Chapter 3

Study site
3.1 Location

The state of Assam is comprised of three physical divisions, namely, the Brahmaputra Valley, the Barak Valley and the hill range. The Barak Valley region is situated between Longitude 92°15' and 93°15' East and Latitude 24°8' and 25°8' North, covering an area of 6922 sq. km. and is located in Southern Assam, North-East India. The valley constitutes 8.9 percent of the geographical area of the state but contains 11.22 percent of the population as per 2001 census. The region shares its borders with North Cachar Hills district and the state of Meghalaya in the North; the state of Manipur in the East; the state of Mizoram in the South and the state of Tripura and the Sylhet district of Bangladesh in the West. The region is composed of three districts, namely Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi. Cachar is the largest district with total geographical area of 3786 sq km. The Valley has an undulating topography characterized by hills, hillocks (locally known as tillah) wide plains and low-lying waterlogged areas (locally called beels) (Roy and Bezbaruah, 2002).

The study was carried out in Dargakona area (24°41'N Latitude and 92°41'E Longitude) of Cachar district of Barak Valley, Assam, North-East India (Fig 3.1). The study site is originally a tea plantation area dominated by tea garden laborers. The laborers in the area like any other tea plantation sites in Assam were brought in from the states of West Bengal, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, during the early 19th century with the rise of the tea industry in the state (Sengupta, 1996). They are mostly concentrated in the tea garden areas and are an important demographic component of the valley and the least investigated homegardening community. The study area is further
Fig 3.1: Map showing the location of the study site in Barak Valley, Assam
divided into several sub categories such as natun tilla, chailta basti, hopi tilla, bhumijjine etc. The dominant communities in the area are Bagdi, Ravidas, Maal, Maalakar and Bharadwaj. The area was originally a tea garden area surrounded by natural forests. Portions of the forest were cleared for establishment of the migrant tea labors. Also some portions were used for sugarcane and paddy cultivation. Later many of such areas were converted to *Imperata* grassland and some to banana cultivation areas. Homegardening is a part of their cultural and social system and has been practised from the beginning of the establishment of the tea laborers in the area. The resource management activities of the community include cultivation of paddy, areca nut, *Vetiveria* grassland, *Imperata* grassland, bamboo groves, vegetables, pisciculture etc (Fig 3.2).

### 3.2 Climate

The climate of the study site is sub-tropical warm and humid with average rainfall of 2660 mm, most of which is received during the southwest monsoon season (May to September). Southwest monsoon usually operates for a longer spell in the Northeastern region compared to the other parts of India. Average maximum and minimum temperatures were 30.6°C and 20.7°C respectively. The climatic variable of the study site is represented in Fig 3.3.

### 3.3 Forests

The Barak Valley region has 3839 km² of total area under forests which is about 55.46 percent of the total geographical area (6922 km²) of the region as against 13.89 percent for the state as whole (FSI, 2005) (Fig 3.4). Forest cover in Hailakandi district represents the highest percentage with 58.85 (26.75% very dense and moderately dense forests) followed by the Cachar district with 58.77 percent (26.67% very dense and moderately dense forests) and the Karimganj district with 46.05 percent (17.96% very dense and moderately dense forests) of
Fig 3.2: Sketch map of the study village depicting different land-use systems (HG= homegarden, BG= bamboo grove)
Fig 3.3: Climate data of the study site from 2003-2006
Fig 3.4: Forest cover map of Assam
the geographical area of their respective district (FSI, 2005). According to Champion and Seth (1968) the forest vegetation of Barak Valley comes under Cachar tropical evergreen forest (1/1B/C3) and Cachar semi evergreen forest (2/2B/C2).