CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCING THE PROBLEM

Tradition is an age-old social practice that revolves around the ways of life of a society. “Tradition means the characteristics, the cultural styles fixed in time and transmitted from generation to generation. The origins of these characteristics might have been linked to the conditions in which man acted on his environment, conditions whose stability during a particular period or in a particular area served to fix them; and once stabilized they were transmitted by habit, and the prehistoric tradition was born” (Ha Van Tan, 1976:159). That is why tradition implies a degree of cultural continuity. Regarding the survival of the traditional practices of remote past in South Asia especially in Indian subcontinent, Bridget Allchin’s (1994) comment may be quoted here

“Respect for tradition in all its forms is a strong, consistent element in the culture of entire Indian subcontinent. People in many walks of life with regard to family and social matters consciously and deliberately follow traditions to a far greater extent than they are in the western world which already facing transformation under the impact of modernization. The folk arts and traditional textiles which characterize every region and show such quality, variety and inventiveness, combined with continuity of character and craft practice from the remote past are the visual manifestation of this aspect of South Asian culture……more basic, are the wide spread survival of traditional practices in agriculture and animal husbandry, some of which now appear to have been established methods of farming since the third millennium BC and probably considerably earlier. Traditional house building methods and settlement plans and settlement patterns, have a comparable and in some cases even greater antiquity” (Allchin, 1994:4).

The cultural configuration of Northeastern India has a deep root of its prehistoric origin, the remnants of which are still visible in the life ways of the people of this region. This is an area where, if the clock of time be wound in anticlockwise direction, then one may discover that the number of archaeological elements still survive in analogous form (Ashraf and Roy, 2012: 23). The geographical situation of this region is such that one encounters the ethno-cultural groups showing different levels of technology ranging from food gathering, incipient form of food production (see plate 1.1) to developed agricultural economy through their respective indigenous technology and cultural pattern.
Some evidences regarding viability of the Neolithic life style in this region is found in the existence of present day ethnic economies as reminiscent of Neolithic cultures (Roy, 1981). While studying the antiquity of the subsistence pattern of the Garo Hills of Meghalaya, Roy has commented that here culture is chronologically modern but economically in prehistoric stage (Roy, 1981:193-220). Although there is no direct evidence of Neolithic economy of Northeast India, it is reasonably appropriate to believe that the Neolithic food producing economy of Northeast India was analogous to that of the present day shifting cultivation. This phenomenon can well be perceived through unindustrialized agricultural paraphernalia related to both past and present-where one will find no difference in typology of the tools except using of two different raw materials in the form of stone and metal (iron) respectively. Regarding the materials used in manufacturing of the implements in the areas where cultivation of yam, varieties of tubers, rice, bottle gourd and broad bean were the main cultivated plants, the cultivation was done with the help of digging stick, the ground stone celts served as the blades of weeding hoes (Sharma, 1974:17-19). Similar evidences come from the Spirit cave in Northwest Thailand (Gorman, 1971) where there was a population who consumed large variety of plants such as bottle gourd, betel nut, almond, broad beans, Chinese water chestnut, peeper, cucumber, some of which were domesticated as early as 10,000 B.C. (the dates of these plants ranges from 11,690±560 B.P. to 7622±300B.P., which are the oldest dates for vegetative plant materials recovered in an archaeological context anywhere in the world). The growing of the similar variety of vegetables, their remarkable consumption and above all the easiest method of their cultivation which is supposed to have been practiced since Neolithic period is still in vogue in northeast
India and Southeast Asia. It compels one to believe at no drastic climatic and ecological changes in this part of the world for last thousands of years. The specific geographical location of Northeast India, its ethnic composition and environmental condition have enabled a unique tradition in the midst of heterogeneity (Ashraf and Roy, 2012:138).

Assam, the easternmost state of India is flanked on its northwest by the Himalayan highlands and on the southeast by the Gangetic Plains (i.e. Bangladesh). The state lies in between 28°18’ and 24° North latitude and 90° 46’ and 97°4’ East longitude. The entire region is connected with the rest of India through a narrow corridor of flood plain of about 56 kilometers below the foothills of Bhutan and Sikkim. The foothills of Assam are a combination of undulated plain and low hills that run in between highland and flood plains in east-west direction. The interstate boundary line marks most of the parts of foothills region of Assam. This region of India comprising seven states (presently eight states after inclusion of Sikkim) viz, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura is geo-culturally an extension of South east Asia and has served as the highway connecting rest of India with South East Asia through which diverse ethnic groups having different cultural entity and speaking different languages passed at different times. This region can be regarded as a corridor of initial movement of people.

The earliest migration to Northeastern region has been traced back to the time before the beginning of the historical period (Lebar et al, 1964; Bayard; 1979, c.f. Ashraf 2010:2). The people of Mon-Khmer or Austro-Asiatic linguistic group and Tibeto-Chinese linguistic group have been identified as the earliest inhabitants of North Eastern region of India who are occupying this region since early Post Pleistocene period. Mon-Khmer is one of the prehistoric linguistic groups of South East Asia. Mon-Khmer speaking groups of people came to India including Assam from Indonesia, in south (Choudhury, 1985: 29). Its only representative i.e.Khasis and Jaintias of Meghalaya although ethnologically different from the other hill tribes of Northeast India, belong racially to Mongoloid (Das, 1968). The Austro-Asiatic Khasis of Northeast India represents genetic continuity, linking the populations of South and Southeast Asia (Reddy et al, 2007:10).

From the linguistic evidence it can be surmised that in the remote past, a migration of Austric speaking people to the Northeastern region took place that are represented by the Khasis and Jaintias of Meghalaya. Probably some of them moved towards the west and north and reached Chotanagpur plateau and foothills of western Himalayas. This Austro-Asiatic migration was followed by the number of communities speaking Tibeto-Burman language, some of which reached up to Tripura but not beyond, while some of them settled in the plains of Brahmaputra and others preferred to live in the hills. The migration of Indo –Aryan speaking people took place in the protohistoric period (Majumdar, 1980:23). The Tibeto-Chinese family of language is divided into two sub families, namely- Tibeto-Burman and the Siamese-Chinese. These
linguistic groups are racially Mongoloid. In several waves these people with Mongoloid racial elements migrated to this region from north and east of South East Asia at different periods (Bhagabati, 1988). N.D. Choudhury’s (1985) statement regarding the migration of the Tibeto-Burmese is worth to be quoted, which reads

“The Tibeto—Burman appear to have first migrated from their original seat on the upper courses of the Yangste and Hoangho towards the head waters of the Irrawaddy and of the Chindwin. Thence, it is believed, some people followed the upper course of the Brahmaputra, the Sanpo, north of the Himalayas, and occupied Tibet. Some of these crossed the watershed and occupied the hills on the southern side of the Himalayan range right from Assam, in the east, to the Punjab in the west. At the Assam end, they met and mingled with others of the same family who had wandered along the lower Brahmaputra through the Assam Valley. At the great bend of the river near the present town of Dhubri, they followed it to the south, and occupied first the Garo Hills, and then Tippera (Tripura). Some of them appear to have ascended the valley of the Kapili and the neighbouring streams into the Hills country of the North Cachar. But the mountainous tract between it and the Garo Hills, the Khasi and the Jaintia Hills, they failed to occupy, and it stills remains the Home of the ancient Mon-Khmer people. Other members of this Tibeto—Burman horde halted at the head of the Assam valley and turned south. They took Possession of the Naga Hills. Some of these probably entered the eastern Naga country directly, but others entered the western Naga country from the south, via Manipur” (Choudhury, 1985: 30).

The Tibeto-Burman sub family has been divided into two main branches, viz. the Tibeto-Himalayans and the Assam-Burmese by the philologists. The Bodo speaking group is one of the major linguistic groups of the Assam-Burmese branch that includes a number of tribes and sub-tribes of Assam among which mention may be made of Garos, Bodos, Rabhas, Kacharis, Karbis, Mishings, Tiwals and Hajongs. All these ethnic groups are largely distributed in most parts of the hills and foothills region and their immediate adjoining plains rather than the valleys. The Austro-Asiatic Khais are thinly populated in the southern foothills region of Assam.

From the archaeological point of view no one state of Northeast India can be visualized without referring to one another due to its unique geo-cultural situation. The region can better be regarded as common cultural zone - an extension of South East Asia. Worman (1949) is of the opinion that the Neolithic system penetrated into India through Assam from Southeast Asia.

The archeological evidences from Northeastern region substantiate the existence of human history since the prehistoric past- more precisely from the early part of the post-Pleistocene period. The earliest form of stone artifacts reported from Northeastern region, particularly from Meghalaya represents the prehistoric traditions belonging to the post Pleistocene phases. The most striking example of the same is the Hoabinhian stone tool tradition of Meghalaya. Some of the important sites of Meghalaya yielding Hoabinhian artifacts are Nangalibbra, Rongram, Thebrongre, Selbalgre, Watiabri, Bibragre, Makbil Bisik, Barapani and Saw Mer. All these sites are located on the upper
reaches of Meghalaya. Out of these sites, Barapani and Saw Mer is the only site located on the Khasi Hills (Ashraf, 2010).

Hoabinhian is a widely distributed Post Pleistocene or Mesolithic tool complex of South East Asia (Mathews, 1968:94). Austro-Asiatic people were the author of the Hoabinhian or Mesolithic cultures at its earliest phase of formation (Ha van Tan, 1990). Gorman has dated the beginning of the Hoabinhian techno complex in Vietnam as late Pleistocene (about 13000-14000 BP) that continued as a unique tradition until ca.5000 to 6000BC. (1970:82). But the date of the recent evidences from Lang Vanh Cave and Xom Trai Cave of Vietnam has extended its time sequence up to 17000 -18000BP. The scholars like Solheim (1969), Dunn (1970) and Golson (1971) are of the opinion that this tradition in South East Asia was initiated in late Pleistocene. (Ha Van Tan 1997:35) The term Hoabinhian was redefined in 1994 by archaeologists attending a conference held in Hanoi. In this conference Vietnamese archaeologists presented evidence of Hoabinhian artifacts dating to 17,000 years before the present. A vote was held where it was agreed that the chronology of the Hoabinhian industry dates from 'late-to-terminal Pleistocene to early-to-mid Holocene'. From all the dates set forth for the Hoabinhian tool tradition of South East Asia it can be estimated that Hoabinhian is definitely a late Pleistocene tool complex which continued up to middle Holocene. The recent discovery of Tuyen Quang - A cave in Na Hang District in the northern province of Tuyen Quang is thought to have housed primitive humans during the Neolithic Era (7,000-8,000 years ago). The expert said the tools bore Hoa Binh cultural (34,100 years ago and lasted till 2,000BC) features. (VNS, Sept13, 2010). Charles Higham & Thomas Higham (2009:125-144) has established a new chronological framework for prehistoric Southeast Asia based on Bayesian model from Ban Non Wat of Northeast Thailand that Neolithic practice begins in the second millennium and hierarchical state forming activities dated to a “starburst” around 1000BC. Thus it can be surmised that whatever the duration it possesses, it intrudes Neolithic Era. On the other hand, the intrusion of Neolithic Phase in to the Iron using stage has been reported from Northeastern India, Arunachal Pradesh in particular (Ashraf, 1990).

The process of assimilation and relocation of the Hoabinhian tradition could have taken place during the early Holocene Period in the higher altitude of Eastern Himalaya. Here the early phase of cultural complex is represented by Flaked-cobble tool Tradition and Stone Block tool Tradition (Ashraf, 2010:9). However, the edge ground tools associated with the former two types depict a late Hoabinhian phase. The most notable point about the distribution of the Hoabinhian tool tradition in Meghalaya is that it is largely distributed in the upper reaches, while the lower reaches are devoid of these industries. From the morpho-metric and techno-metric point of view the tools of foothill region, especially in the Assam-Meghalaya border area, exhibit a completely different picture. Almost all the stone artifacts are grounded, bearing late Neolithic features. Some of them are polished too. Although the ground tools from the lower
reaches bear more or less same typo-technological features with that of the tools from highlands, but in respect of morphological features there is a marked distinction between the two regions. For example, in the foothills, these are more flattened and comparatively broad; mostly dominated by either quasi-tang or tanged tools with plano-plane contour. Differences exist in raw materials also. The artifacts from upper reaches are exclusively made of dolerite while in foothills extensive use of clay stone is noticed. Here majority of the tools are faceted. Besides, almost all the sites in the foothills region are largely associated with hand made potteries. The presence of cord-impressed pottery, which is hitherto regarded as the one and only hallmark of the ceramic Neolithic tradition of Assam that imbibed from the Southeast Asia, is now being discarded. The presence of another most prolific indigenous potter type—Plain Course Brown (or drab red) Ware with its vivid shape and size dominates the center-stage of the ceramic Neolithic cultures of the foothills of Assam. Nonetheless, both the pottery type i.e. cord-impressed and coarse plain grey is found in association with shouldered celts. The latter have absolute dates of 2700±0.05, 3290±0.07 and 3690±0.05 years B.P. obtained from three pottery samples (see Chapter 6).

The shape and size of the stone artifacts along with their context of occurrence in the Kitchen Midden point towards a completely different utilitarian aspect of these artifacts. The context itself denotes that these stone artifacts were nothing but household implements which were used for day-to-day activities. Thus, the Bambooti tradition, although bears Southeast Asian character in respect of celts, its association with the locally developed incomparable pottery industry of the Neolithic past is amazing because that phase was still under the great influence of lignin culture of Southeast Asia. The circumstantial evidence as well as the morphometric and technometric differences and similarities of Bambooti tradition with the findings from other sites bestowed a new developmental stage quite attuned to the given ecological setting in the areas under study (see Chapter 4 and 5). Thus, the continuity of the end Stone Age (Advanced Neolithic) traditions in northeast India that are understood to have established a set of contacts with Southeast Asian cultural elements and later with the emergence of certain locally developed cultural-paraphernalia to cope with the shifting ways of life, albeit in a micro level, with the advancement of production economy, had its tremendous impact on both the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of the southern foothills of Assam. That legacy still continues without having any basic techno-cultural alteration. This locally developed cultural pattern still sings in their tune of origin but in a transformed style. Because culture does not come out of vacuum, it rests on the past. It is the reflection of the past on the present (Ashraf, 2010:3). Based on the evidences, it can fairly be said that people living in the high altitude, were heavily dependent upon foraging which resulted into the production of the heavy-duty tools

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1 Use of bamboo in the Northeast India and Southeast Asia was so prolific that it never necessitated the development of pottery industry, infact the bamboo tube cater the vary need of appliance for which the pottery came into existence in most parts of the world.
during the early part of the Holocene epoch. Seemingly, in the later part of the epoch, as suggested by the material evidences, viz. continuation of using of stone artifacts impregnated with new types and functions clearly indicates a sort of past present continuum that creeps down or extends up to the area under study. Here their economy shifted from foraging and dry cultivation (horticulture) to the wet cultivation (agriculture) along with foraging economy as an ‘economic-equilibrium’ (Ashraf, 2010:130). It is to be mentioned that not only in Northeast India but also in the hilly and forested environments of Central India, the Eastern and Western Ghats hundreds of tribal societies practicing some form of primitive agriculture continue to supplement their subsistence by hunting and gathering (Nagar Malti et. al. 1995: 169-192).

The prehistoric modes of settlement pattern in the foothills belt itself indicate the mode of basic subsistence of the people. The landscape around the periphery of the prehistoric sites particularly the water soaked river basin, and its utilization for rice cultivation following the rudimentary method of cultivation by broad bladed hoe made of iron (simply a replacement of stone blade by the Rabhas); practicing shifting cultivation on the adjoining hill slopes by using iron blade (simply a replacement of stone blade by the Garos), and the continued existence of earthen utensils bearing similar techno-morphic characters with the excavated potsherds - are some of the tangible clues that lends support to the continuation of Neolithic life style. These tangible elements are closely attached with some intangible age old elements also. Besides, the making of bark cloth by the Garos, the erection of menhirs by the Karbis, dependence on gathering and hunting activity for food supplement pursued through unique age old methods and techniques and the extensive use of perishable materials like bamboo and wood for making of majority of the material cultural items are some of the archaic living traditional practices that have made this region a rich field for the ethno archaeological study.

Besides, so far as the process of transformation of the artifacts is concerned, “it is not only played out through the movement of objects from one place to another. The patina of age can also obscure or add to the traditional meanings of things. Archaic tools may become important motifs or symbols, and yesterday’s rubbish can become a much sought-after collectable. Passed down from one generation to another, objects may be endowed with complex personal biographies. Even stone tools become entangled in new systems of meaning and value. Found in a field and placed on a mantelpiece, they may be valued for their perceived aesthetic qualities or for the sense that they evoke of a long-established human presence” (Edmonds Mark, 1995:11). The most striking example of transformation of meaning and value and even use of stone artifacts comes from Assam and other parts of Northeast India. The Neolithic stone tool tradition of Assam, specially the foothills region, is mainly represented by celts. These celts have long been preserved by each and every ethnic group of this region whenever they are
encountered on the surface. It is because of a most common belief that these are nothing but thunderbolts. Thus, the word *Goira- Gitchi* means God’s axe. Medicine man of the

**LOCATION MAP OF STUDY AREA**

![Location Map of Study Area](image)

Fig: 1.1 Location Map of Study Area

... communities like Garos, Rabhas, Karbis and Tiwas use these stone artifacts for medicinal purpose. So, it is apparent that the use of these stone artifacts is still in vogue among the ethnic groups of Assam, though in different context but nevertheless tied up
with strong belief and sentiments. It is pertinent to say that similar type of implements made of iron and hafted with bamboo and wooden shaft have largely been found among the Khasis, Garos, Rabhas and other ethnic groups, which are basically used in the jhum field for tilling soil and weeding. The difference between iron hoe and stone hoe rests only with the raw material. Other aspects like morphology, hafting method, etc is same. Therefore, the iron hoe is nothing but a true replica of stone hoes which link up both the past and the present. Here, lies the relevance of archaeoethnological\(^2\) rather than ethnoarchaeological investigation.

Ashraf (2010:124) rightly pointed out that a past material cultural assemblage is nothing but an archaeological ‘black-box’ that codified the activities of the people we are concerned with. Further, he opined that the process of codification in systematic and divergent directions started taking place towards the end of Pleistocene in Northeast India. Therefore, the identifiable variation and continuity in the cultural pattern within more or less common geo-cultural setting and time-plane is quite apparent in this region (Ashraf & Roy, 2012:24). The contemporary society crusted with conventional systems could reflect the degree of absorption, continuation, variation and alteration that codified within the material cultures of the given society with reference to the past activities. The whole process can be viewed in vis-à-vis manner. In other words, the former acts from known to unknown while the latter denote unknown to known. “Ethnographic research for archaeological purpose can be regarded as a linking material remains to the human behaviour from which they resulted” (Gould, 1978c: vii). While discussing the ethnographic analogy in archaeology, Ascher (1961:325) concluded in the following words- “it is the study of this very special corpus of data (the post depositional transformation of discarded and disused material) within the living community which holds the most fruitful promise for analogy in archaeological interpretation.” Edward Staki and Livingstone Sutro (1991:2) stated that “ethnoarchaeology is the study of ethnographic or historical situation, either through firsthand observation or documentary research, to extract information useful for understanding the relationships between the patterns of human behaviour and material culture in all times and places.” There is a complex relationship between the artifacts recovered from excavation and the human behaviour which produced them and in turn all of the economic and social activities in which they were engaged. In addition, there exists the relationship of the artifacts and their organized pattern with their surrounding environmental and ecological situation, which introduces the dimension of time in form of seasonality and ultimately the concept of culture change (Stiles, 1977:91). From the observation of inter-relationship of material culture and human behaviour, it is possible to create realistic models on how societies functioned in the past, using archaeological data as supporting and contradicting evidence. Thus, ethnoarchaeology views contemporary culture from an archaeological perspective and thereby relates past with

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\(^2\) Understanding of ethnological problem through archaeological means.
the present. However, the present study is not purely an ethnoarchaeological study. Hence it is not fully involved in decoding the degree of codification of human activity. Rather it is an archaeoethnological study dealing with known to unknown facts of a society and thereby trying to relate present with the past. Archaeo-ethnology views archaeological culture from the perspectives of ethnographic present (Ashraf and Roy, 2012:22). The ethnographic composition, their settlement and subsistence pattern, material cultures and related age-old intangible traditions in the area under study are some of the most vital clues that can lead one to trace back the ethnohistory of the people to the prehistoric past. The strong base of the existence of prehistoric tool tradition clustered with hand made pottery of Locality 1 (e.g. Bambooti, see Chapter 4, 5 and 6) along with the other prehistoric sites of Locality 2 and Locality 3 (see Chapter 4, 5 and 6) put more impetus to this problem. Although the stone tool tradition not only intruded into the metal using stage but it has also penetrated into the metal tool tradition with the changes in raw material and a little bit morphometric changes. Moreover, Bambooti pottery tradition is still in focus as a surviving prehistoric tradition with a minute stylistic change. In this context it is worth mentioning that both the significant prehistoric cultural items—Neolithic celts and the pottery ceased to exist in the foothills of Assam but their impact on the traditional societies is still reckonable. The role of Neolithic celts transformed into intangible heritage associated with beliefs and myths while the pottery remained almost static in the unaltered state. In fact, without considering the context, it is almost impossible to draw a line between the past and the present.

1.2 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The particular aim of this work reflects on the chosen research topic. The notion that centres round the survival of prehistoric traditions among the Northeast Indian ethnic groups is an undeniable reality. In the given context, we have attempted to cover a region that had its legacy in the upper reaches in the form of post Palaeolithic cultural tradition. This cultural legacy originated in the upper reaches but some of the prehistoric traits apparently percolate to the foothills belt in the identical or varied form. So, the prime aim of this research is to identify and segregate the prehistoric elements that have been operating both in the past and the present context in the given areas. The entire exercise aims at understanding the sources and development of traditions that are operating within the area from time immemorial.

Thus the present study aims to discern the surviving prehistoric traditions in the foothills region of southern part of Lower Brahmaputra valley on the basis of tangible evidence which includes stone artifacts, pottery, material culture of contemporary ethnic groups inhabiting in and around the study area and also their intangible cultural traits.
It is worth mentioning that while interpreting the material evidences that came into light during our fieldwork in foothills belt, a new set of problems relating to our present study emerged. Special mention may be made of the recent excavated materials derived out of a ‘Kitchen Midden’ at Bambooti. With the present state of knowledge it can fairly be said that the finding has offered certain vital clues in unfolding some hitherto unsolved problems. For instance- (a) regarding the actual use of stone artifacts (Celts), (b) its relationship with the pottery as an associated finds, (c) the trend of economic activities in the foothills region, etc. This new discovery has led us to incorporate these aspects into the aims and objectives of the present study. Besides, an attempt has been made to work out the duration of the continuity of the use of lithic implements in the foothills region.

Thus, the present study aims to work out a transparent worksheet leading to the solution of most of these problems confronted in tracing out a schematic view of the surviving prehistoric traditions and its variations.

1.3 METHODOLOGY

Methodology is based on covering both archaeological as well as ethnographic parameters. So far as the archaeological part is concerned, the data has been collected through intensive field work which covers Bambooti, Silpara, Nisangram, Hahim, Rani, Tetelia, Adingiri, Pamohi, Nilachal, Chandrapur and Sonapur. Besides, for the purpose, a good number of stone artifacts from the areas in question (till date around 150), which are housed at the Departmental Museum, have been identified and examined afresh.

The Department of Anthropology of Gauhati University under the guidance of A.A.Ashraf made the discovery of Bambooti, a prehistoric site, situated at the foothills of East Garo Hills in November, 2010. In the whole process of exploration and excavations the present researcher was also an active participant.

The preliminary investigation on the foothills of East Garo Hills which is adjacent to the Assam –Meghalaya border near Damra of Goalpara District was carried out with a view to explore the terrain in search of some prehistoric evidences either in the form of stone artifacts or pottery.

An extraordinary prehistoric site at Bambooti was discovered in the course of exploration in the Foothills. It was brought to light through systematic investigation based on summing-up of certain nature-based parameters, such as- detection and rejection of sunshine and sun-shadow area respectively, coupled with favorable slope gradient of not more than 7°in the hilly terrain and availability of nearby water source, which are the prerequisites for a prehistoric settlement (Ashraf, 2011:268-280). Interestingly, same conditions are still applicable so far the settlement pattern of the
contemporary ethnic communities of the foothills in particular and Northeast India in general is concerned.

Based on these factors the department of Anthropology, Gauhati University discovered the Neolithic site- Bambooti on the right bank of the Bambooti Chiring (stream).

Six numbers of trenches 2m x 2m have been laid down at Bambooti. Out of which two have been exposed to a depth of 36 Centimeters B.S., i.e. up to the sterile layer. The striking features revealed through these excavations are the exposition of a Kitchen Midden and postholes.

The interpretation of the data has been made on the basis of careful statistical exercise along with the cartographic illustrations. The stone artifacts brought under study are acquired through exploration, excavations, besides using the relevant museum collection. These are systematically documented and brought under the typotechnological classification. Here weightage has been given on the morphometric and technometric analysis of the stone artifacts which includes length, breadth, thickness, weight, shape, hafting facility, gripping facility, characters of working and butt end, cross-sectional contour etc. Since the sample size is not equal, following ‘unit distribution’ which replaces percentile for unit does the comparative analyses of the artifacts from three localities.

To obtain the date of the site three samples of potsherd collected from the excavated site at Bambooti were sent to the Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology, Dehradun for dating through oSL method. The methodology that was followed for dating the samples is furnished in details -

1.3.1 LUMINESCENCE DATING METHODOLOGY

“Technique: Optically Stimulated Luminescence (OSL) Dating
Material: Pottery; Mineral: Quartz; Size: 90-120µm
Protocol: Single Aliquot regeneration (SAR) protocol (Murray and Wintle, 2000)
In the laboratory, under subdued red light conditions, the pottery samples were crushed and transferred to a beaker after removing light exposed materials from the surfaces. Sample was then treated for removing carbonate and organic matter using 1 N HCl and 30% HPO$_2$ respectively, and then sieved to obtain 90-125µm size fraction (Aitken, 1985). From the separated size fraction (90-125µm), quartz grains (density 2.65 gm/cc) were extracted by density separation using high density liquid (sodium polytungstate solution). The extracted quartz grains were etched for 80 minutes in hydrofluoric acid (40%) to remove the outer layer (the HF treatment also removes any feldspar contaminations) and subsequently treated with HCl and washed in distilled water and re
sieved. The purity of the etched quartz (i.e. any feldspar contaminations) is confirmed by infra-red stimulated luminescence (IRSL) technique.

The etched quartz grains were then fixed into the centre of stainless steel discs (i.e. about 3mm diameter mono layer of samples in 10 mm diameter steel discs) using silicon oil (adhesive agent) for determining the radiation energy received by the sample after its burial (i.e. palaeo dose or equivalent dose). The Single Aliquot Regeneration protocol (Murray and Wintle, 2000) was used for equivalent dose (De) determination. The Optically Stimulated Luminescence (OSL) measurements were carried out in an automated Riso TL/DA-20 reader equipped with blue light emitting diodes. The equivalent dose (De) values were calculated using the initial integral (0.8 sec) of the OSL (by Duller’s Annalyse software). For the annual dose rate estimation, concentrations of uranium, thorium and potassium were measured by ICP. Grun’s software is used for dose rate and age calculation.

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\text{Age} = \frac{\text{Equivalent dose (Gy)}}{\text{Dose rate (Gy/kc)}}
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So far as the analysis of ethnographic data is concerned, the ethnographic accounts, cultural history, folktales, folklores and legends are some of the source of consultations that has immensely helped in the interpretation of data. The assimilation of the present cultural scenario of the foothills of southern Assam and its past background is made possible by means of the study of their geo-cultural set up, geoclimatic condition of the region and most importantly the material culture and some related age old intangible traditions.

1.4 PREHISTORIC STUDIES IN NORTHEAST INDIA THROUGH THE AGES

The archaeological map of the world does not demarcate the seven states of Northeast India separately, rather prefers to identify it as a single strategic region because of its peculiar geographical location, geomorphologic features as well as its ethnic composition.

Till 1974 or even later, archaeological literature published in India and abroad included all discoveries of the prehistoric period of Northeast India as representing prehistoric cultures of Assam, which is said to have passed all the stages of prehistoric cultures right from the early stone age to Megalithic stage. After the reorganization of Assam into several small states, the prehistory of truncated Assam have been treated in the new beacon since the state is yet to yield cultural relics of Paleolithic and the Mesolithic period (Sharma, 1991:54-55).
Sir John Lubbock (1857) initiates the work on the Stone Age of undivided Assam. He referred to the collection of Neolithic finds in Naga Hills (then a district of Assam) by E.H.Steel and Lt.Barron. His report “The Stone Age of Assam” was published on Athenaeum, London (No.2069, June22, 1867:822). Since then some stray finds have been reported. Here, the mention should be made of the large collection of the tea planter of Bishwanath Mr.W.Penny from Darrang District whose findings were later listed and published in two separate papers by Coggin Brown Coggin Brown and H.C.Sengupta (An Catalogue of Prehistoric Antiquities in the Indian Museum, Calcutta, 1917:131-33).

In the year 1875 Godwin Austin and in 1879 Cockburn reported ground and polished Stone Age relics in Khasi Hills, Meghalaya. Gurdon explored a number of hilltops of Cherrapunji, Maoflong, Lailkor, Jowai, Nortiang, Lailongkot and other isolated areas of Khasi and Jaintia Hills and thereby tried to establish a prominent place for Khasi Megaliths in the archaeological map of the world. Besides, he tried to find out the connection among the inhabitants of Malay, Burma, Khasi Hills and Chotanagpur in the Neolithic period by putting stress on the occurrence of shouldered celts in these areas (Gurdon, 1914:55-144).

In 1924, R.D. Benarjee made first systematic study on the Neolithic artifacts of this region in the caption of ‘Neolithic Implements from the Abor (Adi) Country (ASI Annual Report (1924:25).

The other large collection from Northeastern states preserved in the Pitt River Museum, Oxford are the contributions of J.H.Hutton, J, P.Mills, G.D.Walker, J.H.Grace and C.P.Pawsey. Hutton who reported many archaeological discoveries (Hutton, 1924; 1926; 1928) described only three types of tools besides dealing with Megalithic remains. J.P.Mills (1929; 1933) focused the potentialities of the North-East India in the field of archaeological research and recognized the Khasi Megaliths as of worldwide fame (Mills, 1933:3-5). K.L.Barua summarized the previous works in his paper Prehistoric Culture in Assam (Barua, 1939: J.A.R.S.VII, 6-18, 35-41). Further P.C.Choudhury gave more stress on the survey of anthropological and archaeological data in his article Neolithic Culture in Kamarupa (Choudhury, 1944: J.A.R.S.XI,41-47). In 1949,Worman (1949) made a very serious comment in his paper ‘The Neolithic Problems in the Prehistory of India’ published in the Journal of Washington Academy of Sciences.Vol.XXXXIX, No.6 that Assam together with Burma acted as a corridor through which celt making techniques entered India from Southeast Asia (Worman, 1949:181-201). Krishnashwami (1959) also states that certain Assam types namely, the faceted hoe, the shouldered hoe and the splayed axe have a wide distribution in southeast Asia and South China and belongs to this general complex (c.f. Goswami and Bhagawati, 1959: 312-324).
A.H Dani (1960) made an important collection, who studied the collection from Garo Hills, Meghalaya made by G.D.Walker and J.P.Mills between 1931-1937. This included Neolithic ground and polished stone axes, adges and hoe blades. A.H. Dani (1960) has also demonstrated the similarity of stone tools from various regions of Northeast India with other parts of Southeast Asia and East Asia. Prof. M.C. Goswami and A.C.Bhagabati also reported a rich prehistoric site at Rengchangre (Goswami and Bhagabati, 1959). In the same year, Profs. M.C.Goswami and A.C.Bhagabati reported a collection of Neolithic tool types from western Assam (Goswami and Bhagabati, 1959: 312-324). The collection of Prof Goswami from Garo Hills since 1949 and onwards was classified by T.C.Sharma (Sharma, 1966, 1980) illuminating its South East Asian linkages. Sharma stated that the large, heavy and roughly flaked axes from Rongram of Garo Hills bear resemblance with the Hoabinhian axes of Southeast Asia and this tool tradition entered to Northeast India from Southeast Asia. While analyzing the ground and polished stone tools, he mentioned that there is unmistakable influence of Southeast Asian Neolithic tradition over the Garo Hills. The presence of large numbers of shouldered celts in the Garo Hills is a clear evidence of such cultural affinities (Sharma, 1980:102-122).

The studies on prehistoric archaeology in North East India got a new dimension with the establishment of the Dept. of Anthropology in Gauhati University in1948 as well as with the introduction of the branch of Prehistoric Archaeology in the same department in 1966. It has resulted into a great collection of prehistoric artifacts from different parts of Assam, the majority of which came from Garo Hills, Meghalaya. The reports on these collections of the students of this department appeared in the Journal of Assam Science Society (Sharma &Sharma, 1968:73-84), (Sharma and Singh, 1968:36-50). In the year 1969, O.K. Singh and T.C. Sharma have reported 43 neoliths from Tangkhul, Ukhrul and Thoubal areas (Singh & Sharma, 1969:36-48). These include edge ground and fully ground stone tools made of basalt, shale, diorite, schist and quartzite. Typologically these are classified as triangular axes, quadrangular axes, adzes, shouldered celts of quasi-tanged Naga Hills type, and Chisel.

The historical furtherance in the archaeological study of North East India took place with the first excavation of a Neolithic site in Daojali Hading of N.C.Hills District of Assam in the year 1963. This excavation headed by Prof. M.C.Goswami and assisted by T.C.Sharma yielded stone tools, mullers-pestles, grinding stone, bone fragments and cord impressed pottery. Sharma stated that the collections of prehistoric antiquities from different parts of Assam including Daojali Hading of N.C. Hills District suggest that prehistory of Assam consists of only one phase of Neolithic i.e. Late Neolithic characterized by ground and polished stone tools, shouldered celts and cord marked pottery showing influence of Eastern Asiatic Neolithic Tradition (Sharma, 1980:107-111).
B.P. Bopardiker made another collection from Daphabum area of Lohit District in 1972. These are preserved by Prehistoric Branch of Archaeological Survey of India at Nagpur resulted into the discovery of a Pre Neolithic Phase in (i.e., Paleolithic cultural phase in Arunachal Pradesh.)³.

The excavated the site Sarutaru and Marakdola located at the foothills of Meghalaya, near Guwahati was claimed to be of Neolithic period because of the presence of ground tools with cord marked pottery (Rao, 1973, 1977, Thapar, 1985). However, the site was later dated as modern by Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (Possehl, 1988:178). Therefore, the site need further investigation.

The systematic archaeological investigation in the area of Rongram, Ganol and Simsang valleys was started under the guidance on M.C. Goswami and T.C. Sharma since 1966 resulting into the discovery of a number of Stone Age sites in the Central part of Garo Hills. Most notable stratified sites among them are Rongram, Thebrongre, Selbalgre, and Mishmagre (Sharma, 1980:111-112). Since 1969, several eminent archaeologists have visited the Garo Hills and made extensive archaeological and geomorphological studies in the said river valleys jointly by the Deptt. of Anthropology, G.U. To name a few, Prof. K. de B. Corington of London University (1969), Prof. H. D. Sankalia (1970-71), V. N. Mishra (1978), R. S. Pappu (1978) and S. N. Rajaguru (1977), V. N. Mishra (1978), R. S. Pappu (1978) of Deccan College Post Graduate and Research Institute, Pune. In 1972 H. C. Sharma produced his theses on Stone Age archaeology of Garo Hills, Meghalaya after studying several sites of Garo Hills. He studied the quaternary deposits and stratigraphic evidences along with different cultural phases and tried to establish the chronology following the “series” of Sankalia.

The year 1977 is remarkable for the extensive study carried out by Rajaguru and others (Rajaguru, 1977-78:42-49) regarding the quaternary formations in the Garo hills with a view to promote a background of quaternary geology for Stone Age culture. In the same year Dr. H. C. Sharma discovered a pebble – chopper tradition in the Simsung-Nangal valley at Nangalbibra in the east of Garo Hills. Sharma reported a microlithic industry from Selbalgre II and also the Hoabinhian from Rongram valley. (Sharma, 1979:289). On the other hand, the same eco-environmental setting of Nangalbibra yielded flake tools and a few microliths on chert and jasper justifying the presence of Levalloisian and Microlithic traditions (Sharma and Roy, 1985:89-91). Sonowal Minarva (1987) made the typo- technological study of the flake and blade traditions in Garo Hills. The study of ceramic traditions from Neolithic to Medieval period of Assam based on Daojali Hading, Garo Hills and Ambari pottery has thrown some new light in the understanding of ceramic traditions of this region (Roy, 1977). In contrast to the previous classification of the stone artifacts of Garo Hills, Alok Ghosh (1978: 6-25) has strongly commented of the absence of Paleolithic artifacts in Garo.

³ Palaeolithic cultural phase through Bopardikar’s finding is not convincing.
Hills and he referred to these tools as "Neolithic debitage". Thus, stone tools of this region became a debatable topic amongst scholars. In the year 1980, D.K. Medhi produced his Ph.D. thesis on the geomorphology of Garo Hills.

The excavation at Parsi Parlo in Arunachal Pradesh (1982-1983) unearthed a stratified site which revealed three successive phases in 100 centimeter thick cultural deposits starting from aceramic Neolithic under the influence of Hoabinhian tradition to the iron using (Ferrolithic) stage through the Ceramic Neolithic (Ashraf, 1990, 1998). He has compared the waisted axes and hoes reported from Parsiparlo to those reported from Hoabinhian sites in Vietnam referred by Colani (1929) and Ha Van Tan (1990).

Mizoram has yielded only one tool till yet which is a large, thin axe made on slate. The butt end of the tool has three broad holes probably for facilitating the hafting of the tool (Sharma, 1984:19).

The lithic evidences of the prehistoric period reported from Central Assam was classified and illustrated by N.D. Choudhury in his published thesis “Historical Archaeology of Central Assam (Choudhury, 1985).

The study of Driem (1998) and Bellwood (2005) has developed a new dimension of analyzing the prehistory of Northeastern India based purely on linguistic
and archaeological data. While studying the linguistic and archaeological correlation, George Van Driem (1998) has correlated the Austro-Asiatic language to the Neolithic culture of Southeast Asia that probably migrated to Northeast India before 3000 B.C. He is of the opinion that archaeological records show more connections between Northeast Indian Neolithic to Chinese Neolithic than the Southeast Asia (Driem 1998: 67-102). Similarly, Peter Bellwood (2005) in his book ‘First Farmers: The Origins of Agricultural Societies’ mentioned that the Neolithic archaeology of N.E. region shows a much stronger connection with China than it does with India (Bellwood 2005: 131).

However, the archaeological studies of Northeast India entered into a completely new arena with the technometric and morphometric study of the lithic evidences in anthropological perspective. This exceptionally brilliant attempt was made by Ashraf (2004, published in 2010) based on lithic tool tradition of the Garo and Khasi Hills, which has opened a new approach to the study of cultural variation and continuity. The study followed conventional typological methods as well as non-conventional study of edge angle, use wear, grip-axis, handedness, etc. This is definitely a pioneering work in respect of the systematic assimilation of conventional, non-conventional archaeological methodology and anthropological theoretical formulations and ideas in the history of the study of Northeast Indian prehistory. Ashraf has brought the lithic assemblages of Meghalaya under the broad spectrum of the Southeast Asia and developed a chronological framework in relation to Southeast Asian prehistory. He has considered that the Mesolithic nomads inhabited the higher altitudes of eastern Meghalaya in the Early Holocene period. By around 7th to 8th millennium B.C., the western part of Meghalaya was occupied by the people of Hoabinhian culture. The study has shown some distinct morphological similarities between the Hoabinhian of Southeast Asia and Meghalayan Hoabinhian especially in respect of truncation character. The appearance of edge grinding tools prior to the appearance of pottery in both the region has been considered as another common sequence. He has considered these two as a common cultural zone due to its undetractable geo-cultural homogeneity and close sequential continuum of material cultures. This study has developed some new structured model for further study of this kind.

M.Hazarika (2006) has been executing some brilliant works on the origin of Neolithic pottery and agriculture of N. E. India since last few years. He has stated that the “due to the strategic geographical location of Northeast India which connects the East and the South Asian regions, cultural affinities can be observed in the material cultural objects since prehistoric times. These cultural affinities during the Neolithic period in Northeast India are basically based on the celt making tradition, cord-impressed pottery, and rice cultivation. These are the characteristic features of the Neolithic culture, which connects Northeast India with Chinese Neolithic, and Southeast Asian Neolithic cultures. Also, we find some similarities of these features with the Neolithic cultures of Eastern and Central India to some extent. The strong influence of the Neolithic culture of China and Southeast Asia is one of the prominent factors in the
origin and development of the Neolithic culture of Northeast India, especially for the origin of pottery and agriculture” (Hazarika, 2006: 5). He also believes the possibility of early rice cultivation somewhere in Northeast India.

On the other hand, O.K. Singh has elaborately describes the prehistoric, proto-historic, historic and contemporary pottery in his book *Pottery Through the Ages in Manipur* in 2008. Here he has shown the continuity of cord mark pottery in Manipur since the prehistoric age till today (Singh, 2008:103). According to him “the Neolithic culture of Manipur has affinity with those of China and Southeast Asia (Singh,1988, 1997). The corded ware was one of the characteristic pottery elements of the Neolithic culture in China and Southeast Asia. In Manipur, based on the stratigraphical evidence at Nongpok keithelmanbi locality-1, corded ware succeeded the early Hoabinhian flaked pebble tools without associating the late Hoabinhian edge ground pebble tools. According to Solheim (1969:131) these two elements were independently invented within Southeast Asia and became culture complex by diffusion during the late Hoabinhian. The cord impressed ware was also reported from Padah-lin caves of Myanmar in association with the late Hoabinhian dating between 13,400±200 B.P. and ca.6500 B.P. (Thaw U Aung, 1971: 132-133, c.f. Singh, 2008: 107). Hence, there is every possibility of arriving the corded ware people in Manipur before the amalgamation of these two late Hoabinhian elements, probably from the direction of South China” (Singh, 2008: 107). He has pointed out linguistic affinity of corded ware culture of South china and Manipur. Another most vital clue regarding the culture contact between Northeast India and Southeast Asia since prehistoric age as pointed out by Singh is the close affinity between the carved paddle impressed pottery of Manipur with the local variations in decoration patterns and the prehistoric pottery of China and Southeast Asia (Singh, 2008: 108-109).

The recent publication on the book *People of Contemporary Northeast India* (Tiluttoma Baruah, ed.) Ashraf (2011) has elaborately described the methodology to be followed during the archaeological exploration especially in Northeast India. This is because, most of the prehistoric sites in Northeast India are located in difficult hilly terrains covered by thick forest, which has made the exploration a quite challenging (Ashraf, 2011:268). Here, he has reported the discovery of the one and only Kitchen Midden site at Bambooti of East Garo Hills near Damra of Goalpara District of Assam. Another recent publication on the book *North-east India-A Handbook of Anthropology* (T.B. Subba ed.), Ashraf and Roy (2012:22-31), has pointed out some scopes and limitations in the ethnoarchaeological study in Northeast India. This study can be regarded as another guideline of the ethnoarchaeological study in the context of Northeast India.

Thus, through the ages, the scholars have treated the survival of prehistoric traditions in Northeast India as a relevant phenomenon and as have made different contributions on the different aspects pertaining to this conundrum.