Chapter 3

ACCOUNT OF PREVIOUS RESEARCH: A REVIEW

This chapter highlights previous researches on the archaeological heritage of Northeast India, including major archaeological finds, made since the first explorations in the region. It further discusses the available literature that has mentioned about the area in the past. Prior to Nagaland's initial bifurcation in 1957 and the subsequent division of Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, and Arunachal Pradesh in 1972 based on ethnic distinction, the Assam region included all seven of the current North-eastern Indian states. Therefore, rather than restricting oneself to the current boundaries of the political state of Assam, it was necessary to evaluate the sites from a broader geographical point of view; by emphasising upon cultural boundary. Thus, without addressing each of the seven states separately, this chapter discusses the various stages of development of earlier research that has been done in the whole northeast area, as its political boundaries do not exactly define the cultural boundaries. Hence, this review begins with collating prehistoric research, and further progressing through Early Historic Period to the cultural groups associated with the megalithic traditions. This is followed by a review of the literature.

3.1: Prehistoric Period

It was in the year 1867 when the first neolith from Assam region (present northeast) was discovered just four years after the discovery of first Paleolithic tool from Pallavaram in 1863. It was W. Haly, a British tea planter in Assam who found a blue jadeite celt from upper Brahmaputra Valley. He donated it to Lieutenant E.H. Steel and the finds were first reported by Sir John Lubbock (1867). Further, from time-to-time stray collection of polished stone tools had been reported from various localities of the region during the setting up of tea gardens, road construction and other administrative works by the Britishers. The first systematic study on Northeastern prehistory was made by J.H. Hutton (1928) who brought new vigor to research on the Neolithic culture of Assam. He classified the three main types of tools from the region as triangular, rectangular, and shouldered. Thus, the archaeological research in Northeastern region began during pre-independence time with the interest of European Archaeologists, British army, and Civil officers (Steel 1870; Barron1872; Brown 1914; Worman 1949). But until late 19th century, no major archaeological approaches were employed, as the

aspects of the region's past was seen from the perspective of mythology linking it with the character Naraka. The authentic information on the early days of this region was derived from the architectural remains of Ahom and Koch, which fall within the medieval historic period (from c. 13th century CE). With the establishment of Anthropology department at the Gauhati University in 1948, extensive studies on northeastern archaeology were started. This marked the beginning of a new phase.

K.L. Baruah, the Deputy Commissioner of Assam and the President of Kamarupa Anusadhan Samiti was the first native Assamese scholar who in his book '*Early History of Kamarupa*' (1933) attempted to present the connected history of the old kingdom as Pragjyotisha or Kamarupa from the earliest times till the death of the Koch king Naranarayan towards the end of 16th c CE. He mentioned the mythological king Mahiranga Danava who was succeeded by Naraka who ruled Kamarupa. They were considered as the "non-Aryan" kings, known as 'Asura'. The different tribes of the region who are under Mongoloid and Caucasian family tree were mentioned as the original inhabitants of the area. Baruah (1933) was the first scholar to identify the comprehensive regional elements of the stone artefacts found from Darrang and Cachar districts, and compared them with the adzes from Burma from Southeast Asia and Chotanagpur region of India.

P.C. Choudhury in his book '*The History of Civilization of the people of Assam: upto the 12th c. AD*' contributed on the little-known past history and culture of Assam which is a constructive work particularly of the early period starting from prehistoric up to the ruling of Palas through the literature of Puranas, Brahmanical and Buddhist works and other foreign sources. While mentioning about the prehistoric cultures of Assam region, he observes that the knowledge of the earlier Neolithic stage is meager, whereas the stone tool findings belonged to later Neolithic period (Choudhury,1959). Regarding the Megalithic tradition of the region, he mentioned that its origin must be attributed to the lithic stage of culture and that its authors had close links with Southeast Asia.

A.H. Dani in his '*Prehistory and Protohistory of Eastern India*' gave a detailed account about the different cultures of Eastern India as well as far Southeast Asia (1960). In his study, he mentioned about the stone tools collected from Assam region by leaving aside the Megalithic remains which are generally used as prehistoric remains in earlier literature. According to him the Neolithic cultures in this region follow a pattern

dictated by geographical factors and can be studied on a regional basis as each group of tools shows a distinct kinship in material and form. After studying each group and forms he divided Assam Neolithic into six different zones. They are:

- Cachar hill zone, a developed Neolithic phase linked with upper Burma with the appearance of fossil wood tools.
- Sadiya frontier zone, identical tool similarity with Yunnan i.e., Facetted tool.
- Naga hill zone, has distinctive tool typology 'gouge adze type' linked with Burma, Malaya, Siam, Laos, and Cambodia.
- Khasi hill zone, tools having similarity with Cachar hills.
- Garo hill zone, similarity of typology with Cachar hill though the materials are different.
- Brahmaputra Valley zone, no similarity with other zones in tool typology and materials (Dani 1960).

Dani's work for the first time demarcated the different zones of Prehistoric period in entire northeast. Following him, the later researchers explored the area and documented the artefact regions.

The year 1962 witnessed the development of northeastern archaeology with the exploration of first prehistoric site Daojali Hading, on the banks of Langting river located between Langting-mupa reserve forest, which was later followed by the excavation in 1962-63 (IAR 1962-63: 3). It was an initiative taken by T.C. Sharma and M.C. Goswami from the department of Anthropology, Gauhati University. This work is of special significance as a fresh stratified context has been provided for the assemblages of the little-known Eastern Neolithic culture for the first time (IAR 1962-63: 3). In the later periods, the Langting Valley was again explored by another team of Gauhati University under the guidance of H.C. Sharma and A.A. Ashraf in the year 1990-91 (IAR:2-3). Along with collecting tools and pottery, the team surveyed the quaternary formations to understand the geology of the site, Daojalihading. An exposed section by the Langting-Haflong road was also studied, which led to the recovery of artefacts from stratified context.

According to H.D. Sankalia (1981), the most important contribution of T.C. Sharma was the systematic classification of the entire archaeological remains, specifically prehistoric assemblages from entire northeast region, taking into consideration the sub

marginal features and the part played by the raw materials. He conducted his studies and analysis on various artefacts from Pitt-Rivers Museum and various museums of India. His second notable contribution in prehistoric studies of the region was the discovery of sites in central and western parts of Garo Hills, Meghalaya. This survey resulted in the discovery of more than 20 sites in the Ganol and Rongram River Valley (Sharma, 1974). He argued that the Neolithic of Northeast India can be dated between 4000 and 3000 BCE. He also proposed that there exists evidence of human activities even prior to this period. T.C. Sharma (1974) noted some Palaeolithic elements such as Abbevillian handaxes, flake tools of Levalloisian-Mousterian tradition, flake, and blade industries, along with the presence of Hoabinhian elements and Neolithic tools from the sites he investigated. During exploration, Goswami and Sharma surveyed the western end of the Garo hills near Rongram River Valley and found broken pieces of ring stones and celts of various shapes and this marks the extension of northeastern prehistory up to the other hill districts (IAR 1963-64:2). From the year 1964 to 1970, several explorations were initiated in the Garo hill districts to find more localities with prehistoric tools. Till date, the Garo hills proved the richest among all the prehistoric sites of Northeast India. The sites explored from 1964 were Chitra abri, Rongramchimbima on Rongru hill area (IAR 1964-65: 4); Rangigir, Selbalgiri and Thusegiri on the Arbela range (IAR 1965-66: 6). This was followed exploration on the high ridges of Tura and Arbela where seven sites e.g. Matchakolgiri, Ganolgiri, Rongram, Rengchangiri, Rongru abri, Chitra abri and Rongdu where prehistoric tools were discovered, of which the last two sites had tools resembling Palaeolithic choppers and scrapers. All these artefacts had been found from the surface of jhum cultivated land or the hill tops cleared for shifting cultivation (IAR 1966-67:3). The artefacts so far discovered has been studied along with the geomorphology of the area and compared with Hoabinhian or Sumatralith of south-east Asia on typological basis. Following the explorations, in the year 1967-68, the site Selbalgiri 2 was subjected to excavations to ascertain the stratigraphic sequence as the site yielded handaxes, highly developed flakes and blade industry and betraying Palaeolithic traditions (IAR 1967-68:7). Selbalgiri 2 represented a three-layered section and all having good quantity of stone artefacts, handmade and coarse pottery. Another Stone Age site towards the north of Tura was discovered by the team of Gauhati University which was located at Thebronggiri with microliths and blade industry which was visited by Prof. K. De. B. Codrington from University of London (IAR, 1969-70:1). The exploration in 1969-70

(IAR:1) marked the discovery of few more important sites which are studied by present day archaeologist to know more about the locational history of the area. The sites were Selbalgiri, Michimagiri and Michimagiri 1. The collections were mostly choppers, handaxes and flakes (IAR 1969-70:1). But despite all the explorations and excavations at one site, no scientific study has been done to know the absolute date of the sites and relatively the sites were dated to Palaeolithic to Neolithic cultural periods based on typological comparison of assemblages with other prehistoric sites, both from India and Southeast Asia.

From 1970s to late of 1980s, the exploration at Garo hills became extensive though the other two hill districts were still virgin in prehistoric studies. The earlier explored sites were studied extensively with adding of various new localities on the river valleys of Ganol, Rongram, Simsang and their tributaries Selbal, Waram etc. (IAR 1970-71: 7). For the first time both early and Middle stone age materials have been recovered from Rambhagiri in a proper stratigraphical sequence (IAR, 1970-71: 4). Within the course of time a good number of Megaliths in the form of Menhirs were discovered in the surroundings of Shillong and Cherrapunji of Khasi Hills of Meghalaya, by the department of Anthropology, University of Calcutta. They found it difficult to ascertain its cultural period as the local Khasi people still practiced the same burial tradition (IAR 1971-72:36). In the year 1979-80 (IAR:59) H.C. Sharma explored and discovered a Neolithic site on the left bank of Wah Umium near Barapani, Khasi hills and this is the first site discovered so far in this hill district which was followed by many in recent times. In continuation, Garo hills was again surveyed in 1995-96 and many sites near Ganol, Rongram and Selbal River Valley representing Middle and Upper Palaeolithic, Mesolithic tools similar to South-east Asia were reported (IAR:59).

Even though the Jaintia hills and Khasi hills in Meghalaya is equally important from an archaeological and an ethnological standpoint, research on it began much later than that on the Garo hills. In order to determine the type of the habitational deposit, the Prehistory Branch, Nagpur, ASI dug a trial trench at Pynthorlangten in the Jowai tehsil in the years 1992–1993 (IAR 1992–1993:75). Although there are stone tool assemblages from the Neolithic period at the site, there are noticeably no shoulder celts. The prehistory branch of ASI conducted a trial excavation for the first site on the Khasi Hills at Barapani in the Umium River Valley in the years 2008 and 2009 (IAR, 2008-09:90), and they discovered Lower Palaeolithic tools including handaxes, scrapers, and

cleavers that were discovered in association with medium to small size boulders. The identification of these tools as Lower Palaeolithic, however, needs to be re-examined in the light of recent developments in the field of Indian prehistory. Mitri (2008) reached his conclusion regarding the intra-site movement of Neolithic people in the entire northeast region with the cycle of Jhum cultivation in his doctoral thesis, '*Archaeological Investigation in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills*'. He further noted that it is highly likely that the early settlers came from the direction of North Cachar Hill and travelled west. In order to determine the chronological and cultural context of the surface finds from the Khasi and Jaintia hills, two new significant sites, Lawnongthroh and Myrkhan, were excavated in 2009 (Mitri, 2009). The sites provide evidence of cord-marked pottery sherds (Myrkhan) and numerous stone tools (Myrkhan and Lawnongthrow) (Mitri et al. 2016).

Sharma (2002) conducted in-depth research on the Garo hill region and contrasted the cultural artefacts with those found in contemporary Southeast Asian stone age sites, particularly those in Thailand. She tried to use a geo-stratigraphic approach to present its chronology. Her study area included the Rangram and Ganol River Valley, where Goswami and Sharma conducted earlier research (IAR, 1970–1971: 27). She worked on the Garo hills to develop an ecological understanding of the adaptability by the prehistoric inhabitants of the region (Sharma, 2007). This study explains the connection between observable archaeological evidence in the area and prehistoric human behaviour. Sharma (2007) noted once more that, if culture is accepted as a durable material expression of an adaptation to an environment, then similar culture may develop in two different locations without physical contacts as an adaptation to a similar physiographical environment.

S.N. Ratha from the Department of Anthropology, University of Gauhati, investigated the hilly regions close to Guwahati in the years 1965 and 1966 and found Neolithic potsherds near Kamakhya Hill, Navagraha Hill, and Sarania Hill that were marked by basket and cord impressions (IAR 1965-1966: 6). It is challenging to pinpoint the pottery's cultural era solely on the basis of these impressions alone because similar assemblages were found from many Early Historic site of Brahmaputra Valley.

The Dibru Valley on the upper course of Brahmaputra was first explored by Anderson (1871) who reported a few neoliths from the Mishmi hills of the Sadiya region of

present-day Arunachal Pradesh. It was in the year 1988 the area had been systematically surveyed by Saikia (1988) who discovered celts and potsherds. During this exploration in 1988, carbon dating on a sample collected from Kanaigaon gave the date 2210±140 BCE which was later pushed back to 6th c CE by Chakraborti (1999).

The foothills of Meghalaya towards the Assam-Meghalaya border were subjected to exploration first in 1973s by S.N.Rao of Dibrugarh University, as this area revealed exposures of stray collection of stone tools from time to time. He attempted to bring focus on cultural continuity and changes throughout the region. Through his study on different sites of northeast,which was marked with the excavations at Sarutaru, a Neolithic site and Marakdola, a post Neolithic site, a few kilometers southeast of Guwahati on the foothills of Khasi hills of Meghalaya (Rao, 1976), he brought out the archaeology of both prehistoric and early historic periods of the region. Further, Sarutaru became a key site for studying both Prehistoric and early historic periods of the whole northeast. His studies also incorporated ethnographic investigations and it may be seen as one of the earliest studies aimed at deriving ethnographic analogies to interpret archaeological remains in the region However, the only sample dated using radio-carbon methods collected from Sarutaru gave a very later date as Modern (Possehl 1988) which may be due to errors in sampling strategies. Later, Sharma (2012) revisited the area and recorded Medieval pottery and no celts and cord-impressed potteries were reported. Moreover, Rao does not specify the proper cultural period for Marakdola despite a succeeding phase of Neolithic. Rao further attempted to establish a relationship between North-Eastern India and the countries of Southeast Asia in terms of the Neolithic prehistory and make comparisons between them.

The Goalpara region and the Suryapahar has been surveyed from a very early period and excavations were conducted from 1992 to 2001 through different seasons (IAR 1992-93:4 to 2000-2001:3) to unearth the structural remains which gives the evidence of Buddhist, Jain, and Hindu material culture. But in 2012-13, the prehistory branch of Gauhati University, Department of Anthropology under the direction of A.A. Ashraf, an intensive exploration was carried out towards the foothills of Goalpara-Garo hill border. A new site Bambooti has been discovered (IAR 2012-13:5) which culturally served as Kitchen-midden with the material evidence pottery and stone tools. Pottery samples from the site were dated through OSL method, which gave the date of 2.07±0.05 ka (Reference).

Hazarika's (2017) work '*Prehistory and archaeology of Northeast India'* is a comprehensive work on the archaeological discoveries of all times and he primarily focussed on the subsistence strategies and ways of life of the early farming communities in the region through a multi-disciplinary approach. He made some comparative analysis of pottery and stone tools so far discovered from Northeast India with adjoining areas i.e., mainland India and Southeast Asia (Dikshit, 2011-12). As a part of his doctoral thesis Hazarika explored the Garbhanga Reserve Forest area in Kamrup District on Shillong plateau and discovered a road cutting section near Bargaon where potsherds were recovered from the slopes of hillocks along with some stray collection of stone tools, animal bones and iron objects from the forest area (Hazarika, 2016). He made some ethnographical study and pointed out that the tools found there has recent ancestral history of the tribal community living on that area. Moreover, the vessels used by the people on daily basis to make rice beer, contrived of wood with a spout, resembling the earthen spouts were discovered from the site. A great majority of his work are based on previously excavated sites, which have been studied from a new perspective.

The lower Himalayan range of Northeast was first explored during 1969-70s (IAR:30) by a team led by B.P Bopardikar of Archaeological Survey of India in collaboration with Geological Survey, Anthropological Survey, Botanical and Zoological surveys of India to investigate Stone Age cultural remains in the region. This marks the amalgamation of Arunachal into the archaeological forefront of the nation. During this expedition the river valleys of Kamlang, Lati and Telly were studied where for the first time at the high-altitude Stone Age sites were reported. Earlier the hills of Arunachal gave the evidence of architectural ruins belonging to Ahom period (IAR 1965-66:35). After 1969-70s, the archaeological record of lower Himalayan area was again studied by A.A. Ashraf of Gauhati University from 1982, who surveyed in the valleys of Kamla and Kurung rivers, which led to the discovery of a number of prehistoric sites. Ashraf along with his team excavated one stratified Neolithic site 'Parsi-parlo' in the year 1982-83 in the district Subansiri (IAR 1982-83:15, 83-84:10). The various cultural levels at the site have been identified as aceramic Neolithic phase under the influence of Hoabinhian tradition, the iron using (Ferrolithic) stage through the ceramic Neolithic phase (Ashraf 1990). Explorations in the Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh by the prehistoric branch of the Archaeological Survey of India revealed four Lower

Palaeolithic sites, namely, Pasighat, Ranighat, Bodak, and Yingkiongm (IAR 2006-07: 4), but no description of artefacts is provided. The Guwahati circle, ASI, resurveyed the area in 2012-13, beginning with district Lohit (IAR 2012-13:2) to investigate the prehistoric cultural remains. During the course of the explorations, the river terraces of Chongkham, Alubari, and Kamlang were studied, and prehistoric sites of the same names were discovered. So far, material evidence gathered include of pebble tools, scrapers, and axes of Hoabinihian origin.

The first phase of explorations began in the hill district of Nagaland in the year 1980-81 (IAR:44) with the collection of stone celts and terracotta objects at Chungliyimiti and Changsang. The prehistoric branch of ASI explored a mound near Kohima and discovered Neolithic handmade coarse pottery and located a fortified settlement with stone rubbles (IAR 1991-92:82). The sites discovered in 1980-81 were revisited by a group of scholars under T.C. Sharma and declared Chungliyimti as the earliest habitat area of the Naga hills (IAR 1991-92:83). The Neolithic celts found from here are of shouldered type, indicating grinding technique. In the year 1994-95, the bordering area of Myanmar was surveyed, which brought to light Neolithic sites near Phekbasu and Shatuza near Tizi River Valley on the high and steep ridges of Tertiary sandstone interposed with deep gorges. The surface collection included ground and polished stone tools and large quantity of pottery (IAR 1994-95:59). The explorations of V. Nienu in the districts of Nagaland was to verify the structure of the bio physical environment and its effect on the prehistoric and ethnographic settlers and more than 30 sites has been reported. The most important among them are Purkha, Mimi cave and Phokhongri rock shelters, Chungliyimti, Changsang etc (Nienu, 1974). In recent years under the initiative taken by Tiatoshi Jamir, of Nagaland University, some novel methodologies were adopted for the study of the archaeological sites, encompassing approaches such as pedestrian surveys to identify prospective caves and rock shelters, the utilization of test pits to evaluate site characteristics, and the implementation of unit excavation techniques (Jamir and Tetso, 2018-19). The other significant works include ethnoarchaeological interpretation of traditional pottery making tradition (Vasa, 2011), Pre-Colonial oral traditions and its relevance in Archaeology (Walling, 2016) and microwear analysis of human dentition, recovered from the caves of Nagaland (Yhome. 2021).

From 1968 onwards, the present Manipur witnessed several archaeological surveys. O.K. Singh (IAR 1968-69:20) made the discovery of the Khangkhui cave in Manipur. The site is located close to Khangkhui Khullen, about 11 km southeast of Ukhrul town, and is situated on a range of hills composed primarily of limestone of Cretaceous origin. There are four caves—two on each of the eastern and western slopes—and cave 3 was excavated in 1969 and 1972, resulting in the discovery of faunal remains as well as stone and bone artefacts (Singh 1997: 26). The other cave sites found so far are Songbu, close to the Burmese border (IAR 1982-83: 64, 1983-84:59-60) and Tharon village (IAR 1980-81: 44) and include edge-ground pebble tools, scrapers, and scrapers on flake. The Department of Archaeology, Government of Manipur started exploring one of the famous Manipur sites, "Nongpok-Keithelmanbi," in 1984-85, close to the valley of the Thoubal River. Choppers, flaked pebble, and numerous potteries, including pieces of glazed ware, were found in the gravel deposits and alluvial terraces of the river (IAR 1984–85). In recent years a few ethnographic studies were also carried out to understand the traditional behaviour of the ethnic communities of Manipur (Barbina, 2020).

Explorations in Tripura began from 1965 onwards (IAR 1965-66:83) with the discovery of Buddhist remains in the form of Stupas and Chaityagrihas along with brick-built structures (IAR 1982-83:138, 1984-85:78, 1998-2001, 2009-2010:115), relatively dated to 9^{th}-10^{th} c CE. From the year 1980-83, the Geological survey of India, while doing quaternary mapping of sites, discovered a good number of stratified stone age sites along with pottery sites, in the Upper Pleistocene to Holocene deposits (Ramesh, 1986). The area mapped falls in Sadar and Khowai sub-divisions of western part of Tripura; towards Bangladesh border. Sites with pottery remains were Khas Kalyanpur and Seratoli in Khowai Valley which has Holocene sedimentary deposits dated to 1440±80 BP (Ramesh, 1986). A good number of sites were located during the quaternary mapping within the areas; Teliamara, Sonai bazar (Upper Pleistocene deposits) and Sonaram. The tools found are chiefly from the Tipam sandstone formation of the hill ranges (Ramesh, 1986). Ramesh concluded that the tools have similarity with the prehistoric assemblages of Burma (Anyathian assemblages). It was in 2013-14 (IAR:170), the Sonai district of west Tripura was surveyed jointly by JNU and IISER, Mohali. Sampling methodologies were used to investigate the area which revealed stone tools mostly made of fossil wood or petrified wood, quartzite. The tools were

classified as celts, knives, borers, chopping tools, adze, discoid, points and flaked blades, mostly hafting tools (IAR: 170-172). In 2018-19, a team of archaeologists and geologists, revisited the sites explored in 1986, as a part of project work of the 36th International Geological Congress (Hazarika et al. 2020). This exploration was carried out to understand the nature and extent of prehistoric human occupation of the quaternary landscape in Tripura, which is a bigger step to understand the prehistoric cultural formation in stratigraphic contexts for North-east.

3.2: Early Historic Period

Studies on the Early Historic period of Northeast India began with the excavations at Ambari by the Department of Anthropology, Gauhati University in collaboration with the Directorate of Archaeology, Government of Assam, in the year 1968-69 (IAR 1968-69:4-5). The Early Historic period of Assam and the entire northeast India is comparatively associated with the findings of Ambari excavation whose materials have been chronologically arranged. This site is the key to understand the continuation of culture in this land and is taken as a reference site for all further explored and excavated Early Historic sites in the region. The excavations at the site started as a salvage operation looking into the remains exposed during the construction of a building of Reserve Bank of India. The site uncovered good number of stone sculptures, brick walls, and stone blocks of various sizes within five layers. Natural soil was not reached due to the heavy and high ground water level. The second season of excavations was initiated by the team led by M.C. Goswami and T.C. Sharma of Gauhati university, M.C. Das of State department of Archaeology, and Z.D. Ansari and M.K. Dhavalikar of the Deccan College Pune in the year 1970-71 (IAR; pp. 4). Based on pottery four phases were determined of which phase I pottery has been related with the pottery of Sisupalgarh; phase II is stamped and rusticated ware; phase III pottery are of Kaolin ware with few sherds of Chinese celadon and one of the samples was taken for carbon dating, which gave a date; 895±105 (1030 CE). Phase IV gave the evidence of medieval glazed ware (IAR, 1970-71:4). The site was subjected to further excavations in the years 1987-88: 8-9, 1988-89: 6, 1989-90: 8-9, 1997-98: 9, 1999-2000: 9, 2008-09:10-17 (IAR) to know the extension of the site and it was remarked that this area should be artist studios where number of undamaged sculptures of post Varman dynasty are present and which were there for export. The excavations indicate the development of

an urbanized habitational site. Based on sculptural and structural evidence, comparison of the material evidence from other sites in India, and the excavation during the season 2008–09 under the direction of S.K. Manjul and his team, the following cultural sequence was derived: Pd I - Sunga-Kushana (2nd–3rd century CE approximately) Phase-I of Pd. II, roughly from the 7th to the 10th centuries CE Early mediaeval (around the 11th to the 14th century CE) Pd III - Mediaeval (approximately the 15th and 17th centuries CE) and Pd IV - Modern (c. the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries CE) (IAR 2008-0910-17).

The excavation at Vadagokugiri, also known as Bhaitbari, on the left bank of the earlier course of the Brahmaputra, conducted in 1991–1992 (IAR:76-82), marked the beginning of the study of the early historic period at the west Garo hill. The site has been dated to the second century BCE based on handmade pottery and the lowest level of settlement. Ambari and Bhaitbari, two early historical sites, could both be positioned within the same cultural epoch. Following this, in 1992–1993 (IAR:4-5, some additional early historic sites at the Phulbari tehsil of the west Garo hill were investigated. These sites contain evidence of red ware potsherds with semi-coarse fabric and stone pestles.

H.N. Dutta of the Directorate of Archaeology, Government of Assam, initiated the first exploration of the Doyang-Dhansiri Valley on the upper course of the Brahmaputra Valley in 1996–1997 (IAR:3-5). Dutta started thinking about the possibility of an independent state existing in that area, similar to the Pragjyotisha-kamarupa in historic Assam. Numerous sites have been found that contain habitational deposits, ramparts made of brick, ditches lined with bricks, sculptures, and brick mounds. An earlier stone inscription from the same region, the fragmentary Nagajori Khanikar Gaon stone inscription from the fourth century CE, dates the area to the early historic period. Site Duboroni in the Doyang Dhnasiri Valley was excavated in 1997–1998 under the direction of Dutta and Deepi Rekha Kouli (IAR 1997–1998:6-9) to learn more about the valley's cultural history. Pranab Sarma (2007) conducted additional research on this valley as part of his doctoral thesis, which focused primarily on the early settlements of the Dhansiri-Doyang Valley. Through a regional lens, he was able to present several factors related tod socio-economic and religious developments in the region. He observes that the majority of the settlements are situated close to the main river, its

ancient channels, or a tributary, and he suggested that the time period of the settlements of the valleyshould be between the fourth and sixteenth centuries CE.

Since the exploration and excavation at Surya Pahar were ongoing at the time of this study, the Goalpara in the lower Brahmaputra Valley has been a good area of study. The excavation by Guwahati Circle, ASI turned up a significant number of Early Historic Stupa (monolithic) and rock-cut caves that were roughly dated by Choudhury (2013) to the first century BCE to the first century CE. Early medieval is defined as the second phase of habitation, which spans the 6th–7th century CE, and the third phase, which spans the 10th–12th century CE. Barman (2017) conducted a survey of the area near the Brahmaputra and Dhudhnoi-Krishna rivers (a tributary of the Brahmaputra), examining a number of interesting areas whose time period can be dated to the early historic to early medieval period, with varying phases from the 6th to the 12th century CE. Hazarika along with his team in his recent project, developed a methodology to understand the significance of the historical archaeology of the Goalpara region by investigating and surveyed all the earlier reported sites, studied material culture, which are currently threatened by various factors, both natural and anthropogenic (Hazarika et al. 2022).

Even with all these early historical contexts, there is still a lack of comprehension and contextualization of material remains, particularly ceramics, for which there is a dearth of necessary analytical resources.

3.3: Research on the Megalithic Traditions

The presence of Megalithic remains is an extended phenomena in Northeast India. In most of the areas erection of Megaliths is still a traditional process associated with the disposal of the dead and commemorating the deceased. It was in the year 1932, Mills and Hutton first discovered the monolithic stone jars from the North Cachar hill district of Assam (Mills and Hutton, 1932). Mills and Hutton after the study directly linked these hollowed monoliths to the burial practices of Khasis, Kukis or Mikirs. In present scenario a good number of stone jar sites have been reported towards the west part of Dima-Hasao district or North Cachar hills, bordering Jaintia hills, where earlier Mills and Hutton first started their exploratory work for the stone jars. Thakuria compared and analysed them with the stone jar sites of Laos and outlined the archaeological importance of them. The study on the Megaliths and Monolithic stone jars opens up

new theories regarding the migration of linguistic groups from Southeast Asia, by using the comparative and provenance study of the stone jar sites of Laos (Thakuria et al. 2016). Colani (1935), connected all these with the wider salt trade network.

Concurrently, the Mikir hill district of Assam was first explored by Dilip K. Medhi of the Department of Anthropology, Gauhati University where he located a good number of Megaliths comprising Menhirs, Dolmen and Dolmenoid menhirs (IAR 1997-98:9-13). In 2000, Medhi once more the Megalithic remains of western Karbi Anglong by developing the methodology of Public Archaeology with active participation of local Karbi people for the long run conservation of those monuments (Medhi, 2002). Bezbaruah (2003) as a part of his doctoral thesis studied the Megalithic remains and the living practice in the context of Karbi culture through an anthropo-archaeological perspective in order to understand early migration, settlement dynamics and cultural contacts of the Karbis. Bezbaruah's research on the Karbi monoliths provided additional support for the theory of migration. Although the importance of using iron increases with the association of megaliths in Indian sub-continent, there are currently no Iron Age sites in Assam. Despite not being dated, we have evidence of a ferrolithic startigraphic sequence from Parsi Parlo in Arunachal Pradesh (IAR, 1983–84:10). However, radiocarbon dating provided the date 2040±80 years BP (353 BCE-CE 128) from the Nongkrem, Khasi Hills, locality of the iron age revealed evidence of continuing iron smelting in the Meghalayan Khasi hills spanning the last two millennia (Prokop and Suliga 2013).

3.4 Literary Evidences

Assam witnessed the start of recorded history nearly 500 years after the Christian era.) However, the Umachal Rock inscription of King Maharajadhiraja Surendravarman, who is thought to havebelonged to the Varman dynasty, which was written in Nagari variety of Gupta script and Sanskrit language and was palaeographically dated to c. 470-94 CE (Barpujari, 2007), is most likely the first written record in the land of Assam. Before that, different branches of the large Sino-Tibetan-speaking peoples that had their Nidus near the confluence of the Yangtze and Hoang Ho rivers, west of China, were probably pushed south and west around the year 2000 BCE. Moving forward, these tribes primarily entered India through the western Brahmaputra coast (Chatterji, 1955). However, Das (2008) mentioned three possible route of Indo-Mongoloid group and

their branch Tibeto-Burman, to enter in Northeast India, that diversified somwhere in north Burma (see chapter 2). The early Vedic contexts did not contain many references to Assam. The Yajur and Arthava Vedas, which were most likely written in the late centuries, provide indirect evidence of Assam by mentioning that it served as a corridor between South-West China, Burma, and India. The Puranic geography (Purana, Ramayana, and Mahabharata) that applied to all of India clearly included Assam. Brahmaputra was acknowledged as one of the holiest rivers. Assam was once known as the centre of both Buddhist and Brahmanical (Sakta) Tantrism (probably in the second half of the first millennium CE). However, the *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*, a Greek work from the first century CE on the navigation of the Arabian Sea and on the trade by sea between India and Egypt and the Roman world, provides proof of the business done by the *Kirata* or Mongoloid tribesmen of various groups, linking India with Tibet and China. For centuries, this amount of trade was conducted between north-eastern India and south-western China. According to Chang Kien's account from the second century BCE, there was an unofficial trade route from Assam to South West China through which bamboo and silk garments entered India (Choudhury,1959).

3.4.1 Assam in Puranas, Tantras, Epics, and other literature

India's sacred regions include Assam, which has long held this reputation. The region was known as Kamarupa (the land where Kamadev is reincarnated; free from the corpse of Shiva) and Pragjyotishpur (the land of eastern star) prior to the arrival of the Ahoms, from whom it is believed that the name Assam was derived. The Puranas discuss the ancestries of former kings. The Garuda Purana describes Kamarupa as a revered pilgrimage site. The Vishnu Purana mentioned about the Boar Incarnation of Vishnu for the rescue of Earth Goddess and the Birth of Naraka with the conjugal Relationship between Vishnu and Earth Goddesss. According to the Hevajra Tantra (8th century CE) and the Kalika Purana, the Kamakhya shrine in Kamarupa had already become a significant site of Tantric worship (both Buddhist and of Hinduism) (earlier than 1000 CE). Sakta Tantricism was well-established in Assam. King Naranarayana of Kamarupa and Koch Bihar and his brother reconstructed the current Kamakhya temple in 1563 CE. However, the first Aryanization of Assam and the settlement of Brahmanas there, which may date back to the second or first half of the first millennium B.C., is when the Hindu and Puranic traditions developed or were established in Assam. These were mentioned in early Buddhist tradition and Brahmana texts from 700 to 500 BCE.

According to estimates, the Mahabharata was written around 950 BCE, and references to Assam as Pragjyotishpura in the Sabha and Udyog parvan provided evidence of the region's antiquity. Bhagadatta, the king of Kamarupa, took part in the Mahabharata battle along with his guests from Kirata and China, and Bhima killed him. In Madhyadesa, around 1000BCE, the Brahmanical world was developing when Bhagadatta, a Kirata or Mongoloid chief, entered it (Chatterji, 1955).

The process of Sanskritization took place during the period of Brahmanical influence, and many of the non-Aryan regions' place names were translated into Sanskrit. But pre-Aryan names ofBrahmaputra, Kamarupa, and Pragjyotishpura are most likely to be in close approximations to Sanskrit. Pragjyotisha is mentioned in the Harivamsa, Ramayana, Vishnu, and other Puranas. Samatata, Davaka, and Kamarupa are also mentioned as frontier states outside the Gupta Empire in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta (circa 350 CE). Additionally, Kalidasa mentioned Pragjyotisha and Kamarupa as states that Raghu subdued. The Harshacharita of Banabhatta (7^{th} c CE): speaks about Bhaskaravarman reign, an important piece of document for political and cultural history for the period. Kalhana's Rajatarangini: mentions about a marriage alliance between the daughter of Kamarupa and king Meghavahana of Kashmir. The most intriguing discovery came from distant Gilgit in Kashmir and shows the influence of at least the Assam ruling family, who are descended from Naraka and Bhagadatta. An inscription of middle 7^{th} c CE (proto-Sarada script) has been found on a rock within the territory of Gilgit which mentions as *Parama-Bhattaraka maharajadhiraja paramesvara Patola Deva Sahi Sri Nava Surendraditya Nandi Deva* who is described as *Sri Bhagadatta* (Chatterji, 1955). The phrase may be roughly translated as …king Sri Nava Surendraditya Nandi, who was referred to as the great of the kings, the devotee of Shiva, who is identified with King Bhagadatta of Kamarupa kingdom.

3.4.2 Dynastic Rules

Post-Gupta period of Assam was ruled by the Varman dynasty, the first ever historical ruling house of the entire Northeast India. Bhaskara Varman, a contemporary of Harshavardhana and Hiuen Tsang, ruled Assam in the early 7th century CE. The two significant copper plate inscriptions Dubi and Nidhanpur, which belonged to the Varmans and were produced by Bhaskar Varman, are among the most important

sources of ancient Assam from a social, economic, and political standpoint. The Sanskrit romantic biography of Harsha-vardhana (Harsha-charita) by Bana Bhatta and Chinese sources also provide information about the ruler Bhaskara Varman. There is some intriguing information about Sino-Indian cultural exchanges throughout Assam, as well as information about the Indo-Mongoloid ruler of Assam, Bhaskara Varman, and his enlightened interest in Chinese thought, which has been recorded by Chinese sources. By the middle of the seventh century CE, Assam had transformed into an empire under the Varmans.

The Salastambha dynasty ruled Assam from 650 to 800 CE, and this is mentioned in an inscription of King Ratnapala of a succeeding dynasty (the Bargaon copper-plate grant of this king dating first half of 11th c CE). Vigraha-Stambha, Kumara, Vajra-deva, and Harsha Varman are a few other rulers of this dynasty who are identified by their inscriptions. Pralambha, known as the Palas of Kamarupa, was the next dynasty to rule Assam after Salastambha. During the rule of the Palas, the region's rich architectural history got its beginnings. Another dynasty with minor impact on the political arena of Assam region, was Lunar dynasty probably of local Bodo origin and this dynasty continued till 1200 CE up to the coming of the Ahom dynasty 1228 CE. (Chatterji,1955). Although we do not have any concrete historical evidence for the date of beginning of the Chutiyas' reign, the extant mythical narratives, archaeological remains and references in the *Buranji*s suggest that the state formation among the Chutiyas started prior to the arrival of the Ahoms, i.e., thirteenth century. Chutiyas ruled towards the upper course of Brahmaputra Valley, up to the present border of Arunachal Pradesh, which was then part of Assam region. Moreover, as almost all the kings of the Chutiya dynasty are having the title 'Pala', historians opine that the Chutiya rulers were connected to the Pala rulers of the ancient Kamarupa kingdom (Baruah and Nath, 2007). It may be surmised that the Chutiya kingdom was a continuation of the ancient kingdom of the Kamarupa in the eastern part of present Assam. The Chutiya royal myths and archaeological remains at Malinithan and Sadiya which were under the territory of the Chutiyas, indicate the process of Hinduisation among them before the Ahoms. The Buranjis refer to the Ahom-Chutiya conflict from the fourteenth century which continued up to the sixteenth century (Nath, 2001: 81). Literature said the Kacharis reigned for almost a decade towards the upper course of Brahmaputra and had a flourishing dynasty before they were broken up into pieces with the coming of the

Ahoms and before they were made to flee up to the hilly areas. They were said to have huge ramparts, watch tower and warlike construction and moreover the only development of Art work also renamed as School of art called as “Deopani School of Art” was thought to have developed during their ruling period.

After the Pala kingdom fell, the region became part of the Kamata kingdom's domain towards the lower Brahmaputra Valley. The Koches, who ruled the region from 1515 CE to the first half of the 17th century CE, were among the most significant of the tribes that declared independence during this time when the Kamata kingdom was beginning to lose its influence. The current Koch-Bihar in West Bengal, which served as the Koch dynasty's capital, was the westernmost boundary of the Koch kingdom. At the same time, The Ahom’s, who had migrated from the Shan Valley in southern China, began to flourish in the 13th century CE, towards the upper course of Brahmaputra Valley. They have a keen sense of history, and all their endeavours and related fields have been chronicled in the form of periodic histories, or "Buranjis," which are occasionally written up. The Tai race, the Shans, the Burmans, the Siamese, and the Chinese all adhered to the universal custom of downplaying all significant events, but the Ahoms kept regular chronicles of their rule up until its end and even later (Bhuyan, 1968). The Buranjis cover all the history and mysteries of the dynasty, from various mythological stories about God creating the earth to the end of Ahom rule during the reign of Purandar Simha in 1838 CE (Barua, 1930). The Tungkhungia Buranji is one of the many Assamese chronicles that describes the final Assamese dynasty of Ahom rulers (Bhuyan, 1968). The Padshah-Buranjis are additional chronicles that focus primarily on the history of the Badshahate of Delhi and include incidents that are absent from other Muhammadan histories (Bhuyan, 1947). The monuments of Sibsagar, the Ahom dynasty's capital, as well as other temples and monumental buildings can be found all over the Brahmaputra Valley as examples of Ahom rule, in addition to these literary records.

A series of historical events took place between 13th to 17th c. CE which was mentioned in the copper plate inscription of Vaidya Dev of Kamarupa and in the Islamic document, Tabaqat-i-Nasiri (Gait, 1926). All the events are related to Muhammadan invasions in the land east of Karatoya. A series of wars between the Ahoms and the Mughals continued throughout the 17th century, causing victories and defeats to both the parties, ultimately ended with the battle of Itakhuli in 1682 after which river Manas became the

boundary between Mughals and the Ahoms. Hence, from the last decades of the 17th century whole of the region remained under the dominion of the Ahoms till the coming of the British Government.

There have undoubtedly been a few studies of the prehistoric era within the current political boundaries of Assam, but numerous explorations and excavations have taken place to comprehend the early development of historical sites. Leaving aside the earlier periods, a suitable framework or the society in which people lived and their cultural behaviour will be provided if literary and archaeological evidence can be combined. But there are currently no studies that compare the material culture from archaeological discoveries to any early historic or early mediaeval dynasty in the same chronological range. In contrast to puranic mythology, literary evidence is also lacking, despite the Ahom chronicles, which provide good glimpse of knowledge about the area, and Hiuen Tsang's writings, on which we can find some notes about the area and its inhabitants.