

## C H A P T E R - V

### Conclusion

Geographically, the area under study comprises the Dhaka and Chittagong divisions of the present-day Bangladesh, and generally designated respectively as Vaṅga and Samatāṭa in ancient times.

Chronologically, our investigation extends from about the 7th to the <sup>beginning of the</sup> 13th century A.D. During this period many an independent dynasty came to power in Vaṅga and Samatāṭa who professed either Brahmanism or Buddhism, but were by and large catholic enough to patronise the religions other than their own. Mahārāja Vainyagupta, the very first ruler during the period under review, who ruled over Samatāṭa in the first decade of the 6th century A.D., personally was a Śaiva, but he granted lands to the Buddhist Avalvarttika Saṅgha, belonging to the Mahāyāna sect. Similarly, Prabhāvatī, the queen-consort of Devakhaḍga of the Buddhist Khaḍga dynasty, who also ruled in Samatāṭa sometime between 67<sup>5</sup>/<sub>4</sub> and 700 A.D., caused an image of Sarvāṇī plated with gold. The religious catholicity of the Buddhist Pāla kings is too well known to need a detailed mention here as it has been discussed before and indeed some of them like Nayapāla betrayed a marked predilection for Brahmanical cult like Śaivism (supra, p. 120). Some of the Chandra rulers of the Buddhist persuasion also exhibited their veneration for Brahmanism (supra, p. 120). The Varmans and the Senas were orthodox Brahmanists, but there is no evidence

that they were hostile to the Buddhists. And indeed, on the contrary, Jayadeva, the court-poet of Lakshmanasena paid his homage to the Buddha in his famous Dasavatara-stotra. Imaginably the subjects of these broad-minded kings and potentates emulated the example of their political masters.

It is against the background of this psychological situation one has to study the surviving examples of the sculptural art of Vaṅga-Samatata which was able to enjoy an undeterred growth and development during the period under review.

Yet whatever remains we have come across have enabled us to clearly trace the history of art activities in the region in question during the period under review. And further they have also helped us to obtain an idea of the contemporary social, economic and religious conditions. Art-historically, these sculptures exhibit characteristic features which distinguish them as products of a local school which may be termed the Vaṅga-Samatata school, presumably a sub-school of Eastern Indian School of mediaeval sculpture. It is these features again, when closely analysed, demonstrate that they have also chronological contexts. In other words, on the basis of these stylistic features the sculptures under study can be placed in a chronological sequence. And such chronological classifications are in some cases supported by

the dated sculptures (supra, pp. 42 ff, 58-59, 69-70, 71, 78-79 etc.) or by the examples bearing plaecographically datable inscriptions (supra, pp. 55, 59-60, 100-101, 110 etc.).

Vaṅga-Samatāṭa sculptures of the Pāla cultural epoch, from the 8th century to the end of the 11th century A.D., further betray close stylistic affinities with quite a number of specimens hailing from different sites of present Bihar, notably Nālandā. The reason of such affinities lies obviously in the fact that the findspots of such sculptures were included in the empire of Pāla monarchs and they were either the imports from the Vaṅga-Samatāṭa region or the handiwork of local artists who were familiar with, or influenced by, the Vaṅga-Samatāṭa idiom. The stylistic and iconographical affinities of the sculptures from Vaṅga and Samatāṭa with those discovered from different sites of North Bengal and West Bengal are more marked than those of the Bihar examples, obviously owing to geo-cultural proximity of the Bengal findspots. It is also noteworthy that the technique of metal casting appreciably developed in the region under study, as evidenced by the Jhewari bronzes, although such specimens fall short of the Nālandā bronzes in respect of plastic quality and technical finish. It further needs mention in this connection that some of the products of the Vaṅga-Samatāṭa school are significantly affiliated with the sculptures of Nepal, Burma and Indonesia. The phenomenon can be explained by the fact that the regions of Vaṅga and

Samatāṭa along with other sectors of the Pāla empire were in contact with these neighbouring countries.<sup>1</sup>

The major corpus of sculptures of Vāṅga and Samatāṭa during the period under study consisted of images of gods and goddesses of the Brahmanical and Buddhist pantheons. Among the Brahmanical divinities Viṣṇu, Śiva and Devī in their various forms and manifestations figure prominently in the contemporary icono-plastic art, while the Buddhist deities mostly belong to what is designated as Tantrayāna Buddhism. From the extant remains it appears that as a religious force Buddhism was stronger than Brahmanism during the 8th-9th century A.D. in the Vāṅga-Samatāṭa region. This is illustrated, among others, by several metal sculptures of Buddhist affiliation discovered at Jhewari in the Chittagong district, anciently included in the Samatāṭa region. And it is interesting to note that most of the Buddhist metal sculptures found at Nālandā, far from Jhewari, which was also included in the Pāla empire, belong to this period. Another significant feature of the religious life

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1. Instances of a Buddhist teacher of Gaṇḍa dedicating a Bodhisattva image in the Chandi Kalasan in the Prambanān valley of Java in 778 (700 Śaka era) and Balaputradeva, king of Sumatra, setting up a monastery at Nālandā for the upkeep of which the Pāla emperor Devapāla granted five villages, may be recalled in this connection.

of the people of the Vaṅga-Samatāṭa region during our period, that has been demonstrated by some iconic examples, lies in the cult-syncretism, which was favoured by the then kings and their subjects. The surviving representations of syncretistic deities are, unfortunately, not many, but the images of Harihara, ~~in the collection of the Dhaka Museum,~~ Archanārīśvara from Pūrāpārā <sup>all preserved in the Dhaka Museum,</sup> and Mahānāyā from Kāgajīpādā, <sup>^</sup>amply bespeak the spirit of rapprochement of the people of those days. Alongside this catholic spirit and outlook, religious rivalry and intolerance were also not altogether unknown. This is attested by images of the so-called Śiva-Lokeśvara and Viṣṇu-Lokeśvara and Parnaśavarī and Bhṛīkuṭī Tārā. In short, the cult-icons of this period not only throw light on contemporary religious condition but have also turned out to be a commendable source of the contemporary social and economic history of Vaṅga and Samatāṭa. Collectively they afford us a picture of the everyday life of the people of those bygone days, their coiffure, dress and ornaments, arms and weapons, their professions, and the rites and rituals which they observed. Undenibly the sculptures of Vaṅga and Samatāṭa during the period extending from circa 700 A.D. to 1200 A.D. are not only significant for their aesthetic and artistic import, but are also useful and valuable for reconstructing the socio-economic and religious history of the time and space covered by the present dissertation.

## Illustrations

Below is given the description of the sculptures reproduced in the accompanying photographs. The name of the deity or semi-divine being is successively followed by the material, findspot, repository, the date and the description of the image concerned.

### Figure 1

Sūrya. Octo-alloy. Deulbādī, Comilla district, Bangladesh. Dhaka Museum. 7th century A.D.

The Sun-god is portrayed as seated cross-legged with his two attendants, Piṅgala and Daṇḍī inside a chariot drawn by seven horses and driven by Aruṇa. There is a figure of Nāga below Aruṇa. The god holds his characteristic attributes, lotuses with stalks, in both hands. Ushā and Pratyushā, shooting arrows, are shown at the extreme ends of the chariot. Pp. 42-43.

### Figure 2

Sarvānī. Octo-alloy. Deulbādī. Present location unknown. Second half of the 7th century A.D.

The eight-armed goddess is standing in samapada-  
stānaka on the lotus-seat placed on the back of her mount, the  
couchant lion. Discus, sword, arrow and conch-shell are held  
by the right hands beginning from the top, while the left hands  
in the same order carry shield, bow, trident and bell. She is  
flanked by two female attendants on her two sides. Pp. 42,  
43-44.

Figure 3

Akshobhya. Bronze. Salvan Vihara, Maināmatī, Comilla district.  
Maināmatī Museum. First half of the 8th century A.D.

This Dhyāni Buddha is seated cross-legged on a lotus-seat.  
The right hand is in bhūmi-sparśa-mudrā, while the left hand is  
placed on the lap. Pp. 44-45.

Figure 4

Amitābha. Bronze. Salvan Vihara. Maināmatī Museum. First  
half of the 9th century A.D.

The Dhyāni Buddha is seated cross-legged. The hands of  
the god are in the dhyāna pose. Pp. 45, 48.

Figure 5

Avalokiteśvara. Stone. Kotila Mura, Maināmatī. Maināmatī Museum. Second half of the 8th century A.D.

This four-armed Bodhisattva is seated on an elevated lotus-seat in a somewhat uncommon posture. Pp. 45-46.

Figure 6

Avalokiteśvara. Stone. Kotila Mura. Maināmatī Museum. Second half of the 8th century A.D.

The Bodhisattva is seated in padmāsana on an elevated lotus-seat. P. 46.

Figure 7

Three figures of the Buddha. Bronze. Jhewari, Chittagong district, Bangladesh. Indian Museum. Circa 10th century A.D.

Of the three figures of the Buddha in a single composition the central one exhibiting dhyāna-mudrā is seated in vajraparyāṅkāśana on the pericarp of the central elevated lotus; the other two displaying dharmachakrapravartana-mudrā are seated in bhadrāsana on the similar elevated lotuses which are joined together by stalks emanating from the central lotus stalk. P. 47.

Figure 8

Avalokiteśvara with Tārā. Bronze. Found somewhere in the Chittagong district. S. K. Saraswati Collection. Second half of the 11th century A.D.

A six-armed figure of Avalokiteśvara and a two-armed figure of Tara are seated in vajraparyāṅkāśana on a common lotus. The normal pair of hands of the god are in the dhyāna-mudrā. He holds a rosary in the top right hand, a manuscript and the stalk of a lotus in the upper and middle left hands; the middle right palm, placed on the right knee, is in the varada-mudrā. The goddess shows the varada pose by the right hand, while the left hand holds the stalk of an utpala supporting an oblong four-petalled flower-like object. Pp. 47, 76-78.

Figure 9

Chundā. Bronze. Found somewhere in the Chittagong district. S. K. Saraswati Collection. Second half of the 11th century A.D.

The three-eyed and six-armed <sup>goddess</sup> is seated in vajraparyāṅkāśana attitude on the pericarp of a lotus. She exhibits the dhyāna-mudrā by the normal pair of hands,

varada-mudrā by the middle right hand and holds a rosary in the top right hand; in her upper and the middle left hands she carries a manuscript with a flower on the upper surface and a kundī respectively. Pp. 47, 76-78.

Figures 10-12

Buddha. Bronze. Jhewari. Indian Museum. First half of the 9th century A.D.

In each of these three examples the Lord is seated in vajraparyāṅkāśana and displays the bhūmisparśa-mudrā by the right palm and the left hand is on the lap. P. 50.

Figure 13

Śiva. Copper. Keoār, Dhaka district. Dhaka Museum. First half of the 9th century A.D.

The god Śiva with five faces and six hands is shown as seated with Pārvatī in sukhāśana. The two-armed goddess sits on his left thigh. The god holds the vara, rosary, arrow, bow, skull-cup (?) and bosom of Gaurī. The goddess carries a full-blown lotus in the left hand, while her right hand is placed round the neck of the god. P. 51.

Figure 14

Śiva. Octo-alloy. Raghurāmpur, Dhaka district. Dhaka Museum. First half of the 9th century A.D.

The god with two hands is seated with his consort, Pārvatī in the rājalīlā pose. He holds a lotus bud in the right hand and the left breast of Pārvatī in the left hand. A circular mirror appears to be held by the left hand of the goddess, while her right hand is resting on the left thigh of the god. P. 51.

Figure 15

Lokanātha. Octo-alloy. Bandarbezar, Sylhet, Bangladesh. Dhaka Museum. Second half of the 9th century A.D.

Standing on a lotus in slightly tribhāṅga pose, the two-armed Avalokiteśvara in this form (he has many forms) holds a lotus with a long stalk in the left hand and displays the varada in the right. Pp. 51-52.

Figure 16

Vishṇu. Stone. Lakshmankāti, Backerganj district. Dhaka Museum. Second half of the 9th century A.D.

The four-handed god is shown as seated in lalitāsana on Garuḍa. In the upper hands he carries two stalks of two lotuses on which Gaja-Lakshmi and Sarasvatī are carved. The attribute of the normal right hand is a chakra with a miniature figure of Chakrapurusha and in the normal left hand there is a miniature figure of Gadādevī. Pp. 53-54.

Figures 17-22

Buddha. Bronze. Jhewari. Indian Museum. Second half of the 9th or the first half of the 10th century A.D.

In each of these six images the Master is shown as seated straight in vajraparyānkāsana with his right hand disposed in the bhūmi sparsā-mudrā and the left hand placed on the lap. P. 55.

Figure 23

Gaṇeśa. Stone. Mandhuk, Comilla district. Maināmatī Museum. Second half of the 10th century A.D.

The upper part of the stela of this image is broken away. The four-armed god is seated in the rājalīlā pose, carrying a radish, a pot of sweetmeat, danta and ankuśa. A number of devotees and a rat are carved on the pedestal. Pp. 58-59.

Figure 24

Tārā. Stone. Khaikair, Dhaka district. Dhaka Museum.  
Second half of the 10th century A.D.

The goddess is holding a lotus with stalk in the left hand and exhibits the varada in the left. A miniature figure of female attendant is seated on the same seat to the left of the main deity. There are two Dhyānī Buddhas, viz., Ratnasambhava and Akshobhya, on the two sides of the head of the goddess. Pp. 59-60.

Figure 25

Vāgīśvarī. Stone. Nalanda, Patna district, Bihar. Indian Museum. Second half of the 10th century A.D.

Seated in lalitāsana on a cushion, the four-armed goddess is shown as pulling out the tongues of two demons with pincers with her two lower hands. She carries in her upper hands an axe and a mace-like object. A crouching figure of lion below her seat is visible. P. 60.

Figure 26

Vishṇu. Stone. Bāghaurā, Comilla district. Present whereabouts unknown. Second half of the 10th century A.D.

The four-armed god, holding the usual attributes, viz., śaṅkha, chakra, gada and padma, is standing in śaṅkha. He is flanked by his consorts, Lakshmi and Sarasvati. Pp. 61-62.

Figure 27

Vishnu. Stone. Dapthu, Patna Gaya border area, Bihar. In situ <sup>in a temple.</sup> Late 9th-early 10th century A.D.

Iconically this figure is practically identical with the preceding one. P. 62.

Figure 28

Ganeśa. Stone. Nārāyaṇpur, Comilla district. Dhaka Museum. Second half of the 10th century A.D.

The four-armed image, shown as seated in sukhāsana, carries a radish, a rosary, an axe and a pot of sweetmeat. A rat, the vāhana of the god is depicted in the middle of the pedestal. P. 63.

Figure 29

Maitreya. Bronze. Jhewari. Indian Museum. Second half of the 10th century A.D.

Seated in lalitāsana with the right foot resting on a lotus-leaf, the two-handed god, the future Buddha, exhibits the varada-mudrā in the right palm which is resting on the right knee, and the branch of a nāgakesara with leaves and flower in the left which is placed on the seat. P. 64.

Figure 30

Gaurī. Octo-alloy. Sonāraṅg, Dhaka district. Dhaka Museum. First half of the 11th century A.D.

The four-handed goddess, standing in samapadasthānaka, carries a fruit, a rosary, a trident (like the branch of a tree with three offshoots) and a vase. Pp. 66-67.

Figure 31

Vishnu. Metal; silver inlay. Mandoil, Rajshahi district, Bangladesh. Varendra Research Museum, Rajshahi. First half of the 11th century A.D.

Flanked by Lakshmi and Sarasvatī, the standing god carries his usual attributes. P. 67.

Figure 32

Śiva Natarāja. Stone. Palgiri, Comilla district. Dhaka Museum. First half of the 11th century A.D.

The ten-armed deity is shown as dancing on the back of a bull. He is flanked by Gaṅgā and Yamunā. He holds the abhaya, khetaka, pāśa, kapāla, danda, trisūla, short staff, vajra and khadga; the normal right hand is in the gajahasta pose. The figures of Gaṇeśa, Brahmā, Śiva, Viṣṇu and Kārttikeya are carved at the top of the stela. Pp. 67-69.

Figure 33

Buddha, Stone. Mahākālī, Dhaka district. Dhaka Museum.  
Second half of the 11th century A.D.

The god, seated cross-legged, has his hands placed one upon the other on the lap. Pp. 75-76.

Figure 34

Umā-Maheśvara. Stone. Thakur-Manda, Rajshahi district.  
Varendra Research Museum. Circa 11th century A.D.

The four-armed god Śiva, seated in sukhāsana with Pārvatī who sits on his left thigh, is holding a rosary, a trident, a lotus and the bosom of the goddess. Pārvatī places her right hand on the right shoulder of Śiva and holds a mirror in the left. The figures of bull and lion are carved on the pedestal. Pp. 75-76.

Figure 35

Sarasvatī. Stone. Vajrayoginī, Dhaka district. Dhaka Museum. End of the 12th century A.D.

Flanked by two female attendants, the goddess is four-handed. She is seated on a lotus-seat with her right leg pendant which is placed on a small lotus. A rosary and a book appear to be held by the upper hands, while two normal hands are playing on a vīṇā. Pp. 79-80

Figure 36

Mahāmāyā. Stone. Kāgajīpādā, Dhaka district. Dhaka Museum. End of the 12th century A.D.

The lower portion of the image is represented by a well-carved liṅga. The goddess has four hands. She holds a rosary and <sup>a</sup> book by her upper hands, and displays the dhyāna-mudrā by her lower hands. P. 80.

Figure 37

Vaṭuka Bhairava. Burnt clay. Raghurāmpur. Dhaka Museum. Second half of the 9th century A.D.

In this four-armed icon Śiva in this terrific aspect is standing on a lotus pedestal with flames issuing from his head. He has round and rolling eyes and carries a sword in

the upper right hand and a staff ( the upper part broken) and a kapāla in the left hands; the remaining right hand is broken away. Pp. 90-91.

Figure 38

Bhairava (?). Stone. Abhaypur, Monghyr district, Bihar.  
Patna Museum, Patna. Circa 12th century A.D.

Standing on a lotus pedestal, the four-armed god is holding a sword, a trident and a kapāla; the remaining object is not clear. The eyes of the deity are round and rolling. From his head flames come out. A dancing male figure is depicted to the right of the image. P. 91.

Figure 39

Garuda. Wood. Raghurāmpur. Dhaka Museum.

The figure of the mount of Vishnu is shown as kneeling on a lotus pedestal. His hands, which are mutilated, are in the anjali pose. P. 95.

Figure 40

Garuda. Stone. Nagail, Rajshahi district. Varendra Research Museum. Circa 10th century A.D. P. 95.

Same as the preceding one.

Figure 41

Vidyadhara. Terracotta. Maināmatī. Maināmatī Museum.  
8th century A.D.

The semi-divine being is in the usual flying attitude. He wears the boots. P. 127.

Figures 42, 43

Vidyadhara. Terracotta. Maināmatī. Maināmatī Museum.  
8th century A.D.

Same as fig. 41. P. 127.

Figure 44

Vidyadhara. Terracotta. Maināmatī. Maināmatī Museum.  
8th century A.D.

Same as the preceding figures. Two ends of the scarf of the figure fluttering up above the shoulders. P. 127.

Figure 45

Vidyadhari. Terracotta. Maināmatī. Maināmatī Museum.  
8th century A.D.

The female counterpart of Vidyadhara is in the usual flying pose. Pp. 143-144.

Figure 46

A man playing on a flute. Terracotta. Maināmatī. Maināmatī Museum. 8th century A.D.

P. 145.

Figure 47

Gandharva. Terracotta. Maināmatī. Maināmatī Museum. 8th century A.D.

The divine musician is in the usual flying attitude. He is playing on a damaru. P. 145.

Figure 48

Gandharva. Terracotta. Maināmatī. Maināmatī Museum. 8th century A.D.

Same as above. P. 145.

Figure 49

Gandharva. Terracotta. Maināmatī. Maināmatī Museum. 8th century A.D.

Same as above. Seated with the right knee raised, he is playing on an earthen pot or small drum. P. 145.

Figure 50

Warrior. Terracotta. Maināmatī. Maināmatī Museum. 8th century A.D.

The figure is holding a big shield in the right hand and a small dagger in the left. P. 147.

Figures 41-50 are from Shahanara Hussain's Everyday Life in the Pala Empire.