

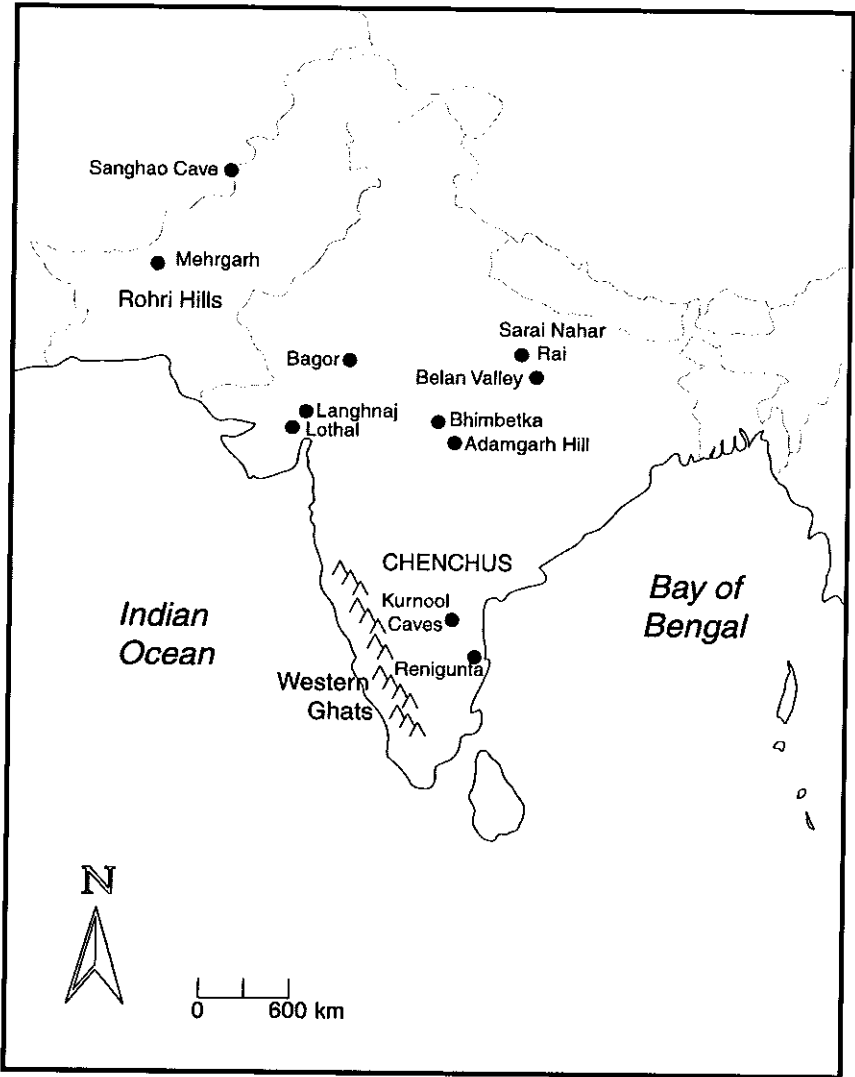
2 Introduction

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If any theme can be discerned in the long archaeological and historical record of South Asia, it may be that of simultaneous diversity and interconnection. Groups of people differently organized into (to name just a few possible dimensions of difference) linguistic and ethnic associations, classes, occupations, lifestyles, castes, and religious traditions have co-existed, sometimes very closely, over long expanses of time.¹ One of the most striking examples of close interaction between groups of people organized in radically different social and economic forms must be the sets of relationships between specialized forager-traders, many living in upland environments, and agriculturalists, merchants, and states, many based in the lowlands. That these kinds of relationships have a long history is one of the primary points raised by all the chapters in part I. However, in order to approach this world, in which foraging strategies, although important, came to constitute just part of a larger behavioral repertoire, it is necessary to consider them in the context of the long record of human habitation on the subcontinent.

In South Asia, humans and their ancestors have made a living by gathering and hunting for perhaps as long as two million and certainly as long as half a million years. However, that deep archaeological record incorporates a significant degree of diversity in lifestyles through time and across space. While Pleistocene and earlier inhabitants of South Asia lived in a sparsely populated world of hunter-gatherers, Holocene hunter-gatherers had to co-exist with agriculturalists, and later with pastoralists, states, armies, and traders. Thus, the later archaeological and historical record of South Asian hunter-gatherers is a record of variable levels of integration between hunter-gatherers and others and of a certain fluidity in subsistence practices so that the same people may have at different times hunted and gathered for their own subsistence and for trade, grown food or commodity crops in their gardens and fields, worked for a wage, or paid tribute to distant kings.

Throughout this long history and into the present, gathering and hunting have remained as important components of both subsistence and socio-cultural identity, especially in more forested upland regions. This long-term continuity of foraging is a critical factor in understanding South Asian



2.1 South Asian archaeological sites

history in general; the viability of foraging as a flexible component of complex socioeconomic strategies suggests that the history of gathering and hunting – and of the people who deploy these strategies – needs to be understood in light of its long history from the Palaeolithic to the present. Although it is possible, even probable, that some contemporary groups can claim a history in which gathering and hunting always played a major economic role, it is also the case that some foraging and trading groups adopted gathering and/or hunting relatively recently (Morrison, chapter 6

this volume). Given the fact that archaeological and palaeoenvironmental remains most clearly reflect the consequences of past activity rather than ethnic or cultural affiliation,² it is very difficult to say precisely which contemporary groups – if indeed, such categories have long-term stability – may have a very long history of gathering and hunting and which ones may have shifted economic strategies more recently. This should, however, in no way suggest that archaeological and historical/ethnographic information cannot be linked. If we think of foraging as *strategic* rather than *essential*, then it is clear that foraging itself has a long and unbroken history from the Palaeolithic to the present. If particular *groups of people* have been more flexible in their deployment of this and other strategies than the received view suggests, it is still the case that this dynamic human history requires an allied analysis of gathering and hunting activities and their organization over time.

The first part of this review outlines the archaeological and historical record of hunting and gathering in South Asia, sketching a chronological framework for situating the arguments presented in the chapters by Lukacs and Possehl. The second half of this introduction links the long temporal perspective afforded by the archaeological and biological data with the rich detail of the ethnographic and historical records, introducing several themes that emerge from the chapters as a whole, themes of “primitivity” (with its associated cultural-evolutionary correlates), “indigenesness,” “tribal organization,” and history, or as I put it, with the “newness” vs. the “oldness” of foraging and of interaction. The chapters by Morrison and Zagarell link environmental, archaeological, historical, and art-historical data in addressing time periods from the last few centuries BC to the seventeenth century.

Archaeological perspectives

The Lower Palaeolithic

South Asia has an important place in the history of archaeology, with the recognition of human antiquity in the region established early on by Robert Bruce Foote, a British colonial officer and geologist who first published a description of Acheulean handaxes from Pallavaram, near Madras, in 1863 and who went on to conduct pathbreaking descriptive work on the Palaeolithic and Neolithic of southern India (Foote 1887, 1914, 1916). Early research on the Indian Palaeolithic was directed toward defining a chronological sequence to match that of Europe and toward establishing correlations between glacial sequences, as reflected in river terrace deposits,

and stone tool assemblages (e.g. De Terra and Patterson 1939). The British Archaeological Mission to Pakistan has recently published a revision of this early chronology and has also presented controversial new evidence for very early hominid occupation of South Asia with the discovery of chipped stone artifacts from the Potwar Plateau dating to 2.2 million years before the present (Dennell et al. 1988). This contention, and the dates of the Potwar Plateau artifacts, remain controversial but may be resolved by ongoing work on the chronology of *Homo erectus* finds across Asia.

Nearly all parts of mainland South Asia were occupied during the Lower Palaeolithic, a period falling within the Middle Pleistocene or about 500,000 to 50,000 years before the present. Climatic conditions during this period were broadly similar to those of today. Lower Palaeolithic stone tool assemblages have been divided into two major contemporaneous types or traditions: the Acheulean or Madras handaxe tradition (similar to material found in Africa and Europe), and the so-called chopper/chopping tool tradition (Davis 1984; Sankalia 1963). The latter are made on small packages of raw material, cobbles or pebbles, hence their other appellation of pebble tools. Pebble tools are found primarily (but not exclusively) in the north and northeastern parts of the subcontinent and in Sri Lanka, Southeast and East Asia. Whether or not these two different forms of lithic technology actually relate to different "traditions," in a cultural or quasi-cultural sense, to differences in the availability of lithic raw material, or to other factors is not clear. These distinct techno-typological forms sometimes co-occur in the same contexts, as in the gravels of the Belan Valley.

Excavated early Palaeolithic rockshelter sites include Adamgarh Hill in central India and Bhimbetka, a series of rockshelters containing artifacts spanning a range from the Lower Palaeolithic to the Mesolithic (V.N. Misra 1985a). Bhimbetka is well known for its parietal rock paintings, most dating to the Mesolithic (Misra et al. 1977; Wakankar 1985). Unfortunately, there is little preservation of bone or other organic material in any of the Palaeolithic strata. The only hominid material is the Narmada skull cap, identified by Kennedy (1999) as an early *sapiens* and not, as originally proposed, as *Homo erectus*. Lower Palaeolithic tools at Bhimbetka, as elsewhere, are made on locally available raw materials and consist of Acheulean assemblages dominated by flake tools. Lower Palaeolithic open-air sites include the important sites of the Hunsgi Valley in southern India, excavated by K. Paddayya (1982, 1987; Paddayya and Petraglia 1997), and the Madras coastal "sites" – the latter a continuous spread of artifacts over tens of square kilometers. These coastal assemblages include many finished artifacts and seem to represent continuous reuse of and movement over a large region.

Most of the well-excavated Lower Palaeolithic sites in primary contexts (that is, not in river gravels) have Acheulean rather than pebble-tool assemblages (see also Pappu 1985). This pattern may, however, reflect the undeveloped state of research in the northeast (cf. Chakrabarti 1993), a region with extensive tropical and semitropical forests and where many contemporary people include gathering and hunting in their subsistence regimes.

The Middle Palaeolithic

The Middle Palaeolithic, or Nevasian, falls during the Upper Pleistocene, with radiocarbon dates placing it between approximately 50,000 and 17,000 years before present (Ghosh 1989:28; Sankalia et al. 1960). This was a period of increasing regional diversity in stone tool forms. Central and southern India, for example, have broadly similar artifact assemblages while the tools of the desert northwest are somewhat different. This period also represents a more humid climatic phase, at least across parts of the subcontinent, and settlement appears to have expanded accordingly. Technologically, Middle Palaeolithic stone tools were primarily made on flakes, and show the use of more complex reduction techniques, with Levallois flakes becoming common. There are also consistent changes in raw material in most areas, so that the larger blocks of local material such as quartzite that are common in the Lower Palaeolithic (in areas with Acheulean materials) give way, in part, to smaller pieces of high-quality raw materials.

During the Middle Palaeolithic, archaeological sites were located all across mainland South Asia, but in this period there is also good evidence for occupation of Sri Lanka by anatomically modern *Homo sapiens* at the sites of Batadomba Lena (c. 28,000 BP; Deraniyagala 1992) and Fa Hien (c. 31,000 BP; Kennedy and Zahorsky 1997), among others. As discussed below, Batadomba Lena also contains geometric microliths, suggesting that many chronological assessments based on lithic technology are likely to be in error. Other important sites include Bhimbetka and Sanghao Cave in the far northwest (present-day Pakistan). The latter holds great promise, having both good faunal and charcoal preservation. Unfortunately, this site has not yet been dated and there is no complete publication of work done so far. Specialized sites such as the factory sites of the Rohri Hills in Sind (an important source of lithic raw material as early as the Lower Palaeolithic and as late as the first millennium BC) are also known, indicating specialized procurement of high-quality Rohri flint (Biagi and Cremaschi 1990). Very large workshops covering several hectares and containing thousands of finished tools as well as flaking debris are also found near Bhimbetka.

The Upper Palaeolithic

Although the broad categories Lower and Middle Palaeolithic seem to fit South Asian data reasonably well, the imposition of Eurocentric categories has been resisted by many researchers, particularly in light of the difficulty archaeologists have had in defining an Upper Palaeolithic period matching the European one. In 1961, the First International Conference on Asian Archaeology formally agreed to adopt the terms Early, Middle, and Late Stone Ages, corresponding roughly to Lower and Middle Palaeolithic and Mesolithic in the European scheme. Since then, however, Upper Palaeolithic-style blade and burin (or flake-blade) assemblages have been identified by several scholars, notably at the sites of Renigunta and in the Kurnool Caves of east-central India (Murty 1968, 1981; Ghosh 1989; and see Sali 1989). The presence of assemblages with a blade-based lithic technology stratigraphically superimposed over flake-based Middle Palaeolithic tools prompted many archaeologists to revert to the older terminological scheme. In any case, the new names had only been partially adopted, with the term "Microlithic" often used in place of Late Stone Age. The result of these changes has been a confusing and inconsistent use of terminology. Coupled with a scarcity of absolute dates, this situation leads one to suggest caution since the same term may be used to refer, for example, to either a time period, a lithic technology, or both.

Putting aside for the moment terminological difficulties, the recently defined Upper Palaeolithic begins around the end of the Middle Pleistocene humid phase and extends through the Late Pleistocene into a major dry period (c. 17,000 to 10,000 years before present). Unfortunately, our understanding of subsistence is sketchy for all Palaeolithic periods of South Asia, due partly to poor preservation of animal bones and plant remains. At the Kurnool Caves, however, faunal preservation is good and faunal analyses suggest heavy semitropical forest cover. Upper Palaeolithic cave sites include Bhimbetka, where the stone tools include short, thin blades and burins, along with "older" tool forms made on flakes. At both Renigunta and the Kurnool Caves, stone tools are accompanied by bone tools (Ghosh 1989; and see Raju 1988).

As noted, the sites of Batadomba Lena and Fa Hien Cave in Sri Lanka date to about 28,000 and 31,000 years before the present, respectively (Deraniyagala 1992; Kennedy and Zahorsky 1997), and thus to the Middle Palaeolithic as defined above. However, both have microlithic stone tool industries. Microliths are small tools made out of blades, usually blades that have been snapped into several pieces. Clearly, blade tools and microliths are closely related technologically. This distinction is important, however,

in understanding the confusion over the Mesolithic period (below), and illustrates why there has been resistance to using European categories that create a sharp break between Palaeolithic and Mesolithic.

The elaborate bone artifacts and other mobiliary and parietal art of the European Upper Palaeolithic have no parallel in South Asia. This is not to say that decorative artifacts are absent, however. In stratified gravel deposits of the Belan Valley, G.R. Sharma and colleagues have identified an Upper Palaeolithic stratum containing blade tools and what they call a "mother goddess" figurine, although others have described this object as a bone harpoon (Ghosh 1989:267). There is also good evidence for production and use of elaborate non-lithic artifacts, including ornaments. At a site in western India, Sheila Mishra and the Archaeological Survey of India have located an Upper Palaeolithic ostrich eggshell bead manufacturing site containing beads in various stages of manufacture. Drills of chalcedony and carnelian were also found, as were microlithic stone tools (Ota 1996). Other specialized sites include Baghor I, where a feature hypothesized to be a shrine has been dated to the late Upper Palaeolithic (Kenoyer et al. 1983).

The Mesolithic or Late Stone Age: hunter-gatherers in a changing world

The Mesolithic is used here to refer to a time period that begins with the Holocene, about 10,000 years ago. The end of the Mesolithic is difficult to fix; conventionally the term is used loosely to refer both to a hunting and gathering way of life³ and to a time period. As an archaeological phase designation, it often includes all time periods after the start of the Holocene and prior to the development of agriculture, i.e. the Neolithic (thus, as late as c. 2500 BC in South India, and as early as the seventh millennium BC in the northwest). Indeed, in a review of the Mesolithic (Late Stone Age, in this case), V.N. Misra (1976:45) notes that the persistent association of microliths with, subsequently, Chalcolithic, Early Historic, and finally Gupta (fourth to seventh centuries AD) ceramics indicates "yet another instance of the persistence of stone tool technology into historic times in the backwaters of central India." Of course, the use of the term Mesolithic to describe contemporary people is also not unknown, so in some (not very useful) sense one might imagine that the Mesolithic period has not yet ended.

The term microlithic is sometimes used as a synonym for Mesolithic, but will here refer only to a form of lithic technology. This distinction is important because sites with microlithic artifacts evince a very broad range of dates (Lycett and Morrison 1989), and need not belong to the

Mesolithic (cf. V.N. Misra 1985b). In fact, a large number of the sites that have been identified as Mesolithic seem to have been produced by small-scale groups of microlith-using people who gathered and hunted, but who also sometimes maintained close relationships with others, as the chapters by Lukacs and Possehl in this volume make clear. Thus, in the interests of clarity, I will use the term Mesolithic to refer to a (still poorly defined) chronological period and the term microlithic solely as a technological category of stone tools.

The Early Holocene: diverging ways of making a living

The Early Holocene was marked by world-wide climatic changes. In India, the aridity of the Upper Palaeolithic ended; pollen data from western India show a climate slightly wetter and more favorable than that of today (Singh et al. 1990). Lakes in Rajasthan that are now saline were freshwater, but the typical monsoon pattern with seasonal dry periods continued. In this period, the earliest part of the Mesolithic, there were still no agricultural communities and we see a continuation of (but a greater diversity in) hunting and gathering ways of life. The Mesolithic also saw the expansion of occupation into new areas and a large increase in the number of sites, probably reflecting larger regional populations.

Microlithic stone tools, many formed into geometric shapes, were made out of small blades, mass-produced by the pressure-flaking technique. These geometric microliths (some of them amazingly small, most made on high-quality raw materials including semi-precious stones) were probably hafted to form sophisticated composite tools with multiple small blades that could be repaired or replaced as needed. Across South Asia, stone tools show significant regional differences in size, shape, and raw material, pointing to the increasing differentiation of strategies and traditions among those living in this part of the world. Environments occupied range from dry to humid, and this range is reflected in material culture. At several sites we see grinding stones for the first time, as well as doughnut-shaped groundstones that may have been used as digging stick weights. Pottery also appears in some Early Holocene contexts, replacing or supplementing less bulky containers such as baskets or woven bags.

Although we know little about how people made a living during the various Palaeolithic periods, it is at least clear that South Asians were mobile gatherers and hunters. In the Holocene, some hunter-gatherers were sedentary, particularly along the southern coasts where they engaged in fishing as well as gathering and hunting terrestrial game. Elsewhere, seasonal mobility continued. The Mesolithic site of Baghor II, dating to between 8600

and 7600 BC (Possehl and Rissman 1992), was repeatedly occupied on a semi-permanent basis. Many of the important cave and rockshelter sites of central and western India (Bagor, Langhnaj, Adamgarh, Bhimbetka) were occupied seasonally, some filling with blown sand in the dry season. Both Adamgarh and Bhimbetka contain bones of domesticated animals, suggesting that they were occupied by people not totally dependent upon wild taxa (see below). Until recently, there has been little work explicitly devoted to reconstructing patterns of mobility (see Lukacs, this volume), but it is interesting that some Mesolithic sites contain structures, stone floors and, at Sarai Nahar Rai, a floor of rammed burnt clay nodules with postholes and hearths (V.N. Misra 1976:50). Some rockshelters contain small walls and huts, suggesting perhaps a longer-term occupation of or investment in these locations.

The Holocene also saw an explosion of rock art in South Asia. The various caves of Bhimbetka contain thousands of paintings. The early paintings are more naturalistic, while later ones are more abstract (Brooks and Wakankar 1976; Wakankar 1985). Common themes include animals and gathering and hunting scenes. Rock art has only recently become a popular topic of enquiry in South Asia and we can expect much more scholarship on this material in the future.

The Mesolithic continues into the period of initial plant and animal domestication. Agriculture changed the conditions of life quite dramatically for some people, less so for others, but no group remained fully outside the changes brought about by this shift. It is useful to think of the process of domestication as mosaic: the earliest domesticates are found in the northwest where, at the site of Mehrgarh, agriculture based on wheat and barley was present by the seventh millennium BC (Constantini 1984; Jarrige 1984; Meadow 1984). In West/Central India, domesticates were well established by the fifth millennium, in the Vindhyan Neolithic of North/Central India cultivation of barley (and later rice) by the fifth millennium, and in the Southern Neolithic millet-based agriculture was established by the third millennium BC. While some domesticates appear to have been introduced from outside South Asia (including wheat, rice, certain millets, grapes), others were domesticated locally (including cattle, barley, and other millets).⁴

Similarly, the density and size of agricultural settlements and the degree of social-political inequality associated with agrarian societies vary a great deal across the subcontinent. By the third millennium BC, large urban sites were established on the floodplain of the Indus and its tributaries. The Harappan civilization, as discussed by Possehl in this volume (and see

Possehl 1998), was contemporaneous with smaller agricultural and pastoral communities (Neolithic or Chalcolithic) elsewhere in South Asia; cities were not established in most of the region until the so-called "second urbanization" of the Early Historic period, roughly 300 BC to AD 300. In light of the regionally diverse and changing picture of South Asian sociopolitical and economic change, it is thus not surprising that intensity of interaction and forms of relationships between foragers and others also seem to have varied.

Hunting and gathering in a larger world

If one considers the contexts of microlithic sites from all time periods, particularly those after about the fourth millennium BC, there is ample evidence for interaction between hunter-gatherers and others (Possehl and Kennedy 1979; Possehl and Rissman 1992). These microlithic contexts represent the material remains of small-scale communities that were very much a part of the larger economic, ecological, and perhaps political contexts of their day (see V.N. Misra 1976 for a review). Well-excavated sites from this period include the important open-air site of Langhnaj, in Gujarat, discussed by Lukacs and Possehl in this volume. The occupational sequence of Langhnaj was divided by its excavators (Sankalia et al. 1960) into three phases. Phase I deposits contained microliths, remains of wild animals, including wild cattle (*Bos indicus*) and water buffalo (*Bubalis bubalis*), a number of burials, groundstone fragments, dentalium shell beads, and what are referred to as "stray" potsherds (V.N. Misra 1976:30). Phase II deposits contain a larger number of microliths, along with a faunal assemblage and human burial population similar to that of Phase I. Deposits assigned to this phase also contained a quartzite ringstone, two miniature ground schist axes, a long copper knife, and a number of fragmentary potsherds. The sole radiocarbon date for Langhnaj is 2495–2180 BC (two sigma range, calibrated; Possehl and Rissman 1992:462) from mixed Phase I/II deposits, making it contemporaneous with Indus cities. The copper knife is morphologically similar to Harappan forms and was probably obtained in trade from the Kutch Harappans of Gujarat. Phase III, tentatively dated to the later half of the first millennium BC, or later (V.N. Misra 1976:32), was without microliths, but did contain ceramics, including some wheel-made ceramics, a tanged iron projectile point, and a stone bead.

Although the movement of artifacts from urban contexts to locations used by more mobile peoples is easier to see than any reverse flow of goods, hunter-gatherers should not be viewed simply as the recipients of technological treats, nor urban peoples as the only agents of change.

Instead, the presence and activities of foraging and pastoral peoples in the region may be seen as also shaping the strategies of agriculturalists and urban dwellers. For example, evidence of trade by small-scale groups practicing gathering and hunting with nearby agricultural communities, including the urban Harappans, prompted Possehl to suggest (1976, this volume) that the urban site of Lothal was a "gateway community," located to take advantage of the specialized procurement of raw materials by hunter-gatherers for manufacture by urban artisans. Dhavalikar et al. (1995) argue for a similar role for the small Harappan port and manufacturing site of Kuntasi, in Kutch. In his chapter, Lukacs makes a strong case for the utility of biological information in elucidating the existence and nature of such contacts. He points out that biological data are of two basic types: those that are genetically controlled and those related to environment or experience. With regard to the former, he notes evidence for biological relatedness between those buried at Lothal and those buried at Langhnaj, indicating that relations were more than simply economic.

In addition to metal and ceramics, foragers (that is, people who gathered, hunted, traded, kept domestic animals, and perhaps even planted a few crops) obtained domestic plants and animals from their agricultural neighbors. Here Lukacs' focus on environmentally influenced biological features comes into play. In the case of Langhnaj, rates of dental caries fall squarely within the range usually associated with agriculturalists, suggesting a soft, starchy diet of carbohydrates, possibly traded food grains. This kind of analysis, combined with archaeobotanical research, has great potential to add to our understanding of forager-agriculturalist interaction (or its absence, as Lukacs shows for the Early Holocene on the Gangetic Plain).

Although the faunal assemblages of both Sarai Nahar Rai and Langhnaj suggest hunting as the sole means of animal procurement, the bones of domestic Indian cattle (*Bos indicus*) are found at Adamgarh, Bagor, Tilwara, and other Mesolithic sites from about 5000 BC onwards, as are domestic sheep, goats, and pigs (Ghosh 1989). Microlithic Bagor, in Rajasthan, has a faunal assemblage containing some 60–80 percent sheep/goat, suggested by Ghosh (1989:41; and see V.N. Misra 1976) to reflect a pastoral way of life. At Tilwara, faunal remains came from both domestic (*Bos indicus*, *Capra hircus*, *Sus scrofa cristatus*) and wild animals, suggesting both animal husbandry and hunting. Tilwara deposits include, in Phase I, both microliths and ceramics, and in Phase II, microliths, wheel-made ceramics, and glass and stone beads. There is also good evidence for several small structures with hearths (V.N. Misra 1976:34). Unfortunately, the Tilwara deposits

are in dune contexts and are likely to be deflated. There are no published radiometric dates from Tilwara.

Better information is available from the site of Bagor, a fairly substantial site with remains of shelters and a radiocarbon sequence indicating some 3,000 years of occupational history (V.N. Misra 1976:35). Phase I deposits, which begin around 5000 BC, contain microliths, abundant fauna of both wild and domestic animals (including, as noted above, a significant proportion of sheep/goat), groundstone, and evidence of several small round shelters. Phase II deposits contain smaller quantities of lithics and fauna, and include copper tools, stone beads, a spindle whorl, and handmade ceramics. The copper objects all came from burial contexts; three of these objects were Harappan-style projectile points. Although two radiocarbon dates place Phase II at around 4000 BC, this is clearly too early for copper artifacts and V.N. Misra suggests a date in the middle of the second millennium BC. In Phase III, for which there are no radiometric dates, there were yet fewer microliths and animal bones. New artifact classes included wheel-made ceramics, iron projectile points, iron, and glass beads. Shelters in Phase III were paved with brick fragments and some dressed stones (V.N. Misra 1976:35–8).

Many more examples along these lines could be enumerated. For example, levels at Lekhanua, in central India, contained microliths, iron tools, and Iron Age ceramics, suggesting to V.N. Misra (1976:42) both sustained interaction and peaceful co-existence of agricultural "Megalithic" (Iron Age) people and microlith-using foragers up to (and possibly into) the first century AD (and see Lukacs, this volume). Archaeological evidence for gathering and hunting after the first millennium AD is spotty, though this is almost certainly a consequence of research emphasis and not an absence of foragers, as discussed below. In a paper on the post-Iron Age occurrence of stone tools, Lycett and Morrison (1989) found not only a large number of reports of associations between microliths and historic sites but also a time span for reported radiocarbon dates of microlith-bearing deposits that covered the entire Holocene. Late stone tools cannot, of course, be assumed to uniquely mark the presence of foragers, as there is some evidence from my own survey data in South India to suggest that impoverished rural farmers may have also used lithic technology as late as the fifteenth century AD. Archaeological evidence from post-first-millennium contexts for the nature of food procurement and production of all kinds is generally lacking in South Asia and until this situation improves, we must rely primarily on texts.

South Asian foragers and text-based history

It is clear, then, that archaeological locales with microliths, sites often labeled Mesolithic on the basis of lithic technology, economic activities, or both, span a very long period of time. As noted, archaeological research has focused more consistently on time periods before about 300 AD than on periods after this, and we quickly begin to lose material evidence for foraging activities after this time. Partly for this reason, but also because of the nature of archaeological data themselves, there are at present no really reliable links that can be established between named contemporary hunting and gathering groups and specific sets of archaeological remains, though as noted above this does not imply a complete lack of historical continuity.

Nevertheless, even very early written records do mention foragers in a general way. Among the earliest deciphered written texts in India are inscriptions commissioned by the North Indian Mauryan emperor Ashoka during the third century BC. These inscriptions note the presence of undefeated forest groups on the borders of the Mauryan empire in East/Central India (Kulke and Rothermund 1990). Thapar (1997:118) notes government interest in forests within the Mauryan empire, mentioning the existence of taxes both on timber and on hunters "who maintained a livelihood from the animals of the forest," suggesting groups of people differentially incorporated into that polity. Similarly, Tamil Sangam poetry of the far south, dated to the Early Historic period (c. 300 BC–AD 300), describes a cultural classification in which there are distinct ecological zones, each with its own type of inhabitant. Mountains are said to be the abode of hunters, with lower elevation forests and brush lands are described as the home of herding peoples and dry farmers, and lowlands the home of rice farmers. Subrahmanian (1966:251–2) claims that Sangam texts recognize a distinction between tribes and castes (see below). He notes the names and occupations of several tribes, occupations that include hunters and robbers, wandering minstrels, the beaters of drums and proclaimers of royal orders, professional fighters, bowmen, and fishermen, suggesting that these named communities were integrated into the larger society while still maintaining a separate identity (and see Morris 1977; Murthy 1994).

Later inscriptional records from South India make reference to hill peoples and note their role in the specialized procurement of forest products such as honey and medicinal and aromatic plants. Other historical data from southwestern India indicate that some gathering and hunting peoples had regular relationships of obligation to lowland kings, supplying

them with tribute in the form of forest products, including elephants. Other special roles of hunting people included serving as guides for royal hunting parties. In Middle Period (medieval) South Indian literary traditions, forests were seen as the abode of both hermits and hunting peoples, both clearly distinct from but not unengaged with larger society. As I discuss in chapter 6, beginning around the sixteenth century AD there was an expansion of the international trade in spices, particularly black pepper from southwest India. The demand for both cultivated and wild products of the western forests, combined with expansion of agriculturalists into the foothills of the western mountains, may have increasingly forced gatherers and hunters into marginal economic and social positions in this expanding world economy (and see Guha 1999).

If historical notices of foragers are consistently present, but spotty and brief before the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, then they become abundant by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, especially with the advent of European anthropological, missionary, and colonial administrative record-keeping. Around this time it becomes possible to identify the names of particular groups who still exist today, and from this time we inherit the peculiar systematics of South Asian group classifications, in which so-called "tribes" were set apart from "castes," the former sometimes being viewed as aboriginal and the latter as intrusive. All of these later historical accounts stress the interrelation between hill tribes and lowland groups, describing both the system of "renters" or middlemen in the trade in forest products (Morrison, chapter 6 this volume) and patterns of allegiance of particular groups to specific polities (Morris 1977; Murthy 1994). The power valences of "tribal" groups in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were not always ones of oppression or submission, however. Many forest peoples were regarded with fear and respect, both because of their reputations as fierce raiders and because of their reported prowess in sorcery or other religious sources of both power and danger.⁵

Tribes and tropes: the newness and oldness of gathering and hunting

South Asian tribal groups have inspired the generation of such a quantity of scholarly and quasi-scholarly writing that it is somewhat surprising there are any forests left. From the beginning, "tribals" constituted an active field of discussion and contestation for anthropologists, missionaries, government officials, and others. Representations of South Asian tribals have been deployed to serve various political agendas as diverse as Nehruvian industrialization and modernization to, more recently, scholarly depictions of a pristine, aboriginal, "state of nature" and ecological harmony that contrasts

with the evils of western imperial and industrial models (Gadgil and Guha 1992; Shiva 1988; cf. Mosse 1999). At both extremes, forager groups are employed as foils for particular intellectual and political programs; certainly the use, both inside and outside anthropology, of notions of primitivity in constructions of nature, history, and humanity has a long heritage and there have been several excellent general critiques of this history and practice (e.g. Fabian 1983; Kuper 1988). However, to point to the rhetorical manipulation of South Asian foragers in various games of representation is not to minimize or ignore their actual political, economic, and social exploitation, even oppression throughout much of recorded history (see, as a beginning, Fürer-Haimendorf 1982).

The notion that South Asian peoples are divided into caste society, on the one hand, and tribal societies, on the other, has a long history in British thinking about this region. The concept of tribe, a cultural entity even now sometimes seen as being coterminous with biological ("racial") divisions, is pre-anthropological, being consistently applied by the end of the nineteenth century (e.g. Forsyth 1889; Kitts 1885). Even before this, British efforts toward social classification and enumeration (the census being one example, and various monumental compilations of tribes and castes of a region, such as that of Thurston [1909], being another) worked to reify and stabilize identity groupings, inasmuch as census categories came to define the contours of group membership, and it was primarily through collective action that resource mobilization became possible (cf. Dirks 1993; H. Bayly 1999).

The designation of a particular group as "tribal" contained within it assumptions of both primitivity and originality. Designations of primitivity reflect value judgments about the degree of "advancement" of the economic base (shifting or swidden cultivation was seen by the British as wasteful, irrational, and as simpler and less developed than plow agriculture; hunting and gathering even more so). Originality, or aboriginality, followed naturally upon primitivity under the powerful intellectual structure of cultural evolution. As Bêteille (1998:187, emphasis in original) puts it, "The 19th-century view was that the tribe represented not only a particular *type of society*, but also a particular *stage of evolution*." Simpler forms were seen to be earlier; hence simpler people ought also to be earlier. This is the logic that made "tribals" into the "original inhabitants of India," that gives us "living Mesolithic peoples," that compelled Murdock (1934) to include the South Indian Todas in his volume *Our Primitive Contemporaries*, and, of course, that was under fire in the revisionist debate discussed in chapter 1 of this volume.

In South Asia, this intellectual tradition is complicated by various indigenous and introduced ideas about historical movements of peoples on the subcontinent, of which the notion of "Aryan invasions" is the most important. Without delving into the tangled history of this historical construction, one can simply point out the association of "Aryan" identity with high social and ritual status. The kind of logic that makes presumably *simpler* people into *earlier* people finds a convenient mechanism for contemporary co-existence of peoples in such migrationist scenarios.

In addition to the logic of a relentless progressivism, another dimension to early constructions of tribes and castes is a pervasive orientalist bias that sees progress (civilization, evolution) as something which is, in contradistinction, not truly "indigenous" to India, as something which is imposed, brought to it, new. By having tribals be India's indigenes (both primitive and old), successive generations of scholars were free to construct historical edifices out of waves of migration and invasions, again mostly built on a logical structure which substitutes space for time, creating quasi-historical sequences out of contemporaneous variation (cf. Morrison 1996; Leach 1990).

In a recent essay, Bêteille (1998) cogently outlines the reasons for eschewing the notion of South Asian tribals as "indigenous peoples," noting that such groups, for whom tribal classifications have come to denote important legal entitlements, are not necessarily any more indigenous than others in what is generally glossed as caste society. It is difficult to mount a convincing argument, he notes, for any coherent distinctiveness of tribal habitats, lifeways, biology, language, or even religious practice, especially in light of the long history of interactions between tribal and non-tribal populations. Bêteille's perspective stands in contrast to that of many ethnographers, most notably von Fürer-Haimendorf, who conducted fieldwork among various tribal groups across the subcontinent between 1936 and 1980. Von Fürer-Haimendorf, who also worked closely with tribal welfare programs and served as a consultant on tribal issues for the government of Hyderabad, reproduces the language of a shared tribalism⁶ and primitivity, not neglecting to see biological associations (1982:4–5, italics added):

Until two or three generations ago, the Jungle Chenchus seem to have persisted in a life-style similar to that of the most archaic Indian tribal populations, and their traditional economy can hardly have been very different from that of forest dwellers of earlier ages . . . Of special interest are the parallels between the Chenchus and the Veddas of Sri Lanka . . . The Veddas have virtually given up their traditional life-style, but during some brief encounters with a group of semi-settled Veddas I was struck by a

physical similarity between Veddas and Chenchus so close that it would be exceedingly difficult to distinguish members of the two populations if brought together in one place. Though separated by a distance of hundreds of miles and a stretch of sea, *the two groups may well be remnants of the most archaic human stratum of South Asia.*

In this citation we can also see several other tropes of South Asian hunter-gatherer studies. First, that until “very recently” (which of course varies, depending on the time of the ethnographic fieldwork) foraging groups are seen as having been entirely “traditional”; integration is always placed by the ethnographer in the recent (but undefined) past (e.g. Ehrenfels 1952:47–8). Secondly, foraging groups are often viewed as being on the verge of disappearing, which might follow both from the concept of tribalism itself (tribes must be autonomous groupings, unlike castes, so that integration with others threatens their tribal identity) and from the perception that contact with others is a recent phenomenon.

If the ethnographic⁷ view from inside tribal studies suggests only recent integration of previously autonomous and isolated tribes (Fürer-Haimendorf 1982), then the perspectives of historians, archaeologists, and anthropologists not specializing in tribal groups provide a sharp contrast. Murthy (1994), for example, uses historical documents to describe the wealth of the Chenchus, the existence of Chenchu royalty, and the ways Chenchus served various governments in eastern India from about the fifth century AD (note that these are the very same Chenchus discussed by Fürer-Haimendorf, above). Similarly, S. Guha (1999) has traced the changing political fortunes of several groups of foragers and especially forager-agriculturalists in western India between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. Guha’s close historical study tracks the development of “tribal kingdoms” in west-central India and the changing alliances of “tribal” military leaders with larger polities. In fact, the degree to which ethnographically and historically known gatherer-hunters of the South Asian mainland and Sri Lanka are integrated into the economies, polities, and religious practices of their agricultural neighbors has prompted some to view them as economic specialists. As early as 1969, Richard Fox referred to South Asian hunter-gatherers as “professional primitives,” in recognition of their integration into the larger society and their specific roles as occupational specialists.

What we see in this volume is that such integration has an even longer history than such accounts imagine. This recognition should not, however, be taken to mean that South Asian gatherer-hunters are somehow not “real”; instead we should recognize that diversity and flexibility in lifestyle and

subsistence have been a feature of South Asian life for a very long time, and that gathering and hunting are important parts of a broad economic repertoire that have lasted for a very long time. Further, the chapters in this volume point to a great degree of variation in strategies and degrees of connection between foragers and others, suggesting that a single model of interaction or isolation will never be satisfactory. We have come a long way from a choice between "primitive isolates" and "professional primitives," from the battle-lines of the revisionist debate which, while it hardly touched the South Asian literature, resonates in some the disagreements about the changing histories of foragers on the subcontinent. Certainly the lessons South Asianists have learned about the complexity and fluidity of subsistence strategies and of interactions ramify beyond the subcontinent and suggest that relations between different forms of production and procurement and between differently organized groups of people have probably always been complex; if foraging in the context of South (and Southeast) Asian history is best viewed as strategic rather than essential, this insight is unlikely to be applicable only to this region.

Archaeology will probably never provide a direct link between specific sets of material remains and named contemporary groups who, among other things, hunt and gather, but there is certainly the promise that archaeological research will soon begin to address more recent time periods and thus round out our still rather sketchy ideas about the long-term histories of South Asian gatherers and hunters. Recent trends toward the integration of textual, material, environmental, and biological information are particularly welcome, and as the chapters in this volume illustrate, such approaches represent our best hope for the future. If such multidisciplinary historical scholarship can only rarely approach issues of indigenoussness (after Bétéille 1998) and specific cultural continuities (or ruptures), it is, however, in a position to comment on both the newness and oldness of hunting, gathering, and trading, activities which have a long genealogy, but which have also been reinvented and reconfigured again and again, in response to the complex circumstances of history.

NOTES

- 1 This has led, not surprisingly, to many discussions about what, if anything, unifies South Asia as a geographic entity. This debate has been closely connected to British colonial assertions about the lack of an "Indian" identity prior to the construction of their colonial empire, and has engendered a large and often contentious literature. Perhaps the most interesting of the early work of the twentieth century is B. Subbarao's (1958) *The Personality of India*, modeled on

Sir Cyril Fox's (1932) *The Personality of Britain*. Subbarao identified what he called "areas of attraction or nuclear regions," "areas of relative isolation," and "areas of isolation or cul de sac," the former being places where centralized, hierarchical political systems emerged and the latter depicted as marginal zones, outside the mainstream of cultural development. Of course these are the areas where specialized forager-traders are known ethnographically and historically, and thus this distinction is of some interest here (see also Sankalia 1963). For more extended discussion of the concepts of "India" and "South Asia" see, for example, Inden (1990) and Spate (1954).

- 2 I am *not* saying here that there are no material consequences of ethnic and cultural identities or that such issues cannot be addressed archaeologically. It is, however, my opinion that we are on much firmer ground in discussing the consequences of human action – whatever complex causal relations lie behind those actions – than in attempting to correlate material remains with ethnic or cultural labels. At the very least, the ambiguous, sometimes fluid nature of self-ascribed or externally assigned identities known historically and ethnographically should make us cautious about attempting to project contemporary cultural categories back in time. The biological perspective is especially important here, as biological relations between peoples seem, in many cases, to cross-cut apparent cultural categories, while in other contexts distinctive biological populations can be isolated. All this points to the complex nature of group identities (ethnic, biological, cultural, economic) through time and over space.
- 3 This is the case even though it is now clear enough that there was never a *single* hunting and gathering way of life, especially after the onset of Holocene climatic changes. Nevertheless, the use of the term "Mesolithic" as a shorthand for gatherer-hunter is well established in the literature (e.g. Allchin and Allchin 1982).
- 4 In general, we can identify two main zones of agriculture in South Asia: a northern/western zone of winter wheat and barley cultivation and a southern/eastern zone of summer rice and millet cultivation, with some regions of overlap where double-cropping regimes were possible. In both zones, animal domesticates include sheep and goats, cows, pigs, and water buffalo. Obviously, this greatly oversimplifies regional agro-ecological patterns, but holds true in a general sense. The introduction of African millets has been recently reviewed by Weber (1998). Domesticated rice appears to have come into India through Southeast Asia. Constantini (1984) reviews the evidence for local vs. introduced plant cultigens at Mehrgarh while Meadows (1984) presents the faunal data. See Kajale (1994) for a review of early agriculture in peninsular India.
- 5 Discussing eighteenth-century North and Central India, S. Bayly (1999:44) describes relations between newly established post-Mughal lordships and "the supposedly fierce and carnal" Bhils, Gonds, and Santals, noting that hill peoples constituted an important market for lowland produce as well as a

critical source of manpower for military levies. She explains (1999:45): "There was always a delicate balance between aggression and harmony in these relationships. Even so, until relatively recent times, plains peoples tended to hold the bearers of 'tribal' titles in mingled fear and reverence. Their hills and forests commanded respect as the domains of blood-taking deities whose powers of *sakti* or activated divine energy empower both kings and gods to contend with the unclean or 'demonic' forces which continually menace the ordered dharmic world."

- 6 Evidently, any tribe can be compared with any other. When this results in comparisons between, for example, peoples of the far northeast and the far south, who have virtually nothing in common beyond their shared tribal label and citizenship in the Indian republic (cf. Fürer-Haimendorf 1982), the curious resilience of the tribal label becomes clearer. If tribals are relegated to anthropology, while others are the subject of history and archaeology, then interaction between tribals and non-tribals need not be addressed, nor indeed need the whole conception of tribalism be re-examined. Clearly, however, if the whole notion of "tribe" is suspect, as I would argue it is, then comparisons between tribals *as such* lose their automatic justification. All this is not to say that comparisons are not warranted and useful, as indeed the project of this volume asserts that they are.
- 7 For more recent ethnographic perspectives on South Asian hunting and gathering groups, especially those from the northeast which are, unfortunately, not well represented in this volume, see Lee and Daly (1999).