Chapter VII

CONCLUSION

Eastern India is not a homogeneous zone having any distinctive cultural grouping of its own. It is comprised of several natural regions falling today into two broad divisions: (1) centripetal areas of the river basins, and (2) refuge areas of the hills and plateaus. These areas have been exploited differently by man at different times, influenced as they were by monsoonic climate.

However, Eastern India is a part of the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent, and has through all the periods of human history shared the cultural life of the sub-continent. There is a land connection with South East Asia, and the Tertiary Ranges form transitional zones, now occupied by several hill tribes whose cultures show evidences of such contact. The Bay of Bengal could, again, serve as a sea-way but only after a knowledge of the monsoonic winds had been gained. The relationship of Eastern India with South East Asia has been correctly put by F. J. Richards (1933, p. 233) thus: "The eastern frontier is . . . . . difficult; true the Burmese and Shans have ravaged Assam, and the Arakanese East Bengal; but the flow of Indian influence is eastward, penetrating Indo-China and the isles as far as Borneo. The meeting points of Chinese and Indian cultures are in Turkistan and North Annam."

It has been shown in chapter II that the palaeolithic industry of Eastern India is related to the Peninsular complex, and has no affinity at all with the Anyathian of Burma. So far no microliths comparable to Eastern Indian industry have been found in the mainland of South East Asia, except a few unpublished quartz flakes, called "microliths", at Tanjong Bunga in Malaya (See Section on Malaya). As far as the Neolithic is concerned, our knowledge in Eastern India is limited to ground stone tools, while in mainland South East Asia pottery has also been found and in Malaya and Indo-China we further get bone and shell implements and ornaments, beads, pendants, bracelets, earplugs, terracotta balls and discs, seals and seal-impressions, dabbers and bark-cloth beaters, besides heaps of shells and bones found in midden remains.
CONCLUSION

The Eastern Indian neolithic complex can be broadly grouped under two heads: (1) the Bihar-Bengal-Orissa culture complex, and (2) the Assam culture complex. As has been shown in chapter V, the first has two groups of tools: group I consists of typically Indian types; and group II shows a mixture with foreign types that are well-known in South East Asia. Though stratigraphic evidence is lacking, field-observations suggest that the group I tools are possibly earlier than the group II tools. The Assam materials can also be classed broadly into two groups: group I including indigenous tool types almost restricted to the various zones of Assam; and group II including common types, wholly foreign, identical with some of the types of Yunnan and Burma. Apparently there is no chronological distinction between these two Assamese groups. On the other hand, evidence has been quoted in chapter IV that stone tools, to a certain extent, continued to be used by the hill people as late as the beginning of the last century.

It is the appearance of the foreign types in Assam, Bengal, Bihar and Orissa that has led scholars to propound various hypotheses, two of which are important: (1) E. C. Worman writes, "Indian smoothed stone celts of ‘Neolithic’ type, regardless of their cultural affiliations, appear to be derived from the eastward." He further says, "The eastern half of India belonged to a fairly large south and east Asiatic area throughout which the evolution of post-pleistocene prehistoric cultures was apparently more or less similar. In the early periods, this area seems to have included much of India, Burma, south east Asia, and southern China. In the later ones, it was apparently confined in the west to the easternmost provinces of India but expanded in the east to include parts of north as well as south China." (Worman, 1949, p. 199). (2) The other is the well-known theory of the shouldered tool being brought to India by the migration of Austro-Asiatics.

Evidence has been given in chapter V suggesting that Indian neolithic complexes are fundamentally different and in their early stage show no influence at all from the East. In a later stage foreign types begin to appear, but they occur in a context that is wholly Indian. Their appearance does not prove any cultural affiliation of Eastern India with South East Asia, but at best establishes contact and borrowings, natural to countries so close to one another. It has
also been shown (See Pp. 107-2) that the archaeological materials in India do not justify linking up these foreign types with the migration of the so-called Austro-Asiatics. These points are further clarified when we survey the "neolithic" cultures of mainland South East Asia.

The "neolithic" cultures of this vast area fall in five broad divisions: (1) Bac-Son, (2) Hoa-Binh, (3) Somrong Sen, (4) Siam-Malaya, and (5) Burma. In almost all these divisions we find two concurrent cultural traditions persisting side by side: (i) the cultures using predominantly chipped stone tools in a stage of food gathering; and (ii) the cultures using predominantly ground and sawn tools along with pottery and other essentials of life in a stage of food production. The first, as has been shown in the case of Burma (where alone the palaeolithic industry has been properly studied), continues the tradition from the Old Stone Age, but its early dating is still a matter of doubt. It may, however, be assumed that it was the main cultural tradition obtaining in these countries before the appearance of the second type of cultures. The second type of cultures show greater homogeneity in their technical achievement but in their material equipment they differ from division to division. Hoa-Binh is the most backward area, while Bac-Son has produced some recognisable features of this cultural type. It is mainly in Somrong Sen and Malaya that it is fully represented, while Siam and Burma are backwaters. This picture may be due partly to uneven research done in these areas, but the present evidence is highly suggestive.

However, it is now clear that these are two predominant cultural traditions in mainland South East Asia. The other minor features, like the edge-ground tools are a by-product of the intermingling of these two traditions. It is also clear that the second cultural tradition is not native to South East Asia. A complete change from the food-gathering stage to a food-producing economy with a material equipment having no connection at all with the first type-of cultures, suggests an intrusion from outside, from a region where such economies must have already existed. It is not easy, however, to find such a region and demonstrate the way in which the new cultural type or ideas reached here from that region.

1 Reference should be made to Pp. 105-107 for the use of this term.
A study of the materials in the Somrong Sen culture indicates a link with the Hong Kong culture of South East China, while Malaya follows a close second in this link, though there are some distinctive types, like the splayed axe (class III d ii, see p. 209), that are peculiar to Malaya, and there are other features, like the “waisted” axe, that seem to relate Malaya with the Indonesian Islands. On this evidence sea communication seems likely.

On the other hand, Yunnan, Laos and Burma have produced some materials which are technically of the same nature and show typologically some resemblances to the types in Somrong Sen and Malaya. Nevertheless there are differences, e.g., the shouldered tool and the gouge-adze are absent from Yunnan, while these link Laos and Burma with Malaya and Siam. There are, thus, some hints for cultural infiltration directly by an overland route. But the poverty of the materials from Bac-SON and Hoa-Binh, even as far north as Kwangsi and Kwangtung, must be borne in mind, before any hypothesis is put forth. Most of these types disappear when we come to Assam, where only two main types, the faceted and shouldered tools are present. In other parts of India the shouldered tool is known, while the faceted tool and splayed axe are limited to Eastern India.

It must also be pointed out that in South East Asia we have a distinct cultural grouping of the materials related to the second type. Stone tools are one of the features of this cultural grouping. From this complex a single type of tool, such as the shouldered tool, cannot be torn of its context and attributed to the so-called “Austro-Asiatics”.

The most important point to realise is the fact that the square-cut implements like the faceted tool or the shouldered tool require a particular technique for their manufacture. Such square-cut forms are not easy to obtain by the ordinary processes of chipping and grinding. In order to get right angles at the corners and perfectly straight sides, one must use a sawing technique, using at least a wire and an abrasive. Without some such process it is difficult to understand how these perfect forms could be produced? The examination of the specimens shows that this process was actually used. Such a degree of perfection in stone working is hardly justifiable unless one is copying a metal form. The earliest evidence of the shouldered type in bronze comes from Anyang where they have
been dated to the Yin dynasty (1300-1028 B.C.: Bernard Karlgren, 1945, Pp. 101-143). These bronze specimens have invariably been found in graves, and hence they are generally known as ceremonial axes. It is hard to believe that such axes should be found in graves without their being actually used in life. So far we know of very few specimens in stone outside the grave finds, and these come from Honan (See chapter IV, and also Andersson, J. G., 1947, pl. 57, 1-8, and pl. 122. 4). These stone specimens are very irregular, and both J. G. Andersson and Bernard Karlgren believe purely on typological basis that the bronze specimens are perfected copies of the stone type. But it is noteworthy that the stone specimens have been found so far only on the surface. From this very cultural area of China comes the facetted tool, termed by J. G. Andersson the "square-cut" axe or the "pen" (See Andersson, 1947, pls. 125-126). Examples have been obtained from a context in which metal was in use.

The infiltration of this northern Chinese culture into the south is known from the excavations carried out in Szechwan (D. G. Graham, 1933-35, Pp. 114-131) in south west China and in Fukien province of south east China and Hong Kong. There is, no doubt, that it penetrated further south into our region, where it is recognised as "developed neolithic cultures" of the coastal plains and the river valleys.

It follows that the appearance of this cultural tradition in South East Asia is hardly likely to be earlier than the date assigned to it in Anyang. On the other hand, the evidence from Hong Kong, Somrong Sen and Malaya indicates a date somewhere about the second half of the first millennium B.C. for its existence in these regions. The persistence of this tradition in these regions even when iron and bronze were introduced, is known from several sites in Indo-China and Malaya.

The foreign types, appearing in India, are traceable to secondary sources in Burma, Yunnan and Malaya, and hence the date of their appearance may be even later, and well within the historical period, or what we have preferred to call in the title of our thesis, the protohistoric period. The evidence from India is, therefore, quite in keeping with this late dating.