled c. 335-375 CE),³⁰ illustrated in Figure 37, carries images of his parents, Chandragupta I and Kumāradevi, on the obverse. The two figures are clearly identified by legends inserted next to them on the coins. Kumāradevi was a princess of the Lichchhāvī royal family, and the coin reminds us of this with the reverse legend *lichchhāvayah*. The marriage of the royal couple was of great importance to the fortunes of the Gupta dynasty, as the Lichchhāvīs were a wealthy kingdom and were able to provide financial support for the expansion plans of the fledgling imperial power. What exactly the two figures are doing on the coin is not entirely clear. The scene may represent their wedding day. On some coins, it appears that Chandragupta is offering his bride a gift, on others that he is offering her a morsel of food. Other interpretations of the action have also been proposed. Regardless of what they are doing, there is no question that the coin features the image of an important queen, whose entry into the Gupta royal house was an important catalyst in the expansion of the Gupta Empire.

Dattadevi, wife of Samudragupta (?)

The *Aśvamedha* (Horse-sacrifice) type of Samudragupta features on the reverse a graceful female figure holding a *chowrie*, or fly-whisk. There is disagreement about who this

³⁰ Some authors, such as P.L. Gupta and A.S. Altekar maintain that the King and Queen type was issued by Chandragupta I. There is another point of view, advanced by John Allan and Ellen Raven, which argues that Samudragupta was the issuer of these coins, in honor of his parents. The discussion has been reviewed, and new evidence in favor of the latter view provided, in Pankaj Tandon: “Reattributing some (more) coins from Candragupta II to Candragupta III,” *Numismatic Chronicle*, Vol. 180, 2020.

figure represents. Some authors, such as Allan, Altekar and Kulkarni³¹ argue that this is the king's consort because she played an important role in the horse sacrifice rituals. Others, including P.L. Gupta and Pratapaditya Pal³² argue that the figure is a goddess, most likely Rājyalakshmī, the goddess of sovereignty. Pal's argument is that there are several reasons to consider the figure to represent a goddess. First, she is standing on a lotus, which is a position reserved for divinities. Second, she holds in her (proper) left hand a diadem or ribboned wreath, an object universally held by divinities in the process of conferring sovereignty on the king. Third, as for the fly-whisk which others point to as evidence that the figure is human (and subservient), Pal argues that since the king is claiming to be equivalent to the boar avatar of Vishnu, since he calls himself the protector of the earth, it would be perfectly logical for the goddess to serve as his attendant.

Without choosing one argument over the other, I have elected to include this coin here (Figure 38a) on the possibility that the figure may indeed be intended to be the queen.



Figure 38: Gold dinars of the *Asvamedha* type of Samudragupta and Kumaragupta I, featuring female figures who may represent their queens

Anantadevi, wife of Kumaragupta I (?)

Kumaragupta I (ruled c. 415-447) also issued *Asvamedha* type coins (see Figure 38b). The same uncertainty about the identity of the figure on the reverse that prevailed for the previous coin applies here also. If the figure is human, she must represent Kumaragupta's chief consort, Anantadevi.

Unnamed mother of Skandagupta (?)

Skandagupta (ruled c. 456-467) issued coins in which he is depicted along with a female figure. Most authors believe the figure represents the goddess Lakshmi, as she is holding a lotus

³¹ John Allan: *A Catalogue of the Indian Coins in the British Museum: Coins of the Gupta Dynasties and of Sasanka, King of Gauda*, London: British Museum, 1914; A.S. Altekar, *The Coinage of the Gupta Empire*, Varanasi: Numismatic Society of India, 1957; and Prashant P. Kulkarni: *Asvamedha: The Yajna and the Coins*, Calcutta: Calcutta Coin Society, 2003.

³² Pratapaditya Pal: "The Chowrie-Bearing Goddess on the *Asvamedha* type of Samudragupta's Coins," *Ars Orientalis*, Vol. 18, 1988, pp. 197-205.

flower. She is not shown, however, with a halo. Some authors, including recently Hans Bakker,³³ argue that this figure represents Skandagupta's mother. Skandagupta's mother is not named in any inscription and most scholars believe that she was not a queen but a concubine in Kumāragupta's harem, which is one of the reasons they believe she would never have been portrayed on a coin. Nevertheless, the possibility cannot be ruled out that this figure does indeed represent Skandagupta's mother.



**Figure 39: “King and Lakshmi” gold dinar of Skandagupta, 8.47g, 20mm
(Tandon collection 421.04)**

Kanchaladevi, wife of Singhana Yadava

The Seuna (or Yadava) king Singhana (ruled in Devagiri, c. 1200-1247) issued an usual coin type on which he appears to have named himself and also his wife, Kanchaladevi. We know nothing of this enigmatic coin, on which the obverse design features a sword flanked by ornate symbols of Vishnu – a discus on the left and a conch on the right. On the reverse, we have a simple Nagari legend in three lines, reading *śrī sangha / ṇa kāncha / la devī* (Figure 40).



**Figure 40: Gold pagoda of the Yadava king Singhana, naming his wife Kanchaladevi
3.83g, 12mm (Tandon collection 453.06)**

³³ Hans T. Bakker: “A Theatre of Broken Dreams: Vidiśā in the Days of Gupta Hegemony,” in Hans Teye Bakker: *Holy Ground: Where Art and Text Meet*, Leiden: Brill, 2019.

Queens of Tripura

A number of the kings of Tripura elected to place the names of their queens on some of their coins. These may have been issued for the purpose of *dakshina* given at times of pilgrimage, when the king, accompanied by a queen or queens, made a pilgrimage to a holy place and perhaps took a bath there. A total of forty two queens are named on the coins, and these are listed in the table in Figure 41.

King	Date	Queen(s)
Ratna Mānikya	1464	Lakshmi Mahadevi
Dhanya Mānikya	1496 – 1514	Kamala Devi
Deva Mānikya	1530	Padmavati Devi
Vijaya Mānikya	1532 – 1563	Lakshmi Devi, Sarasvati Devi, Vaka Devi
Ananta Mānikya	1564 – 1565	Ratnavati Devi
Udaya Mānikya	1567	Hira Devi
Jaya Mānikya	1573	Subhadra Devi
Amar Mānikya	1577 – 1581	Amaravati Devi
Rajdhar Mānikya	1586	Satyavati Devi
Yaśo Mānikya	1600	Lakshmi Devi, Gauri Lakshmi Devi, Lakshmi Gauri Jaya Devi
Kalyan Mānikya	1626	Kalavati Devi
Govinda Mānikya	1660	Gunavati Devi
Ram Mānikya	1676	Ratnavati Devi
Ratna Mānikya II	1681	Satyavati Devi, Bhagavati Devi
Dharma Mānikya	1714	Dharmashila Devi
Jaya Mānikya II	1740 – 1746	Jasovati Devi
Krishna Mānikya	1760	Jahanbi Devi
Ram Ganga Mānikya	1806 – 1821	Tara Devi, Chandra Tara Devi
Durga Mānikya	1809	Sumitra Devi
Kashi Chandra Mānikya	1826 - 1830	Chandraveth, Kirti Lakshmi
Krishna Kishore Mānikya	1830	Bidumukhi Devi, Ratnamala Devi, Purnakala Devi, Sudhakshina Devi
Ishan Chandra Mānikya	1849	Chandresvari Devi, Muktabani Devi, Rajalakshmi Devi
Vira Chandra Mānikya	1869	Bhanumati Devi, Rajesvari Devi, Manmohini Devi
Radha Kishore Mānikya	1896	Ratnamanzari Devi, Tulsivati Devi
Virendra Kishore Mānikya	1909	Prabhavati Devi
Vira Vikrama Kishore Mānikya	1927 - 1931	Kanchan Prabha, Kirtimani

Figure 41: Table of Tripura Queens named on Coins

Figure 42 illustrates two of the coins. The first is a silver tanka of Udaya Mānikya (ruled 1567-1573) on which he names his queen Hira Mahadevi. This coin is typical of most Tripura

coins, featuring a large Tripura lion on the obverse along with the date, here Śaka era 1489 (=1567 CE), and the legend on the reverse. This legend reads *śrī śrī yuktoda / ya mānikya / deva śrī hī / ra mahādevī*. Coin b in the Figure is a little more unusual. It is a silver tanka of Yaśo Mānikya (ruled c. 1600-1626) on which the obverse features Krishna playing the flute, standing in his usual pose with one foot crossed in front of the other. There is a *gopī* on either side and the Tripura lion stands below. Underneath is the date Śaka era 1522 (= 1600 CE). The reverse legend reads *śrī śrī yuktad yaśo / mānikya deva / śrī lakṣmī gaurī ja / ya mahādevī*. So on this remarkable coin, Yaśo Mānikya lists three queens and then places the figure of Krishna flanked by two *gopīs* on the obverse. Perhaps he fancied himself quite the Romeo, much like Krishna!



Figure 42: Silver Coins naming Queens of Tripura

Queens of Nepal

We have already seen in the previous section that ten queens of Nepal served as regents and had their names appear on coins. Another 13 queens who never exercised power directly had their names appear on coins, either by themselves or in combination with their husbands, who were the ruling kings at the time. Figure 43 tabulates the Nepal queens whose names have appeared on coins, excluding the ones who served as regents (who are listed in Figure 20).³⁴

Name of Queen	Wife of	Dates	Coins
Kingdom of Dolakha			
Vijaya Lakshmi Devi	Indra Simha	1540-1548	AR tanka
Malla Dynasty, Kingdom of Kathmandu			
Rupmati Devi	Jaya Pratap Malla	1641-1674	AR suki
Rajya Lakshmi Devi	Jaya Parthivendra Malla	1680-1687	AR 1, ½ mohar, suki
Jaya Mahendra Lakshmi	Jaya Mahendra Simha	1715-1722	AR suki
Jaya Lakshmi Devi	Jyoti Prakash Malla	1746-1750	AR suki
Malla Dynasty, Kingdom of Patan			
Mrigavati Devi	Jaya Srinivasa Malla	1661-1685	AR suki
Yoga Lakshmi Devi	Jaya Yoga Narendra Malla	1684-1705	AR 1, ½ mohar

³⁴ Once again, this section draws heavily on N.G. Rhodes, K. Gabrisch and C. Valdetaro: *The Coinage of Nepal*, London: Royal Numismatic Society, 1989.

Jaya Lakshmi Devi	Jaya Yoga Narendra Malla	1684-1705	AR mohar
Narendra Lakshmi Devi	Jaya Yoga Narendra Malla	1684-1705	AR 1, $\frac{3}{4}$, $\frac{1}{2}$ mohar, suki
Pratapa Lakshmi Devi	Jaya Yoga Narendra Malla	1684-1705	AR mohar
Yoga Rakshmi Devi	Jaya Yoga Narendra Malla	1684-1705	AR mohar, suki
Narendra Rakshmi Devi	Jaya Yoga Narendra Malla	1684-1705	AR mohar
Bhagyavati Devi	Jaya Indra Malla	1706-1709	AR 1, $\frac{1}{2}$ mohar

Figure 43: Queens of Nepal who appeared on Coins (other than Regents)

As some coins of Nepal queens have been illustrated earlier in Figure 21, only a couple of coins are illustrated here in Figure 44, chosen for their unusual designs. The first coin is a silver mohar of Yoga Narendra Malla, naming two of his queens on the reverse: Narendra Lakshmi Devi and Pratapa Lakshmi Devi. On the obverse, the main epithet of the king *śrī 3 lokanāth* (the numeral 3 indicates that the previous word should be repeated three times) is



Figure 44: Coins of Nepal Queens

placed in the central square, while the name of the king surrounds it. On the reverse the name *śrī narendra lakṣmī devī* is located in the large diamond; outside the diamond we see the legend *śrī pratapa lakṣmī devī* along with the date. The coin has a truly unique design. This is one of only two Nepal coin types to feature the names of two queens; the other is another silver mohar of Yoga Narendra Malla, naming his queens Yoga Rakshmi Devi and Narendra Rakshmi Devi.

The second coin in the Figure is an issue of Jaya Indra Malla, naming his queen Bhagyavati Devi on the reverse. Once again, we have the epithet *śrī śrī lokanāth* in the central square on the obverse, with the king's name *śrī śrī jaya indra malla deva* spelled out in the periphery. The reverse features a fancy quatrefoil design containing the name *śrī bhāgyavatī devī*.

In addition to the queens named on coins in the British period, there are two modern Nepal coins which have featured queens on them. They are illustrated in Figure 45. The first, issued in 1975, is a 20-rupee coin, 50% silver, celebrating International Women's Year and featuring the jugate portraits of King Birendra and Queen Aishwarya. The second, from 1988, is

a pure silver 600-rupee coin celebrating the 60th birthday of the Queen Mother Ratna Rajya Lakshmi Devi.



Figure 45: Modern Coins of Nepal featuring Queens

Queens of Śiva Simha of Assam

One king of Assam, Śiva Simha (ruled 1714-1744), issued coins naming his queens.³⁵ Rhodes and Bose quote the explanation offered by Gait,³⁶ that Śiva Simha, under the influence of an astrologer, believed that his reign might be short and so he declared his queen to be the ruler in his place. The first such coins were issued in 1724 (Śaka year 1646) and for the next several years, all coins of the kingdom carried the names of both Śiva Simha and his queen, Phuleśwarī Devī (see coin 46a). The obverse legend on the coin reads, in four lines: *śrī śrī hara / gaurī pada*



³⁵ This section draws heavily from N.G. Rhodes and S.K. Bose: *The Coinage of Assam, Vol II, Ahom Period*, Kolkata: Mira Bose, 2004.

³⁶ E.A. Gait: *A History of Assam*, Calcutta: Thacker, Spink & Co, 1906.

	
<p>c. Silver rupee of Śiva Simha with Pramatheśvarī Devī, 11.34g (Album Sale 23 Lot 1698)</p>	<p>d. Silver rupee of Śiva Simha with Pramatheśvarī Devī, 11.29g, 19mm, 6h (Tandon collection 421.06)</p>
	
<p>e. Gold quarter mohur of Śiva Simha with Ambika Devī, 2.88g, 15mm, 6h (Tandon collection 387.03)</p>	<p>f. Silver rupee of Śiva Simha with Ambika Devī, 11.43g, 24mm, 6h (Tandon collection 261.08)</p>
	
<p>g. Silver rupee of Śiva Simha with Sarvveśvarī Devī, 11.16g, 23mm, 6h (Tandon collection 261.09)</p>	<p>h. Silver half rupee of Śiva Simha with Sarvveśvarī Devī, 5.66g, 18mm, 6h (Tandon collection 421.10)</p>

Figure 46: Coins of the Queens of Śiva Simha

pa / rāyanāyah / śāke 1647, indicating a date of 1725 CE. There is a winged lion to right below the legend. The reverse legend reads, also in four lines: *śrī śrī śiva / śimha nṛpa mahi / śrī śrī phuleśva / rī devyah*. The fact that Queen Phuleśvarī was given equal status on the coin, and that all coins, in all denominations (mohur, quarter mohur, rupee, half rupee and quarter rupee), carried her name suggests that Gait's explanation is indeed true. In fact, the quarter rupee had only the queen's name, Śiva Simha's name is absent from the coin. So it seems plausible that the queen was officially the ruler, although of course Śiva Simha wielded the true power.

In 1726, Queen Phuleśvarī decided to change her name to Pramatheśvarī, which is another name for Pārvaṭī, the consort of Śiva. Phuleśvarī was apparently a fervent Śaivite and, in

any case, her new name seemed more apt for the wife of a king named Śiva Simha. Accordingly, all coins issued between 1726 and 1730 carried the name Pramatheśwarī instead of Phuleśwarī (see Figure 46b); the rest of the legends remained the same. An unusual aspect of these years, however, was the issuance of rupees in Persian (Figures 46c and 46d). The legend on the round coin (46c) reads: (obverse) *siva singh shah sikkah zad chu mahr bahm begum pramatheśwarī shah*. On the reverse we have the information that the coin was struck in Rangpur in the year 1649 (Śaka era), the 14th year of the auspicious reign. The square coin (Figure 46d) has the same legend, but was struck in Gargāon, in the (Śaka) year 1651, the 15th year of the auspicious reign. That year, Śiva Simha had moved the capital from Rangpur to Gargaon, although he moved it back to Rangpur in Śaka year 1654. Gait does not mention these changes, thereby leaving us without an explanation for them.

Queen Phuleśwarī died in Śaka year 1653, and Śiva Simha married her sister Ambika. All coins from S.1654 to S.1659 had Ambika's name on them. Figure 46e is a quarter mohur of this period, with a simple legend: (obverse) *śrī śrī śi / va simha ma / hipa*, (reverse) *jāya / śrīmad ambi / kānam*, along with the regnal year 24. The rupee in Figure 46f has the same obverse legend as did the rupees of Phuleśwarī and Pramatheśwarī (46a and 46b) but the reverse has a modified legend which reads, in four lines again: *śrī śrī śiva / simha nrpa tadva / llabha śrīmad ambi / kādevīnām*.

Sadly, Ambika also died prematurely and Śiva Simha's new bride was Sarvveśwarī. Once again, the coinage reflected the new reality. Figure 34g is a silver rupee, which maintains the same legends as Ambika's coins, replacing only the queen's name with the name *sarvveśwarī*. The half rupee in Figure 34h dispenses with the obverse legend of the rupee entirely and we now have the simplified legend: (obverse) *śrī śrī śi / va simha na / reśvara*, (reverse) *tadvalla / bha śrī sarvve / śvarī devīnām*, followed on this coin by the regnal year 29.

These were the last Assamese coins to feature the names of any queen.

Moran

Certain Sikh rupees have been popularly called *Morashahi*,³⁷ said to be a reference to a Muslim woman named Moran, who was a dancing girl in Lahore and who, it is said, gained considerable influence over Maharaja Ranjit Singh. In 1802, he had made her one of his many wives. Some people argued that certain designs seen on some of these coins represented peacocks, *mor* in Hindi, which were references to the name of Moran. This view was strongly contested by many, including Herrli in his widely admired book on Sikh coins.

However, in 2014, Gurprit Singh published a paper³⁸ in which he pointed out certain coins, all minted in VS 1862 (=1805 CE) on which there was a clearly identifiable peacock and, indeed, some coins on which there were *two* identifiable peacocks. Figure 47 shows one of these coins. On the reverse, we see a peacock facing right but with its head bent back towards the left. Just to the right of that, we see the long straight line of the letter *kā* which could be seen as the

³⁷ This section draws from Hans Herrli: *The Coins of the Sikhs*, Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2012.

³⁸ Gurprit Singh Gujral: "The Mystery of the Moran (Mora) Rupees Solved," *Journal of the Oriental Numismatic Society*, 219, Spring 2014, pp. 26-28.

tail of a peacock facing right, with a curved neck and head attached at the end. To my eye, these look like peacocks and the case that these represent Moran seems quite plausible.



**Figure 47: Silver *Morashahi* Rupee, Amritsar, 11.2g, 23mm
(SikhCoins.in)**

WOMEN ON COMMEMORATIVE COINS

Since achieving their independence, India and Pakistan have issued several coins commemorating prominent figures of the past, including some women. A total of seven women have been so honored up to the time of this writing in 2021.

Fatima Jinnah

Fatima Jinnah was the sister of the man considered the founder of Pakistan, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. She was born in 1893 in Kathiawar, now in the Indian State of Gujarat. She attended the University of Calcutta, where she earned a dental degree, and in 1923 opened a dental practice in Bombay. In 1929, when Muhammad Ali Jinnah's wife passed away, Fatima closed her practice and moved in with her brother. She ran his household for the rest of his life and never herself married.

Along with her brother, she became active in politics and was a strong proponent of the two-state solution to Indian independence. Her activism earned her the title of *mader-e-millat* (mother of the nation). After the creation of Pakistan, she was very active in the women's movement and in the resettlement of the migrants from India. After her brother's death in 1948, however, she was banned from public activities, probably because Liaquat Ali Khan, the Prime Minister, feared her popularity. At this point, she started living a retired life. However, she returned to politics in 1965, running against General Ayub Khan for the office of President. She won the popular vote but lost the election; some believe the voting was rigged. She died in 1967. The official cause of death is heart failure, but some believe she was assassinated.

The year 2003 was declared the year of Fatima Jinnah by the then Prime Minister, Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali. On this occasion, Pakistan issued a 10-rupee copper-nickel coin in her honor (Figure 48). The obverse carries the crescent moon and star along with the Urdu legend *Islami Jamhoriya Pakistan* (Islamic Republic of Pakistan) and *10 rupia*, along with the date of issue, 2003. The reverse features a spray of jasmine flowers along with the legends, above: 2003

sal-e-madar-e-millat (2003 the year of the mother of the nation), below: *muhtarma fatima jinnah* (the respected Fatima Jinnah).



Figure 48: Copper-Nickel 10-Rupee Coin Commemorating Fatima Jinnah, 7.25g, 27mm (Chiefa Coins)

Saint Alphonsa

In 2009, India issued coins to commemorate St. Alphonsa, the first woman of Indian origin to be canonized by the Catholic Church. She was born in 1910 as Anna Muttathupadathu in a small town near Kottayam in Kerala. Her mother died when she was quite young and a rather strict maternal aunt raised her. Her life was one of suffering; she was teased at school and frequently was very ill. She became a sister of the Franciscan Clarist Congregation and took the name Alphonsa of the Immaculate Conception, since it was that saint's feast day on the day she received her postulant's veil. She took her vows in 1936 and was assigned to teach at St. Alphonsa's Girls High School. During much of her career there, she was too ill to teach. She died in 1946, at the age of 35.

Soon after her death, reports of miraculous healing caused by her intercession began to appear. Her patient suffering throughout her life and then these reports of miracles led her to be beatified in 1986 and then to be canonized in 2008.

In anticipation of her birth centenary, the Reserve Bank of India issued coins in her honor in 2009. Coins in the ₹5 and ₹100 denominations were issued, the latter being 50% silver.



Figure 49: Silver ₹100 coin commemorating St. Alphonsa (35g, 44mm)

Mother Teresa

Mother Teresa (later named St. Teresa of Calcutta) was commemorated in 2010 by the issuance of coins by the Reserve Bank of India. Like St. Alphonsa, Mother Teresa was born in 1910. She was of Albanian origin, and was born in Skopje, now the capital of North Macedonia, but at that time located within the Ottoman Empire. Her name at birth was Anjezë (Agnes) Gonhe Bojaxhiu.

At the age of 12, young Anjezë became fascinated by the work of missionaries in Bengal and decided to make it her life's work. At the age of 18, she joined the Sisters of Loreto and, after a year in Ireland to learn English, she arrived in India in 1929 to begin her novitiate in Darjeeling. Curiously, just as St. Alphonsa taught at St. Alphonsa's High School, Anjezë taught at St. Teresa's School in Darjeeling. She took her vows in 1931 and elected to be named for [Thérèse de Lisieux](#), the patron saint of missionaries. However, another nun at the convent had the name Thérèse, so Anjezë decided to use the Spanish spelling of the name, Teresa.

Sister Teresa moved to Calcutta, where she began to teach at the Loreto Convent School. She taught there for nearly 20 years, becoming headmistress in 1944. However, she was becoming increasingly distressed by the poverty she saw all around her, exacerbated by the 1943 Bengal famine. In 1948, she gave up the Sister's habit and started to wear the white sari with the blue border that she wore for the rest of her life, working with the poor. In 1950, she founded the Missionaries of Charity, with the goal of caring for the most downtrodden members of society, particularly those shunned by others, such as lepers, patients of tuberculosis, and, later, those with HIV/AIDS. She became an Indian citizen in 1951. By the time of her death in 1997, she had seen the Missionaries of Charity grow to an order of over 4,000 sisters, another 300 plus brothers in an affiliated order for men, operating 610 missions in 123 countries. She had become Mother Teresa.

Mother Teresa won a large number of prizes and awards, too many to list here. In 1962, she was awarded the Padma Shri and the Ramon Magsaysay Peace Prize. The Jawaharlal Nehru Award for International Understanding followed in 1969, the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979, and the

Bharat Ratna in 1980. On the occasion of her Nobel Peace Prize ceremony, she persuaded the organizers to eschew the usual banquet and to donate the normal cost of \$192,000 to the poor in India.

Mother Teresa had significant health problems for years, mainly heart problems. She died in 1997, at the age of 87. After her death, she was credited with having effected a miraculous cure of a tumor in a woman by the name of Monica Besra, who said a beam of light emanated from a locket containing Mother Teresa's picture to heal the tumor. Besra's husband and doctors said that she had simply responded to a long treatment of the cyst, rather than tumor, caused by tuberculosis. A second miracle was ascribed to Teresa when a Brazilian man with multiple brain tumors was reported to have been cured by her intercession. She was canonized in 2016 and is now known as St. Teresa of Calcutta.



Figure 50: Silver ₹100 coin commemorating Mother Teresa (35g, 44mm)

The coins issued in Mother Teresa's honor were issued in 2010 on her birth centenary. A nickel-brass ₹5 coin and a ₹100 silver piece were issued, the latter being 50% silver.

Begum Akhtar

The singer known as Begum Akhtar was honored by the issuance of two coins, in ₹5 and ₹100 denominations, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of her birth.

Akhtari Bai Faizabadi was born in 1914, the daughter of a lawyer in Faizabad, Uttar Pradesh. She became interested in singing at the age of 7 and, after working with a series of teachers, became a disciple of Ustad Jhande Khan. She gave her first public concert at the age of 15 and attracted the attention of Sarojini Naidu when she sang at a concert to benefit victims of the 1934 Bihar-Nepal earthquake. She came to be known as the Queen of Ghazals. In addition to her singing career, she was a sought after actress, singing all her own songs in the films in which she appeared. She also sang frequently on All India Radio. She died in 1974, at the age of 60.



Figure 51: Silver ₹100 coin commemorating Begum Akhtar (35g, 44mm)

Begum Akhtar received the Padma Shri in 1968, a Sangeet Natak Academy Award in 1972 and a posthumous Padma Bhushan in 1975. The coins issued to commemorate her include a nickel brass ₹5 coin and a ₹100 coin, the latter being 50% silver. Note that the rupee symbol, adopted by the Indian government in July 2010, appears on the reverse of the coins; the words “rupees” in English and Hindi having been eliminated.

Rani Gaidinliu

Rani Gaidinliu was a Naga political and spiritual leader who led a revolt against the British. Born in 1915, within the ruling clan of her village in what is now Manipur. At the age of 13, she joined the Heraka movement of her cousin, Haipou Jadonang. Heraka was the traditional religion of the Nagas and Jadonang was attempting to revive it in the face of large-scale conversions to Christianity. His movement also sought to end British rule and to replace it with self-rule for the Nagas.

Jadonang was arrested and hanged by the British in 1931 and Gaidinliu emerged as his spiritual and political heir. She exhorted the people not to pay British taxes. The British mounted an attempt to arrest her. She was able to elude them for a while but in 1932 she was captured and jailed. Jawaharlal Nehru met her in the Shillong jail in 1937 and promised to try to secure her release, but he was unable to persuade the British to do so. He gave her the title Rani.

In 1946, when the Interim Government was set up, Nehru had her released from prison. She continued her work for the revival of Heraka and for the development of her people. She opposed the Naga separatist movement, which was led by Christians. She was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 1982. She died in 1993, at the age of 78.

Coins were issued to commemorate the 100th anniversary of her birth; they include a nickel brass ₹5 coin and a ₹100 coin, the latter being 50% silver.



Figure 52: Silver ₹100 coin commemorating Rani Gaidinliu (35g, 44mm)

M.S. Subbulakshmi

Madurai Shanmukhavadiyu Subbulakshmi, generally known as M.S. Subbulakshmi, was considered the greatest exponent of Carnatic vocal music in her time. She was born in 1916 in Madurai. Her father was a veena player; her mother was a singer from the *devadasi* community; and a grandmother was a violinist. Her mother introduced her to singing in the Carnatic style at a very early age. Later, she also trained in the North Indian style of devotional singing.

She started giving recitals while still a teenager and also appeared in several Tamil and Hindi films. However, her real career was as a singer, and she performed all over the world through a long career. She was the first Indian musician to perform at the UN General Assembly, which she did in 1966. She stopped performing publicly in 1997, after the death of her husband. She herself passed away in 2004, at the age of 88.



Figure 53: Silver ₹100 coin commemorating M.S. Subbulakshmi (35g, 44mm)

Sarojini Naidu called her the “Nightingale” of India. She received numerous awards throughout her life, including the Padma Bhushan in 1954, the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award in

1956, the Ramon Magsaysay Award in 1974, the Padma Vibhushan in 1975, and the Bharat Ratna in 1998.

Coins were issued to commemorate her birth centenary; however, the coins were released only in September 2017, a full year after her actual centenary. The coins issued were a nickel brass ₹10 coin and a ₹100 coin of 50% silver. Note that the lower denomination coin is of ₹10 and not of ₹5, as had been the normal issue for commemorative sets prior to this time.

Ruth Pfau

Hailed by some as the Mother Teresa of Pakistan, Ruth Katherina Martha Pfau was a German-born nun and medical doctor who devoted her life to the well-being of the Pakistani people, particularly leprosy patients.

She was born in 1929 in Leipzig to Lutheran parents. After World War II, her family moved to West Germany and Ruth studied medicine at the University of Mainz. In 1953, she converted to Catholicism and, in 1957, she joined a Catholic order, the Daughters of the Heart of Mary. She wanted to devote her life to healing the sick and the order decided in 1960 to send her to southern India. A problem with her visa led to her being forced to stop in Karachi. She ended up staying in Pakistan for the rest of her life, becoming a citizen of the country in 1988.

Her main work was in the treatment of leprosy patients. She founded the Marie Adelaide Leprosy Centre in Karachi and treated over 50,000 patients in her lifetime. For her selfless service, she received many awards, including the Hilal-e-Imtiaz in 1979, the Hilal-i-Pakistan in 1989 and the Ramon Magsaysay Award in 2002. She died in 2017, having suffered from heart and kidney problems for many years, and refusing to be placed on life support. She was a month short of her 88th birthday.

A few months later, in May 2018, the Pakistan government issued a cupro-nickel Rs 50 coin in her memory. The coin features the moon and star along with the Urdu legend *Islami Jamhoria Pakistan* and *50 rupia*, along with the nominal date of issue, 2017, on the obverse. The reverse carries Dr. Pfau's portrait along with the years of her life, 1929-2017.



Figure 54: Silver Rs 50 coin commemorating Ruth Pfau (13.5g, 30mm)