

Presidential Address

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Coinage of Madurai Nayakas- A reappraisal

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Dear friends and respected seniors,

Firstly I would like to thank the President, General secretary and the executive committee of the South Indian Numismatic Society for the honour you have conferred upon me in electing me to preside over the 28th Annual conference being conducted at the historical city of Mysore, **the cultural capital of Karnataka**. I shall take this as an opportunity to throw light on some untouched facets in the Madurai Nayaka coinage.

The feudatories of Vijayanagara , especially the nayakas , issued wide variety of coinage with equally interesting legends and motifs. In this presentation, an endeavor has been made to resolve the obscurity in the legends pertaining to Madurai nayaka coins and also bring forward some new findings which would reinforce the understanding of the history of Madurai nayakas.

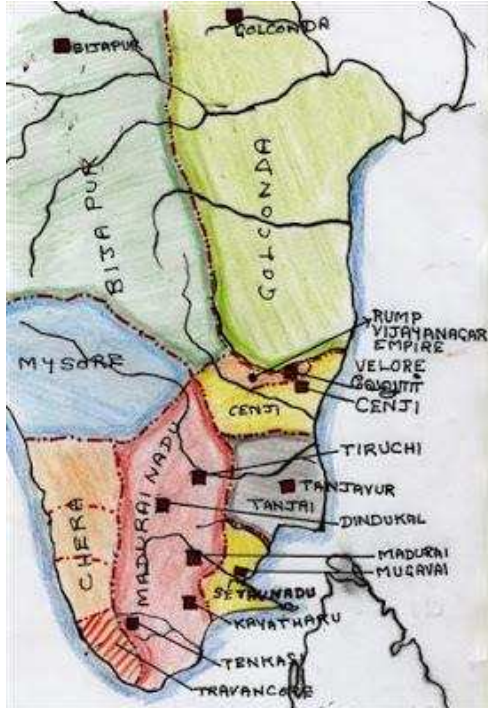
Madurai Nayakas:

Visvanatha nayaka , the son of Kotiya Nagama Nayaka , was appointed Viceroy of the south with the titles- *chief of the Pandya country* and *Lord of the Southern throne* during the reign of Vijayanagara emperor Krishnaraya. Nagama Nayaka was an able commander who initially served under Saluva Narasimha. The exact date of coronation is not known. But the earliest inscription of Visvanatha nayaka in the Madura region could be dated around 1533 C.E in Melur Taluk, Madura district, which mentions a gift that was made for the merit of Achyutadeva Maharaya .Madura was called with an epithet '*Raya-dakshinasimhasana Sthana*' (the headquarters of the Raya's southern throne) by the Vijayanagara rulers. This explains the significance of the southern territories during that period. He had even the Chola country under his control till the time it got separated as a separate nayakship and went to the control of Sevappa nayaka. As a result of this new arrangement, Tiruchirapally went to Madura and Vallam to Thanjavur. While Visvanatha was engaged in the north, his general and co-adjutor Ariyanatha was sent to down south as far as Tirunelveli to restore peace and order. This historical event of assignment of governance of Madura country to Visvanatha had culminated in the inception of **Nayakship of Madura**.

There seems to have been no legitimate pandya king in Madura in the sixteenth century. The withdrawal of the actual Pandyas to the environs of Tenkasi perhaps brought into existence in Madura many illegitimate claimants, mutually questioning their legitimacy. Ariyanatha had to subdue such illegitimate Pandyas/refractory vassals to establish a systematic and robust governance.

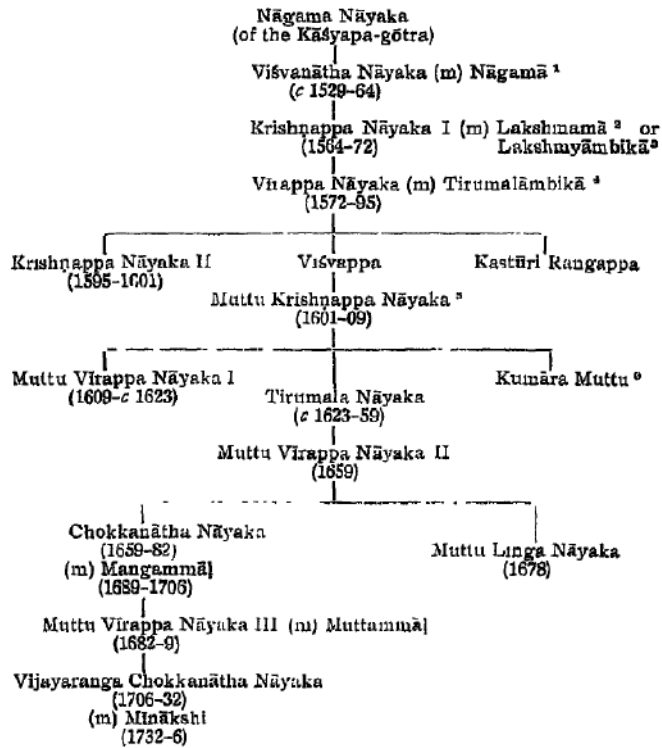
Organization of the palayams: After restoring order, the duo of Visvanatha and Ariyanatha organized the whole country. They had to take into account the old local chieftains who were the vassals of Pandyas, the migrants from north who had left their country either owing to the Muhammadan peril or in quest of new pastures. They incorporated them all of them into a system of government, which would conduce to the peace and prosperity of the country. To provide safety to the civilians from robbers and

invaders, the dense forests were planned to be cleared to make way to new palayams. The chronicles speak of the division of the country into seventy-two palayams and a polygar was assigned to each one of these palayams to defend the bastion located in the respective palayam. In the forthcoming sections, we will be able to understand the authority and the influence exerted by the Polygars till the advent of the British.



The genealogical chart of the Madurai nayakas is shown below for better understanding the lineage of the rulers :

GENEALOGICAL LIST



Coinage:

The nayakas of Madurai issued a wide range of copper coins with the inscription of the ruler written on one side of the coin and dieties/animals depicted on the other side. So far no gold coins are known. The 'Sri veera' coinage is abundant and posed a challenge to the numismatists till date in terms of attribution. In the following sections, I have tried to resolve this enigma on the 'Sri veera' coins in general and few other varieties which were earlier understood to be bearing the legend 'sri veera'. The below sections give a detailed analysis on the study done so far on the Madurai nayaka coinage.

As discussed afore, the inception of Madurai nayakas started with the accession of Visvanatha Nayaka on the seat of Madurai, who is also referred to as 'Visvanatha Chokkanatha' in the inscriptions. This happened around 1530 CE. Henceforth post the period of Visvanatha, we have multiple rulers who ruled Madurai till it met its end during reign of Queen Meenakshi. The coinage issued by the rulers was thought to be a very uniform type. But it is not the case as seen from the evidences and inscriptions. The numismatical study done in the recent past has gleamed a lot of facts on the history and the rulers. Infact few new names came into the fore which weren't discussed so far on the coins.

Chokkanatha nayaka- 1659 -1682 C.E

Recently few varieties of coins which were assumed generally to be 'Sri veera' were took for reappraisal study. Barbara Mears has written a monograph titled '20 Interesting south Indian Coins from the American Numismatic Society' in MCS 2001 Bulletin. She has listed one such coin, which is being discussed upon now, and assumes it to be a probable issue in South Karnataka region during 16th/17th

centuries as the obverse contained an image of two fishes. She infact even published an interesting eye copy of the legend as well. But no other details pertaining to the legend were discussed. It has been observed by me , after the study on these coins , that the specimen what she has listed bears the legend '*Sri Chokka*' and is clearly a Madurai Nayaka issue.

Now going to the details, all of the specimens took up for study bear the Kannada/Telugu inscription that can be deciphered as '*Sri Chokka*'. This could be clearly matched with the way the term '*chokka*' was written in the copper plate inscriptions of the ruler '*Vijayaranga Chokkanatha*'. But these coins should have been issued during the rule of the Sri Chokkanatha Nayaka , who had a prolonged reign from 1659 CE to 1682 CE as per inscriptions (*Nayaks of Madhura* by R.Sathyanatha Aiyar).

Chokkanatha ascended the throne when he was only sixteen years old. He attacked the Thanjavur kingdom and Marava kingdom of Sethupathis very early in his career .Vallam was annexed into the Madhura territory from Thanjavur province but the guerilla tactics from the Sethupathis made him to retract to Madura . Few forts like Kalayairkovil which were conquered had to be surrendered back to the Sethupathis .Later Raghunatha Setupati showed his loyalty towards Chokkanatha and earned titles from him like '*pararajakesari*' , '*tulukarmoham tavirttan*' after his exploits against Rustum khan, who had tried to seize the throne. Around the year 1662 CE, the capital was shifted to Tiruchirapally from Madhura, which is a good point to be noted, the chief reason being the superiority of Tiruchirapally as a defensive strong hold compared to Madhura.

The details of the coins and the legend are furnished below :



Metal: Copper

Obverse : Divine couple probably Siva and Parvathi depicted with in a circle

Reverse: Telugu/Kannada legend '*Sri Chokka*'

Weight : 2.9 gm

Diameter: 17 m



Metal: Copper
Obverse : Lord Krishna depicted as 'Narthana Krishna'
Reverse: Telugu/Kannada legend "Sri Chokka"
Weight : 2.6 gm
Diameter: 16 mm

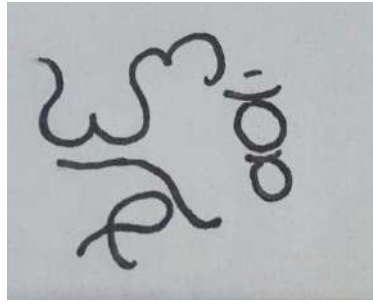


Metal: Copper
Obverse : A lion advancing to left
Reverse: Telugu/Kannada legend "Sri Chokka"
Weight : 1.54 gm
Diameter: 13 mm



Metal: Copper
Obverse : Portrait image of the nayaka ruler holding a dagger in his left hand.
Reverse: Telugu/Kannada legend 'Sri Chokka'
Weight: 1.6 gm

Diameter: 14 mm



Metal: Copper

Obverse : Lord Krishna on the obverse

Reverse: Telugu legend 'Sri Chokka'

Weight: 2.7 gm

Diameter: 17 mm

Copper plate of Vijayaranga Chokkanadha : The image of the copper plate shown below pertains to a grant made during the reign of Vijayaranga Chokkanadha. We can observe the style of inscribing the legend '**chokka**' in this grant and it can be easily matched to the way it is written on the coins of Chokkanatha nayaka. The plate is attested by the ruler by his signature 'Vijaya ranga **chokkanaadha naayanayya vraalu**', which means the signature of myself i.e **Vijayaranga chokkanadha nayanayya** (*nayani* is an honourable adjective for nayaka).



Ranga Krishna Muddu Virappa – 1682 to 1689 C.E

A copper coin has been collecting recently which was bearing the motif of a bull and Telugu/Kannada inscription on the reverse of the coin. When I referred the *studies in Vijayanagara coins* by K. Ganesh, it was tentatively read as 'sri ranga raya'. But I was under an impression that the ending part of the legend could not be deciphered as 'raya' and I could surely read the character "kra/"kru" after the legend 'sri ranga' .I continued my research henceforth and it did not take much time to find that the legend was indeed '**Sri ranga Krishna** '.The *Travancore Archaeological series* served as a good reference for the genealogy of the Madurai nayakas and then for the reconciliation of the legend as well .As the inscription suggests , these coins are issued by **Sri Ranga Krishna Muddu Virappa nayaka**.

Ranga Krishna Muddu Virappa also known as Muddu Virappa III , succeeded his father Chokkanatha in 1682 C.E. The failure of Chokkanadha to keep his dominions intact reduced the extent of the kingdom of Madura. Consequently Ranga Krishna inherited only a part of his ancestral territories. He came to throne under most discouraging circumstances.The Raja of Mysore, Sambaji , the King of Tanjore and the Sethupathis were holding portions of the territories. The war between the Mysore and Sambhaji's forces worked in favour of Ranga Krishna and he was able to regain much of the territories with in no time. Also Ranga Krishna tried to checkmate the moves of Kilavan Sethupathi , who had tried to attack Madura province from the support of ex-Dalavay of Madurai i.e Venkata Krishnappa and Chengamala Das (last of the Thanjavur nayaks) . He even invaded the Marava country but was repelled back by the combined troups of the enemy. He seems to have been a ruler of energy and a man of strong character. He had a considerably short reign.



Metal: Copper

Obverse: A couchant bull facing left with in a rayed arch

Reverse: Kannada legend : 'Sri ranga Krishna' written in non-linear style

Weight: 2.2 gm

Diameter: 20 mm



Metal: Copper

Obverse: A couchant bull facing right with in a rayed arch.

Reverse : Kannada legend "Sri Ranga Krishna"

Weight: 2.2 gm

Diameter: 20 mm



Metal: Copper

Obverse: A trishul (Trident) flanked by an ankusam and a battle axe with in a rayed arch.

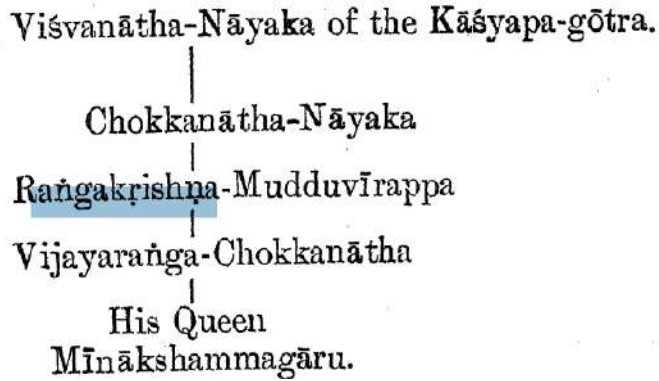
Reverse : Kannada legend "*Sri Ranga Krishna*"

Weight: 2.2 gm

Diameter: 20 mm

As seen from the images, the script aptly ends with the term "Krishna" . These coins were clearly issued during the reign of ***Sri Ranga Krishna Muddu Virappa***.

Ranga Krishna Muddu Virappa's inscriptions mention him as son of Chokkanatha nayaka , with usual honorific reference their progenitor Visvanatha nayaka.



M.T Karunakaran had discussed on the coins bearing the legend "*sri ranga*" and attributes them to Ranga Krishna muddu virappa. Now that we are able to find the exact name of the ruler inscribed on the coin , it can be deduced that the prefix /part of the name of the ruler's name or the actual names are inscribed on the coins. Chokkanatha nayaka had issued coins with the prefix of his name '*Sri Chokka*' ; Ranga Krishna Muddu Virappa used '*Sri Ranga Krishna*' ,Queen Mangamma and Meenakshi used their actual names i.e '*Sri Mangamma*' ,'*Sri Meenakshi*' on their coinage.

The important outcome of this study is that each and every ruler in the Madurai nayaka kingdom issued their independent coinage with their own titles/nomenclature inscribed upon the coins.

M.T.Karunakaran had discussed on this aspect. This current work proves and removes all the confusions we have on this series of coins so far.

Coins with the legend 'Sri Veera' :

Till date we see eclectic varieties of coins in Madurai nayaks with legend "Sri veera". The hypothesis on these coins was the legend referred to a title assumed by a set of rulers who have ruled Madura.

As per Micheal Mitchiner , the 'Sri Veera' coins could have been issued in the period 1601- 1736 CE and could be probable issues after the coinage reform undertaken by Muttu Krishnappa Nayaka. He had also mentioned that the coins with early 'sri' were believed to be issued between 1601 to 1630 CE, the main series of coins around 1630-1700 C.E and the late series with concave reverse around 1700 to 1736 C.E.

But this cobweb built on this series of coins is cleared for ever and it is described below:

As a conclusion of study done so far, we can conclude that the coins with 'sri veera' could have been issued as an inception by Periya Virappa nayaka Nayaka 1572- 1595 CE and continued by Muthu Virappa Nayaka 1609- 1623 C.E .The same series must have been revamped during the rule of Muthu Virappa nayaka II 1659-1662 . This explains the reason for the quantity and diversity of this series of coins.

Few images of the Sri veera coins are added here.



Metal: Copper

Obverse: Divine couple (probably Siva and Parvathi) seated on a vyali.

Reverse: Telugu/Kannada legend "Sri Veera"

Weight: 1.6 gm

Diameter: 15 mm



(Scan courtesy – Kirubai Rajan , Chennai)

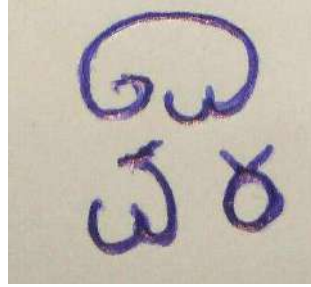
Metal: Copper

Obverse : Tamil legend 'Aandalu' with in a dotted circle , denoting 'Andal' the female Alvar saint.

Reverse: Telugu/Kannada legend "Sri Veera" with in a dotted circle

Weight : 1.9 gm

Diameter: 18 mm



Obverse : A temple car/chariot

Reverse: Telugu/Kannada legend "Sri Veera"

Weight : 1.4 gm

Diameter: 13 mm



Metal: Copper

Obverse : Lord Hanuman carrying mount Sanjeevani

Reverse: Telugu/Kannada legend 'Sri Veera'.

Weight : 1.2 gm

Diameter: 16 mm

As seen from these sample images, the legend *Sri veera* has undergone a lot of degeneration and this could be due to the usage of the title *Sri veera* by successive rulers with the name '*Veerappa*' in different points of time over a broad time frame of around 100 years. The earliest series ,which must have been issued by Virappa (Circa 1572- 1595 C.E) , should be the ones with the clearly readable legend *Sri Veera* as depicted in the eye copies and the degeneration of legend can be seen till the point where the legend appears so corrupted . The degeneration of the legend must have started during the reign of Muthu Virappa Nayaka I 1609- 1623 C.E and henceforth we see such coins with corrupted legend '*sri veera*/'*sri dara*'. Hence , the current study has resolved the enigma surrounded around the *Sri veera* coins and from now could well be properly attributed.

Coinage of Polygars

Mazhavarayars : The Tiruchirapalli region comprised of five major palayams . They are Udayarpalayam, Ariyalur, Marungapuri, Thuraiyur and Cuddalore. Amongst them , the Ariyalur palayam was one of the strategically important zone and guarded one of the bastions of the Madura. It is situated to the east of Tiruchirapalli district and north of Kollidam river.

In 1573 C.E, Arasunilaiyitta Krishnappa Mazhavarayar founded the rule of Ariyalur Palayam as a subordinate of Kondama Nayaka of Gingee and Sriranga Raya– I of the Vijayanagara Kingdom. Up to 1817 .C.E , 16 Chiefs ruled from Ariyalur. The records refer to their gifts to Siva and Vishnu temples, temple building activities in Ariyalur region and portray Ariyalur as their capital and an important commercial centre.

In 1710 C.E, Peddaranga Mazhavaraya of Ariyalur **acknowledged** Vijayaranga **Chokkanatha Nayaka** of Madura as overlord. Later the Mughal King Aurangazeb captured the Carnatic from the Marathas and appointed Zulfikar Khan and Sadatulla Khan as Nawab of Carnatic. They invaded Ariyalur, Thanjavur and Trichy and extracted tribute from the polygars of Ariyalur. Vijaya Oppilla Mazhavarayar accepted the suzerainty of the Nawabs. During the Carnatic wars in 1755 CE and 1757 CE the French attacked Ariyalur. But the British sent an army to protect the Ariyalur Palayakar. In 1780 CE , the two Palayams sought the help of Hyder Ali and got rid of the yoke of the Nawabs. But later after the defeat of Hyder Ali by the British the Palayakars accepted the rule of the British and paid Peshkas to them. Lastly, when the Carnatic was made over to the British in 1801 Ariyalur became the Zamindari under the British and it was also abolished in 1950 after the -Independence.

A copper coin was discovered recently bearing the Kannada/Telugu legend 'Maravarayadu' / 'Mazhavarayadu' with motif of Lord Sri Rama holding a bow and an arrow.



Metal: Copper

Obverse : Lord Rama carrying a bow and an arrow

Reverse: Telugu/Kannada legend 'Marava/rayadu' in two lines .

Weight: 2.8 gm

Diameter: 16 mm



Metal: Copper

Obverse : Lord Rama carrying a bow and an arrow

Reverse: Telugu/Kannada legend 'Maru /vara/yadu' in three lines .

Weight: 3.2 gm

Diameter: 17 mm

Initially the legend was read as 'sri ramanayadu'. But on examination of few more specimens encountered recently, it is very clear that the legend is 'maravarayadu'. The generic usage of the name of the ruling clan i.e Mazhavarayars/Maravarayadus on the coinage is a significant aspect to be noted. On perusal of records, it is the title adopted by the chiefs of Ariyalur. The notable point here is the Telugu adaptation of the title 'rayadu' has been used on the coinage instead of their actual title 'rayar'. This explains a Telugu connection to these chiefs. The topology suggests that this could be 17th century issue. The motif of Lord Rama should well be used in connection with Lord Rama who is the principle diety in the Alanthurayar Kothandaramasamy temple in Ariyalur constructed during the rule of Ariyalur *Arasu nilaiyitta Oppila Mazhavarayar*. There are two inscriptions and one Copper plate in this temple. The earliest record is dated to 1635 C.E and it is engraved in the south base of the main temple. It is damaged and refers to an order of Ariyalur *Arasu nilaiyitta Oppila Mazhavarayar* who agreed not to collect some taxes in anju parru nadu in Vitta parru. A Copper plate charter dated to 1729 C.E and issued during the reign of *Arasu nilaiyitta Rangappa Mazhavarayar* refers to the decision reached by the shepherd community (called **Ayppadi Gopala vamsattar**) to contribute one panam per head and house of their community to this temple during the time of marriages in their families. . There is an inscription dated 1742 C.E in the Krishnaswami temple in Ariyalur , mentioning a grant of 15 kulis of land to a Brahman Narasappa by *Vijaya Oppillada Malavaraya*. There is a grant in Varadaraja perumal temple in Udayarpalayam as well referring to donation of 90 kulis of land to the lord by Kumara vijaya oppillada Malavaraya in 1763 CE.

Excerpts from Epigraphical sources (Annual reports on Indian epigraphy 1926 – 1929)

The genealogy of the rulers constructed as per epigraphical records can be explained as follows:

Arasu Nilayitta Oppillada Mazhavaraya (circa 1635 CE)

Vijaya Oppillada Mazhavaraya

Rangappa Mazhavaraya

Vijaya Oppilada Mazhavaraya (circa 1742 C.E)

Vijaya Oppila Mazhavaraya (Circa 1746 C.E; son of Muddu-venkatappa Mazhavaraya)

Vijaya Opillada Mazhavaraya (1808 C.E)

Kumara Oppilada Mazhavaraya (1832-1843 C.E)

The title '*Oppillada*' assumed by the chiefs is not merely an epithet signifying 'incomparable' but also would have been added in honour of goddess Oppilada Amman of Ariyalur. The distinctive clan – name of the Ariyalur chiefs appears to have been '*Malavaraya*' .

As discussed aforesh, this is a significant finding that brings forward a family of chiefs/polygars to the numismatic arena .

Ghatti Mudalis of Tharamangalam region

Tharamangalam was one of the 72 palayams appointed to guard the bastions of Madura country. The rulers were called by name *Gatti Mudalis/Gatti Mudaliars*.

The Gatti Mudalis were in charge of the most dangerously exposed province of the Nayak Kingdom with Kaveripuram on the right bank of the Cauvery as their strategic capital commencing one of the principal passes to the Mysore Plateau. The centre of their power seems, however, to have been Taramangalam where they have built a grand edifice of a temple. It is said their domination extended as far as Thalaivasal to the east, Dharapuram in Erode district in the west and Karur district in the south.

Amarakundhi served as a second capital for the Mudalis. The Gatti Mudali chieftains have employed unique insignia by combining the green mat, garland of flowers and tiger and this representation finds a definite place in all the temples originally built, extended and renovated by them. The forts of greatest strategic importance held by the Gatti Mudalis were Omalur and Attur.

We already know some coins with Telugu/Kannada legend '*Ghatti*' issued by the Gatti Mudalis (#9) . Few coins ,which are already known to numismatists , are taken up for reappraisal now.



Metal: Copper

Obverse: A fish

Reverse: Devanagari legend '*Ghatti*' (* - Please See #11 in the references section for details)

Weight: 3.4 gm

Diameter: 22 mm



Metal: Copper

Obverse: A fish with in a dotted circular border.

Reverse: Tamil legend legend 'mu' , denoting 'Mudali' /'Mudaliar'

Weight: 6.3 gm

Diameter: 25 mm

References

- 1) R.Sathyanatha Aiyar, *History Of The Nayaks Of Madura*
- 2) V.Rangacharya, *A Topographical List Of The Inscriptions Of The Madras Presidency (Collected till 1915) With Notes And References*
- 3) *Annual reports on Indian epigraphy 1926 – 1929*
- 4) Ramanatha Ayyar A S, *Travancore Archaeological Series- Vol 5*
- 5) Micheal Mitchiner , *The Coinage And History Of Southern India ,Part Two -Tamilnadu-Kerala 1998*
- 6) M.T Karunakaran, *Coins Of Sri Ranga Muthu Veerappa Nayak*, Madras Coin Society Bulletin 1999
- 7) Barbara Mears, *20 Interesting south Indian Coins from the American Numismatic Society*, Madras coin society special bulletin 2001
- 8) K.Ganesh, *Studies in Vijayanagar Coins* 2009
- 9) Arumuga Seetaraman, *Tamizhakka Kasugal* 2014
- 10) Special thanks to Gautham Kanishka (Chennai) ,Raman Sankaran (Chennai) for allowing me to publish images of the coins from their collection .
- 11) * A similar coin was listed by Imperial auctions in the July 2017 sale after the cataloguing team consulted me for the identification/attribution of the same.