

CHAPTER - VII

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Mainamati, the name of a village and a union, is a very familiar historic place situated in Burichang Thana of Comilla district in Bangladesh. This union consists of 23 villages. Mainamati is a small strip of hilly land but it is extra-ordinarily rich in transferable and non-transferable archaeological evidences and was one of the most important historical and religious centres in the eastern part of ancient India (at present a part of Bangladesh). The area, located in the centre of the ancient Samatāṭa Maṇḍala, was politically very significant in ancient times and gave birth to many popular ballads and folk literature. The greatest assemblage of ancient Buddhist remains lies in the Mainamati-Lalmai hill range. It extends for 11 miles north-south from Mainamati village on the Gumati river in the north to Caṇḍī Murā near Lalmai Railway Station in the south and is about 25 miles in circumference. In its widest parts, the ridge is about five miles across and its highest peaks attain a height of 150 feet in a few places, but the average elevation is 40 feet above the plains and 90 feet above sea-level; the highest peaks are Kalir Bazar and Caṇḍī Murā. Like the Barind and Madhupur Tract, this ridge represents a small mass of quasi-lateritic old alluvium. These high lands were formerly thickly wooded with an abundance of wild life, but land-hungry local farmers have now pushed back the forest to the highest points and to the patches of Śāl trees on the slopes. An interesting material found scattered all over the hill range is fossilwood. It shows the ancient characteristic of this area.

This place was named after Mainamati only a few hundred years back. Till to-day, no historical or epigraphical evidences for giving this name to this place are found. According to some legends and ballads, Queen Mainamati gave birth to prince Gopicand. Some scholars have identified Gopicand with Govinda Candra of Candra

dynasty of Samatāṭa Maṇḍala. But it is strongly contended that Mainamati did not give birth to Govinda Candra, son of Laḍaha Candra. Most probably the village Mainamati has come to light from the name of Queen Mainamti, mother of Gopicand, the ruler of Mrikul.

According to inscriptional evidences the kingdom of Samatāṭa was very well-known from 4th century A.D. A number of foreign travellers visited Samatāṭa and described its rich geographical details and political and socio-cultural activities. Most probably the area of Kiā-mo-laṅ-kiā mentioned by Yuang Chwang (7th century) and Komalā of Vāyu Pūrāṇa, are the same. It is generally accepted that Kiā-mo-laṅ-kiā and Komalā are the present district of Comilla. Comilla was under the ancient state of Tripura. A study of the ancient maps by Pargiter, Thomas Watter, John D. Byaros, Svanson D. Ababil, Phon-den Brook and Rennel, indicates the position of the Comilla district which is situated on the northern side of the Bay of Bengal and the eastern side of the River Lauhitya i.e. Brahmaputra.

The geological analysis shows that the existence of Madhupur Clay of Pleistocene Epoch which is observed around the bottom of Mainamati-Lalmai hill range. The soil of this region is roughly called reddish-yellow coloured clay or sandy soil. From the middle stage of Tertiary era i.e. from the Miocene Epoch, nearly 40,000 feet long alluvium bed has settled in this region forming its bottom as foundation. The bottom foundation of this district is estimated to be nearly 3 crore years old i.e. formed during Miocene Epoch.

Most of the natural environments on geological structural formation of this district are the gift of the river system. From ancient times, numerous rivers and streams are flowing over this district helping the work of its formation. After all, the rivers, from ancient times, have been contributing to the natural land formation.

The line of the Tropic of Cancer passes over the Comilla district. So the entire district is under the influence of the tropical environment. Naturally, tropical monsoonal climate is observed here. The climate of this district is comfortable and

healthy. Due to this reason, human habitation has come up in this area from very ancient times. No direct evidence has been found of the people who lived in Mainamati- Lalmai region but the assemblage of the ancient and archaeological sites shows its ancient historic relations with the present. Speaking about its richness in archaeological evidences, it is mentionable that more than fifty sites are traced in this hill range. Out of fifty, thirty-eight are archaeological or ancient brick structures classified into monasteries, large shrines, administrative site, hill-top mound, non-structural sites and water reservoirs. Brief descriptions of these sites are given to show that they cover a span of nearly 8 centuries from 6th to 13th. The remaining 12 sites do not possess any structural evidences or minimal heights required to call them archaeological remains. It is believed that most of these buildings were used for controlling the political and socio-cultural activities of south-east Bengal. The large number of such ancient structures indicate that the powerful Buddhist dynasties ruled over this area from 6th to 13th century A.D. A large number of cultural material and artifacts have been exposed from the abandoned sites of this area, which suggests that this area was densely populated. The art and architecture of the artifacts found here represent the characteristic peculiarities of the local artists of south east Bengal.

From the sixth century through the thirteenth century A.D, two major historic phases can be distinguished. The first phase was marked by the establishment and successive enlargement of Buddhist monasteries. The second phase is defined by the structures of small temples.

In the first phase from the 6th to 8th century, a large Buddhist centre had developed in the Mainamati region. A large number of artifacts were found during excavation in various sites. These include copper plates, silver and gold coins, bronze images caskets and utensils and other metal objects, pottery, terracotta plaques and a number of various minor objects accumulated over the centuries. There are traced seven large monasteries named (1) Army Bunglow Vihāra (St-4) (2) Ānanda Rājā's

Palace(St-12) (3) Rūpbān Kanyā's Palace (St-15) (4) Bhoj Rājā's Palace (St-16) (5) Kotbāri Murā (St-20) (6) Rūpbān Murā (St-21) and (7) Sālvanpur Mound (St- 24).

These seven large monasteries can be dated to 6th to 8th century A.D. when the Buddhist religion, political and socio-cultural relations were flourishing not only in Mainamati but almost in entire ancient India.

In the second phase, 10th to 13 th century, Mainamati -Lalmai area lost its political autonomy for a short time. As a result, the political support for the monasteries dwindled as Vaiṣṇava shrines gained their place. The copper-plate grants of Candra dynasty donating property in the Samatāṭa Maṇḍala were issued from Vikramapura, forty miles to the west from Mainamati. The Candras were the rulers of Vaṅga, Vaṅgāla, Candradvīpa, Samatāṭa and Harikela regions. But their capital was in Vikramapura. It seems that the old capital city of Devaparvata and cities like Kripura, Vasantapura and Karmānta were neglected by Candra rulers. By the time of Candra rulers, the size of the buildings and the budgets were reduced. The amount of the donated lands was also reduced.

The ruins of Mainamati -Lalmai hill range remind us of the forgotten city of Pattikera, of the capital city- the "Camp of Victory"- Devaparvata, Kripura, Vasantapura and Karmānta, Rohitagiri and Lālāmbivana. From the discussion of the ruins of Mainamati it has come to light that these structures were mostly used for religious purposes from 6th to 13th century A.D.

Mainamati excavations have unearthed a large number of artifacts which are valuable for re-constructing the historical co-relation in the time and space of this area. The copper-plate grants discovered from Mainamati are twelve in all. Out of the twelve copper-plate grants, five are heavily corroded and impossible to deciphered. The remaining seven grants disclose valuable information for reconstructing the historical, geographical and socio- cultural relations. Seven other epigraphs - three copper plate grants of Sri Candradeva and four stone image inscriptions which are found not actually from the area under study but from a nearby area are also included because they provide good material for reconstructing the dynastic

chronology and historical co-relations of the ruling dynasty of Samatata Mandala. On the basis of these evidences the entire thesis presents the geographical, political, chronological lineage and the socio-cultural status of various ruling dynasties of Samatata Manadala and the nearby area.

Mainamati excavations have thrown a flood of light on the history of Samatata Mandala. As many as 400 specimens of gold, silver and copper coins of various types and size are found. Except a few, all of them are recovered from an early occupation level of the monastic cells of Salvan Vihara. One gold coin has been identified as *Aśvamedha* coin of Samudragupta (c.335-375 A.D) on the basis of its motif and a short legend on its reverse. Out of the three Gupta gold coins, one represents the well-known Laksmi and Archer type. This has been identified with a coin of Candragupta II (c. 376-415 A.D). The Laksmi and Archer type coins, characteristically Indian in style and design remain an exclusive model for gold currency of eastern India for more than three centuries. Two imitation gold coins belong to one Balabhatta, probably a prince of the Khadga dynasty. A dozen of post-Gupta era imitation type gold coins are found from Salvan Vihara. There is a legend on the coins. It reads "Sri Vaṅgāla Mṛgaṅka". Most probably these coins were issued by the powerful Deva dynasty of Samatata Mandala. These beautiful imitation coins indicate the prosperous condition of the south east area of Bengal under the Devas.

224 silver coins were also found from the interior cells of the Salvan Vihara. All of them bear the images of a Trident, the Sun and the Moon on the reverse and an image of crouching bull (most probably Nandi) on the obverse. The portion above the bull contains two type of legends. In some it is **Pattikera**, in others it is **Lalitakera Dharma Vijaya**. It is concluded that the coins were issued by some powerful and prosperous rulers of Samatata, probably, Sri Ānanda Deva of Deva dynasty of Samatata. The discovery of various type of coins and some gold ornaments from Mainamati excavation indicate the prosperity of the Buddhist Vihāras in those days. It appears that these coins must have been given as donations to the Vihāra by the devotees.

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 Sālvan Vihāra, Kutilā Murā, Ānanda Vihāra and Cārpātra Murā excavations. These plaques represent the popular folk art of Bangladesh.

The themes of the terracotta plaques are drawn from the daily life of the people. This art shows clearly the popular folk art of that period depicting the motifs of divine and semi divine beings, hybrids, flying Gandharvas, Apsaras, Kinnaras and Yakṣas, mythical creatures and composite animals, men, women and children either engaged in various activities of life or at rest, warriors, musicians with their instruments, archers, acrobats balancing bodies on their hands, Makaras and Kṛttimukhas, dancers, sages and ascetics, monkeys and apes, birds, beasts, fish, animal fables, flowers and plants and other such domestic and family studies. They represent their local and ethical characteristics. The exceptionally rich plastic art of Bangladesh reflects a faithful picture of the prevailing social and cultural life, of the people. We can get a clear idea about their religious practices, their mode of life their dress and ornaments etc.

Huge quantity of pottery also was recovered from the archaeological sites of the Mainamati - Lalmai hill range. Most of them were found from the first and second construction and re-construction level of Sālvan Vihāra. The study of the pottery reveals that the seven large monasteries in this area were built early. The site of the Mainamati's Palace Mound had a long period of active use and was contemporaneous with all of other structural sites. The large shrines of Cārpātra Murā and Ābbās Ali Murā were probably latter in construction and use.

A large number of Bronze images and two stone images are also found from this area. The composition of Mainamati bronze images shows a peculiar local characteristic feature, probably because of the freedom adopted by the local artists. It is also observed 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 Nalanda. In view of these images of the Tantric gods and goddesses, some of the Mainamati bronze images appear to be earlier in date.

There are no rocks and good stone to be found Mainamati - Lalmai hill range and all over Bangladesh. Therefore, only two stone images were discovered from the central stupa of Kutilā Murā. The style, decoration and ornamentation of both the images indicate their close relation with the Gupta art. It is noted that the influence of Gupta art was strong throughout the 7th century A.D. in Bengal. But the local artists of Samatāṭa tried to give expression to their own style in their art. A large number of minor objects have also been discovered. These throw a good deal of light on the life style of the contemporary people of this region.

For the historical re-construction, the epigraphs copper-plates, coins, stone image inscriptions etc. are the most dependable and informative material. There are a total of 28 inscriptions related to the Mainamati Lalmai hill range or the adjacent area. They are discussed here for the purpose of correlating their data about the ruling dynasties of Samatāṭa Maṇḍala. The early history of Samatāṭa Maṇḍala is still not clear to us. There is no proper evidence about the people who first lived in this area. The classical epics and religious treatises refer to it as *Ārya-Pāṇḍava-Varjita-deśa*. However, we have some epigraphic evidences that many dynasties ruled over Samatāṭa Maṇḍala from 4th to 13th century A.D. We have a number of references to the Gupta, Rāta, Khadga, Bhadra, early Deva, Pāla, Candra, Varman, later Deva and Sena dynasties. Most of them ruled over Samatāṭa Maṇḍala directly and some like Pāla ruled indirectly.

The name Samatāṭa first appeared in the Allhabad posthumous stone pillar inscription of Samudra Gupta (mid 4th century). The independent existence of various territories of Bengal came to an end under the Gupta Empire in 4th century A.D. The whole of Bengal with the exception of Samatāṭa was definitely incorporated into the Gupta Empire by the time of Samudra Gupta. Vainya Gupta ruled over Eastern Bengal in 508 A. D. The study of the Gupta plates reveals that the south

eastern Bengal was included within the Gupta Empire up to the first decade of the 6th century A.D. Vainya Gupta's "Camp of Victory" was situated at Kripura somewhere in the Comilla district. He was a contemporary of Vijaya Sena and Gopacandra. Most probably, Vainya Gupta ruled over Vanga and some portion of Samatāṭa Mandala.

From copper-plate grants, it is clear that five generations of Khadga dynasty ruled over Samatata. Their camp of victory was first at Jayakarmanta and later on, it was shifted to Devaparvata. The Mainamati Palace is generally identified as Devaparvata.

The Khadgas are roughly placed in last three quarters of the 7th century A.D. The rule of the Bhadra dynasty over Samatāṭa was in the 7th century A.D. It may be suggested that the family was originally known as Khadga and when the name and fame of Silabhadra spread widely in the Buddhist world, the family also came to be known as Bhadras. There is a strong probability that the Khadgas were originally Brahminical Hindus and became Buddhists later on.

The Tippera copper-plate grant of Lokantha shows that Nātha dynasty ruled over some part of the south east Bengal in the second half of the seventh century A.D. We find six generations of the Nātha dynasty ruling in the south eastern Bengal. On the palaeographic considerations of the copperplate of Lokanātha and a close study of Rāta and Khadga copper-plates, it appears that Lokanātha may have belonged to the second half of 7th century A.D.

The history of Rāta dynasty is known from the Kailan copper-plate inscription of King Śrīdharana Rāta. Three generations of Rata have ruled over Samtāṭa about the second half of the seventh century A.D.

After Khadga, Bhadra and Rāta we have the dynasty of Devas. Five grants of Deva dynasty have given good material to re-constitute their lineage. Four generations of Deva dynasty are found mentioned by the grants. They ruled over Samatāṭa in the 8th century A.D.

From the ten copper-plate grants of the Candra dynasty it has come to light that

they ruled over Candradvipa, Harikela, Samatata, Vaṅgāla and Vaṅga from the last quarter of the ninth to the second quarter of the eleventh century A.D. They were the rulers of Rohitagiri i.e. Mainamati Lalmai hill range and Vikramapura was their "Camp of Victory." They were Buddhists by faith. Seven generations of this dynasty ruled over south east Bengal.

From the copper-plate grants of the later Deva dynasty, we find that six generations of Devas ruled over Samatata in the 13th century A.D.

In an attempt to re-construct the historical geography of ancient kingdom and different place names, the inscriptions have been our most dependable and informative sources. The greatest of the problems was to identify the place names found in the inscriptions. An attempt has been made (in ch. VI) to define the boundaries of the places names of which are listed in 3 separate categories- the 37 places names, five river names and seven kingdom names- with their relevant demarcating areas.

Thus, an attempt has been made here to put together all archaeological data found in the area of Mainamati-Lalmai hill range which is relatively very small but archaeologically very rich, also to bring in other relevant data found in the surrounding areas, and to make a systematic study of them, to attempt to reconstruct a historical overview of the political vicissitudes of this area and to portray the socio-religious scenes of the area in their bygone ages purely on the basis of the archaeological artifacts consisting mainly of the copper-plates(which are all without exception written in Sanskrit) and supported only in a minor way by other archaeological evidences like structural sites, pottery, coins, teracotta plaques, stone images and bronze idols etc. It is expected that the attempt which is made here for the first time will merit a general acceptance.