

SIKH COINAGE - SYMBOL OF SIKH SOVREIGNTY

By Surinder Singh



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*A Review by Dr. M. S. Ahluwalia**

Coin collection is a well-established hobby in India and there are very large numbers of coin collectors interested in collection/sale/purchase of ancient, medieval and modern coins. Surinder Singh is a coin collector with a difference. He has not only collected Sikh coins, but has carried out numismatic investigation dovetailed with historical accounts bringing out various important distortions in the books on history and also establishing Sikh coins as a symbol of Sikh sovereignty.

The collector's instinct led Surinder Singh to make a sizeable collection of Sikh coins during his posting at Jullundur in early eighties. After his retirement in late eighties he started studying the Persian legends on Sikh coins and the historical and religious background in the formation of these legends. Having not been able to secure help of any expert conversant with the subject, he started study of Sikh history as such, which had random references to the Sikh coins.

The Sikh history has been primarily based on Persian, Punjabi and English sources wherein certain garnishing about Sikh coins has been made to make it more interesting and lively. There has been no proper and serious study of Sikh coins made by any historian and their accounts are based on historical fiction and hearsay without any examination of actual coins.

Surinder Singh's attempt has been the first detailed study of Sikh coins, in which he has dovetailed the historical accounts with numismatic investigations and thus brought out a number of disinformations and distortions, e.g.: -

- (i) The often repeated story by almost all Sikh historians that Ranjit Singh struck coins in the name of a courtesan oh his by the name Moran has been to be totally incorrect with numismatic investigation.
- (ii) The story that Jassa Singh Ahluwalia struck a coin in his own name in 1761 is incorrect as the coins struck in 1765 under the leadership of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia have been in the name of Sikh Gurus only and are readily available.
- (iii) The solitary pictorial coin stated by all to be that of Baba Nanak with Mardana, is in fact that of Ranjit Singh before Baba Nanak seeking his blessings. The coin is only a proof coin and was not minted for formal issue as Ranjit Singh anticipated serious Sikh opposition in his being seated on the coin with Guru Nanak.
- (iv) The story repeated by many historians that Hari Singh Nalwa struck coins in his own name, while he was governor of Kashmir and Peshawar is incorrect as established by historical evidence and numismatic investigation.
- (v) The Persian legends have not been studied with reference to Sikh ethos and have been interpreted incorrectly by various historians.

Another important aspect has been the intimate relationship between the Persian and the concept of Sikh sovereignty bequeathed by Sikh Gurus to “Sikh Panth”. The tenth Guru shortly before his demise abolished the personal Guruship and placed his spiritual sovereignty in the holy Granth and his temporal sovereignty in the Khalsa Panth.

While creating Khalsa in 1699 after selecting 5 Sikhs called ‘*panj piaras*’ and giving them *khanda pahul*, he merged himself in the Khalsa by personally taking the *pahul* from those very *panj piaras*. He emphasised the democratic principle that wherever there are five Sikhs, he is present there in spirit and their decision should be applicable to all of them. When the first Sikh state came into existence in the times of Banda Bahadur in 1710, they decided to have a seal. The legends for the seal selected was:

*“Deg Togh Fateh O Nusrat Baidarang,
Yaft Uz Nanak Guru Gobind Singh.”*

Meaning that the kettle to feed, the sword to defend, and the resultant victory have been achieved with the spontaneous help received from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh.

Whereas the 10th Guru placed the temporal sovereignty in the Khalsa, the Khalsa did not take it in their names, they kept it in the name of Gurus as de jure sovereigns and themselves carried on the administration as de facto sovereigns on behalf of their gurus. The salutation “*Wahe Guru ji ka khalsa, wahe Guru ji ki fateh*” meaning that the Khalsa belongs to the Guru and so does the victory belongs to the Guru. For the coin, the legend taken was:

Obverse: *Sikka zad bar har do alam, Togh-I-Nanak wahib ast,*

Fateh Gobind Singh Shah-I-Shahan, Fazal Sachacha Sahib ast.

Meaning that the coin has been struck in both the worlds, under the guarantee of Guru Nanak’s double-edged sword. The victory of Guru Gobind Singh, king of kings, has been with the grace of God Almighty.

Reverse: *Zarb ba aman-al-dahar, masavarat shahr zinat altakhat khalsa mubarak bakht.*

Meaning minted at Place of Perfect Peace, picture of a beautiful city, where the fortunate throne of the Khalsa is to be located.

The Sikh coins being in the name of Sikh Gurus, have certain amount of sacrosance and dedication of the Sikh to these coins. No Sikh sardar or ruler has ever attempted to put his name on the Sikh coins and these legends remained in circulation on the coins right from 1710 to 1849 when the Sikh state was annexed by the British. The author has thus deemed Sikh coins as the symbol of Sikh sovereignty.

The author has, in his analytical study by dovetailing historical evidence with numismatic investigation, removed some of the cobwebs of ignorance and moss of disinformation about Sikh coins. In fact, he has opened a new vista/dimension of authenticity and accuracy to the fiction ridden study of Sikh history.

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