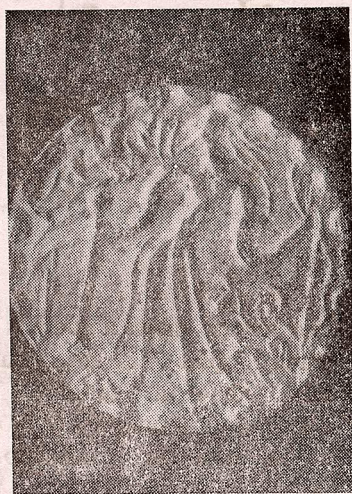


A Newly Discovered Silver Imitation Gupta Coin

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The coins of the Gupta emperors were mostly in gold, although they have also issued silver, as well as copper coins. The wide circulation of gold coins in that period has been allegorically termed as 'reign of gold'¹. The influence of Gupta age on gold coins continued even in the post Gupta period, though the subsequent coins were issued mostly in debased gold. In this part of the subcontinent, we have come across a good number of crude and debased imitations of the Gupta gold coins, mainly from undivided Bengal, Assam and Tripura.² These gold coins can be assigned to nearly two centuries or more from the first quarter of the 7th century A.D. According to the famous historian R C Majumdar, although a number of independent rulers of Bengal issued imitation Gupta gold coins, no silver coin could be traced out.³ However, prevalence of silver coins in the same period has now been proved by the discovery at several places in Bangladesh⁴ and Tripura. They have, of course, no resemblance to Gupta coins. These coins are of the 'Bull and Tripartite' type. We have now come across one interesting silver imitation Gupta coin in the coin cabinet of Shri Krishna Gopal Roy of Agartala, which is being discussed in this paper.



The above silver coin is of a round shape. It weighs 4.895 grammes and measures 22 mm in diameter. The obverse of this

coin has a king to the right holding a bow on his left arm and an arrow in right hand ; a horse on the right arm side. The name Shri Shri Bala Bhatta is inscribed in Bengali on this side of the coin :

*Bala
Bhat*

While 'Sree' has been prominently written on the top of the coin in between the horse and the head of the king, Bala Bhat is mentioned in two lines beneath the folded left arm of the king. With the help of the charts prepared by R.C. Majumder about the origin and gradual development of Bengali scripts, which formed a part of his *Bangla Desher Itihash* (Part I), we could decipher the inscriptions on the coin. The following table will explain this process of deciphering :

Modern Bengali script	Script on the coin	7th century script	12th century script
৳	𑂔	𑂔	𑂔
৳	𑂔	𑂔	𑂔
৳	𑂔	𑂔	𑂔
৳	𑂔	𑂔	𑂔

The reverse shows a goddess (Laxmi ?) flanked by 'Dhan Chhara' (Paddy spike). A small human figure is also present on the left hand side of the goddess. The overall condition of the coin is excellent and legends are very distinct.

A thorough examination of the background of the place where the above coin was found need be made to ascertain the identity of the king Bala Bhat and the location of his kingdom. The coin in question was collected from South Tripura. This particular area

has already established a distinctive place in numismatic arena, as a number of post Gupta gold coins and a sizable number of thin die struck silver coins bearing recumbent 'bull and tripartite' trident on the obverse and reverse respectively have been unearthed in this region. Again at Pilak (or Pilak Pathar) in South Tripura, where excavation works are now going on, a good number of post Gupta imitation gold coins, seals, stone and bronze made statue of Lord Buddha, terracotta designs have been discovered.⁵ The adjoining areas of South Tripura are Comilla, Noakhali and Chittagong in Bangladesh. According to Wilson, the ancient 'Sumbhadesh' was comprising of these areas, namely Tripura (Hill and plains including Comilla), Chittagong, Noakhali and Arakan⁶. Sumbhadesh was divided into a number of small kingdoms. In ancient times these areas probably developed in isolation. Various royal grants found in this region, show vividly that this part of the country was also known as 'Samatata'⁷.

The excavation works at Mainamati and Lalmai Hills near Comilla, which are very near to the present Tripura or precisely South Tripura, have enlightened us about the domain of Samatata and its rulers⁸. Antiquities unearthed at Mainamati indicate that Samatata was ruled by the 'Khadga' and 'Deva' dynasties during the 7th and 8th century A.D⁹. A Chinese traveller, Sheng-chi, who paid a visit to this area during the 7th century had also recorded in his account that Raj Bhat was the king of Samatata. R C Majumdar opines that, Raj Bhat was probably a king of the Khadga dynasty¹⁰. Two copper plates found in Mainamati in Comilla are stated to have mentioned the name of a prince Bala Bhata, who belonged to the Dev Khadga dynasty, in one of the plates and also about king Bala Bhata, in another. Moreover, three coins, one made of mixed alloy and the remaining two in gold, bearing the name of Bala Bhata, found in Mainamati have decisively proved the existence of a ruler in the name of Bala Bhata in the 7th century.

Considering the above fact, we can now safely conclude that the silver coin under discussion, was issued by Bala Bhat of Khadga dynasty, who ruled in Samatata during the 7th century.

It is notable that this coin is not totally identical to the gold coin of Bala Bhat, as published in JNSI Vol. XLVII.

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