

The Kingdom of Sikkim covers an area of some 2800 square miles, and is situated on the southern slopes of the Himalayas, sandwiched between India to the south, Tibet to the North, Nepal to the west and Bhutan to the east. On its border with Nepal is the third highest mountain in the world, Kanchenjunga.

The Kingdom was founded in 1642 when Phuntsog Namgyal was proclaimed Chogyal or King. His ancestors had come to the Sikkim area about 150 years earlier from Eastern Tibet and, over the years had gained the confidence and respect of the indigenous inhabitants, the Lapchas. The descendents of Phuntsog Namgyal have ruled Sikkim ever since.

Initially Sikkim covered an area at least twice as large as it is now, but annexations by neighbouring powers reduced its size until in 1835 it reached its present area after the Chogyal "presented" the hills of Darjeeling to the British "out of friendship". In 1861 Sikkim became a protectorate of British India with the British exercising complete control over foreign affairs and defence and the Chogyal being in charge of all other internal matters.

India's independence brought little change to this situation until April 1973 when there was an uprising during which the Chogyal asked for the assistance of the Indian Government. An agreement has now been reached under which the Chogyal's powers are to be greatly reduced and the administration of Sikkim is to be headed by a "chief nomination of the Government of India".

For practically the entire period of its history, Sikkim had no coinage of its own and until the last century trade was carried out by barter with taxes paid in kind. On the few occasions when inhabitants needed money, Tibetan coins, silver or gold bullion, or later, Indian coins were used. For only three or four years in the 1800's were coins struck in Sikkim, and then they were struck by Nepalese immigrants. Since the beginning of the twentieth century Indian currency has circulated widely and exclusively.

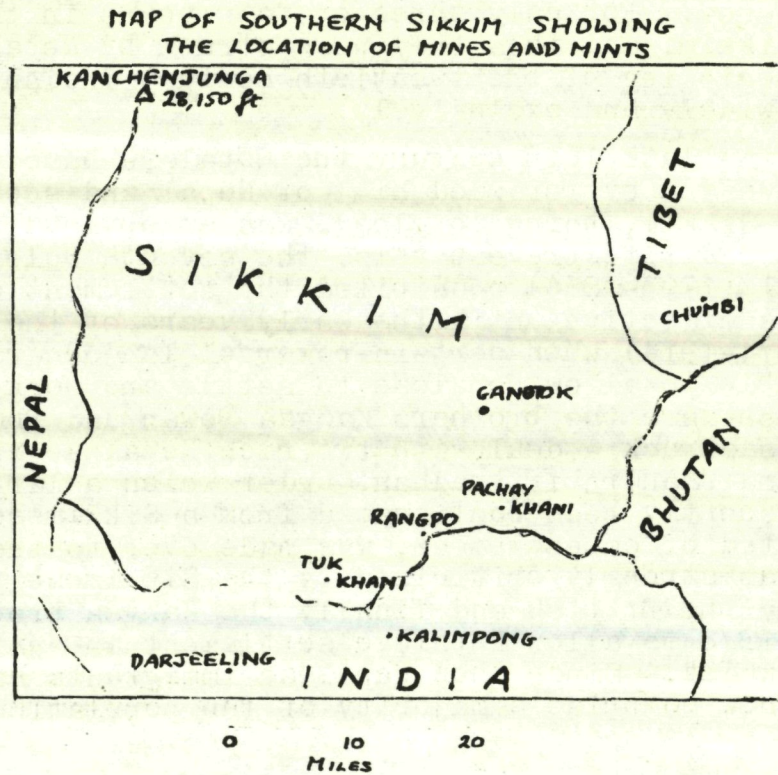
Since the late 18th century the Nepalese have exhibited a strong urge to leave the overcrowded hill of Nepal and seek their fortunes elsewhere. Sikkim, being so close, was an obvious target for settlement and in order to prevent this, the seventh ruler of Sikkim, Tsugphud Namgyal (1793-1864) prohibited the settlement of Nepalese in Sikkim. This ban was effective until the early years of the reign of Thutob Namgyal (1874-1914) when certain powerful landowners realised that it was profitable to allow Nepalese to settle and work the land. Foremost of these were the brothers Kangsa Dewan and Phodong Lama. These two brothers struck a deal with two rich Nepalese traders, the brothers Lachmidas and Chandrabir Pradhan, under which a large tract of land which had recently been confiscated from a Sikkimese nobleman who had been convicted of embezzlement, was made over to the Nepalese brothers. This deal was strongly criticized by the Sikkimese people, but was supported by the British and finally the Kangsa brothers persuaded the Chogyal in 1878 to allow Nepalese settlement in "uninhabited and waste lands of Sikkim". Since then Nepalese immigrants have flooded into Sikkim and now comprise a majority of the population of the country.

It was the Pradhan brothers who were responsible for the Sikkim coinage. Soon after acquiring their lands they obtained licences to mine copper in a number of places, most important of which were Tuk Khani, Bhotan Khani near Rangpo and Pachay Khani. Some of this copper was sold in Nepal and Darjeeling, but some remained unsold, so in 1882 the brothers sought and obtained the permission of the Chogyal to strike copper coins. The minting was done in two places near the mines of Tuk Khani and Pachay Khani. Unfortunately for the Pradhan brothers the Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling forbade the circulation of the Sikkim coins in the Darjeeling district and this made the coins unpopular among the people. The minting was not profitable and was discontinued in 1885.

The coins themselves are, except for the inscription, exact copies of the Nepalese paisa of Surendra Vira Vikrama Shah. They are very poorly struck and very few specimens have all the details of the design visible. The date is only very rarely legible. Three major types are known, but there is no indication of the mint of origin and die-links exist between the types. The coins are all intended to be the same denomination, one paisa, although the weights of individual specimens vary within the range 6.0 gms to 4.0 gms around a mean of about 5.2 gms.

References

- "Sikkim Copper Coins" by Monmohan Chakravarti. JASB Vol.V No. 1. (1909)
- "Sikkim, A Concise Chronicle" (Govt. of Sikkim, published c 1964)
- Information provided by Mr. Udai Pradham, a descendant of the Pradhan brothers who struck the coins.



Description of the Coins

Type 1 Obv. Legend in three lines within square, date below.
 श्री श्री श्री / सिक्किमपति / महाराज
 Sri Sri Sri Sikimpati Maharāj
 (Exalted Highness Lord of Sikkim)

a) Date १८४० (1940 Samvat = 1883 A.D.)

b) Date १८४१ (1941)

Rev. Legend in three lines within square.

श्री श्री श्री / सिक्किम / सरकार
 Sri Sri Sri Sikim Sarkar
 (The Exalted Sikkimese Government)

Type 2 Obv. As last, but legend on four lines.

श्री श्री श्री / सिक्किम / पति मा / हाराज

a) Date १८४१ (1941)

Rev. As last.

Type 3

Obv. Legend in three lines as on type 1, but "ti" of "Sikimpati" on third line. Two varieties of spelling exist for the third line.

A. महाराज

B. माहाराज

Obv. A. is known for two dates a) 1941. १८४१

b) 1942. १८४२

Obv. B. is known, as yet, for only one date, b) 1942 १८४२

Rev. As previous types, but three ways of spelling "Sarkar" in third line - the last two are errors:-

- i. सकार (Sarkār)
- ii. सकार (Sakār)
- iii. सिकार (Sikār)

NOTE

Die-links have been found between the reverses of types:-

1(b) and 2(a)

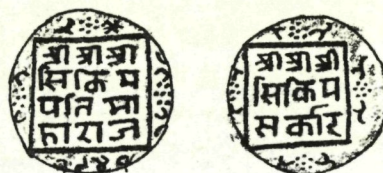
1(b) and 3Ai(?)

For type 3 all six possible combinations of the obverse and reverse varieties are known.

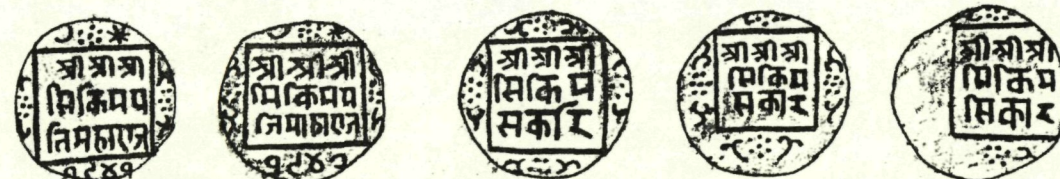
TYPE 1



TYPE 2



TYPE 3



Obv. A

Obv. B

Rev. i

Rev. ii

Rev. iii