Amphibians constitute an important group of vertebrates and hold a significant intermediate position between the aquatic and terrestrial life. They are least numerous amongst the vertebrates and comprise nearly 6.6% of the total life on this universe (Lagler et al. 1962). The term Amphibia was coined for the first time by Linnaeus in "Systema Naturae" in 1758. The beginning of the anurans i.e., frogs and toads is seen in the Lower Triassic era with the appearance of genus Protobatrachus. With the onset of Jurassic period, there was a sudden change from Protobatrachus to the modern type of amphibians. From then onwards, their number increased so rapidly that
the Carboniferous period is often spoken as the "age of amphibians".

Amphibians are beneficial to man. Due to their easy availability, frogs have been and are now extensively used for laboratory dissections, physiological experiments, human pregnancy tests and in pharmacology. They are used as fish baits for pikes and some other voracious fishes. The skinned fleshy hind limbs of some Indian frogs are considered to be a great delicacy in many parts of the world like France, Italy, North America, etc., where they are commonly called as "Indian frog meat". The frog's meat can supplement the protein deficiency in man's diet.

Toads are usually caught in abundance near orchards, ornamental plants and forests showing their close association with particular type of environment. These are also recognised as enemies of insects and other harmful creatures. They feed on worms, snails and other noxious creatures like insects during their night hunts. *Myobatrachus gouldii*, an African species, lives entirely in association with termites, ants and wood lice cavers. In France, the gardeners even buy toads for keeping harmful insects under control (Stiles et al., 1969). *Bufo marinus*, a North American species, has been introduced in tropics, especially in areas where sugarcane is grown, to control the insect pests (Gadow, 1901). Frog's skin and its oil is used in leather
Inspite of great importance of the amphibians, very little is known regarding their ecology, biology and systematics when compared to other vertebrate groups. The taxonomic studies on the anurans were initiated since the times of Linnaeus (1758), Jüges (1834), Günther (1858) and Owen (1866). Boulenger (1882, 1890, 1920) recorded 108 species from India, of which nine species were from Himachal Pradesh. Subsequent literature reveals that the studies on the amphibian fauna of Himachal Pradesh have been sporadic and have remained more or less neglected.

Himachal Pradesh was politically separated from old Punjab in 1972 and was divided into twelve districts with altitude ranging from 300 - 9000 m, including the lower, lesser and the greater Himalayas, comprising diverse ecological biotopes, viz. torrential streams, forests and cold deserts.

The systematic study of amphibians has so far been based mostly on external morphological characters and the functional aspects of these taxonomic characters have been least discussed. The data available on the role of detailed osteological characters as a means to supplement taxonomy, have rather been meagre, though only a few workers like Parker (1868), Boulenger (1882, 1890, 1920), Gadow (1901), Parker (1934), Chacko (1964) and Mahendra and Charan (1972)
made some attempts in this direction. The study of larval forms in Amphibia is important both from the point of view of evolution of the group and as supplement to the taxonomy of adult forms (Annandale, 1918; Noble, 1929; Hora, 1934). The existing keys to identify the tadpoles are not adequate to diagnose immature stages especially of those species found in Himachal Pradesh.

The food and feeding habits of many species from other parts of India have been reported by Hora (1930), Long (1970), Mondal (1970) but such studies have not so far been attempted in Himachal Pradesh. Further, the studies on the food and feeding habits of amphibians may throw some light on the biological control of insect pests of agriculture, orchards and forests. Keeping these in view, a study of the bionomics of amphibian fauna of Himachal Pradesh, a very neglected field of study, was considered imperative. The present work was, therefore, undertaken to study the taxonomy and altitudinal distribution of the amphibians in Himachal Pradesh. As a result, sixteen species, belonging to four families, viz. Ranidae, Bufonidae, Microhylidae and Rhacophoridae have been recorded. Distribution of seven species has been reported for the first time from this area. The various adaptations of these amphibians in relation to diverse ecological niches have been studied and importance of taxonomically important characters discussed. The skeletal parts, namely, neurocranium in ten species and pectoral girdle in all the species have been studied in detail and have been used as additional
taxonomical characters. The evolutionary significance of these osteological modifications is also discussed. The food and feeding habits of four species of *Bufo* and breeding behaviour of two species of *Ranidae*, viz. *Rana (Laq) minica* and *Amolops afghanus* and two species of *Bufonidae*, viz. *Bufo viridis* and *Bufo himalayanus* have been investigated. The various developmental stages and their metamorphosis in relation to particular environment are also studied.