CHAPTER-IV

ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDINGS OF MAINAMATI

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Introduction

The Mainamati excavations have discovered a large number of valuable archaeological findings. It has thrown a flood of light on the history of Samatata Mandala from 6th to 13th centuries A.D. As many as 400 specimens of gold, silver and copper coins of various types and sizes were found. Except a few, all of them were recovered from an early occupation level of the monastic cells of the Salvan Vihara. A large number of terracotta plaques in various designs were recovered from Mainamati-Lalmai hill range. These specimens of terracotta plaques were mostly found in loose conditions from Salvan Vihara, Kutila Mura, Ananda Vihara, and Carpatra Mura excavations. These plaques represent the popular folk art of Bangladesh. Huge quantity of pottery was recovered from archaeological sites of Mainamati- Lalmai area. Most of them were found from the first and second construction and reconstruction level of Salvan Vihara. A large number of Bronze images and two stone images were found from this area. It is worth remembering that there are no rocks and good stone to be found in Mainamati - Lalmai hill range and even in Bangladesh. Due to these artifacts, the Mainamati-Lalmai hill range is wellknown among scholars. These artifacts of varied types the objects of the everyday life of the people- inform us about the culture and civilizational tendencies of these people.

HISTORICAL RE-CONSTRUCTION ON THE BASIS OF INSCRIBED COINS

Ancient coins are one of the most important sources for the archaeologist for the reconstruction of history. Nearly two hundred years ago, the historical information about the South Eastern Bengal was almost nil. In 1803 A.D., a copper

FIGURE NO. 1 : GOLD COINS

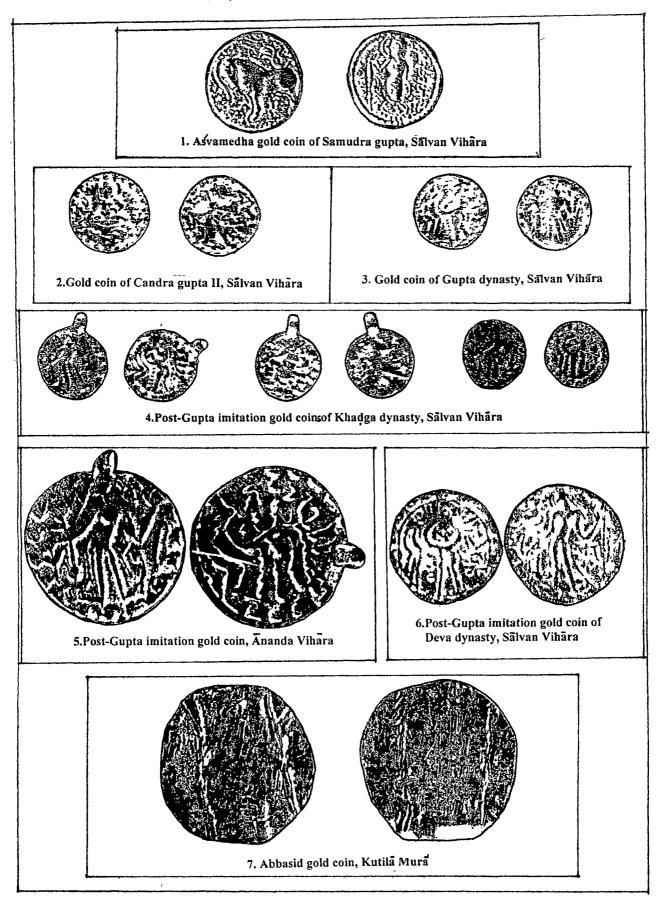


plate was accidentally found on Mainamati hill range and the history started revealing itself to the scholars. The first regular excavation was started in 1955 on this hill range. From Mainamati excavations we have recovered over 400 specimens of gold, silver and copper-coins of various types and sizes. Except a few, all of them were discovered from an early occupation level of the monastic cells of the Sālvan Vihāra. The vast majority of these are silver coins.Gold coins are few in numbers. These coins are important as some of them represent the earliest coins found from stratigraphical levels in this region. The large number of silver coins represent the local culture and tradition, and are therefore, more important and valuable. The gold coins include five Gupta, three Khadga, a dozen post Gupta "imitation" type and one Abbasid specimens¹.

Two gold coins belong to the imperial Guptas of the earliest date. One of them, found from Sālvan Vihāra depicts on its obverse an uncaparisoned horse bent infront of a post placed on an ornamental pedestal and on the reverse a female figure. This has been identified as Aśvamedha coin of Samudragupta (c. 335 - 375 A.D) on the basis of the motif and a short legend inscribed on the reverse².

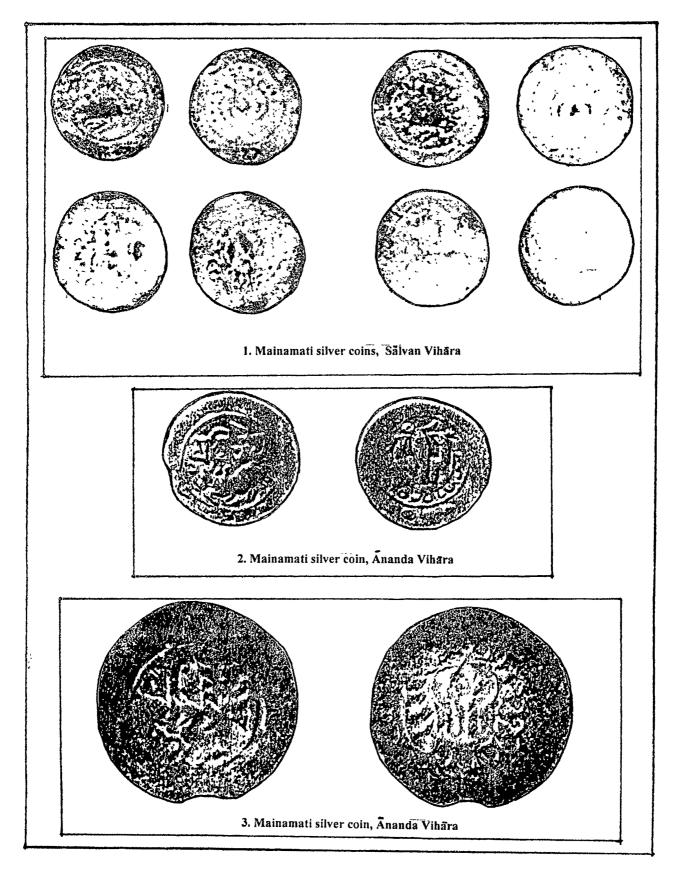
The other three Gupta coins are found amongst a hord from another cell of Sālvan Vihāra. One of them represents the well-known Laksmi and Archer type. This has been identified as a coin of Candra Gupta II (c. 376-415 A.D.). The coin is not in a good state of preservation. Yet it is distinguished by the purity of its metal and the artistic excellence of its style. The Laksmi and Archer type coins, characteristically Indian in style and designs, remain an exclusive model for the gold currency of Eastern India for more than three centuries.

Three gold coins, with characteristics similar to the above mentioned coins of
Candra Gupta II (c-376 - 415 AD) which are recovered from Sālvan Vihāra are
imitations. Two of these coins with another adulterate-metaled-coin belong to
Bālabhatta who was probably a prince of the Khadga dynasty³.

These Archer type imitation gold coins found from Salvan Vihara are the most interesting. There is a legend on the coins, which has been rendered as *Sri Vahgāla Mrganka*. These coins are associated with three other gold coins of the Khadga

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FIGURE NO. 2 : SILVER COINS



dynasty and six golden earrings from Salvan Vihara. The legend, *Sri Vangāla Mrganka* is also found on the top of the Anandadeva copper plate of Salvan Vihara, Mainamati. *Srī Vangāla Mrganka* was probably the royal title of the Deva rulers. If both the readings are correct then we may conclude that the coin was issued by one of the early Deva rulers in imitation of the Gupta coins. These beautiful imitation coins indicate the prosperous condition of the South - Eastern Bengal under the Devas.

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Another gold coin recovered from Kutila Mura excavation in 1957 belongs to the last Abbasid Caliph Abu Ahmed Abdullah Mustaasim Billah (1242-1258 A.D.). It was found in a good state of preservation though it was very thin. The discovery of this coin may indicate good trade relations between the Arab countries and Samatata during the pre-Muslim period.

The prosperous condition of Samatata is particularly noticed by the recovery of a large number of silver coins from the interior cells of the Salvan Vihara. Here 224 silver coins were found from two hoards. All of them bear an image of crouching Bull on the obverse and of Trident, Sun and Moon on the reverse. The portion above the Bull contains two types of legends: In some it is 'Pattikera', in others it is 'Lalitakera Dharma Vijaya'. Except these legends all the coins are identical in every other detail. It is to be noted that eight silver coins have been found in Sylhet and adjacent to the north eastward of Comilla district. All of them have a single line of inscription. David W MacDowell read, the legend of these eight silver coins as 'Yārikriya'⁴ But Dani A.H, later on, read as 'Pattikera' and ascribed them to the Candra rulers of East Bengal⁵. All of them are similar to the silver coins of Mainamati.

Now, we know Patțikera to be a city in the Samatața Mandala⁶. It could also be a district. But we hardly know anything about any city called Lalitakera. The difficulty is aggravated by the presence of the words "Dharma" and "Vijaya" alongwith it Lalitakera could possibly be a city like Patțikera. But what do we take "Dharma-Vijaya" to mean ? Is it a name of any person ? Or does it suggest some event of religious significance occuring in a city ? Or could it mean that the whole city of Lalitakera embraced some religion, possibly Buddhism, and coins were issued to mark that event? We are at present in no position to make any definite or even positive statement in this regard.

Phayre has described some Arakanese⁷ coins. Dani⁸ feels that" in type, fabric and also in some of the coin legends there is a close similarity between them (i.e. The Arakanese silver coins and Mainamati silver coins bearing the "Lalitakera Dharma Vijaya"legend). Is this an indication to suggest some sort of relationship between the Arakanese Candras and the Candras of South-East Bengal? At least the present copper plates⁹ do not hint at this at all". So far Dani appears to be correct. But at another place he suggests that these coins must have been issued by the Candra kings of South - East Bengal.¹⁰

But this seems to be in contradiction of the available facts:

(1) The Candra dynasty ruled over South-East Bengal during 900 to 1050 A.D. According to Dani,¹¹ however, the coins are found in the archaeological layers of 7th-8th century. The coins thus seem to belong to an era, which was earlier than that of the Candra dynasty.

(2) Even the Palaeography of these coins indicates an age prior to the Candra dynasty Era¹².

(3) The images of Trident, Sun, Moon, and Bull etc, all indicate to the Hindu religion of the issuing king preferably his Saiva leanings.

(4) Silver coins of similar type have been found from the earlier phase of Ānanda Rājā's Palace excavation.

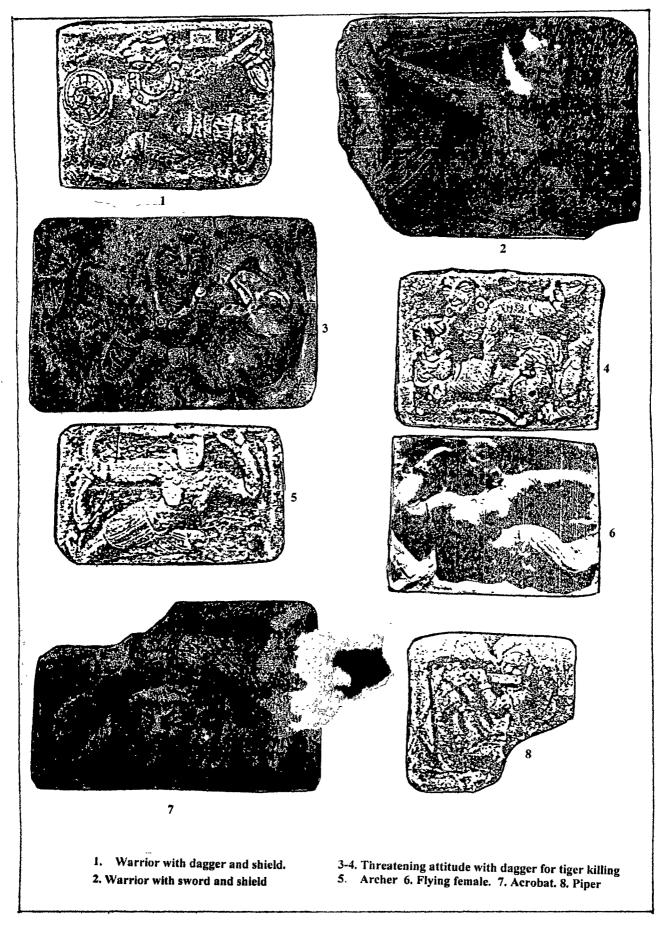
The overlord of this area in the 7-8th century was the great king Ananda Deva. The Mainamati copper-plate of Ananda Deva is also found from the same place of excavation of Salvan Vihara from where the coins are found. The copper-plate indicates the date of Ananda Deva as 7th - 8th centuries and the coins are also found from the archaeological layers of the same period. Therefore, very likely, Ananda Deva of Deva dynasty was the issuer of these coins. Even the ancestors of Candra kings must have been present at that time, but they must have been very minor,

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FIGURE NO. 3 : TERRACOTTA PLAQUES



FIGURE NO. 4 : TERRACOTTA PLAQUES



insignificant royalty, and could not have issued the currency, particularly costly currency like silver coins.

From all these evidences and the large number of their occurance, their association and find-spot, a strong indication that the coins were issued by some powerful and prosperous ruler of Samatata, probably, Sri Ananda Deva of Deva dynasty.

Two other coins, one silver and one gold, are of great interest as these belong to the Abbasid rulers of Baghdad. Both are inscribed with the Muslim creed in Kufic Arabic¹³. The silver coin found from the early level of the Salvan Vihara is in a damaged condition. It is undecipherable.

Very few copper coins are discovered in Mainamati excavations, which include a unique post Gupta "imitation" specimen.

The discovery of various types of coins and some gold ornaments from Mainamati excavations indicate the prosperity of the Buddhist Vihāras in those days. It appears that these coins must have been given as donations to the Vihāras by the devotees.

HISTORICAL RE-CONSTRUCTION ON THE BASIS OF TERRACOTTA PLAQUES

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A Large number of terracotta plaques in various designs recovered from Mainamati- Lalmai hill range belong to the early Deva dynasty (C. 7th-8th century A.D.). Most of these were found in loose conditions from Salvan Vihāra, Kutilā Murā, Ānanda Vihāra and Cārpatra Murā excavations. These plaques are now on display in Mainamati Museum, Comilla. All these plaques are fashioned out of fine alluvial clay.

It is well known that there are no rocks to be found in the Mainamati - Lalmai hill range, and in fact, in the whole of the Bangladesh. The local artists had, therefore, of necessity to fall back upon the alluvial clay, modelling for giving expression to their art. The fact is that the terracotta plaques found in the Mainamati - Lalmai area are the oldest specimens of this art in the entire Bangladesh area; it also automatically follows that these plaques are not influenced by the stylistic or thematic peculiarities of the plaques from other areas of Bangladesh. In other words, the plaques found in this area are the oldest specimen among those in Bangladesh and possess very individual characteristics entirely uninfluenced by the style of plaques from other areas; in fact, these specimen appear to have exercised strong influence upon later models found in the other areas of Bangladesh.

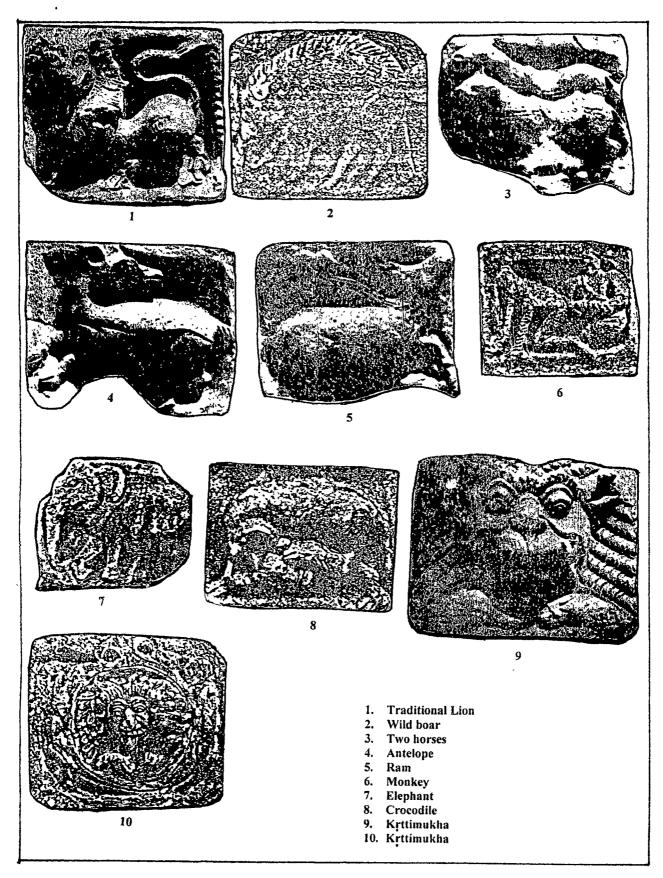
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The themes of the terracotta plaques are drawn from the daily life of the people-from all creations of God and nature in their various stages of activity, emotion, movement etc. This art shows clearly the popular folk-art of that period. Divine and semi-divine beings, hybrids, flying Gandharvas, Apsarases, Kinnaras and Kinnaris, Kimpurusas, Vidyādharas and Yaksas among the demi-gods, mythical creatures and composite animals, men, women and children either engaged in various activities of life or at rest, warriors, archers, acrobats balancing bodies on their hands, musicians with their instruments, Makaras and Krttimukhas¹⁴, dancers, sages, and ascetics, monkeys and apes, birds, beasts, fish, animal fables, flowers and plants, and domestic and family studies are represented with all their local and ethical characteristics.

Among human beings, these plaques show the creative mind of the artists depicting warriors in action with dagger and shield, with sword and shield, threatening attitude with dagger for killing tiger and archers with bow and arrow etc, offering interesting materil for study. Besides these, flying female figures, amorous couples, piper and acrobats are fairly common.

Among animals, lion, wild boar, horse, antelope, ram with a flying scarf, monkey, elephants, crocodiles and Krttimukhas, are popular. The lions are depicted in majestic style. Running horses are good specimen of naturalistic representations. The crocodile and fish represent the aquatic world. Krttmukhas, decorating the corners of building, represent two crouching lions with double bodies on both sides of the corner.

FIGURE NO. 5 : TERRACOTTA PLAQUES



Snake is represented in a few plaques. One plaque in the southern basement of the wall of the central shrine of Salvan Vihara depicts a small mongoose fighting a big hooded snake. This plaque shows the natural movement of the two natural enemies.

Among birds, peacocks and swans (Rājhańsas) are represented in many plaques. A swan holding a string of pearls and another eating a stem of lotus are highly artistic. Another plaque shows a lady seated with her right hand resting on her thigh and left hand touching her head as bemoaning attitude. This would recall a familiar Indian mode of expression of grief or pensiveness.

A large number of plaques representing plant and flowers are also found from different sites of this area. Various forms of lotus have been depicted. Besides the conventional lotus there are representations of full- blown lotuses with bud, with a bird on its top (lotus symbolizing moon and Sun.) and so on.

A number of terracotta plaques depict Buddha, Stupå, Triratna, Makarmukha, Semi-Divine and unearthly figures including Kinnari, Gandharva, Vidyādhara, Kimpurusa, Yaksa and a composite animal with a bird's beak on a crocodile's head. Semi-Divine beings, such as Kinnara with human head and bird's body and wings, Kinnara with human body and horse-head, Gandharva as a celestial musician, playing a damaru and Gandharva (or perhaps a human being) beating time on a pitcher and Vidyādharas hovering in the sky with garlands in their hands from the subjects treated on a number of terracotta plaques recovered from the central mound of Bhoj Vihāra, Sālvan Vihāra and Ānada Vihāra.

A plaque showing the Buddha seated in *Vajrāsana* with right hand in *Bhūmisparśa* attitude and another representing **Padmapāni** seated in *Mahārājā-lilā pose* with **Kundalas** in the ears, braided hair in curls, right hand resting on the ground and left holding lotus by its stalk are the best specimens of the heretic religious art of Bengal prevalent under the Palas. Representations of the demi-gods form the majority. Vidyādhars are depicted on three best specimens. A Vidyādhari forming part of a Vidyādhara couple hovering in the sky forms the subject matter of yet another plaque that reminds one of the Gupta style of art. While Vidyādharas are

FIGURE NO. 6 : TERRACOTTA PLAQUES

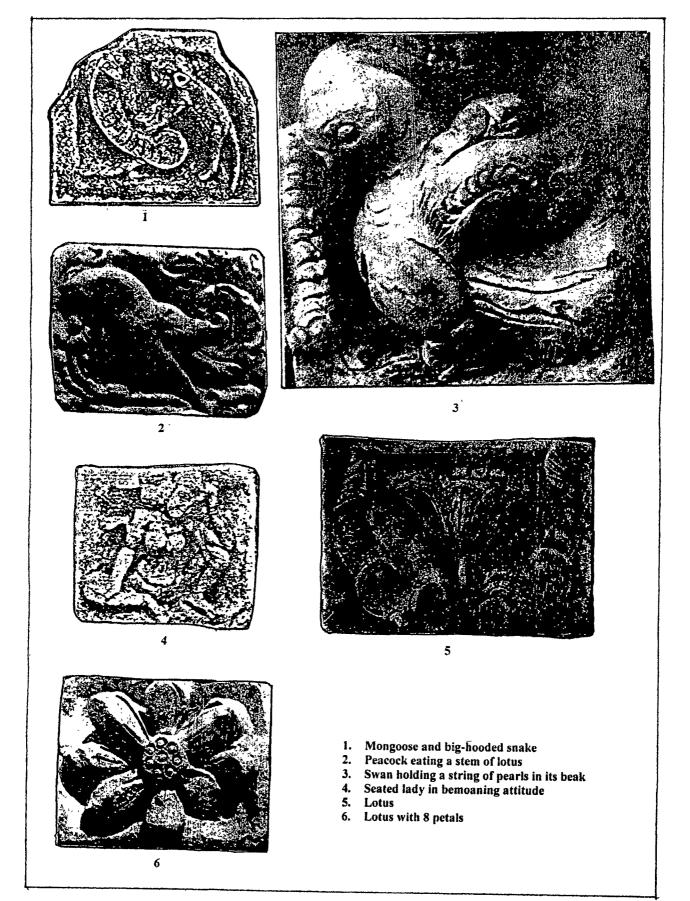
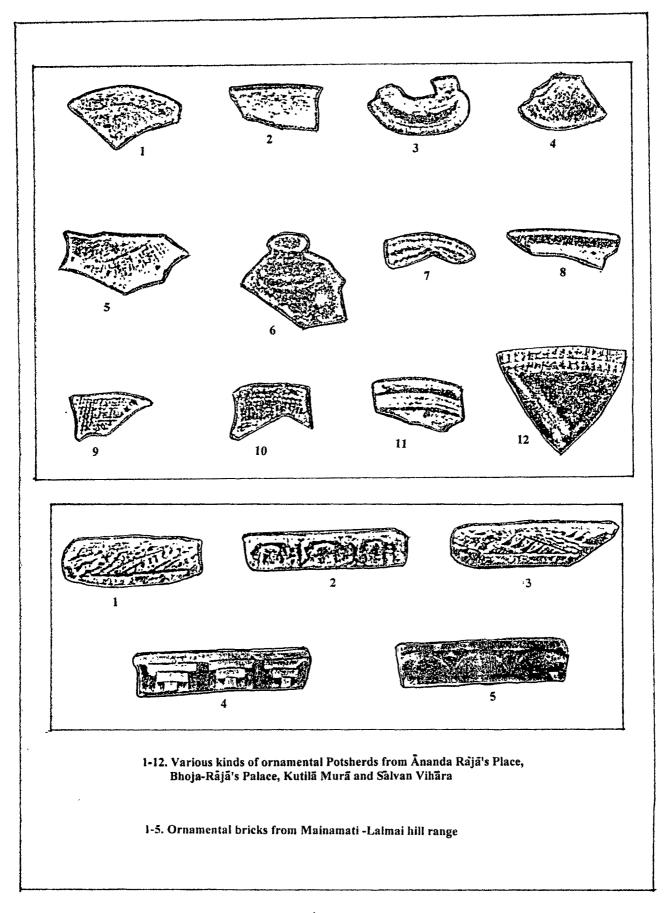


FIGURE NO. 7 : POTTERY AND BRICKS



human, the Gandrvas and Kinnaras are hybrid in character. Certain texts describe a Kinnara as one with human figure and head of horse, or horse's body and the head of a man. Other texts draw a distinction between Kinnara and Kimpurusa by ascribing horse-head and human body to the Kinnara and human head and horse body to the Kimpurusa¹⁵.

The Mainamati plaques represent the popular folk art of Bangladesh with little or no direct relation with any other art. Their features recur in reliefs from Paharpur, Mahasthan, Sabhar and many other sites lying scattered all over Bangladeh and approximately datable to the 8th-9th centuries A.D. Since the Mainamati reliefs are undoubtedly earlier in date and since the Paharpur series and others show some definite development in technique and style, this remarkable art may have originated in this region under the patronage of the well-known Buddhist dynasties of Samatata. These crude, light-hearted unreflective works, deep-rooted in the folk art of Bangladesh represent an indigenous style with a distinct local character and development. It is an uncouth but vigorous style, often heavy and lacking in knowledge but is, nevertheless, expressive in a naive and direct fashion.

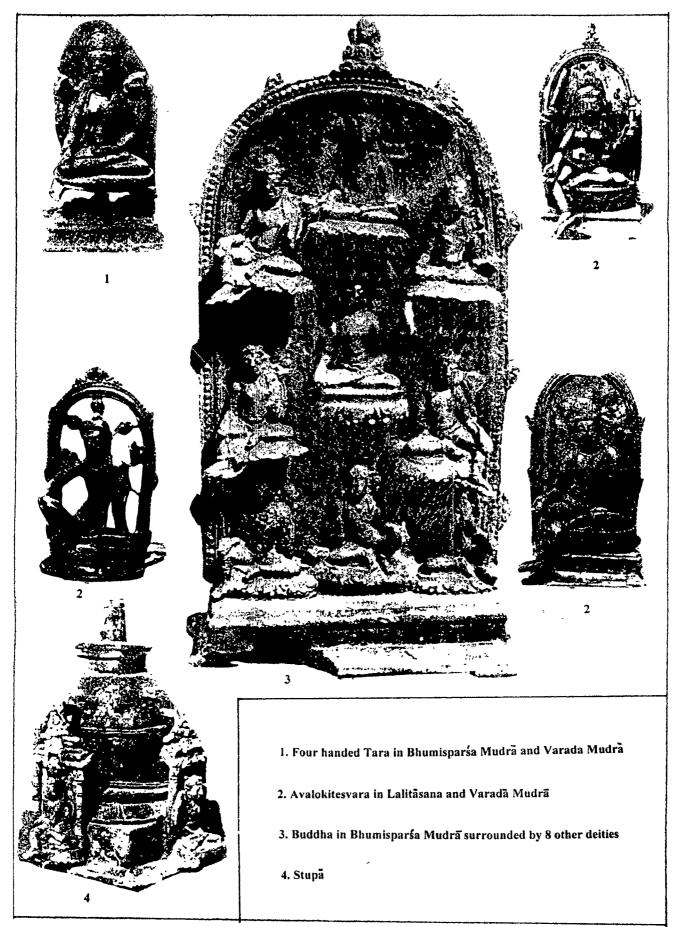
This exceptionally rich plastic art of Bangladesh reflects a faithful picture of the prevailing social and cultural life of the people. We can also get a clear idea about their religious practices, their mode of life, dress, ornaments, etc.

HISTORICAL RE-CONSTRUCTION ON THE BASIS OF POTTERY

It is well known that pottery is the most important artifact and is most widely distributed among the sites. For a good study, it is essential to collect sherds systematically from all the sites. Pottery has been recovered from sixteen of the 38 sites located in or immediately adjacent to the Maimanati-Lalmai hill range. The pottery was collected under varying conditions, but always with the intention of producing a representative sample at each location. After washing, drying, sorting and numbering, these representative samples were prepared for the study. Various FIGURE NO. 8 : BRONZE IMAGES



FIGURE NO. 9 : BRONZE IMAGES



representative types of pottery were found from only two or three of sixteen sites. Four types of common pottery (i. e. pink, pale brown, reddish yellow and light gray) were found from each of the sixteen sites. Besides these another type of pottery (i.e. chalky gray, fine reddish yellow, thick dark gray, corded brown) is also found at some sites. Large numbers of pottery are found from large structural sites, which are older in age. Smaller numbers are found from small sites, which are later. The study of pottery thus suggests periods of construction and usage.

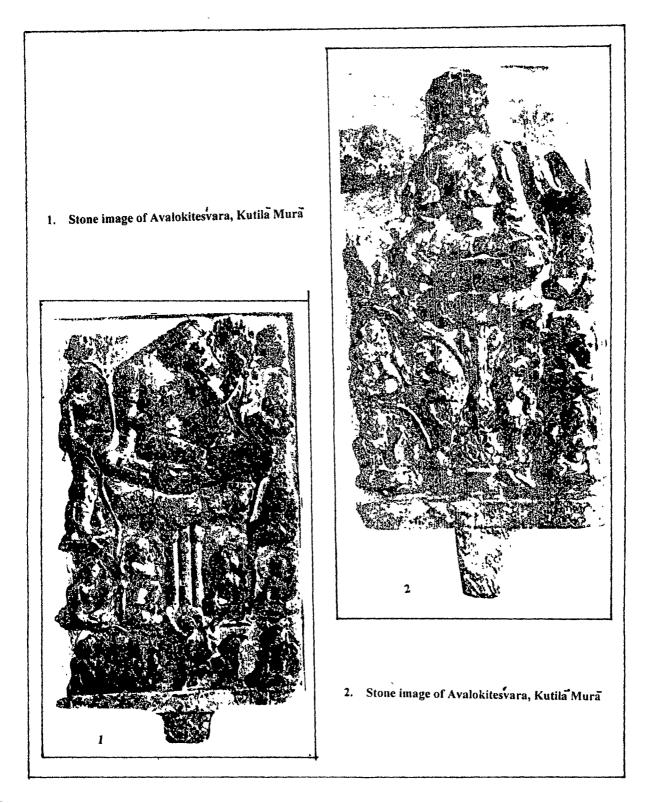
The large monastic sites i.e. Sālvan Vihāra (ST. 24), Bhoj Vihara (ST. 16) Ānanda Vihāra (ST. 12) and Rūpbān Murā (ST.21) were built early. Sālvan Vihāra apparently continued to be in intensive use for a longer time than the other large monasteries. The Palace site i.e. Queen Mainamati's Palace Mound (ST.1), had a long period of active use and was probably contemporaneous with all of the other structural sites. Other large shrines Cārpatra Murā (ST. 8) and Ābbās Ali Murā (ST. 6) were probably later in construction and use. There are not enough grounds for dating the hill top sites.

HISTORICAL RE-CONSTRUCTION ON THE BASIS OF ICONS

A. Bronze Images

Large numbers of bronze images are found from Mainamati area. It has been brought to light that brick hunters recovered seven pots containing hundreds of votive images of Buddha in bronze from Rupban Mura. Later on only thirteen of these could be recovered from them. All the images represent Buddha in *Bhumispars'a Mudrā* and are very small in size. The height of these tiny images is about 2" to 14". The iconographic details and workmanship of these images are similar to those of the inscribed votive bronzes recovered from Jhewary in Chittagong District, assignable to the ninth-eleventh centuries A. D¹⁶. A large number of bronze images were also recovered from the excavations carried out in Salvan Vihara. All of these represent Buddha, **Bodhisattva** and Tara. Among the discovered images, *Dhyānī* Buddha is

FIGURE NO. 10 : STONE IMAGES



found in *Bhumisparśa Mudra*^{*i*} i. e. right hand is in earth-touching attitude and left on the lap. Three images of Buddha Amitābha are found in *Dhyānīmudrā* seated on lotus. Bodhisattva Padmapāni is found sitting a cross-legged posture on lotus. Bodhisattva Manjusri is found sitting in stretched-legs attitude attended by two deities and *Dhyani* Buddha on the top. Another type of Avalokiteśvara is found in *Lalitāsana* seated on lotus. There are also found eight handed Mahāpratisāra and four handed Tārā seated on lotus with stretching right leg and left folded on right lap. Eight-handed Mahapratisara is very interesting. Images of Avalokiteśvara are also found in *Lalitāsana* and *Varadamudra*. Image of Buddha surrounded by 8 other deities is found in *Bhumisparsamudra* seated on lotus.

The composition of Mainamati bronze images shows a peculiar regional or local characteristic feature probably, because of the freedom adopted by the local artists. It is also to be noted that all the sculptures represent *Tantric* gods and goddesses. Tantric Buddhist images, belonging to 8th and 9th centuries, are rare even in the great Buddhist centres like Bodh Gaya, Kukrihar and Nalanda¹⁷. Among the *Tantric* gods and goddesses, some of the Mainamati bronze images appear to be earlier in date.

B. Stone Images

There are no rocks and good stone to be found in the Mainamati-Lalmai hill range and all over in Bangladesh. Therefore, only two stone images have been discovered from the central stupa of Kutila Mura. But no other stone images were found from any other sites of Mainamati-Lalmai hill range, including the excavated sites. These two stone sculptures are made from soft gray stone. They are made probably by some local artist. Stone images of similar type were also found from the surrounding places of Mainamati-Lalmai hill range. All the images indicate the spiritual faith and feelings and the distinctive characteristic of the art and culture of southeast Bengal i.e. Samatata. Both of the discovered images are of Avalokitesvara. In one of these images, groups of miniature Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and other deities surround the central image of lord Avalokites/vara. The pedestal of the images is depicted with devotees on the sides. Avalokites/vara with his attendants is seated on lotus above the pedestal. The entire lotus has long lotus stalks. Another image is also decorated with miniature attendants. Both the images bear short inscriptions in the central part of their pedestals. On palaeographical consideration, the sculptures have been dated to the 7th century A.D¹⁸. The style, decoration and ornamentation of both these images indicate a close relation with the Gupta art. It is to be noted that the influence of Gupta art was strong in Bengal throughout the 7th century A.D. But the local artists of Samatata tried to give a personal stylistic expression to their art.

MINOR OBJECTS

A large number of minor objects have been recovered from Mainamati area. Terracotta objects, toys, beads, net sinkers, small figurines, a large number of ornamental bricks in various sizes, earthenware, pots, oil lamps and utensils, semiprecious stone beads, buttons, red ochre, weights, grinding stones, bronze relic caskets, bronze and copper vessels, gold and silver ornaments, bronze bangles, circular pieces of silver ingots, iron nails, glass and shell objects and fossilized wood have been recovered from Mainamati-Lalmai area. All these minor objects throw good deal of light on the life style of the contemporary people of this region.

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- 10. Dani A.H, J. N. S.I., Vol-XXIV, 1962, PP-141-142.
- 11. Dani A.H, P. A., No 3, 1966, PP-27.
- 12. Alam A.K.M Shamsul, Mainamati, 1982, PP- 59.
- 13. Ibid, P- 59
- 14. The Scholars (Vide: B.A., 1979, P. 79) refer to this terracotta as 'Krttimukha' but this seems unusual. Krtti means 'skin of an antelope or tiger, used by sages or their pupils to sit upon for study' (cf. Amarakosa, II, 7.46, Sabdakalpadruma, Vol -II, P- 176, Dictionaries of M.Monier Williams, P-304 and V.S.Apte, P- 371). The word Kirtti seems to have been used here in its etymological sense (from Krt-'Cut' meaning a devouring animal, a carnivore; it is noteworthy in this connection that the head in these terracotta strongly resembles that of a lion or a tiger. Hence, Krttimukha 'tiger-head.')

- 15. Vacaspatya, Bhagavata Purana, Book VII, Chapter 20; but Visnudharmottara (Book III, Chapter 42, and Verses 13-14) recognizes two classes of Kinnara- one with horse body and human head and the other *vice versa*. But the Manasara, which is a standard work on this subject, describes the Kinnara as 'a being with legs of animals, upper body like that of man' face with Garuda features, arms provided with wings, the crown decorated lotus etc.
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