

## The Six Distinct One-Rupee Coins of King Edward VII: a 1903 Numismatic Investigation

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### ABSTRACT

This study explores the six distinct varieties of the one-rupee coin minted in India during 1903 under the reign of King Edward VII. These coins, produced in Calcutta and Bombay, reflect both deliberate minting practices and accidental engraver errors. The six recognized types include: (1) Calcutta-minted rupee with no mint mark, (2) Bombay-minted rupee with a small incuse "B," (3) Bombay-minted rupee with a small raised "B," (4) Bombay-minted rupee with a "dot" on the stem of the lotus-bud, (5) Calcutta-minted four dots rupee, and (6) Calcutta-minted three dots rupee. Through examination of historical context, minting practices, literature review, and collector perspectives, this paper demonstrates how these varieties serve as valuable artifacts of British India's monetary system. The findings illustrate the intersection of political authority, colonial minting practices, and numismatic significance.

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### Introduction

Numismatics, the scholarly study of coins, is an essential discipline for understanding the political, economic, and cultural dynamics of history. Coins are among the most tangible artifacts of a civilization, representing not only tools of commerce but also symbols of power, artistry, and technological innovation [1-3]. In the context of British India, coins carried a dual significance: they were daily instruments of exchange, and they also projected the authority of the British Crown across a vast colonial territory [4-6].

The rupee was the cornerstone of British India's monetary system, and its design reflected the Crown's dominion over the subcontinent. With the death of Queen Victoria in 1901 and the accession of Edward VII, India entered a new phase of coinage [7-9]. Edward VII's rupee coins are particularly notable because his effigy is shown bare-headed, a departure from the crowned bust of his mother's coinage. This seemingly minor design feature reflects the political transition and practical realities of minting.

The year 1903, the first year of Edwardian coinage in India, stands out in numismatic history due to the remarkable diversity of rupee types issued. Different distinct varieties emerged that year, differing in mint marks and engraver details. Some differences were intentional, meant to mark the origin of the mint, while others were accidental, arising from mistakes in engraving [10-13]. This paper aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of these varieties. By situating them within their historical and minting contexts, reviewing existing literature, and analysing their numismatic

significance, the paper contributes both to the academic study of coins and to practical collector knowledge.

King Edward VII (1841–1910), the eldest son of Queen Victoria, ascended the throne in 1901 following her death [14,15]. His reign was relatively short, lasting until 1910, but his coinage occupies an important chapter in the history of British imperial money. Unlike Queen Victoria's coins, Edward VII's effigy was portrayed without a crown. This decision was not based on ideology but rather on practical timing. Since master dies were prepared before his coronation on 9 August 1902, the designs could not be updated to include the crown, and production continued with the bare-headed bust.

In India, the rupee served as the principal unit of currency and was minted primarily in Calcutta and Bombay [16-18]. These mints used distinctive methods to mark their coins. Calcutta typically did not employ mint marks, while Bombay often used letters or symbols, such as an incuse "B" or a raised "B." By 1903, Bombay introduced yet another distinguishing feature, a dot placed on the stem of the lotus-bud on the reverse of the rupee. The Edwardian rupees of 1903 thus capture a transitional moment in colonial minting practices. They reveal experimentation with mint marks, as well as lapses in engraving accuracy, particularly in rendering Persian script on the reverse. The missing dots in some rupees demonstrate how engraver unfamiliarity with scripts could lead to enduring varieties that later gained numismatic significance.

### Literature Review

The study of British Indian coinage has been enriched by the works of several scholars and numismatists. Coins of India is considered

an important reference, especially for its detailed cataloguing of varieties and mint marks. It highlights the deliberate use of dots and letters to distinguish between Bombay and Calcutta issues and points out the engraver's errors that resulted in rare varieties in 1903 [19]. Scholars of South Asian numismatics provide broader historical and technical contexts, emphasizing how minting technology, die production, and engraver skill levels directly influenced the emergence of varieties. Detailed catalogues highlight the significance of minor variations in symbols and dots, treating them as evidence of both mint identity and historical process [20, 21].

Auction catalogues and collector handbooks also play an important role in the literature. Numismatic auction records document how frequently each of the six-rupee types appears in the marketplace, offering valuable insights into relative rarity. These records indicate that the Calcutta three-dot rupee is scarcer than the more common Calcutta no-mint-mark rupee, and therefore commands higher collector premiums [22]. The literature further highlights the symbolic role of coins in projecting imperial authority. Edward VII's uncrowned bust is often discussed as a peculiarity that differentiates his coinage from that of Victoria and George V, and scholars point to its unintentional but lasting influence on how his reign is numismatically remembered.

### Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative approach, drawing from coin examination, catalogued records, and numismatic literature. The classification of six-rupee types is based on three main criteria: mint marks, engraver details, and anomalies in inscriptions. Coins were compared across published references, photographic documentation, and collector reports. To ensure accuracy, photographic placeholders are included in this paper where images of each type would be inserted. These placeholders serve to illustrate differences in mint marks and dot patterns.

The research also incorporated auction archives and collector catalogues to assess the frequency and rarity of each type. These sources provide empirical evidence of the circulation and survival rates of the coins. While metallurgical analysis was not performed as part of this study, existing research confirms that Edwardian rupees were consistently minted in silver of similar purity, thereby minimizing metallurgical variation as a factor.

Limitations of this methodology include reliance on secondary sources for market valuation and potential underreporting of rarities. Nevertheless, the triangulation of physical evidence, published scholarship, and collector data provides a reliable foundation for analysing the six types of 1903 rupees.

### Results and Discussion

Calcutta minted rupee with no mint mark represents the standard issue from the Calcutta Mint. Lacking any mint mark, it appears plain in comparison with Bombay issues. The absence of a mint mark was characteristic of Calcutta production during this period. Calcutta minted rupee with no mint mark is shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1: Calcutta Minted Rupee with No Mint Mark

Some 1903 rupees struck in Bombay bear a small incuse letter "B" as a mint mark. The incuse technique involved engraving the letter into the die, producing a sunken impression on the coin's surface. This was one of the earliest attempts by Bombay to distinguish its coins. Below Figure 2 shows Bombay rupee with small incuse "B".



Figure 2: Bombay Rupee with Small Incuse "B"

Another Bombay issue featured a raised "B," where the mint mark protruded above the surface of the coin. This was a shift from the incuse method and was likely an attempt to create greater clarity and durability of the mark. Figure 3 shows Bombay rupee with small raised "B".



Figure 3: Bombay Rupee with Small Raised "B"

Bombay later adopted a subtler approach by placing a small dot on the stem of the lotus-bud on the reverse of the rupee. This minimalistic mark served the purpose of mint identification without cluttering the design. Figure 4 shows Bombay rupee with dot on lotus-bud stem.



Figure 4: Bombay Rupee with Dot on Lotus-Bud Stem

### 5. Calcutta Minted Four Dots Rupee

A rare variety of the Calcutta issue features only four dots in the Persian inscription, rather than the usual five. Scholars suggest that this occurred because the engraver, unfamiliar with Persian script, omitted a dot. Figure 5 shows Calcutta four dots rupee.



Figure 5: Calcutta Four Dots Rupee

An even scarcer variety is the three dots rupee, in which two dots are missing. Like the four dots rupee, this was likely caused by engraver error. Its rarity makes it one of the most sought-after Edwardian rupees among collectors. Figure 6 shows Calcutta three dots rupee.



Figure 6: Calcutta Three Dots Rupee

The coexistence of six-rupee types in a single year is highly unusual in numismatic history. From a technical perspective, the Bombay Mint's progression from incuse to raised marks, and eventually to a subtle dot, reflects experimentation in minting practices. These changes were likely motivated by both functional and aesthetic concerns, as mint marks had to be visible yet unobtrusive.

The engraver errors leading to the four-dot and three-dot rupees highlight the challenges of colonial minting in a multilingual environment. Engravers unfamiliar with Persian script made mistakes that resulted in varieties now treasured by collectors. Such mistakes underscore the human element within industrial coin production.

From a numismatic standpoint, rarity and error varieties greatly enhance collector interest and market value. Auction records show that while standard Calcutta issues are relatively common, the three dot variety commands significant premiums. Collectors

value these coins not just for their silver content but for their historical uniqueness. Historically, the six types rupees of 1903 symbolize a transitional moment in Indian coinage. They reflect the coronation of a new monarch, the experimentation of mints, and the interplay of colonial administration with indigenous cultural forms. Coins thus serve as both economic tools and cultural documents, embodying the complexities of empire.

### Conclusion

The six-rupee varieties of 1903 minted under King Edward VII represent a remarkable chapter in British Indian numismatics. They embody a blend of intentional minting practices and accidental engraver errors, producing diversity within a single year's coinage. These coins illustrate the technological experimentation of colonial mints, the symbolic assertion of imperial authority, and the inadvertent human errors that created enduring rarities.

For collectors, these coins remain valuable artifacts, commanding attention and premiums in auctions. For historians, they offer insights into the material culture of empire and the intersections of technology, politics, and artistry. Future research might expand by examining metallurgical composition or comparing Edwardian issues in India with those in other British colonies. Ultimately, the six-rupee types of 1903 demonstrate the richness of numismatic research and affirm the coin's role as both a monetary instrument and a historical artifact.

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