Chapter 1:

HISTORIOGRAPHY: ISSUES AND PROBLEMS
INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a survey of the scholarship trends that deal with the study of ancient Indian history. The literature surveyed in this chapter goes beyond the political boundaries of present day India and is not confined to the trends in the study of the Brahmaputra valley. The historiography is thematically presented and deals with issues that have been of interest to scholars such as foraging, settlement patterns, origins of plants, placed within the larger issue of environmental diversity. At times it also shifts beyond the purview of history and examines several ethnographic accounts as diverse communities also play a significant role in the region. This approach has been followed in the historiography in order to encapsulate studies that have addressed themes that are significant for addressing environmental issues.

The historiography focuses on central issues pertaining to the thesis and attempts to bring out the shifts in the past in the study of various issues. The main focus of this thesis has been to look at environmental complexities and how it has been impacting the various communities in the past, the basic understanding of the historiography is to locate this work in the broader paradigm of historical writing for the construction of ancient Indian history. During the past fifty years it has been observed that within the scholarship on ancient Indian history, the issue of agrarian expansion has received much attention by scholars in the study of ancient Indian history with a paradigm of agrarian expansion from the Gangetic valley towards other regions of India by historians. Thus, the discussion is limited to various issues pertinent to this study such as the role of environmental diversity, agricultural systems and multiplicity of communities, since there have been no works that have addressed these issues pertaining to the Brahmaputra valley. In such a situation, this study has tried to present areas that have been of interest to scholars such as origins of agriculture, rice cultivation and settlement patterns and not delved into the debates on state formation and the emergence of land-grants.

The recent interest in environmental history has emerged from a conservationist point of view with a tint of activism involved in it. Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha (1995) have looked at the ecological habitats in history and the manner in which society has been moulded by ecology. Works by Grove, Damodran and Sangwan (1998) which are of the view that environmental degradation emerged out of population expansion in the modern
times tend to push back and impose such a view for the ancient period as well which is
problematic as this view is not applicable for the ancient period where there is no evidence
of such population expansion.

Various forms of agricultural activities can be seen as having a close link with the
environment as agricultural intervention can change the face of the environment. Scholars
have defined agriculture in various contexts. Scholars such as R.S. Sharma opine that in the
Ganga valley agriculture was a state sponsored activity. Agricultural production was
directed towards surplus production for supporting the emerging class of brāhmaṇas and
rājanyas (Sharma 1983: 116-7), thus restricting its meaning.

The peasants living in the plains produced enough cereals to support
themselves and they could also spare a part of their produce for the use of
the emerging classes of the brāhmaṇas and the rājanyas in the form of
gifts, presents, taxes and tributes.

However on looking at a wider meaning of agriculture, it is seen as a "unique ecological
intervention that gives nature its identity and civility; and which imparts personality to the
land as people cut forests, divert rivers, create dams and lakes, kill predators, tame, breed,
and slaughter animals, and burn, chop, and otherwise eliminate natural growth to replace it
with plants that people like to grow" (Ludden 1999: 17). The ecological conditions under
which an individual crop is grown are determined not only by its natural soil and
atmospheric environment and the modifications made to this environment by the farmer
through ploughing, weeding, irrigation, applying fertilizers, etc. but also by the farming
system of which the crop is a component.

Thus, the definition of agriculture cannot be tapered down to just the farming activities of
sowing and reaping, but it can be viewed in a broader sense as being interconnected with
the social complexities of life. It can be defined as the institution of a social organisation of
physical powers to produce organic material for human use. Animal and forest products fall
within this definition. Agriculture includes ancillary activities like animal husbandry,
pastoralism, fishing, hunting and harvesting of forest produce (Ludden 1999: 18).
Agriculture is viewed as a way of life rather than a commercial activity (Barthakur 1968:
45). A wider notion of agriculture can enable scholars for a better understanding of the
complex man-environment relationship in the past and view it in terms of a wider ‘agricultural system’ and not merely focus on mono-cropping methods and techniques.

There are works written in the past on the region that have attempted to look at the socio-politico-economic history of the Ancient and Medieval period. There are scholars who have done pioneering works on the history of Assam which have not been discussed in detail here such as the works of Edward Gait (1926), PC Choudhary (1959), BK Barua (1969), SL Baruah (1985), etc. However, there are two recent works that are significant to our discussion.

Nayanjot Lahiri’s work Pre-Ahom Assam (1991), attempts to understand the early history of Kamrup and some of the emerging patterns in the lives of the people between the fifth and thirteenth centuries AD on the basis of epigraphic sources. She establishes cultural links with the Ganga valley. However, there is a need to look at the complexity that existed in terms of agricultural and craft production as she opines that it was being performed mostly at the house-hold level.

Ajay Mitra Shastri (2002) in his work uses a variety of literary sources along with epigraphy. Following traditional scholarship, he has been unable to move beyond the themes of political history, Brahmmanisation and elite formation in society.

These two works are fairly recent publications that have been written for the early period of the region. Enough focus has been given to the issue of agrarian expansion and there can be ways in which newer approaches can be formulated and a departure is made in viewing the region in its uniqueness, diversity, environmental abundance and its resulting complexity.

I

ENVIRONMENTAL DIVERSITY AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

The man-land correlation is a mutually dependent observable fact. Human beings directly depend on plants, animals and mineral resources and utilise these to fulfill their day-to-day needs. These activities are controlled by ecological factors and require adaptability to nature to some extent. Forests, grasslands, marshes, plain cultivable land, hilly terrain, mountain slopes, wooded areas, river valleys, sand-dunes, etc., are the varied range of land
categories that are available for him and its available products in their natural or wild form and the outcome of the activities (cultivation, terracing) carried out by him in these land categories provide him sustenance. Studies in the past have focused on one kind of environmental zone, mainly the Ganga Valley that has been the focus of study by historians and several gaps exist in the study of the so called ‘peripheral’ regions. However works in the past have addressed the issue of environmental diversity as discussed in this section.

Mehra and Arora (1985:275-279) on their work on the domestication of plants in India focus on tribal communities as efficient exploiters of the economic potentialities of plants, and the information on the present day use of plant species could be analysed to understand the processes involved in the sequence from food gathering to cultivation and domestication and in the diffusion of economic plants to other groups. By and large, physiographic and climatic variations and ethnic diversity have created pockets of concentration of plant species of economic value and the tribal people contributed substantially to the pattern by identifying and utilising the flora.

Vishnu-Mittre (1985:281-291) observes that the uses of wild plants in the Indian subcontinent show several stages of man-plant relationship, ranging from mere acquaintance with a wild plant to its subsequent selection and cultivation. It is interesting to note that certain wild plant species have the same uses in China, Africa and Southeast Asia as in the Indian sub-continent.

Guha (2001:28-34) in his work on the Garhwal and Kumaun region describes the character of the village settlements and their access to a wide range of resources. The location of settlements gives them an advantage of the diverse environments such as grass-rich areas of the forest for grazing animals; oak forests provided both fodder and fertilizer. The broad-leaved trees provided the villagers with fuel and agricultural implements. The forests were central for agriculture and animal husbandry and were also a source of medicinal herbs and food in times of need in the form of fruits, vegetables and roots.

Mehra (1999:139-146) in his work, looked at a diverse subsistence base in the prehistoric past in the Indian subcontinent. He makes inferences about possible means of subsistence in Pre-Neolithic times which can be drawn from the present-day uses of biodiversity, especially by communities living in the tribal belts of India where agricultural practices are
only part of people's subsistence practices, and people continue to depend on forest products. He argues that crop diversification was an obvious subsistence strategy of the Chalcolithic period. Crops suited to dry lands and wetlands were available for cultivation in both seasons, leading to better land use.

Norman (1984:220) views that root crops play a primary nutritional role in the tropical region as a source of carbohydrates for subsistence and local sale. In regions where there is an abundance of root as well as cereal crops, as in the case of Eastern Java, rice seems to be the preferred item of diet. Rice is consumed by the affluent sections and root crops by the poor people. The epigraphs in the Brahmaputra valley give a list of several plants in the region such as jam and wood apple, Banyan trees, bamboo, mango, fig, betel nut, jackfruit, black-berry, silk-cotton, sweet root, plum and areca nut trees (Sarma 1981).

The environment of the Brahmaputra valley is influenced by the high mountain walls on all sides excepting the narrow gap on the west, through which the Brahmaputra flows, and the dense forest, marshes, hilly terrain and riverine tracts leading to its complexity. The implications of such a complex system and its significance in the agricultural system will be taken up for discussion in chapter 2.

II

NOTIONS ON "AGRICULTURAL SYSTEMS"

Within its broad umbrella an agricultural system comprises of smaller segments of shifting cultivation, hunting-gathering or foraging, wet rice cultivation, etc. In the Brahmaputra valley wet rice cultivation plays a significant role in the valley region as agricultural activities are confined to the wet season while shifting cultivation plays a significant role in the hills (Barthakur 1968: 45). There are several present day communities who live in dense forests and upland areas and pursue shifting cultivation such as the Lalungs of Assam (Singh 2003:481-489).

Jahnabi Gogoi Nath's (2003) work throws light on the Agrarian system of Medieval Assam. The book attempts to address several aspects linked with the agrarian system such as land system, extent and methods of cultivation, revenue administration, condition of peasantry and trade in agricultural products. Her work mainly relying on written records such as the Ahom chronicles or Buranjis, land grant epigraphs, biographical and
genealogical works of the medieval period of Assam (both published and unpublished), contemporary foreign accounts and the Persian chronicles. The work although primarily focuses on the administrative aspects of agriculture, yet it attempts to study agriculture in its entirety as a system incorporating swidden farming, wet rice cultivation, etc.

The ecological conditions under which an individual crop is grown are determined not only by its natural soil and environment and the modifications made to this environment by the farmers through ploughing, weeding, irrigating, applying fertilizer, etc. but also by the farming system of which the crop is a component (Norman 1984:3). Thus, a unique pattern of farming emerges in the region where wet rice cultivation takes place in the valley region while shifting cultivation takes place in the hill area. The environment is a key element in moulding the farming pattern and also in the selection of the agricultural crops, techniques and methods.

Tropical farming can be classified into shifting cultivation systems and semi-intensive rain fed systems. Shifting cultivation and semi-intensive rain fed systems are characterised by a fallow period during which no crop is grown and native species reappear in the cropped area. Shifting cultivators play a significant role in the wet tropical forests as they often gather a significant proportion of their total food supply from wild plants (Norman 1984:5).

**Relevance of Shifting Cultivation**

Shifting agriculture or swidden cultivation is a form of agriculture which involves clearing woodland, burning the trees over the clear plot and mixing the ash into the soil, and then cultivating the prepared fields. After a few years, the soil is exhausted, so the farmer moves on to new woodlands and leaves the abandoned fields to lie fallow (Fagan 2004:275).

Shifting cultivation is also known as slash-and-burn cultivation and *jhum, khallu, bewär, marhan*, etc. in India.

Anthropologists do not view this form of agriculture as an uninformed, casual, and careless food-getting strategy. They often have well-developed techniques of clearing, firing, fertilising the soil, and crop rotation. Although some swidden cultivators depend primarily on one crop, many more cultivate several crops as one crop may not provide all the necessary proteins required for the human body (Nanda 1984: 161).

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1 The ash acts as a fertiliser, returning nutrients to the soil.
Scholars studying agriculture have primarily focused on settled plough cultivation in the Plains. In the past two decades the trends in the study of agriculture have not been restricted to the study of settled agriculture alone but shifting agriculture has come to play an integral role. The study by Ajay Pratap (1987:69) on the shifting cultivators of the Rajmahal hills is a departure from such a trend as he attempts to study the pattern of shifting cultivation based on Colonial records and also field survey. His research attempts to study the nature of the Savariya society and how it is linked to other economic systems involving domination and interference from the outside. He is opposed to the linear evolutionary development patterns of agriculture and also to the understanding of shifting cultivation as a precursor to the 'Neolithic revolution food producing strategies'.

Pratap’s recent work [(2000) and (2004)] looked at the ethno-history of shifting cultivation in eastern India and how archaeology can bring about a shift in paradigm to the history of ‘selective areas’. He argues that shifting cultivation as a farming system is based on the environmental locale, such as the presence of slopy terrain and sufficient rainfall. In his paper on the Santhal Parganas he discusses the archaeological finds surveyed during the course of his field study. He also adopts a methodology whereby an attempt is made at analysing the site typology, its features and also the assemblage composition and variability. This analysis is based on relational analogy where he links the Paharia past with the present on account of mobility consideration (Pratap 2004:304).

Pratap’s methodology is significant for the study of shifting cultivators, especially in those areas where similar subsistence strategies have some antiquity. The study of the settlement patterns and farming systems of tropical and sub-tropical regions can be attempted with the aid of his method of historical analogy.

The above survey brings to light the fact that the study of shifting cultivation has been carried out in various other regions as reflected in the works of Ajay Pratap. Shifting cultivation is practiced extensively in the region of study thus there is a need to address issues pertaining to diverse forms of cultivation.
Significance of Foraging Mode of Subsistence

Another significant element of the agricultural system is the foraging mode of subsistence. Hunting and Gathering or foraging, relies on food that is naturally available in the environment. Included in this strategy is the hunting of large and small game animals, fishing, and the collection of various plant foods. Hunting and gathering does not involve the production of food, either directly, by planting, or indirectly by controlling the reproduction of animals or keeping domestic animals for consumption for their meat or milk (Nanda 1984:153).

Many up-land groups and plain forest-dwellers entirely or partially through a combination of gathering and hunting activities produce not only subsistence goods, but also commodities for exchange. The emergence of such specialised foraging and exchange is dependent on several factors such as the local environmental contexts and processes. Gathering and hunting in the Holocene are seen as “doable, enduring and pervasive strategies”. These strategies have continued historically and have battled against sedentarisation or peasantisation and more efficient and comfortable modes of subsistence (Morrison 2002: xv).

M.L.K.Murthy (1997:70-81) in his work attempts an ethnographic analogy of the prehistoric dwellers and the present day fisher-hunter-gatherer tribes inhabiting the south-east coast of India. He suggests that there is a striking contiguity between the habitats of the ethnographic present and the Stone-Age sites, which implies that the Stone Age hunter-gatherer ecosystems, no matter how vestigial they have now become, continue to support groups with a hunter-gatherer pattern.

Lukacs (2002:44) in his paper discusses the hunting and gathering strategies in prehistoric India. He attempts to formulate a bio-cultural approach as opposed to earlier models of evolutionary ecological, historical particularism and professional primitivism. Critiquing the romanticisation of hunter-gatherer communities as done by ethnographers he emphasises on the demographic and health factors as an integral part of exchange between communities as several communicable diseases were passed on to traders in the due course of exchange.
Romila Thapar (2002:55-56) sees the hunter-gatherers as a distinct section in contrast to the peasants and pastoralists. She refers to the conflict portrayed in literary texts between the forest dwellers and the intruders. The forest dwellers were not confined to be hunter-gatherers as some were practicing shifting cultivation or were horticulturists and some practiced sedentary cultivation. She highlights the demarcation between the grama (village) and the aranya (forest) as an opposition was perceived between the two systems. In actual practice the dichotomy may not have been so sharp but existed in theory. There was a shift in the attitude towards forest-dwellers from earlier to later times. Initially, the forest was the habitat of those regarded as outside the social pale. Subsequently, the establishment of hermitages and the preference of ascetics for forest retreats led to the romanticising of the forest. But, on the other hand the state and the rulers treated the forest-dwellers with suspicion.

The studies based on hunter-gatherer societies provide an insight into how foraging methods are practiced based on the usage of a diverse range of natural resources. Agricultural systems comprising varied components result from environmental diversity creating conditions for the existence of a mosaic of activities.

**Wet Rice Cultivation**

Among the variety of food plants available, rice\(^2\) vies with wheat as a human food. Among the cereals, rice has the unique ability of tolerating continuous flooding and is often a sole crop for subsistence farmers in low-lying monsoonal regions. It is because the structure of the plant is semi-aquatic and hence transports air from the shoot to the root zone, enabling the microorganisms associated with the rhizosperm to biologically fix nitrogen. As a result subsistence farmers are able to reap some harvest without fertilisation (Chang 1989:408).

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2 A survey based on cropping pattern and production has revealed that rice, is the most extensively cultivated crop in the world, and forms a part of a staple diet of a vast majority of the world population. In total area of cultivation, China is the largest producer in the World, where as Indonesia is the highest in terms of per Hectare production. India produces nearly 21 percent of the world's production. Other important rice producing countries are Bangladesh, Japan, Indonesia, Thailand and Burma. The global scene points out towards a south East Asian geographical zone, as a prime area of rice cultivation. In India, rice occupies the largest area under cultivation, which is about 30% of the total area used for all food grains. Although rice is cultivated in various parts of India but it is the eastern parts which shares a higher concentration, Viz. Assam, West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and Andhra Pradesh (Randhawa 1980:262). A vast population of the world is engaged in rice production than any other cereal and out of 100 million hectares under rice cultivation, more than 90 percent are is in southern and eastern Asia (Glover 1985:265).
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It has been seen by Geographers and Botanists that rice was one of the earliest plants to be cultivated or domesticated by food gatherers in both tropical and warm temperate regions, where standing water or intermittent flooding occurs during the growing season (Chang 1985: 408).

Largely studies on rice cultivation have primarily focused on the origins and spread of rice as a food crop in the world, but not many attempts have been made to understand the social significance of rice in rituals and for a plethora of other purposes as we shall see in the case of the Brahmaputra valley, where there is an availability of a wide range of wild varieties of plants in the region which is unique. It might be possible that the agro-climatic feasibility may be conducive for the growth of the wild varieties of various crops especially rice as a result of which food gathering proves to be productive for the inhabitants in the pre historic period and till later times. Anthropological studies reveal that the present day inhabitants still harvest various kinds of wild varieties for domestic use only, such as bora, komal, and joha rice, etc. Apart from domestic consumption these varieties are locally produced for ritualistic purpose, which are required for harvest related rituals and festivals such as Bihu. This signifies the fact that these plants were not only being produced for consumption purpose but had a social significance in society.

In the 1950s N.I. Vavilov on the basis of phyto-geographic plant breeding emphasised that the Indian centre of origin of cultivated plants, especially rice is in Assam and Burma, and excludes North Western India, Punjab and the Ganga Valley. Vavilov after examining 117 species of plant varieties argues that India is undoubtedly the birth place of plants such as rice, sugarcane, a large number of legumes and many tropical fruit plants, including the mango and numerous citrus fruits (e.g. the orange, lemon, some species of tangerine, etc.) Assam is referred to in particular for its most remarkable place for citrus plants. Thus the picture that emerges is one where the Brahmaputra valley and its adjoining areas are viewed as being very fertile and also the most appropriate. Vavilov refers to the Brahmaputra Valley and its adjoining areas, while discussing the issue of the introduction of rice domestication in the region.

A new approach can be seen in Tuk Tuk Kumar’s study (1988) which attempts to look at the history of a single crop i.e. rice in India looking at all regions including the
Brahmaputra valley. Her work can be seen as a departure from the other works on rice cultivation as she attempts to incorporate various disciplines like archaeology, literature, botany, ethnography and linguistics. She discusses the significance of rice in rituals and also the variations in the rice growing practices, such as the harvesting of wild varieties and also the cultivation of other variety of crops in different environmental regions of India.

T.T. Chang’s (1989:408-417) contribution towards the study of rice cultivation is significant as he bases his arguments mainly on the knowledge of the biogeography of rice and botanical genetics. He accepts the intermediate stage of wild annual varieties. He limits the area of domesticated rice to a broad belt between 20° and 23° N, stretching from the central Ganga Valley to the South China Sea and suggests that North Eastern India was the most likely place for the first cultivation of rice, during the Neolithic period.

Looking at the role of environmental change in the origins of rice cultivation, Higham (1996:127-155) focuses on the transition to rice cultivation in South-east Asia especially in the area between the Yangzi and the Chao Phraya rivers. He emphasises the fact that the prehistory of rice in this region can be appreciated only in conjunction with the enveloping environmental changes that have occurred since the late glacial times. He proposes that rice was a part of the diet among sedentary village communities that took advantage of the very rich lacustrine and coastal resources characteristic of the Holocene period in East and Southeast Asia. He argues that a prerequisite for sedentism is a sufficiently reliable food source to sustain a group without its having to move. He analyses several factors that may have given a push to this transition such as climatic deterioration, proximity of settlements to flooding, etc.

Glover and Higham (1999:413-441) present their position on the debate pertaining to the origins of rice cultivation that rice was first domesticated and came under regular cultivation, probably in areas of seasonally receding floodwaters around lakes in the middle and lower reaches of the Yangzi River, at least 8,000 years ago. By 5,000 years ago it was being cultivated, probably as a ‘dry’ or rain-fed crop on the southern margins of the millet belt of northern China, and only in the late third millennium BC can we recognise a rapid expansion of rice cultivation into mainland Southeast Asia and westwards across India and Pakistan.
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Focussing on the significance of rice in a feasting context Brian Hayden (2003:458-469) in his paper on luxury foods in Southeast Asia, discusses that the first domesticated plants and animals were consumed as luxury foods primarily for the purpose of feasting. Using Southeast Asian tribal society as a case study, he demonstrates that all the domesticated animals and the most important of the domesticated plants such as rice constitute forms of wealth that are primarily used in feasting contexts. He views that rice has traditionally held a highly valued position in Southeast Asia.

The interest on plant origins and domestication is a complex issue and an area of interest for scholars belonging to diverse fields. It has been a subject of research which has been influenced by technological advancements, experimentation and a constant inflow of new data. Earlier research has focused on understanding the reasons behind the origins of agriculture. Since plant domestication is imperative to the study of agricultural systems, an attempt would be made to analyse some of the researches pertaining to this issue.

The work of V. Gordon Childe (1951) relates the development of European Civilisation to a series of technological revolutions, for instance the “Neolithic” or “Food producing” revolution involving relatively short-term massive reorganisation of technology which resulted in periods of rapid population growth and reorganisation of social institutions. He proposed that this major revolution took place in Southwest Asia during a period of severe drought, a climatic crisis that caused a symbiotic relationship between humans and animals in fertile oases.

Braidwood and Home (1960), for the first time, tested the hypothesis relating to the origin of and the processes leading to food production, and opined that the causes of the move towards the development of an agricultural way of life occurred as the culmination of the ever increasing cultural differentiation and specialisation of human communities.” As a result of his field work, it is being increasingly realised that the following factors would perhaps have played a causative role in the shift from hunting and gathering to food production: (a) demographic stresses, showing a tendency to settle more or less permanently at one place in a locality; (b) a proper environment; (c) a distinctive level and a type of exploitative technology. Likewise, domestication of plants would have been effected through various stages of development.
The contributions of Flannery (1964) and Binford (1968) have made the study of agricultural origins deal with it as a process rather than an event. The emergence of agriculture is seen as a modification of systematic behaviour patterns linking man and his resources and to evaluate the factors which interact to modify these systems. Flannery demonstrates how a complex and stable system of interaction between man and his resources might be modified for agriculture in response to the availability of wild forms of maize. He places the beginnings of agriculture in the context of competitive economic strategies, and provided a model of the behavioural patterns and cultural choices involved in this new technology. On the other hand Binford argued that the basic stimulus to agriculture was population "pressure" as large populations could not be supported by hunting and gathering. The rising post-Pleistocene sea levels created a favourable coastal habitat for sedentary human population, which then grew rapidly, and many people moved towards interior areas intruding over hunter-gatherer territories. These are the areas where domestication of plants first occurred.

The role of technology and other environmental factors too needed to be taken into consideration. Durkheim and Mansfield (1970) suggested that factors like climate, soil and relief exert the greatest influence on farming systems. The ability to exploit the potential resources at a site would depend upon the available technology. Soil working implements of Neolithic assemblage restricted the range of effectively workable soils to light to medium loams. Heavy alluvial soils, with a higher natural fertility than loams, would have been subjected to seasonal or permanent flooding. The location of a Neolithic site, especially in respect of soil, is thus conditioned by a combination of two factors: tractability and fertility. The soils around Neolithic sites are, therefore, required to be studied both from the palaeo-economic and agronomic point of view.

The diffusionist view that agriculture spread from one centre to other regions was also put forward by scholars. Sauer (1952) views that agriculture originated in South East Asia with cultivation of root crops and fruit trees by fisher folk and that it diffused from there to other parts of the world. Johanessen (1987) has supported many of Sauer's theories, particularly those of diffusion from a single centre with the use of plants, which reproduce vegetatively.
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Johanessen again states that as a result of change due to domestication, a few plants featured in a marked way while the rest remained relatively constant. But Johanessen dismisses Gorman’s (1977) theory that the dramatic rise of sea level in response to world climatic change at the end of the Pleistocene was the trigger for domestication.

The trends in the study of plant domestication and agricultural systems have undergone a sea change with the amalgamation of archaeo-botany as a significant method of study and the usage of archaeobotanical data for an enhanced study of the agricultural system. Fuller (2002:247-364) in the third volume of the ‘Indian Archaeology in Retrospect’ looks at the growth of archaeobotanical studies as a discipline in India in the past fifty years and also explores its vast potential in the future as a complementary source for the study of agricultural systems. He does not emphasise mono-cropping but surveys a gamut of crop packages and how researches have progressed, issues related to their identification and also processes and methods involved in archaeobotany.

Attempts have been made in the past to study the origins of agriculture with the aid of archaeobotany. Ranjit Pratap Singh (1990) in his work attempts to reconstruct the beginnings of agriculture in the Indian subcontinent on the basis of archaeobotanical remains obtained from archaeological excavations in recent years. He has made an attempt to assess the role of plant economy and to reconstruct the agricultural practices of the protohistoric inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent. He has presented a large quantity of data which has further scope for analysis.

That population increase was the compelling factor for man to engage in cultivation has also been opposed. Brian Hayden (1992:11-19) postulates a competitive feasting model as opposed to the population pressure model put forward by Cohen (1977). He argues that generalised hunter-gatherers employ a strategy of maintaining their population levels in a dynamic equilibrium with their resources. In the face of semi-cyclical fluctuations in resources of varying magnitudes, this equilibrium is neither too high that starvation is a frequent event, nor so low that population size adversely affects mating, defence, or constantly requires excessive population control. He makes an assumption that the competitive feast with hierarchical socio-economic rivalries could have emerged in the richest resource areas. He suggests that the richest individuals used the economically based
competitive feast to gain control over people's labour, loyalties, and loans. In competitive feasts, control over labour is a primary goal and it is used as a symbol of success and power. If the first domesticated species were highly desirable foods, but labour intensive to produce or otherwise difficult to obtain, it is most likely that domestication took place within the context of competitive feasting.

There has been a recent shift from studying agricultural origins to looking at its process of intensification. Kathy Morrison's (2000) work on the Vijaynagar Empire looks at a broader base of agricultural intensification as opposed to agricultural beginnings and also as being related to demography, ecology and culture. This organisation is flexible and the courses and causes of its change are of fundamental analytical concern to this work. Agricultural production provides an excellent example of what Godelier refers to as a "twofold act," lying as it does at an intersection between ecological and social forces, broadly conceived. Her work traces the path or course of productive intensification in one specific region over time. She discusses whether this intensification is an outcome of environmental, demographic, social or political forces, or a natural outcome of human conditions. She bases her work on three lines of evidence, archaeological, historical and botanical and follows a line of argument which highlights the alliances formed between the kings and temple authorities in obtaining agricultural produce which is highly debatable.

Recent works such as those carried out by Fuller and Ravi Korisettar have focussed on agricultural communities and their practices and have placed them within a complex agricultural system. Fuller (2001:171-185) outlines the aspects of the cultivation system of the Southern Neolithic especially in its core region. Based on the crop species present and their frequency and ubiquity, he proposes a model of the seasonal scheduling of agricultural production as well as that of probable wild plant food gathering. He also discusses the probable spatial and temporal patterning in the processing and preparation of the staple crops as they relate to the distribution of grinding and pounding equipment.

Attempting to place agriculture within a complex social system, Fuller (2001:43-46) presents the outcome of his field project of surveying the hilltop sites of Andhra Pradesh and Karnata, where he elucidates the nature of early agriculture and attempts to reconstruct the organisation of food-producing societies. He emphasises the role played by
indigenous plants in the agricultural system as opposed to the dispersal theory proposed by earlier scholars.

Fuller, Venkatasubbiah and Korisettar (2001:151-237) discuss the nature, origin and meaning of the ash mounds, the organisation of Neolithic economy in terms of pastoralism, agriculture and settlement patterns, and the origin of the Neolithic culture. The Southern Neolithic is important as it lies at the origins of the Indian village traditions of the southern peninsular region. The legumes domesticated in South India appear to have played an important role in the early agricultural economy of India. The archaeo-botanical evidence calls for considering South India as a possible region of independent agricultural origins.

The contribution of linguistic studies in throwing light upon agricultural origins is interesting. Fuller (2002:191-213) presents an interesting methodology based on the linkages formed between plant domestication and linguistics. He develops an alternative model by building on empirical archaeological evidence and the linguistics of particular crops and agricultural terms. He reviews the data of sites yielding archaeobotanical evidence and then turns to the linguistic data for key species to see how far back they can be reconstructed for sub-groupings within the Dravidian family, and how these might relate to geographical groupings. On the basis of the available evidence he argues that much of the modern distribution and the diversification within the Dravidian subfamilies can be argued to go back to the beginnings of food production but that the evidence suggests that the proto-Dravidians were already in place on the Indian Peninsula as seed-using foragers and differentiating when agriculture began. Also a few implications for the prehistory of other language groups, such as Munda, have been outlined.

In 2004 a team of archaeologists presented their results (Fuller 2004:115-29) on the southern Neolithic on the basis of the evidence and suggested that native species were domesticated before the arrival of introduced species. It is therefore possible that south India represents a region of independent agricultural origins, even though rather late by comparison to other world regions. While the evidence of this study does not come from the earliest phase of the Southern Neolithic (dated to the beginning of the 3rd millennium B.C.), nor from the transition from hunting-gathering to herding-cultivating, the evidence is suggestive. This archaeo-botanical picture must be considered alongside the faunal
evidence for the introduction of sheep and goats and perhaps cattle, although cattle could have been domesticated from wild populations in the region. Nevertheless, more research is needed to assess the possibility of northern influences or even immigrants promoting the emergence of peninsular agriculture, as many hypotheses suggest. Most general syntheses of agricultural origins view Indian agriculture as largely derivative and secondary, but the current evidence might be seen as support, at least in part, for Vavilov’s Indian Centre of Origin. The current study highlights the potential for problem-oriented research into the beginnings of agriculture in south India.

The various trends in agricultural studies reflect that attempts have been made in the past in looking at agricultural origins and archaeobotany combined with the study of linguistics, communities, etc. has aided the study of agricultural systems. This step has been significant as it gives a wider perspective in the study of agricultural systems and presents numerous alternative approaches to the study.

The agricultural settlements did not emerge in a vacuum but were along side habitational settlements, where inhabitants lived, but there were also spaces for ritual performance, centres of storage and exchange of agricultural products. The next section will take up the discussion of the significance of settlements and how it has been studied to form distinct patterns with the aid of archaeology.

**Settlement Pattern in South Asian Context**

By far the research on settlement patterns is carried out in varying ethnological, historical and geographical contexts. Settlement pattern is defined as the way in which man disposed himself over the landscape on which he lived. These refer to arrangements of dwellings, the nature and disposition of building pertaining to community life, etc. These patterns are influenced by the natural environment, level of technology of the people and interaction of social and cultural institutions. As the settlement patterns are determined by the cultural needs, they offer a crucial point for the functional interpretation of archaeological cultures. The settlement arrangements reflect the adjustment of man and culture to the environment and to the social organisation (Ray 1987:1-2).

The pioneering work on the Stone Age culture of the region was done by Sir John Lubbock in 1867. He was followed by some British scholars and administrators like J.H.Hutton,
J.P. Mills and others. Since 1857 onwards, there have been reports of finds of Neolithic tools along the Brahmaputra Valley by Lubbock, E.H. Steel and Lt. Barron, who have reported Neolithic stone tools along with megaliths. Later, Sir Edward Gait published on the progress of Historical Research in Assam in 1897. Further, he published a book titled a *History of Assam* incorporating an account of the History and culture of this area.

Several scholars have worked on the pre-historic cultures of Assam. It was A.H. Dani in 1960, who was a pioneer in archaeological research. His works did not concentrate only on the Brahmaputra valley but also present-day Bangladesh, West Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, which gives a clear archaeological comparison with South East Asia, in terms of tool specimens and other material culture. He states that the Neolithic traditions of polished stone tools from Southeast Asia via Burma entered the Brahmaputra valley. He has attempted to put together in one place, materials scattered in various museums and journals in order to make a systematic survey of the ‘confused mass of unrelated materials’. He provided a provisional classification, which may serve as a guide to future excavation and exploration. He has surveyed the Neolithic settlements in the region and has compiled several stone tools that are associated with agricultural activities and the processing of plant foods such as the grinding celts, axes and chisels.

Anthropologists from Gauhati University have done extensive excavation and cataloguing of various archaeological sites and finds in the region, which give a preliminary idea of various sources regarding the material culture. The excavation at the Stone Age site of Daojali Hading in the North Cachar Hills District in 1962-63, brought to light evidence of a Neolithic habitation. S.N. Rao during 1967-73 excavated a Neolithic site at Sarutaru in Kamrup district near Guwahati. He brings out the results of this excavation in his paper in 1977 and discusses about the pottery and stone industry at the site combining it with ethnographic studies of the Khasis and Mikirs, drawing analogies with their culture.

Two decades ago a trend emerged where scholars perhaps for the first time attempted to reconstruct the pre-historic settlement patterns of Eastern India. Works by scholars such as Reba Ray (1987) catalogued the pre-historic finds of North Eastern India and viewed them as being distinct cultures from those of other parts of eastern India. She sees the emergence of settlement against the geographical and geological background. On linguistic grounds
she argues that there was migration during the Neolithic phase from South East Asia via Burma into this region. Accordingly it is presumed that the Neolithic cultural settlements of North East India are to be affiliated to those of South East Asia owing to the similarities in artefacts found in this region with Burma and other South East Asian countries. Her views are similar to those of Dani who make similar attempts to club the artifacts of north-east India with those of Southeast Asia. Another important work by Urmila Sant (1991), on prehistoric archaeology discusses in great detail the finds as well as the pattern of life in prehistoric times.

Attempts have also been made to co-relate the archaeological data with the ethnographic material for the purpose of reconstructing the pre-historic settlements in the light of results of the ethnographic study of the communities. For instance, D. K Medhi’s (1983) paper ‘The Garo and their material culture: a study based on ethno-archaeological approach’ is a study of the ‘Achuk Mande’ or the Hill Man and his occupation, which is mainly agriculture, based on Jhum Cultivation.

There has been very little work done on the historical archaeology of the region. Scholars such as R. D. Choudhury (1985) and Nishipada Deva Choudhury (1985) have conducted an extensive study of the 'Brahmaputra valley' and 'Central Assam' respectively. He has concentrated on the Brahmaputra valley as he felt that all the historical sites are located there due to the 'Aryanisation' of the valley while the hills portray only the tribal culture and were displaced from the valley as a process of this 'Aryanisation'. In his preface he points out that 'the present study pertains to the study of the Hindu culture of old Assam'. His work has compiled some of his own field data, other published data from the Archaeological Survey of India and other works on this theme. He has brought together data on the iconography, architectural remains, sculpture, epigraphy and coins found at the various explorations carried out in the valley region. These artifacts have been found in villages, fields and tea gardens and are located close to towns like Goalpara, Tezpur, Guwahati, etc. He also discusses the finds from the excavations carried out at the site of Ambari in 1967 but they could not be incorporated as part of the main text due to the delays in the publication of the report.

3 R.D. Choudhury's work was part of his doctoral thesis and was carried out during the period from 1966-69 and was published at a later date.
Chapter 1: Historiography: Issues And Problems

Primarily concentrating on the region of Central Assam, Nishipada Deva Choudhury incorporates the results of an exploration carried out here. His work focuses on the compilation of archaeological data from one single zone that is the central zone. He has incorporated the valley and the hills, as he looks at the megalithic cultures existing in the Diyang valley and the north Cachar hills. His work is different from that of R.D. Choudhury as his starting point is the Neolithic period and not the early Christian era. His work can be seen as a departure from earlier works as he does try to interplay between archaeological data such as architecture, sculpture and iconography and relates it with religious, philosophical, social, economic and political developments in the region.

Dilip Chakrabarti’s *Ancient Bangladesh*, (1992) is a study of the archaeological sources found in the prehistoric Paleolithic sites in the Lalmai-Mainamati region until the emergence of early historical settlements in the region such as Pundravardhan or Mahasthangarh and even Wari Bateshwar. In his work he views Mahasthan which is located on the Brahmaputra-Karatoya confluence as the ‘easternmost expansion of the Mauryan Empire’.

The study of settlements witnesses a departure from the earlier trend as earlier studies initially were engaged in primarily cataloguing data. There is now a shift towards presenting settlements not without the “people” element in it. The aim of Zarine Cooper’s (1997) work is to obtain comprehensive information on the content and internal structure of the Chitrakoot assemblages and study it in relation to the ecological background and relevant ethnographic data. The purpose of this exercise was to test the validity of the hypothesis concerning the system of adaptation particularly suited to this riverine tract. This subsumed the existence of a long-term settlement in this area, given that the caves and rock shelters on the Michanar encampment are devoid of evidence of prehistoric habitation.

Unconventional sources such as the rich plethora of ethnographic and archaeobotanical data, which is available to us, can provide an alternative approach to the study of settlements not in isolation but also its links with the environment and the visibility of the human element in it. There are studies that have catalogued data which can be given their due share of appreciation but issues regarding the environmental diversity of the region which is a contrast to the rest of the subcontinent and has moulded the farming pattern.
never seems to occur as a research theme. To this we can add unconventional sources such as the rich plethora of ethnographic and archaeobotanical data, which is available to us. This data may help us to construct the interaction between the environment and the communities during the pre-historic past that have inhabited this region.

III

TRENDS IN THE STUDY OF COMMUNITIES

A study of the ethnographic sources has shown that a conglomeration of divergent groups continue to exist until the present times in the Brahmaputra valley. Presently numerous communities are living along the river from its origin to its fall. Among them are the Bodo, Mishing, Rabha, Hajong, Deuri, Rajbanshe, Aka, and Abar. A variety of diverse groups in the region have been performing diverse functions such as fishing, farming, food gathering, exchange activities, textile weaving, cane and bamboo weaving, boat building, construction work and the use of herbs and medicinal plants. These diverse activities are dependent on the environment and these diverse groups are engaged in the utilisation of these environmental resources.

The pioneering work of ethnographic documentation was initiated by British administrators who attempted to understand the region and its inhabitants. In 1837, M'cosh in his account Topography of Assam revealed extensive information on the climatic condition of the region at that time. An appreciable work that he did spells out detailed routes from the valley to Bengal, Bhutan, Tibet, Burma and China. He traced the history of Assam from the 13th century onwards after the Ahom invasion and compiled information on the flora and fauna to animal species, metals, political organisation, health disorder, revenue system and about the hill communities. A later work of M’cosh (1860-61) on the various lines of overland communication between India and China refers to five roads leading from Sadiya, the Frontier station of the Brahmaputra Valley into Tibet or China. In 1838, Captain Francis Jenkins wrote his diary An Account of Assam. The control of this region was crucial for the British in order to enhance their business interests with southern China. His report gives an extensive knowledge of the physical and topological situation of this region.

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4 A surgeon by profession he travelled in this region to get first hand information of the river route for further exploration.
works described this region as being inhabited by ‘wild’ and ‘Barbaric’ tribes. It was M’cosh’s account, way back in 1837, in which the tribes were referred to as thieves and murderers. Unfortunately, these writings have formed the basis of future anthropological research in the region.

Another work by G.A. Gammie (1895) is a Report on a botanical tour in the Lakhimpur district of Assam. It is a very rich document as it not only gives an account of the river journey on the Brahmaputra but it also portrays the changes in the landscape, vegetation and terrain in his journey. He documented his observations during the boat journey from Jatrapur to Dibrugarh. This tour was undertaken and accomplished during the months of March and April 1894. This account gives a vivid picture of the diverse environmental resources available in the region. A similar account was given by Dr. Wallich and Dr. Griffith who were deputed by the Government in 1834 to examine that tract producing the indigenous tea plant. Dr. Griffith in the transactions of the Agricultural and Horticultural society of India, Vol.V.1838, recorded a systematic list of plants collected in Sadiya and emphasised the strong affinities of the flora with that of China of more recent collections, the chief being those found by Gustav Mann (conservator of forests in Assam) and C.B. Clarke. T.T. Coopers work (1873) on the Mishmee hills gives an account of the journey undertaken by the author in the early sixties of the nineteenth century to penetrate China with the objective of opening new routes for commerce. For six months he passed safely through China from East to West traversing impassable snowy ranges of Eastern Tibet.

A work that was written way back in 1884 presents a stereotype on the study of communities in India is that of S.C. Dutta’s *Wild Tribes of India*, which was written by an Indian scholar, yet describes the tribes as living an in-human life outside the folds of civilisation.

The beginning of the twentieth century saw studies being undertaken by military officials on the region. Major P.R.T. Gurdon’s (1906) work is an attempt to provide a systematic account of the Khasi people, their manners and customs, their ethnological affinities, their laws and institutions, their religious beliefs, their folk lore, their theories about their origin
and language. Sir Charle’s Lyall’s (1908) account presents the origins and cultural aspects such as dress, weapons, laws and customs, religion, etc., of the Karbis. The book also describes three Karbi folk tales in the original language with the literal English translation, which could be seen as the beginning of the recording of oral tradition. J. Claude White’s (1909) work on Sikkim and Bhutan gives a detailed account of his mission and explorations of the region. Another work by T. C. Hodson (1911) describes the ethnology of the tribes inhabiting the hills in the state of Manipur. Humphrey G. Carter et al (1917) talked about the diverse terrain of the region of Assam and also the diverse resources accruing from it. He refers to the ‘jheel’ or swamp vegetation and the tall grasses growing on the banks of the river Brahmaputra.

An account given by two British officials, J.P. Mills and J.H. Hutton documented their visit to the remote unadministered areas of the Naga Hills during the year 1923, when this region was inaccessible to people belonging outside the region. These areas had never been visited by any British administrators and visitors from outside feared to move through these villages unless accompanied by strongly armed escorts. The two officers had an escort commanded by a Military officer, Capt. W.B. Shakespear when they left on the first tour. The two diaries throw a flood of light on the geography of the region and the life led by the local Nagas in their forest habitations. The two tour diaries present a day to day account of the geographical terrain covered, the character of the settlements, the rituals practiced and festival celebrations by the people like the spring festival. The account has good visual documentation and a number of sketches to depict what they observed.

An unpublished document that was sent by G.D. Walker (1930) along with the four packages of Garo specimens to Dr. Balfour in Oxford from Silchar in Assam as mentioned in his letter. Along with this package of artifacts he also sent their description and uses. It also had a long list of words spoken by the various tribes living on the Garo hills and explains the agricultural uses of the stone artifacts and bamboo objects used in several activities.

5 This book was originally published in the United Kingdom and was titled Mikirs and was a monograph that was researched under the directive of the then Lt. Governor of Eastern Bengal and Assam Sir Bampfylde Fuller during his tenure (1902-06). The first Indian reprint too was published under this name in 1972. The area occupied by the tribe is now known as Karbi Anglong District and the tribe is known as Karbis.
Works by authors such as B.A. Saletore (1951) *Tribes of Indian History*, where inhabitants belonging to this region have been referred to as ‘barbarians’ reflects a perception that was put forward by the colonial ethnographers and formed the basis of the stereotype notions that developed on the region. Such studies have been problematic yet continue to be reflected in various studies.

Christopher Von-Haimendorf (1950) in his account portrays the life of the Apa Tanis, who inhabit the Suvarnsiri region. He describes the agricultural pattern of the Apa Tanis, their land tenure system, agricultural practices and rituals and their cropping pattern. Halfden Siiger (1956) presents an extensive account of the tribes inhabiting the Chitral, Sikkim and Assam regions. He portrays some of the rituals associated with the Deoris in Assam.

There are some works that refer to the close interaction of the inhabitants of the Brahmaputra valley with the environment such as the work by Hem Barua (1962) on the nature-songs of the folk people of India. He refers to the *bangits*, which are songs intimately connected with nature, expressing the feelings of the people towards nature. Another work by Professor Hemanta Kumar Sarma (1970-71) on the Bhatheli festival of Assam, which is celebrated to usher in the spring season during the months of April and May which involves the usage of bamboo and different kinds of trees and associated with the worship of Indra.

Ironically, anthropological studies during the post-colonial period witnessed attenuation. Works by modern day anthropologists such as D.G. Danda’s book *Among the Dimasas of Assam* (1978) is based on an ethnographic study of the Dimasa community. The book portrays the agricultural patterns and the interweaving of social organisation and cultural aspects linked with culture such as rituals, feasting, etc. Birendra Kumar Gohain’s (1993) work on the Hill Lalungs is based on his first hand experience gained during his field work and presents a detailed ethnographic account of the community. P. C. Sarma’s book (2003) on the Dimasas of the North Cachar Hills of Assam is an attempt to record their cultural practices on the basis of data and information collected during field surveys.

There is some literature available, which throws light on the agricultural patterns and food gathering practiced by several tribes such as the compilation of papers on the Garo hills by L.S. Gassah (1984). T. Bhattacharya’s Sociology of *the Karbis* (1986) is a monograph.
elaborating on the socio-economic life of the Karbis. There have been other studies based on the study of tribes in this region, such as B.M. Das (1987) in his study on the tribes of Assam talks in terms of the linguistic and racial composition of the people, while the other appreciable aspects of their viable means of subsistence has not been discussed.

There is a vast mass of ethnographic data available to scholars, but the compilation of data by Dr. K.S. Singh, (1996), is a huge collection of tabulated data, where he has categorised several characteristics, such as food habits, consumption of cereals by communities on the basis of religion in each state. The anthropological data cannot be incorporated for research purpose as the correlation between religious groups and their food consumption pattern is not useful for forming conclusions.

K.S. Singh (2003) as part of his people of India series presented two volumes on a hundred and fifteen communities inhabiting the Brahmaputra valley, their occupational structure, cultural practices, customs and rituals, religious beliefs, etc. He explains the ecological location of each community as the peasants (kalitas) were settled on the plains, the tribes in the hills and the kaibartas or the fishing communities along the riverine tracts (Singh 2003: xviii). He forms links between the ecology and the economy of the region but since he forms analogies with communities in other parts of India, he is unable to highlight their unique subsistence pattern.

Recent studies on communities reflect a departure from the way they have been treated in the past. Mignonette Momin (2003) has edited a collection of essays on the history of the Garos and reflects a departure from the existing ethnographic studies as it is not just compilation of data but addresses diverse issues from the handling of sources and interpretation of the literary and archaeological evidence to empirical studies on the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial policies. It attempt to fill in the existing gaps on the history of the Garos. The essays emphasise a direct relationship between intellectual development and the material realities. The issues discussed in this work vary from the origin of Garo identity to a comparative study of their culture.

Ashok Sarma's work (2004) is a detailed study on the Mishings, a community inhabiting the plains of Assam. On the basis of oral narratives he has dealt with the factors that influence the material culture and presents the folk arts and craft, architecture, costumes
and ornaments and food. He examines the way their traditional life pattern and legends, myths and tales are interwoven in aspects of their artistic and cultural life, painting and sculpture. He looks at several craft activities which are dependent on environmental resources such as weaving, cane and bamboo works, wood works, manufacturing of tools and other implements, earthen pottery, construction work, traditional cooking processes, food types and preservation. The book presents exhaustive details and gives a good insight of the Mishing culture. Having the advantage of being written during the present times the work also attempts to record the changes that have occurred in the Mishing cultural traditions. Yet, like any other book on ethnography it lacks analysis and interpretation of the material culture.

J P Das (2004) in his documentary film on the Apatanis titled ‘The Green Warrior-Apatanis’ portrays the agricultural cycle of the Apatani community practicing wet rice cultivation through the traditional methods of farming. Their methods of farming are in harmony with the environmental diversity of the region. Their decisions pertaining to the agricultural activities are made independent and collectively. He portrays the agricultural rituals in the region and does not present them as living an ‘underdeveloped’ way of life. In recent years cinema has become a medium of documenting the lives of various communities.

Anthropology in the first half of the nineteenth century concerned itself with the study of ‘archaic’ civilisations and the customs of ‘the primitives’, especially those who came under the colonial power (Cohn 1988:52-4). Anthropologists reconstructed the laws of social development through the comparative method. The classification system used by the comparativists was developed during the eighteenth century and was based on analytical units of customs, manners, morals and institutions thought to be universal and rooted in the human condition. Such a ‘classificationist’ and ‘comparativist’ methodology seems to have been followed by most ethnographers on the region.

Most ethnographic studies on the tribes in the region have either looked at the tribes in isolation and not in terms of having an interaction with the other surrounding communities. The environment has played a significant role moulding the communities, which has often been overlooked by anthropologists. The up-land and the forest-dwelling communities
exercised their own decision making process in their agricultural cycle. Their Mongoloid origins and physical traits have been of interest and an issue of discussion. Most communities have been studied from the point of view as being socio-economically backward and outside the domain of a civilised way of life.

Summarising the issues in the context of the existing historiography, an attempt has been made in this thesis firstly, to look at the region in terms of its environmental diversity, abundance and uniqueness. It looks at the emerging historical specificities such as the emergence of a diverse settlement pattern, where the inhabitants were accessing diverse resources. The agricultural system does not focus on a mono cropping pattern of permanent wet rice cultivation but examines the multifaceted dimensions of the environment that are conducive for foraging, fishing and shifting cultivation. This goes against existing notions of surplus production and the formation of elite that controlled society. An attempt has been made to put forward a wider notion of agriculture as the diversity in the environment resulted in a variety of crafts that were integral to the socio-economic set-up which also incorporated within its fold versatile professions and were not static or of a rudimentary level. The forthcoming chapters will argue against these stereotypes that have emerged for the region in the existing historiography.