

## Coin heritage

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Popular and value-added, here are names of coins belonging to ancient India...



### THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Numismatics being a multidisciplinary pursuit, we frequently come across certain curious terms such as *pana*, *achu*, *raasi*, *kaasu*, *chakrom*, *grain*, *rati*, *hoard* and *provenance*.

*Provenance* is the spot or place of origin of coins or from where they are found. A store or collection of coins can be said to be a hoard. *Grain* and *rati* are related to the metrology of coins. *Grain* is equivalent to 0.065 grams and the average weight of a *rati* is reckoned at 1.83 grain.

Before metallic currency came into circulation, *cowry* was the cardinal medium of exchange. The fact that even after coinage, a number of coin denominations are associated with *cowries* proves that these were widely used as a standard unit in ancient India.

Interestingly, the Gupta ruler, Kumaragupta discontinued copper currency and used *cowry* as the common medium of exchange, a fact that finds mention in Fa Hien's travelogue.

The *Pana* monetary system was closely correlated with *cowry*. The inference is that a handful of *cowries* is equal to one *pana*. The earliest *pana* coin, recorded in history, was *Kaarshapana* having been available even prior to the reign of the Magadhan emperor Bimbisara. It was known as *dharana* or *purana* and later christened as the punch-marked coin.

*Karsha* ascribes to the act of ploughing and agriculture, indicating that the hub of weight standard, monetary system and coinage of India has been agriculture. Coin heritage of Kerala is no exception.

The first non-Kerala coin which the early Keralite met with was the *Kaarshapana* brought to the region by the Buddhist mendicants. The Kodussery hoard, which also includes the Asoka coinage, testifies this.

Other non-Kerala coins worth mentioning are *drachma* (dramma) *dinar*, *Veerarayan pana*, *taarem*, Mughal coins, *thulukku kaasu* of Malabar Sultan, coins of foreign trading companies, Venetian ducats (*Aamaada or vilkkaasu*), *Ananthasayanam* coins etc.

Silver denarii of Roman origin was unearthed in Nedunkandam in Idukki district a few years ago.

The Anjengo Diary of the English East India Company confirms the use of *cowries* and *panas* till the sunset years of the 18th Century.

*Kaasu* of Kerala, an adaptation of *Kaarsha* and *Pana* had its origin in *kaarshapana*.

Information on our coins reveals the heritage value of the ancient coins.