CHAPTER - I

Introduction

I. Nature and scope of the study.

Arunachal Pradesh, formerly called NEFA, is the north-easternmost tract of the Indian Union. Peoples of other parts of the country know very little of this tiny Union Territory. Difficulties of communication and distance from the mainland together with the nature of its terrain have kept Arunachal largely isolated from the rest of the country and hindered progress of historical and scientific investigation. Yet the territory did never remain in complete obscurity and with the passage of time has been gradually coming into the limelight. And this has been possible, thanks to the efforts of the officials and administrators and occasional explorations by scientists and surveyors. Historically, this far-flung territory seems to have roused active interest of the British administration when China was reasserting her influence over Tibet at the beginning of this century which culminated in the occupation of Lhasa in 1910. Since then extensive survey operations started in the area with a view to putting more details of the territory and its inhabitants on record (infra, Ch. II).

Finally, the independence of the country was followed by greater attention to the land which being a part and parcel of the Indian Union could not longer be left uncared for by the democratic government responsible for the welfare of the entire nation.
But the initial exploration by administrators were followed mainly by anthropological research. As yet very little scientific investigation from historical standpoint is undertaken here. Nevertheless, whatever little have been discovered so far by the conjoint efforts of various explorers as well as some notable findings in recent times with the progress of archaeological and geological activities in the region require to be properly assessed and brought together. Here, more than anywhere else, an intensive study of the available materials from different standpoints is imperative in view of the paucity of the relics. Another impediment in respect of the reconstruction of the early history of Arunachal lies in the lack of literary tradition among the most of the inhabitants of the territory. Besides, there is no ready-made example set by experts that may be followed in writing a connected history of Arunachal since the works so far published consist mostly of administrative reports, anthropological studies and sporadic articles relating to occasional archaeological discoveries and excavations. A few books claiming to deal with its history chiefly narrate the policy of the British government towards the tribes of Arunachal. It may be modestly claimed that the first attempt to bring together the archaeological materials has been made by the present writer in collaboration with Y. A. Raikar. But a full-length history of Arunachal Pradesh based on all these materials (many of them have been revealed through the efforts of the present author) as well as

1. Y. A. Raikar and S. Chatterjee, Archaeology in Arunachal Pradesh.
the comparative study of ethnological and linguistic data and early literary accounts relating to our territory and adjoining parts of Assam and the neighbouring foreign territories like Tibet, Bhutan and Burma is perhaps undertaken for the first time in the following pages. This being a pioneering effort the emphasis is given on the reconstruction of the developments in chronological term and the discovery of cultural patterns existing in the territory in different periods as far as possible.

When properly analysed, glimpses of interesting aspects of various phases of history of the territory can be gleaned from the available materials though all the details at every stage can hardly be delineated. Still a pattern of evolution in the region through the ages has now become clearer than before. Further investigation in future may enable us to fill in the blanks left in the superstructure. But identification and description of various elements of its culture, their mutual counteraction and resultant developments, relationship with the world beyond its present boundaries, its borrowings and contributions to the variety of the Indian civilisation while revealing the same characteristic note of unity found in the parent stock is possible even now as is to be seen hereinafter.

II. Sources of history and culture of Arunachal Pradesh.

The sources of history of Arunachal Pradesh may be divided as in the case of other states of the country into the following broad general categories: (i) Archaeological objects; (ii) Literary texts; and (iii) Myths and legends.
A. Archaeological objects

Archaeological remains of Arunachal may again be subdivided into (a) fossils, stone tools, weapons and utensils; (b) architectural vestiges, sculptures, paintings, terracotta, bricks and woodcarving; and (c) inscriptions and coins.¹

A number of discoveries over the last few decades have stretched the limit of palaeolithic culture to the north-easternmost borders of India. Against this background discovery of a vertebrate fossil by the geologists in 1974-75 from the upper tertiary rocks of Ramghat area in the Lower Subansiri district of Arunachal Pradesh proves to be quite significant in so far as it indicates the continuation of the Siwaliks to the eastern Himalayas or Arunachal Siwaliks. The upper tertiary horizon of Arunachal now seems to have been inhabited by hominids and palaeolithic men.

Stone age tools and artifacts including neoliths and river terraces have been recorded by B.P. Bopardikar in his report of exploration in Daphabhum area of the Lohit district on behalf of the Archaeological Survey of India in 1969-70. S. N. Rao of Dibrugarh University detected some semi-precious palaeoliths in the Kamlang valley of the Lohit district in 1971. Y. A. Raikar of the Research Department, Government of Arunachal Pradesh, discovered chips of semi-precious stones like chalcedony, jasper etc. from Vijayanagara in the Tirap district in 1971 which he considered to be relics of microlithic culture. These reports gather significance from the

¹. For details of these objects see Chapters III & V.
discoveries of stone age relics from the adjoining regions of Assam, Meghalaya and other parts of North-East India.

Neoliths have been found in plenty from all over Arunachal Pradesh chiefly as surface finds. Numerous such tools and implements have been collected by European officers and archaeologists as well as their Indian counterparts right from the middle of the nineteenth century through casual interest or regular exploration.

As yet only one single scientific expedition has been undertaken for investigation about pre-historic age of Arunachal Pradesh in 1969-70 in the Daphabhum area of Lohit district which has been referred to above. River sections and terraces were detected and artifacts like cleavers, ovates, chisels, cores, flakes, points, proto-hand-axe, unifacial chopper and neoliths were found. It has indicated the possibility of discovery of relics of early man in the terraces between Hawai and Hayuliang through more intensive exploration in future. In 1979 D. K. Duarah reported discovery of a probable neolithic site. All these indicate potentiality of the area awaiting further research for pre-historic remains. In this respect the reported discovery of a megalithic site at Jamiri in the West Kameng district is also quite interesting.

Weapons of different types that have come down to us from at least the seventeenth century A.D. are found preserved in the monasteries and also in the households of tribal chiefs. These vary from tribal weapons like bow, arrow, spear, shield etc. to swords, guns and cannon of which a few dated specimens are also available. These
provide important materials for military history as well as for study of industrial pattern and transaction with outside world.

Implements and utensils of olden times as are preserved in private households and monasteries are also welcome indicators of life pattern and industry of their respective periods. Plenty of such materials are available awaiting thorough examination. Well-known specimens of Tibetan and Burmese types made of silver, brass, copper and other metals are encountered in most of the religious centres. Apart from these, gongs and other items of heirloom preserved in the households of non-Buddhist tribal folks occasionally having definite exchange value are also noteworthy in this context.

Architectural vestiges of Arunachal are exemplified by Buddhist monasteries, stupas and shrines (most of which are in situ), forts and hill resorts noticed at Bhālukapung, Naksāparvata, Itānagara, Bhīsmakanagara, Śīśupālagada etc. and old Hindu shrines like the Mālinīthāna and Tāṅreśvarī Temples. These furnish valuable materials for study of various aspects of religious, social and political life and history of the territory. Architectural characteristics of these monuments indicate varying degrees of impact and interaction of different cultural strains.

Sculptural remains, mainly consisting of religious icons, are numerous, though decorative motifs are also available in plenty. Living and old monuments of Buddhist, Hindu and tribal religion, are repositories of religious icons, fetishes and human and animal figures connected with different forms of religious worship. Ruins of old
temples, forts and caves often comprise stone images in relief and round. Loose sculptures are also noticed in course of excavation or as stray finds. Monasteries, chapels and private households preserve stone, metal and clay images for worship. From all the districts abundant materials are forthcoming.

Tawang, Zemithang, Kalaktang, Dirang, Rupa, Shergaon and other places of the West Kameng district and Mechukha, Tuting, Gelling, Mankhota and other sites of the upper parts of the West Siang and Dibang Valley districts are full of Buddhist gompas, monasteries and chörten belonging to the different sects of Vajrayāna Buddhism constructed during different periods. Images are preserved in monasteries and gompas traditionally ascribed to the eleventh-twelfth century A.D. or still earlier times.

The Theravāda monasteries and shrines of the Lohit and Tirap districts also contain numerous images of Buddha fashioned in stone, metal or wood and occasionally images of other deities and monks as well. Some are assignable to the seventeenth century, while others belong to later times. From an eighteenth-century stūpa excavated at Vijayanagara in the Tirap district have been found a number of Buddha figures made of stone and metals.

Beautiful icons of Hindu divinities have been discovered from the temple at Mālinithāna in the foothills of the Siang region bordering Assam. These are variously datable to different periods between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries. The ruins of the temple structure include elegant sculptures of several deities, Vidyādharas, Gandharvas, sages, door-keepers and other
human figures of different imports as well as representation from the world of animals and vegetation. The Tamresvari temple of the Lohit district and Nakşparvata ruins of the East Kameng district also furnished specimens of stone sculptures.

Ports of Bhālukapung in the West Kameng district, Itānagara in the Lower Subansiri district and Bhīsmākanagara in the Lohit district have so far yielded a few stone, terracotta and metal figures which can be considered as principally somewhat secular in character. Stray figures, coarsely executed on stone by tribal people or Ahom administrators with varied intentions, are noticed occasionally amid forests beyond the present habitats of tribal people. Some are worshipped as guardian-deities of salt-wells etc. Again, there are specimens representing human organs and other symbols used to commemorate certain rites performed for better crops which provide closer insight in popular art. Incision of symbols and emblems on rocks and inside caves and Sivalingas have been noticed at different sites. Foot-prints and other emblems of sages like those of Guru Padmasambhava are also known.

These numerous specimens have not yet been thoroughly investigated or studied. Nevertheless, whatever evidence is readily available demonstrates various phases of cultural movements in Arunachal. Migration of different ethnic groups, their admixture and cultural contact with the world beyond its present geographical limits are vividly recorded amid the sculptural treasures as well as in other material remains and literature.
Beliefs of early paintings are mostly forthcoming from the Buddhist centres. These belong to the domain of religious art and primarily consist of murals, with which the monasteries abound, miniatures by way of illustration in manuscripts and painted scrolls. The images of Buddhist divinities and Lamas are invariably painted gracefully by the artist monks who manufacture them. Painted bas-relief figures on stone plaques are available at Mechukha in the West Siang district.

As regards terracotta materials, they mainly consist of relics yielded by excavations and explorations at various sites such as Bhālukapung in the West Kameng district, Itānagara in the Lower Subansiri district, Bhismakenagara, Rukmininagara and Mud Fort near Tezu in the Lohit district and Vijayanagara in the Tirap district. Divine, human and animal figurines, plaques with designs, spouted vessels, bowls have been collected. Bricks of various sizes and types noticed in the monuments give some idea about their origin and authorship as well as development of the industry in the area. These, too, help study history of this territory in comparison with the bordering regions.

Specimens of woodcraft and basketry are found in abundance though the extremely moist climate is not suitable for their preservation and attempts are yet to be made to determine chronology of the available materials.

Inscriptions found within the boundaries of present Arunachal Pradesh so far known do not go beyond the fourteenth century A.D.
Their short cryptic nature also does not furnish ample details required for building up a satisfactory account of the territory based alone on their evidence. Nevertheless, the intrinsic merit of the epigraphic documents certainly renders them valuable as bedrocks of history of their respective periods offering definite information. Some of these bear specific dates while in case of others, palaeography and circumstantial evidence help to ascertain their time and place of origin with a tolerable amount of certainty.

Although the known specimens are very few in number they offer some variety in language and script as well as in their subject-matter. These are variously written in Assamese-Bengali, Tibetan, Newari and Tai scripts. The Tai language is employed on a single specimen so far known. On a few others, written in Assamese-Bengali characters, Sanskrit has been used. Compared to these Tibetan tablets and inscriptions (some portions of these records are also written in Sanskrit language.) are much more numerous though their proper study for utilisation as historical records is still awaited.

The earliest datable inscription is found from the Tamresvari Temple in the Lohit district. It is purported to record building of a boundary wall around the Tamresvari Temple by Muktadharamnaryana in Saka 1364, i.e., 1442 A.D. It is written in Sanskrit language and Assamese-Bengali script of the fifteenth century A.D. and throws some light on the political, religious and cultural history of the period.

Next may be mentioned the short legends inscribed on a number of bricks found from Bhismakanagara fort situated at a place
not far removed from the Tamresvari Temple. These are not dated, but palaeographical consideration suggests some period between the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries A.D. The legends on the available specimens appear to contain a uniform formula repeating devotion to certain deities. The executors or the devotees have not registered their names on them. The language and script employed are Sanskrit and Assamese-Bengali respectively. Obviously these too throw some light on the cultural history of the region.

Two inscribed guns of the time of the Ahom king Gadadharasimha have been found from Chowkham in the Lohit district. Three more identical inscriptions, earlier discovered from Assam, also deserve notice in this context. The inscriptions engraved on the muzzle of the guns are written in Sanskrit language and Assamese-Bengali characters of the seventeenth century. These are dated Saka 1604, i.e., 1682 A.D. Although primarily related to an important development in the struggle between the Mughals and Ahoms for the control over Assam they offer interesting sidelight on the history of the Union Territory, the provenance of the two specimens particularly with regard to its relation and contact with the Assamese people and politics.

Inscriptions of Assam also occasionally reflect interesting events of the history of Arunachal. Thus the Sadiya Snake Pillar inscription written in the Tai language and script found from Sadiya in Assam near the borders of Arunachal Pradesh records some contract made between the Ahom king and the Mishmis.

Several tablets in the Buddhist monasteries, forts or dzongs, chörtsens and inscribed miniature chörtsens, stone plaques and pedestals...
of images are found in plenty among the habitats of the Vajrayāna Buddhist population of the West Kameng and upper parts of the West Siang districts. These have not yet been properly studied. But some are known to record the object of building of new structures. Others near water-wheels contain mantras pertaining to charms and religious purposes. Those incised on images occasionally described the icons, while stone tablets bearing religious formulae are placed inside tombs (kudungs) near burial places. A memorial stone inscription is also found amid the ruins of Naksāparvata in the East Kameng district suggesting similar association. These are written in Tibetan or Newari scripts and languages employed are Sanskrit or Tibetan. All these taken together furnish information which help verify, corroborate and supplement evidence available from other sources.

Numismatic material for Arunachal is still very meagre. A few late Ahom issues are the only coins known to have been discovered from within its boundaries. These pieces belong to Śīvasimha and Rudrasimha and are identical with their known issues available from other provenances. Their evidence is useful as corroborating information regarding contact with Assam.

B. Literary texts

Literary records bearing on Arunachal Pradesh are, as in case of other places, numerous and varied in nature. Starting from the earliest phase of Indian literary history there are covert references to the non-Aryan autochthones like the Nisādas, Kirātas etc. and their settlements. Many of these accounts from the nature of their hints
and description may well be construed as related to the areas and people representing the present region designated Arunachal Pradesh. The later Vedic and the early sections of the Brahmanical literature, viz. the Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa and the Vaiśeṣīyam Samhitā of the Yajurveda as well as the Atharvaveda contain brisk mention of the hill people as well as herbs and plants growing in their country. As is but natural, in the early days of their immigration the remotest territories of the North-East India were but vaguely known to the Indo-Aryans and hence no detailed or vivid description regarding those parts can be expected in the Vedic literature. However, in the course of gradual migration and expansion eastwards the Aryan adventurers came in closer contact and clashes with the people of these regions. Consequently greater knowledge about them is reflected in the Mahabharata and the Rāmāyaṇa, the Purāṇas and the Tantras, especially in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, the Kālikā Purāṇa and Yogini Tantra.

Other works of both indigenous and foreign origin occasionally reveal awareness about this region. The Manusmrti and Milindapanha may be mentioned among the Indian works. Early foreign accounts of the Indian sub-continent like those contained in the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea and Ptolemy's Geography often are found to incorporate references to the land of the Kirātas producing malabathrum and offering routes through which trade was carried on with China. These tracts may well be recognised as parts of Arunachal Pradesh which fit in nicely with the description of these works.

In Huen Tsang's account an idea is given of the hilly region east of Bhāskaravarman's kingdom. It was full of barbarian folk living
amid forests infested with venomous snakes, herbs etc. and extended up to the borders of China. Shibabuddin Talish accompanying Mirjumla during his expedition left a detailed narrative on Assam. In this he also incorporated available information about the tribal people residing in the region now comprising the hills of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. The Ahom Buranjis which provide elaborate accounts of medieval Assam contain references to the Arunachal people. The relation of the Arunachal tribes with Ahom monarchs have been recorded in details which are useful for conjuring up the political history of Arunachal.

After the establishment of British supremacy over Bengal towards the close of the eighteenth century the north-eastern zone gradually allured bands of British adventurers and imperialists alike. Explorers often penetrated the hills with different motives. Raids of tribal folks into the plains and the need to forge some settlement with them especially after expansion of British authority over Assam invited occasional expedition of British forces deeper and deeper inside the boundaries of Arunachal Pradesh, then known as the North East Frontier Tracts. Diaries and reports of these explorers and administrators, treaties and documents of settlements with the tribal chiefs, acts and regulations of the British Government relating to these regions furnish very important information about the modern period of its history.

Finally, the acts, regulations, treaties etc. of the independent Indian Union bearing on Arunachal Pradesh and Parliamentary papers and decisions changing the status of the territory ultimately
leading to its establishment as a Union Territory with a legislative assembly under the guardianship of a Lieutenant-Governor may be perused with benefit for an up-to-date account of its political development.

Books and articles of modern writers on different aspects of life and culture of Arunachal, census and statistical reports, periodicals, journals, Government magazines such as BESANUN, Arunachal News, Journal of the Assam Research Society and publications of the Anthropological Survey of India bringing out articles and write-ups on Arunachal may be mentioned in this context.

Arunachal Pradesh has, again, a rich treasure of manuscripts. Illustrated and illuminated manuscripts containing painted portraits of Buddha and different forms of the popular Buddhist goddess Tārā demonstrate artistic zeal as well as the source of inspiration. The themes and portrayals vary in accordance with the difference of origin. Thus the Vajrayāna Buddhist manuscripts, viz., the Kanjurs and Tanjurs found in the western and northern fringes of the territory show totally distinct art-motifs from the Kanjur manuscripts of the Khamtis of the south-eastern region. These manuscripts, in the main, have been brought from outside. But certain texts, almanacs, accounts, books for guidance of priests performing various rites, record books of the different monasteries etc. are the handiwork of local inhabitants and immigrants in their new land of refuge. Majority of the manuscripts deal with religious themes. Those will afford us insight in the religious ideas and beliefs of the people as also the
world of religious art. But books on secular subjects like the history books of the gompas or records of accounts kept in the monasteries, almanacs etc. and the unpublished documents of treaties and sanads, occasionally met with among the households of the chiefs and dignitaries, provide valuable pointer to the contemporary economic, political and administrative systems.

C. Myths and legends

Myths and legends represent quite an interesting and important source for preparation of history of this region. Paucity of literature and other material remains invest them with additional significance offering as it were a direct access into the tribal mind and tradition. Every village and community has a rich heritage of such legends regarding its ancestors, origin, history of migration etc. which exist mainly in the form of oral tradition. Many of these have been collected by British administrators and anthropologists. Verrier Elwin's book, *Myths of NEFA*, offers a rich collection of these legends. Other works are also available. Attempts of the Adi Research Society in this direction and its publications are noteworthy. Folk-tales of Assam occasionally furnish helpful corroborative and supplementary material.