

**ONE PHENOMENON, DIFFERENT PERCEPTIONS: THE CASE OF
STONE STRUCTURES OF THE NAGA HILLS AND IN VIDARBHA**

*Dissertation Submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University in Partial
Fulfillment for the Award of the Degree of*

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

W.WANGJIN



**CENTRE FOR HISTORICAL STUDIES
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI-110067**

2011

For,

DAD AND MOM

*“When wisdom enters your heart and knowledge is pleasant to your soul;
discretion will preserve you; understanding will keep you”*

Proverbs 2: 10-11



Date: 25th July, 2011

DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation entitled “**One Phenomenon, Different Perceptions: The Case of Stone Structures of the Naga Hills and in Vidarbha**” submitted by me in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of **Master of Philosophy**, of Jawaharlal Nehru University, is my own work. This dissertation has not been previously submitted for the award of any degree of this University or any other University.

W. Wangjin

CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation

Supriya Varma

(DR. SUPRIYA VARMA)

SUPERVISOR



Centre for Historical Studies
School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi - 110 067, INDIA

Kunal Chakrabarti

(PROF. KUNAL CHAKRABARTI)

CHAIRPERSON



CHAIRPERSON
Centre for Historical Studies
School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi - 110067, INDIA

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I with all my heart, thank my supervisor Dr. Supriya Varma who strongly believed in academic justice and pursuance of higher excellence. Words are inadequate to express her profound guidance for which this present work is possible. I owe a very special debt for the personal kindness, encouragement and the freedom to think she imbued me with. In spite of my many limitations, she has been so forbearing and totally humane and guided me with the fullest enthusiasm that I can ever perceive of. The errors and the lacunae in the research are entirely mine.

I am thankful to Apajalei, the Chief Angh of Chui village whom I interviewed in two occasions but showed eagerness each time. In a similar vein, I wish to thank Shri. Medoselhou Keretsü, whom I interviewed to understand the Angami practices. My gratitude is also to Shri. Kesohelie Suokhrrie for availing me right person to interview for which this work is possible.

I am indebted to NU Library (Nagaland University) Kohima, ASI Library (Archaeological Survey of India) New Delhi, DSA Library, JNU and Central Library JNU, New Delhi for letting me access to various valuable books and documents.

I am also indebted to UGC (University Grant Commission) for the financial assistance that I could avail through which this work is possible.

My special thanks to Nangkham Angya from whom I received unwavering support in various forms and who always believed in me throughout this venture. I would not miss my circle of friends- Levinuo, Kenie, Sulila, Amenuo, Bauna, Lungkilang and Engkima who enriched me with several discussions and interactions we engaged in. I am indebted to Dr. Jaya Menon, Aligarh Muslim University for the proof reading of two chapters. My special thanks is also to Lamin Simte for helping me out with the maps. I am also thankful to various individuals and friends whose name I may have missed out but whose silent prayer and support helped me through.

Finally I wish to thank my Dad and Mom who in spite of the many sufferings and hard times ensured me with every possible means and instilled in me the will to believe in dreams that I have. Above all, I thank God who I trust and because of whom, what I am now.

25 July, 2011.

W. Wangjin

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Chapter One

Introduction

The use of stones stretches back into prehistory which was the most common for transmitting social memory especially when they were inscribed with letters, images or both. Stones were used as medium through which stories of various circumstances and events were perpetuated and passed down. It was appropriated for both commemorative and funerary. Different society appropriated stones differently in the context of the beliefs and practices inherent within that society. These stones as a relic of the past then become very important archaeologically that can throw light on the past society.

The etymology of the term “Megaliths” is derived from the Greek word “Megas” which means “Great” and “Lithos” which means “Stone”. Therefore megaliths generally meant “great stone”. Megaliths may comprise of both sepulchral and non sepulchral in nature. However, there are also stones which necessary cannot be called ‘great stone’ but were appropriated for similar and different functions within the context of different societies. These stones may comprise of small dolmens, circular or rectangular enclosures, heaves of small stones in vertical standing, small cists for disarticulated parts and so forth.

Speaking of the practices of stone erecting in the Indian subcontinent, it encompasses various structural, functional and architectural plans that is predominant in peninsular India but equally prolific in other regions such as Vidarbha and north east India. Some of the practices are also retained as living traditions among the Madias who occupy the hills and plains of Chandrapur and Gadchiroli districts of Maharashtra and belong to the larger ethnic group known as Gonds (Kulkarni 2002: 197). These groups are also distributed in the region of Bastar in Chhattisgarh who also have similar practices but these are associated more with a festival than the Gonds of Chandrapur and Gadchiroli of Maharashtra, whose core practices are associated with the dead. The north east India, particularly the Nagas and the Khasis have retained the practice of stone erecting both for commemorative and burial purposes.

Though there are different temporal and spatial distribution of stones structures among the Nagas and in Vidarbha and its evolvement and practices over a period of time, but irrespective of the two distinct societies with different histories, ecology, social relations and other dimensions, the premise and central thrust is rather to understand the very distinctiveness nature and appropriations of stones in various forms. Against discourses construed within the framework of homogenized understanding in the subcontinent, this work attempts to explore the multiplicity of perceptions and phenomenological experiences which could also be inherent in societies outside of this scope of studies. The attempt is therefore to bring out the variations of stone practices as implicit in the said cultures as against a dominant framework of homogenization in the earlier discourses. The choice of two disparate regions for the present study i.e. Vidarbha and the Naga Hills is in keeping in mind the relevance and significance of the scope of study. A primary concern of the study is to draw the variations and perceptions, be it in burials, commemorations or other social aspects. The other dimension is also to understand how stones are appropriated with multiple meanings which can be both similar and different in various societies in different historical time and space. The choice of Vidarbha is further substantiated keeping in mind that this region has been extensively and intensively investigated through surveys and excavations. The production of knowledge has also been vast as compared to the Naga Hills which have seen meagre archaeological investigations but much more ethnographically. While this is one reason for choosing of Vidarbha, like the Nagas that have retained some of the practices of stone erecting as living tradition, the Gonds of Chandrapur and Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra in a similar fashion retain certain features of stone erecting as living tradition. This is one prominent reason which has led me to consider the region of Vidarbha and for my comparative study of stone structures. The title of my study "*One Phenomenon, Different Perceptions: The Case of Stone Structures of the Naga Hills and Vidarbha*" is an attempt to vindicate that similar action which is the very act of stone appropriation though put in different temporal and spatial context can have similar or different meanings and perceptions in the context of different societies.

It is imperative to note that the usage of the term ‘Megaliths’ for the purpose of the present study is in a broader sense. It has been used to include stone structures which may not necessarily fit into the neat category of megaliths like the Stonehenge of Europe. However, more profoundly, stone structures particularly in case of the Nagas, which have been studied in the present study, are of various shapes and sizes and at times too small to be even called megaliths. Therefore I prefer to use the term ‘stone structures’ rather than ‘megaliths’ although at times, the term ‘megaliths’ are interchangeably used in my dissertation but this only in the case when I am citing other archaeologists.

1.1 Introducing Landscape

This research work attempts to examine the patterns of appropriation of stone structures which are embedded with multiple meanings and perceptions. My research attempts to understand this particular phenomenon through the perspective and lens of the landscape. By landscape, I mean both physical and memory. The physical landscape may comprise of human constructions and alterations of the landscape through the very act of human activities which are based on the consciousness of the actors. The landscape of memory here is understood as a medium of both individual and collective memory of past which are continuously reworked through monumental representations, events, stories, myths and so forth. The transformation of the landscape with the construction of monumental space must be conscious. The selection of location must be suitable and specific for which the purpose was intended to portray.

The word ‘landscape’, is derived from Dutch ‘*landschap*’ and first appeared in the late sixteenth century especially used by painters as a technical term. It gradually changed particularly in the eighteenth century to apply to rural scenery itself since it reminded the spectator of landscape pictures. Thus, the term as applied to actual places and spaces originated with a sub-text of ‘picturesqueness’. The history of our understanding of what is meant by ‘landscape’ therefore relates not so much to an actual environment but to a way in which that environment is visualized, what elements and aspects are highlighted or ignored (Forbes 2009: 10).

Landscapes have been interpreted in many forms and particularly in the archaeology of landscape; there has been an attempt to interpret within the phenomenological experiences. Landscapes are engaged and experienced through the human consciousness and active involvement and since it is subjective, and this subjectivity then opens to multiple understanding (Bender 2006: 303). When used by many archaeologists, phenomenological approaches to landscapes frequently involve the identification of ideational landscapes, with issues such as ritual, power and identity taking centre stage. A landscape as an ideational construct integrally links memory, time and the past (Forbes 2009: 18). Human activities become inscribed within a landscape such that every cliff, large tree, stream, swampy area which then becomes a familiar place. Daily passages and the visibility through the landscape become biographic encounters for individuals and groups, where the past traces of the activities are therefore embedded in the social and individual times of memory. Therefore, the past as much as the space is then crucially constitutive of the present (Tilley 1994: 27).

Landscape must be felt to be able to differentiate the different elements. The transformation of the landscape through monumental space is the very act of transforming the perception of that landscape. It is in this landscape that materials, symbols and signs are exchanged. Landscape may be transformed with the desire to keep the social orders or distinguish elements between good and bad, pure and polluting, desirable and undesirable and so forth. Meanings must be placed and these symbols exchanged.

Therefore, from the lens of stone monuments as constructed landscape and within the landscape, it represents “both an ordering of that landscape, an ordering of the relationship between past and present” (Tilley 2006: 28). Graves were constructed in the mortuary landscape and rituals practices appropriated as a means through which chaos and polluting elements can be defeated. The act of monumental structuring was also an act and desire through which the ancestors could be remembered and the bonds renewed. For the community who built them, it was the world where their ancestors dwelt. It was a landscape where their “bountiful ancestors” (Morris 1974: 12) lived and resided.

Landscape therefore, becomes the identifier of the ancestors. This landscape of death by means of the monumental space is actively imagined and recreated. It becomes an aid by which the past can be remembered. The permanency of monuments in the landscape becomes the memory. The past necessarily and easily are not forgotten unless the materials are either destroyed or perished. Monuments within landscape therefore, provides memory, identity and social orders because the events are inscribed within it and are collectively and socially remembered through its attachment to the place or through the medium of visibility and its presence. It provided identity for whom it was erected and to the one who erected them. Social and collective identity was also constructed because it is the world where their collective ancestors dwelt. It's the place where they continuously watched over their loved ones and who in turn watched over them.

1.2 The Framework

This study is divided into six chapters including the introduction and conclusion. Chapter two is a historiographic survey of the studies on stone structures. It is divided into three sections; In the first, ideas and the trend of understanding the megaliths in Europe is highlighted with the intention of comprehending the theoretical insights which could well be considered while interpreting and understanding stone structures of India. In the second section, the various trends and interpretations of stone structures of India are emphasized and drawn particularly from both the primary sources in the form of archaeological reports and secondary sources. This section attempts to see the discourses and trends on the study of the stone structures in India particularly the case of south India and in Vidarbha. It also attempts to see the various themes that emerged and have been debated. The third section consists of the stone structures of the Nagas which are further sub divided into colonial period¹ and the post colonial. The encounter of the colonial ethnographers with the Nagas becomes fundamental in the productions of knowledge particularly stone structures which were popularly and often related with the Stonehenge

¹ By colonial, I meant production of knowledge by colonial ethnographers who were also part of the colonial enterprise at this time and continued to do so even after India's Independence. While post colonial refers to the development and the production of knowledge, by both locals and non locals but was not a part of the colonial enterprise.

of Europe. The histories of the Nagas and perceptions of the stone erecting practices were strongly imbued by the understanding of the colonial world view of creating histories of the people. This section deals with colonial enterprises and their pattern of production of knowledge of the practices of stone erecting and the issues and themes that subsequently emerged. The second section entitled 'post colonial' is an attempt to see if there is a break or continuity of the academic discourses on the study of this practice. I argue that there is a similar trend and linearity in the reproduction of knowledge. The absence of theoretical frameworks and lack of multiple interpretations are the lacunae substantiated further by absence of vigorous archaeological explorations. I have also used 'Naga Hills'² interchangeably to subscribe to the colonial narratives particularly stone structures. This becomes inevitable on the ground that colonial ethnographers were engaging prior to modern state demarcations though the tendency to homogenize was inherent. Subsequently I have used the nomenclature 'Nagas'³ but the practices are largely drawn from the Angami, Chakhesang and the Konyak Nagas.

The third chapter explores and centers on the scope of interpreting stone structures of Vidarbha in multiple ways and attempts to suggest that the phenomenological experiences within and through the landscape are socially and consciously constructed. The eminence of stone structures as constructed landscape and reflected in the desire for visibility and appropriation of landscape is one theme which emerge. The landscape as an immovable monumental experience and desirability for permanence would and could influence for a much longer period of time. This could have different effects on the social dimensions of the living through the very act of different perceptions of the landscape at different times. Likewise, burials are explored to understand both the symbolic representations of socio-economic dimensions of society and burials as ideology and a

² The Naga Hills was first named by the British for administrative purposes. It was also meant to demarcate the plains (Assam) and the hills (inhabited by the Nagas). The Naga Hills were further divided into administered and un-administered zones.

³ The Nagas are a conglomeration of different groups having similar or distinctive dialects. The term may have been derived from the Assamese word 'Noga' which mean 'hilly people'. The second etymological derivation is the Burmese word 'Naka' which means 'people with pierced ears'.

legitimizing enforcing agent of social order and social realities by a particular group(s). Besides, in this chapter, I also try to understand how landscapes are reworked, reinterpreted and reconstructed through time and space. It also incorporates some of the living traditions particularly those retained among the Gonds of Chnadrapur and Gadchiroli in Maharashtra and the Gonds of Bastar region of Chhattisgarh. The attempt is not to validate the claim for a parallel tradition but a claim for possibilities of drawing some inferences and underpinning principles of the practice of stone structures and perceptions that could be inherent in both the societies. The construction of identities, issue of rituals and power takes a centre stage here. The incorporation of these living traditions is also to see the multiplicity across culture particularly with the Nagas as pointed out earlier. This chapter deals with various forms of interment and representation of the dead by the living. The conceptions of death and the transformations of death into life together with beliefs of a life hereafter or realms where the ancestors are living are among the several fundamental aspects of the burials in Vidarbha. Such a “transcendental states are not merely spiritual or ideological, but they are materialized by the descendants and the living” (Fahlander and Oestigaard 2008: 1). As such, it attempts to look at how dead are materialized by the living.

Chapter four attempts to offer new perspectives and interpretations of the stone structures in the Naga Hills as against popular understanding and common association of the practice with the “Feast of Merits”⁴. However, this is not to negate feast of merits as one instrument and medium for eligibility of stone erecting but a more profound understanding and its various implications both economically and socially are propounded. This chapter is largely a culmination of and drawn from field work and colonial ethnographical records for reason of paucity of academic discourses in post colonial era. This by no means subscribes entirely to the views perpetuated by colonial production of knowledge but rather an attempt is made to critically analyze the existing

⁴ The term was one of the first or the first to be coined by J.P Mills. A Series of feasts were given by individual or a household to the entire village to be eligible to erect stone monuments. Such feasts and subsequent erecting of stone is a point of entry to attain a higher social status.

documents and offer perspectives. The limitation of the field work only to the Nagas is keeping in mind the living practice of the stone erecting and also it is of recent past as compared to the practice in Vidarbha.

The chapter also attempts to throw light on the representation of dead, beliefs in the indestructibility of life, interferences of the ancestors which are inherent amongst the Nagas and its similar reflection in the mode of burials. The experiences of stone erecting among the Nagas are also contested, examined and cross compared. The appropriation of stone structures for multiple ways with multiple meanings embedded in it is attempted. The hypothesis for the transformation of landscape into a more complex ritual space particularly by the Konyak Nagas is put forth. The stone structures with different structural and functional aspects are explored, which then opens up the scope for multiple interpretations. One of the theme explored in the chapter is a concept of 'fertility' which then argues that the Angami, Chakhesang and Konyak Nagas, while invoking the spirit of ancestors for fertility of crops, cattle and human have very different experiences though the objective and purpose is similar.

In a similar fashion and coherent with chapter two, it explores stone structures as a medium through which status is achieved and grounded. The tendency to construct identities at the level of the individual, family, clan and community and stone erecting as a legitimizing force is argued. Stones erecting which is socially recognized by society but given that certain criteria are fulfilled enable to actively participate and achieve such status and carve one's identity. The series of feasts and the aftermath of redistributions of wealth is a process through which one's identity is manifested but also an act through which social harmony and bonding are recognized though Jacobs (1994) has argued that, feasts of merits has the tendency to weaken the strength and power of the chiefs (Jacobs 1994: 82).

In the subsequent part of the chapter, I also argued that stone structures have a force and are ideal sites of social and collective memories. The stone erected in association with a particular individual becomes identity of the person after he is long gone. It becomes the identity of the person because it is visible and permanent in the landscape and can be socially and collectively attached. The stone structures in rectangular or circular

structural plan that are connected with resting, watch chamber and public meeting can recreate social events and memories because the stories and events are embedded in stones and in location.

Chapter five explores the various perceptions and experiences of stone erecting among the Nagas, Khasis and in Vidarbha. The purpose of including the Khasis is also to see the divergences with the Nagas though these regions share geographical proximity to each other. The central thrust is not to look at uniformity of the practice, but the points of divergences within that uniformity. It is divided into three sections. First, an attempt is made to understand the relations and variations inherent among the Nagas. Second, stone structures of the Nagas and Khasis are compared. Third, Naga Hills and the Vidarbha region are explored. In the context of Nagas, I argue that stone was used for various purposes encompassing perpetuation of ancestors, fertility and other independent reasons. Both the functional and structural dimensions and different meanings encoded within it are explored. However, the central argument is based on the concept of fertility which is associated with the stones and therefore discussed in some detail. Further, the attempt of this chapter is to understand these beliefs and activities, and to draw the different social experiences. The concept of fertility emerged as a strong theme and one which is not only intrinsically linked to the fertility of crops but also of human sexuality. This basis is mostly drawn in the light of the Konyak and the Angami Nagas. Selection of location for structuring of these stones is also brought to limelight and the different perception of this space. The idea is also to link these locations with different social organization in both these societies.

I also argue that the construction of identities is inherent both the societies but this identity is experienced and manifested differently because the elements of rituals are different. While the Angami, Chakhesang, Maram, Anal Nagas and so forth can carve identities through the series of feast and subsequent erection of stones (Venuh 1995; Devi 1998, 2004; Sharma 1997; Jamir 1997) but such practice is completely absent among the Konyak Nagas. Therefore stone erecting is intrinsically linked to status achievement but the criteria are very different.

Given this context, I, however, argue that the same stone can be also used for different purposes that ranges from perpetuating memories of the ancestors, fertility to identity construction and therefore, stones are embedded with multiple perceptions and meanings. Thus the premise is also to understand the mass of beliefs and activities which are actually inter-connected and related against the trend that has emerged, which merely focuses on the single aspect of feast of merit. I also argue that such ceremonies and rituals were a basis for a collective identity representation which also brought about social harmony and at the same memories of the past were continuously reinforced.

In the second theme, stone structures of the Nagas and the Khasis are explored. I argued that one of the aspects of Nagas and Khasis stones are connected with their ancestors but the relation with their ancestors is different. For the Nagas, the erecting of stone is an acknowledgment to their ancestors which could also further enhance the fertility. I also point out the different kinds of stones of Khasis, some of which are associated with ancestors and group affiliated and its manifestation of desire for continuity as a group.

The final theme engages with the stone structures of the Naga Hills and Vidarbha. Though, the two societies are located in two different historical times, it becomes fundamental to understand the underlying principle and perceptions of the stone structures that could be inherent in both the societies. Bearing this in mind, one of the arguments that has emerged is the relation of stone structures with agriculture. From the evidence of faunal remains and cultivated species such as barley, lentil, rice, common bean, horse gram and so forth. It has been suggested that the Iron Age societies in Vidarbha practiced agriculture (Singh 1986; Kajale 1989) as against the assumption that they were nomadic. Agriculture could be also possible with a more settled life. The point here is that the stone erecting by Nagas was fundamentally connected with agriculture and fertility. As far as structural and functional dimensions are concerned, stone structures of the Nagas are more commemorative in nature and therefore non sepulchral in character while Vidarbha stone structures are characterized by extensive burials. The attempt therefore, is to draw on some of these aspects and locate the appropriation in multiple ways in two different locations, both temporally and spatially. The variations are largely drawn on how stone as a medium can be interpreted and used in multiple ways by

one society and the same can be used for a very different purpose by a different society with different perceptions.

The finding of the study and the suggestions forms the conclusion.

Chapter Two

Historiography

2.1 Colonial Ethnographers and the Knowledge Production

The archaeology of North East India and Nagaland in particular are still in their infancy. However, there is huge potential to study the regions for various reasons. North East India is inhabited with multi ethnic groups with varied and distinct cultures of their own which are linguistically diverse. It is also one region where significant social formations may have taken place and where the relations with South East Asia can be understood. The migrations of different groups and continuous interactions between regions can be understood. In this context, one needs to take account of North East India.

However due to the lack of academic discourse and the severity of the conflicts in this region, North East India has largely been neglected. In recent times, there has been a shift and scholars have realized the potential of the region. This has prompted a leap in academic disciplines not only within the understanding of the political spheres but also a discipline like archaeology have spring up but which continues to be tied to history or anthropology. In Nagaland, in fact archaeology is associated with history.

Despite these grievances and lacuna, one of the fundamental records that are the basis even today for the study of North East India, and particularly for Nagaland are the accounts of colonial ethnographers, anthropologists and administrators who took up the responsibilities of collecting objects, writing monographs and giving reports. Archaeological investigation and survey in North East remained meager when compared to the studies that have been undertaken in other parts of India. By far, the region has remained ignored and demarcated. Alexander Cunningham, the founder of Indian archaeology surveyed most parts of North India surveying but failed to venture into the hilly regions of North East India. In is this unfortunate situation of negation and neglect that the present state of archaeology has failed to produce sufficient knowledge.

Looking through the lens of “observer and the observed” we cannot deny the colonial perceptions which were largely of unmitigated greed and an attempt to present the mentality of their superior knowledge against the so called ‘uncivilized’ ‘savages’ that were ‘wild’ and ‘barbarous’ (Woodthorpe 1882; Robert 1944) as well as their mission for civilizing them. In a way, knowledge was produced in the perceptions of the colonizers and history was created not by the locals but for them. Special emphasis was on the mission to rescue the knowledge of the Nagas’ culture which was thought to be on the verge of extinctions and therefore to study the Naga history was justified and thus these perceptions evolved a necessitated urgency. The ethnographical idioms used in the Naga Hills comprised and existed side by side with the military reports, popular literature, scholarly books and journal articles till the British departed from India (West 1994: 58).⁵ The Nagas, thus, became the best known inhabitants of the Assam-Burma hills region, but while building such reputations on the knowledge of the Nagas in India. Andrew West pointed out three chronological frameworks in the production of ethnographic knowledge on the Nagas by the British. First the military phase characteristics of the late nineteenth century: second, the administrative phase which dominated the beginning of the twentieth century: third, the phase of transitions through which the ethnography of the Nagas was established within the British academic anthropological studies (*Ibid*: 56). The last phase also saw the entry of professional anthropologist like Furer Haimendorf into the Naga Hills who interacted mostly amongst the Konyak Naga and wrote “*The Naked Nagas*” (1939) and “*The Konyak Nagas*” (1969) and produced several other documents.

However, beyond these categorizations, lacuna and perceptions, the monographs and writings of the colonial productions of the ethnographic knowledge becomes significant in the absence of rigorous research undertaken in the region. Therefore, the attempt to make a paradigm shift in the writings on the Nagas has never been possible for lack of supplementary writings. There has also been the tendency to follow the same line of thinking and reproduce similar knowledge. For this reason, much work is necessitated for future academic discourse.

⁵ Hutton for example not only drew on his predecessors works but seems to have collected sketches from Woodthorpe. For detail, see West, Andrew 1994.

In fact, it is interesting to see that even the Neolithic cultural patterns of North East India was first addressed and initiated as early as 1928-32 by colonial administrator such as J.H. Hutton in his report "*Prehistory of Assam*" (Sharma 2004: 13). The first stage of work was concerned with the collections of the stone celts and tools. In march 1869, Lt. Barron collected and retrieved four types of stone celts (axe shaped) from the Naga Hills which the locals called as "*Boga*" meant "white" while another was red which the locals termed as "*Lal*"; the stones were further categorized into "living" and "dead". The locals believed that these kinds of stones fell from the heavens and only fortunate people could find them (Barron 1872: xii). J.H Hutton also reported the same in which he described that the commonest type of stone celt among the hills inhabited by the Nagas were rough triangular ones with the cutting edge being polished and the sides showing a rough attempt at shouldering which clearly fitted into a wood handle by the insertion of the apex end into a hole. Drawing similarities to the type found among the Mon-Khmer, Hutton even suggested that some branch of the Mon-Khmer race inhabited or passed through the Naga Hills before it had learned the use of iron (Hutton 1924: 22). Acharya also pointed out the two types of celts found among the Nagas; first, a triangular in size with the widest part at the working place and second that resembled a Naga adze (Archarya 1989: 41).

Thus, the materials collected by colonial ethnographers and anthropologists whether they be stone celts, tools, ornaments and so forth have remained as an important references and sources of information for current archaeologists and to a certain extent, the production of current knowledge becomes a reproduction of the colonial knowledge. In other words, the anthropological data has become an archaeological data which in one way is very unfortunate. However, in more recent times, the archaeological potential of the region has been realized.

2.2 Archaeology in Nagaland

In the context of the Nagas, the intertwining of archaeology and myths become inevitable. The myths of origin among most of the Nagas are similar in which each group held that they originated from either a stone or caves. The Ao Naga believed that they

emerged out of the earth at “*Longterok*”, literary meaning “six stones” which are now in Chungliyimti, occupied by the Sangtam tribe of Tuensang district. These stones were again categorized individually into males named *Longphok*, *Tongpok* and *Longjakep* and females named *Longkakupokla*, *Yongmenala* and *Elongse* of which the biggest female stone was destroyed by the Christian missionaries in a fit of iconoclastic zeal (Temsula 1999: 3). The Mao Nagas believed that their common ancestors emerged from the earth and a stone was erected at Maikel to mark the place of their emergence (Hodson 1911: 13).

Similar myths of origin can be found among the Angami Naga, Konyak Naga, Zeliangrong Naga and so forth. The Angami Naga believes that their ancestors emerged from the bowel of the earth (Hutton 1921: 6) and point to present Kezakhenoma village in Phek district as a dispersion location. The Konyak Naga on the other hand claim they came from “*Longphang Phinyu*” or “*Longphanghong*” where “*Longphang*” means “under the rock” and “*Phinyu*” means “open up”, literally meaning an “open rock”. Konyak would also refer to the crossway “*Alamkaphan*” interpreted as the gate of the sun and thus make sense their migration from the east (Wangsha 2003: 3).

The significance of the myths of origin is that it allows one to see and locate the direction and departure point of archaeological investigation in Nagaland which is based on mythology, folklore and tradition. One of the objectives of the excavation at Chungliyimti was to see whether the archaeological finds could validate the myths of origin. Some of the ancestral sites that have been dated are Laruri (circa 690 AD-1000 AD), Chungliyimti (circa 920 AD-1116 AD), Khezakenoma (circa 1320 AD-1350 AD),⁶ Khusomi (circa 1450 AD-1670 AD) and Phor (circa 1500 AD-1600 AD). This dating has been done on the basis of radiometric dating. However, no sites have been excavated elaborately and extensively except for Chungliyimti which has undergone a few seasons of excavation.

⁶ The sites of Chungliyimti and Kezakhenoma have been excavated to validate the common myth of origins or the location of dispersion. These sites are believed to be one of the earliest settlements of some group of Nagas like the Aos, Sangtam, Phom and Angami Nagas respectively. This information was published in the ‘Nagaland post’ dated 7th July, 2009 under the caption “Naga ancestral sites dated to 7th AD”.

The finds in Chungliyimti was reported in the early 1970's by Nienu which included stone bowls, pestles, balls, hammer stones, mullers, whorls, scrapers, cores, flakes and later in 1972 by T.C Sharma who included polished stone axes, grinding stones spindle whorls, pottery vessels, beads of rare stones and stone earrings among the finds (Jamir and Vasa 2008: 323-339).

Recent excavation at Chungliyimti has revealed cultural artefacts of both modern and an ancient from both the locality 1 and locality 2. However, in the absence of a convincing sterile layer in both localities, one may suggest the occupation of the site without any break. It has revealed seven house plans of which House-1 has been reconstructed to its approximate size in traditional ways which have been retained as a living tradition. The finds included buff coloured wheel made pottery of kaolin clay which is similar to the finds that have been encountered at Ambari. Besides, beads made from glass, tile, jade, agate, carnelian, spillite celts and iron tools have been excavated. Uncommon handmade pottery such as perforated ware, wash type and the applique and punctuated types has also been found (Jamir and Aier 2009: 7).

In a recent published work, "*Local Culture: new findings and interpretation of Nagaland*", Tiatoshi Jamir and Ditamulu Vasa argued that most of the Naga tribes were side by side during the early migration period and this hypothesis is drawn on the basis of the common origin myths, clan and village affiliation. They attempted to see megalithic structures of related functions, similar burial types and pottery origins and argued that cultural patterns of prehistoric times were not heterogeneous but were closely homogeneous. The complex variations and shared affinities between the Naga tribes resulted not because of the long term development of distinct ethnic identities but as a result of diachronic structural transformations and adaptations out of one singular cultural complex. These evidences further supported by the similar ceramic designs from excavated and surface litter sites of Chungliyimti, Jotsoma, Rito and Tiyi Longchum in the Naga Hills (Jamir and Vasa 2008: 323-339).

The other aspects of the archaeological investigation in Nagaland are the concentration on the study of stone structures. The stone structures of Nagaland have attracted a good number of scholars for two main reasons:

1. These are the only archaeological potential that are visible in the condition of lack of survey for archaeological sites.
2. The stone structures of Nagaland remain living traditions.

The encounter of the colonial ethnographers with the practice of stone structures amongst the Nagas and the subsequent productions of knowledge by the local writers will be discussed later in section which deals with the historiography of the stone structures of the Naga Hills. It is important to first look at megaliths in a larger context.

2.3 Brief Survey of the Trends of the Megalithic Study in Europe and India

The etymology of the word “megaliths” is derived from the Greek word “Mega” which means “Great” and “Lithos” which means “stone”. Therefore megaliths generally meant “great stone”. However generally speaking, megaliths may include structures of stones which include tombs stones and in circular formations. The extent of the megaliths are not confined to one area but are spread around the world such as Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia, north and South America. The megaliths themselves have been a tricky issue with a wide range of opinions expressed by different scholars but without any conclusive evidence. The old belief was that large megaliths were made for forecasting an eclipse that gave prestige and power to religious leaders showing their ability to predict such exceptional events. Some believed that they were markers of boundary and areas of worship by family members and monuments connected with worship of dead ancestors. Since the megalithic practices are spread all around the world, the first builders of the megaliths cannot be conclusively ascertained. There have been numerous opinions and much debate on the issue of the origins. Even in the context of India, with the impact of “diffusionist” theory that was raging around the world, the megalithic culture was attributed to various groups of people like the Scythians, the Druids, the Celts etc. and by the 1960’s, with the advancement of the method focused mainly on the racial affinities of

the skeletal remains, the 'origin and authorship' of the megalithic people were attributed and identified with the Proto-Australoid, Negroid and Mediterranean groups (Settar and Korisettar 2002: 27). Meadows Taylor as early as 1851 argued for the authorship of the nomadic Druidic Scythians who penetrated into India at a very early period who then formed local settlements in various parts of India (Taylor 1851: 17). On the other hand, based on the concentration of megaliths in south India coinciding with the distribution of languages belonging to the Dravidians family, it has been argued that the authors could be the Dravidians while other opinions favoured the idea that the megaliths were Aryan in origin based on the theory that the megalithic builders were outside the pale of Vedic society.

2.3. A. Europe

One of the recent trends in the study of the European megaliths have been in terms of looking at the relationships of the stone monuments within the context of the landscape. This approach mainly tried to understand the larger ideology, symbols and the relations that run between the stones and humans and even the construction of identity within this landscape. Christopher Tilley (2006) presents a framework on the understanding of issues relating to the aspects of landscape and emphasized the importance of looking at the relation of humans with nature and the larger dominant ideologies and perceptions and the whole consciousness of identity, place, myths, memories etc. within the sphere of landscape conceptions and not just looking at relations in the past but the meanings ascribed to it through time and space. He brought out very fundamental perspectives which limit and restrict the study of the places and identity. He argued that although hills and prehistoric ruins may still be bodily experienced, we need to re-imagine the various tasks and activities that took place with reference to the traces left to us so that an insight from the contemporary and historical studies allows us to understand continuities and differences and actively re-imagined of the prehistoric past. He emphasized on how landscape can create a relation and can be reflected in the rocks and standing stones which represent an ordering of the landscape and the relationships between the past and the present (Tilley 2006: 26).

Early in the 90's, Levy have attempted to study the mortuary remains in the Northwestern of Europe within this context of the landscape in which she suggested that the mortuary remains have permanence on the landscape and that these can be significant parts of the cultural landscape even after death rituals are long over and no longer understood by the community. This serves as cult of memory and also become or interpreted as a new ideology. People manipulate the existing monument for new cultural purposes and thus the past continuously influences the present. In other words, she suggested that from the archaeological perspective, death rituals are significant not only because they may crystallize values and social structures of a community for an experimental monument but because they leave physical remains that may influence or organize human behaviour or be manipulated by human behaviour for much longer then the ritual event itself (Levy 1989: 155-161).

The other trends that have developed in Europe are the study of megaliths particularly in the understanding of the relationships of the dead and the living and the larger ideologies involved. Julian Thomas in trying to understand these relations pointed out that the common practice of the Neolithic mortuary deposits of disarticulated skeletons and their reorganizations was not simply a way of making space for subsequent inhumations but acted and served as a metaphor for the changing state of the person as it was transformed into a different kind of being. He attempted to look in terms of the economy of the human bones in which bones might have circulated between people as a symbol of rituals and thus created relations not just between "givers and receivers" but also the relations between the "living and the dead" (Thomas 2000: 653-668). The subsequent construction of the long barrows graves (Midley 2008: 40) and the replacement of the timber chamber with a cut grave and the introduction of the encircling ditches in the later Neolithic period may have created a great distance between the mortuary deposits and the living community and in the cases where stones were intentionally blocked suggest their isolation and inaccessibility (Thomas 2000: 653-668). Giving a similar interpretation, Midley also pointed out that the small dolmens may signify individual interments after the completion of the ceremonies and the capstones sealed but this does not meant that the living were not aware of the dead as indicated from the dolmen of Gronjaegers Hoj

where it was covered by a huge quartz slab which remained visible and might have acted as a powerful reminder of the death beneath. As such, she pointed out that it was the changing ideologies, architectural elements and the use of the raw materials which made possible this structuring. She also suggested understanding of the floor which was the place where the burials and grave goods were deposited and placed. The deposition of the raw materials, the arrangements employed may indicate wider symbolic expressions than we think and assume (Midgley 2008: 124).

The study of megaliths particularly the menhirs of Britain can be seen in the work of Christopher Tilley (2004) where he brings out three significant criteria, one, the phenomenological experience of the complex monuments, two, relationship to the landscape and three, providing an interpretation of the link between the stones to their individual and the landscape settings. Tilley attempted to establish an interpretation of the presence of menhirs along the coast and its transformation through the Mesolithic period to the Neolithic period suggesting that the rise of the sea level during the Mesolithic period had a profound effect on the hunter-gatherer-fisher population of the coastal areas of Brittany. The post Neolithic submergence of land resulted in menhirs located originally in the inland becoming part or very near to the coast and at times leading to the disappearance of some and forming islands which were formerly a part of the mainland. This resulted in a greater social impact in the areas and the very transformation of the coastal landscape which might have given birth to a fundamental set of mystic beliefs. The loss of place and social relationships and memories rooted in those places might have had immense impact on society. The erecting of menhirs in coastal areas may also have acted as symbols of stabilizing the land against the future encroachment of the sea. It might perceive the stone to be alive and capable of moving and possessing powers.

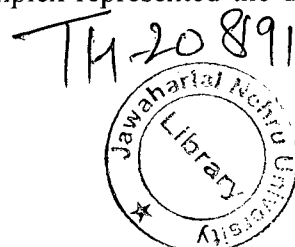
The other significant change was in the shape of the stone such as erecting of axe-shaped stones as seen in Bes Leon. The metaphor of the organic nature of stone might have been replaced by a metaphor of dominance over 'nature' and 'natural' forces, control and it might have symbolized an act of force, violence and intervention in the world. These may be connected with the changing economic relations where agriculture replaced the activities like hunting, gathering, and fishing. One can see in this a symbolic

expression such as territorial markers signifying the affiliation of different groups with discrete areas of land and this reworking creating a larger transformation of the old landscape into new. Very significantly, he also suggested looking at the menhirs in relation to the potential of fecundity, growth and transformation and erecting of it in a particular location which may have different implications when viewed from different directions (Tilley 2004: 54).

2.3. B. India

In India, the megalithic tradition came to be known when Babington unearthed a group of burial monuments at Bangala Motta Parampa in the northern part of Kerala. This discovery initiated further excavations and explorations. Since then the issues related to their origin, chronology, authorship and other aspects have been studied and debated at wide range. As per recent estimation, there are about 1400 locations of megalithic remains in different parts of India of which about 1120 are reported from south India alone (Gangopadhyay 2002: 73). Megalithic burials and monuments of India generally belong to the iron age though the tradition of megalithism is found even in the pre iron age i.e., the Neolithic and the chalcolithic periods where the practice of burying the dead was found in different parts and the practice proliferated by the iron age. The megaliths have been categorized into several varieties based on their structures. They are: menhir, dolmen, cist, cairn, stone circle, umbrella stone and rock cut caves. Scholars have attempted to study the megalithic cultures but like any other megalithic remains of the world, the nature of the megalith itself has not been completely understood. Unfortunately, many of the megalithic burials in India have either been destroyed or the grave goods carried away by treasure hunters.

Writing in 1974, Lesnik argued that the megalithic tradition of South India was the result of the influence of a single technological tradition. He argued that the practice of burials did not originated in India as prior to the advent of the "Pandukal complex" the burial system was very different where normally, it was complete inhumations. Infants and children were buried in urns and placed horizontally in the ground and adults were given extended burials in trench graves but the Pandukal complex represented the disposal of



the dead which involved exposure and secondary fractional burials in actual cemeteries or at least outside the habitation. He maintained that this had a western origin, particularly from north India and Persia (Lesnik 1974: 248).

Another trend among scholars has been to look for cultural contacts or cultural diffusion among the megalithic builders of the various regions. Ramachandra Murthy (2000) maintained that since tools like axes with a single strap have been recorded at Brahmagiri and Pochampad, a type, which is absent in the Krishna and Tungabhadra, it suggested the arrival of the community from Karnataka via a different route, likewise, copper hilted knives are not found in the megalithic burials in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh but recorded in the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra (Murthy 2000). Therefore the orientations of the entire book and argument was based on the logic for migrations from one site or region to the other and the arguments largely drawn from the presence or absence of artefacts, similarities and differences in the material distributions. K.P Rao (1998) also speaks of the cultural links and contacts between Khapa and the habitation of Takhalghat based on the homogeneity of goods like iron objects, sword, chisels, daggers and copper objects like bangles, bells, dish and assemblage of burials like pottery, beads and iron objects (Rao 1988: 38).

In a similar line Ramanna in his work (1983) argued for the same understanding of the cultural contacts between the two. He argued that there is substantiated evidence that the megaliths of south India and south East Asia as far as Philippines and Formosa chronologically coincides with the iron age though the megaliths of south India existed for a prolonged period of time extending up to thousand years while the South East Asia ones ceased to exist till the commencement of Hinduisation in the 1st and the 2nd century AD (Ramanna 1983: 69). Ramanna in a very similar vein to the opinions of Haimendorf, Katz and Hutton argued that the Mon-Khmer group was the original megalithic builders and that the remains of the megaliths in the Assam Hills are the legacy of this group who even after being Indianized continued with the practices. Thus, the Angami Naga megaliths and the wooden post of the Sema Naga were related with the Mon Khmer people. One of the perspectives that is evident in such understanding is the emphasis on the connectivity of the megaliths in India and South East Asia which are closely

associated and share a common origins for many reasons one of which is the cultural contacts and through the process of Indianization.

Looking at the mode of burials, scholars like Leshnik and Moorti have also attempted to understand the social organizations, economy and ideology of the megalithic builders. Leshnik argued that the Pandukal burials do not conform to the land use patterns associated with agriculture although there are instances of burials in or near cultivated tracts. He made this argument based on the absence of habitation (Leshnik 1974: 247) while Moorti argued that the megalithic society practiced mixed economy based on agro-pastoral production. His opinions is based on thorough study of the technomic items such as axes, chisels, wedges, adzes and hammer stones in Verapuram, Hallur, Maski and Ramapuram which were used for felling trees. Further, Moorti (1994) attempted to understand the functional role of the megalithic in a cultural system by adopting Binford's method of classifying the megaliths artifacts into technomic artifacts, sociotechnic artifacts and ideotechnic artifacts. Analyzing 186 excavated burials, he indicated that 32 were symbolic burials due to the absence of skeletal remains while in 71 burials the skeletal remains were too fragmentary to be analyzed. The remaining 83 burials produced 184 individuals buried in single, double and multiple burials. It contained the individual skeleton numbering to 40, 17 and 26 respectively in these burials. Calculating the artifacts of sociotechnic, technomic and ideotechnic categories in each burial, Moorti concluded that the artefactual association differed in each burial and even in the funerary monuments. He therefore concluded that the funerary monuments were used as symbolic carriers of power and social differentiation and that the megalithic society was organized into a ranked society as evident from the tools found in the burials. The presence of the non local prestige goods suggests the control of long distance trade by elite groups and practice of alliance and gift exchange. The use of iron as weapons proliferated and these weapons came into the possession of the chiefs and prince and the increase in the agricultural and crafts tools after 500 B.C, which contributed to the beginning of social differentiations (Moorti 1994: 86). This argument was in contrast to Leshnik's interpretation of the social organization of the Pandukal complex as an egalitarian society, an argument based on the homogeneity of the assemblage and the

absence of artefacts relating to crafts specializations and division of labour (Leshnik 1974: 250).

On the meaning and the ideology of the megalithic monuments, Moorti argued that they did not simply serve as burials but had a greater meaning 'living entities' where the dead were not separated from the living but lived as ancestors in the houses of the living and could be approached by opening the chamber or contacted through rites and offerings. This symbolized both the collective efforts of the community and the heroic leadership of chiefs legitimizing and sustaining the power of their ancestors (Moorti 1994: 112).

As far as the Vidarbha region in specific is concerned, there have been extensive archaeological excavations. The excavations undertaken by S B Deo have been particularly large in scale. However, most of the knowledge produced has been in terms of interpreting the artefacts. There have been attempt to study the settlement patterns and, the functional and structural models of the stone burials. The trend of understanding the cultural contacts and links have been much discussed and studied.

With the development of new perspectives particularly as seen in the writings of Christopher Tilley of understanding in terms of the phenomenology and the landscape, there has been a shift even in India. The idea is to look at the landscape of the region and to understand the dominant role the landscape plays in the location of the stone monuments. The idea is also to look at the relation of humans with the landscape which could go far beyond fixed time and space and has the potential to be reformulated in different forms in different times. Such a theory offering multiple perceptions has been lacking in India though recently, there have been attempts to understand the landscape of the both the physical (the physical remains of the landscape) and the landscape of the mind (the memory of a particular landscape that may include the stone burials or events) (Suvrathan 2009: 124-174, Visvanathan 2009: 174-204).

2.4 Stone Structures of the Naga Hills

The study of the megaliths in North East India, as well as of Nagaland was first initiated by colonial administrators as early as the 19th century who were intrigued by such

practices. The explanation of these rich traditions was however merely confined to the descriptions and no painstaking work has been undertaken which deals comprehensively with the relation of human and the stones. Colonial administrators documented the stone structures they encountered while others were neglected in the areas they could not reach which sadly remain undocumented even to this day in some parts of Nagaland. The little work that has been undertaken in the colonial and post colonial eras has shown few changes in its approaches and methodology and thus shows no sign of a paradigm shift in its study.

Very few stone structures in Nagaland have been excavated because of the fact that these remains as living tradition and to excavate these megaliths would mean hurting the local sentiments. The absence of rigorous and trained archaeology in the region is another hindrance for the slow pace and growth of it. The chronology has also not been concretely ascertained but it has been suggested that both in the Naga and Khasi Hills, the monuments are of prehistoric origin and date back to about 1292 A.D (Devi 1998: 124).

Colonial administrators such as J H Hutton, J P Mills, Haimendorf, Austen and so forth produced a good number of articles on the existing megalithic practices of the North East India. In the absence of formal state demarcations, the writings were confined to particular descriptions of a tribal or a larger ethnic group having certain elements of these practices. For a better understanding of the studies undertaken on the stone structures of the Nagas, it can be broadly classified into two broad divisions: colonial and post colonial. These divisions would help understand whether there have been any trends and the developments in its study.

2.5 Colonial Ethnographers and the Knowledge of Stone Structures in the Naga Hills

Among the colonial administrators, J.H Hutton spent about twenty years (of a twenty seven year long career) in the Naga Hills producing two monographs "*The Angami Naga*" (1921) and "*The Sema Naga*" (1921). Besides, these two monographs, he wrote about 51 articles on North East India. Of these articles he dedicated some on the stone

monuments of the Naga tribes ranging from the erection of these stones to the larger beliefs of daily life associated with it. Hutton (1926) categorized the use of stone into three broad classifications: 1, Utilitarian 2. Ceremonial and 3. Magical

The term utilitarian, he wanted to emphasize on the stone celts and tools that were mainly used for cutting and chipping. For Hutton, the larger aspect of the ceremonial was principally associated with the erection of the stone platforms which acted as sitting places, dancing places, forts or as memorials and these stones were also intimately associated with the cult of the dead. The concept of dead seemed to be inherent part of the living as indicated by the beliefs and associations of the erection of the stones with the spirit of the dead. Likewise, among the Kaccha Nagas, dolmens were erected at the wayside for the passer-by to rest and these dolmens were frequently associated with the name of the dead person while the Angami Nagas built the resting place intended for the glorification of some individual, put up during his lifetime and the same had the significance of perpetuating his name even after death. The third category of erecting the stones was associated with the magical aspects of promoting the fertility of the soil. Among the Angami Nagas, the dead whether friends or foes were associated with the crops and even memorial stones for relatives were erected in the rice-fields. There was also a belief that the bigger the stones, the more magical power it holds (Hutton 1926: 71-82). The choice and differentiation in male and female was also identified. The parallel practice and beliefs of the association of the erection of the stones and fertility also existed among the Konyak Nagas in which they erected stone in the middle of the stone platform in front of the "Morung" on which the heads of the enemies were exposed and buried after successive raids (Hutton 1922: 243).

The colonial writing on the megaliths also presented the idea and the notions of diffusions of one tradition. The concept of a single megalithic tradition which evolved in Europe and spread to other parts of the world was very clear as indicated by their approach to its study. To the colonial agents, the megalithic traditions which exist as living traditions in North East India and particularly in the Naga Hills were something they never expected to encounter. Within this spectacle of theory of "diffusion", common origins based on similarities began to be explored. Colonial Anthropologist like

Haimendorf attempted to see the parallels between certain hill tribes of north-east India and the mountain peoples of Luzon in the Philippines. He asserted that among the Nagas the erection of stone monuments is usually associated with the performance of feasts of merits and a very close parallel of these occurs among the Ifugaos where wealthy men of upper class (Kadangyan) status enhance their prestige by giving feasts in the course of which pigs and buffaloes are sacrificed. As among the Nagas, such feasts are arranged in a sequence and a man may proceed to the higher and more lavish grades of feast only after he has completed the series of preliminary and minor celebrations. In the region of Kiangang a ceremony called *Hagabi* is the climax of the sequence of feasts of merit, and men who perform this rite are entitled to have a huge wooden bench carved. Such a bench is placed in the space between the poles on which the house rests. Its form suggests vaguely the shape of a pig, and it is a prestige symbol similar in function and connotation to the wooden pillars and forked posts which Naga donors of feasts of merit erect in front of their houses (Haimendorf 1971: 339-348). Haimendorf however pointed out that there is no inherent causal connection between the ecology and the social system of a people, but that two populations with virtually identical economies and material equipments can have diametrically opposed social systems. This realization throws serious doubt on the validity of the theory of material determinism, for in the two examples analysed the material foundation of life neither determines the social superstructure nor the individual's position in society (*Ibid*: 346).

Hutton although prior to Haimendorf has also given the same theory of diffusion of a singular tradition where for him, the "*Kwehu*", a kind of stone platforms prevalent among the Angami Nagas which was erected as a memorial to the dead, also existed among the hills of southern India. On this basis he suggested that there was a great possibility of origin of one element of the Naga tribes in a migration from south India to the coast of Golden Chersonese (Russia) and also going as far as North African coast of Mediterranean and the Tyrrhenian coast of Etruria (Hutton 1926: 75). Going in a direction away from this narration, J P Mills wrote on a type of stone which represented a human form found in the Zemi (Kaccha) Naga village of Peisa in the North Cachar Hills, where its presence was believed to promote the fertility of men, beasts and crops. It was

in the possession of the villagers when they occupied their former site, and was brought with them when they moved a few miles away to the present site. Twelve monoliths were erected connected to this efficacy. However, JP Mills denied this to be the work of the Nagas since the Zemi Naga were entirely ignorant of the art of carving in stone, and, therefore he suggested that it was made by a vanished race which once occupied parts of the north Cachar Hills (Mills 1930: 34-35).

Major Godwin Austen doing a comparative study of the Megalithic traditions among the Khasis and the Nagas as far back in 1872 commented that the Khasis had a more elaborate practice of erecting stone in associations with the cult of the dead while the Naga buried the dead on the street, close to the door and the stone was never erected over the dead (Austen 1872: 129). In 1875, when he visited the Kohima region, he was amazed to see the remains of dolmens and the erection of menhirs in large numbers but continued with the same opinion that the megaliths among the Angami Naga were never erected over the dead except for the propitiation of the manes of the ancestors (Austen 1875: 144-147). This interpretation however was wrong for the practice of the megalithic burials was also prevalent among the Nagas as can be seen from the evidence recovered from the recent excavations of burials in Nagaland.

Looking at the other aspect in the colonial era of the production of the megalithic knowledge in the Naga Hills, we see the attempt to locate the relations between the wooden post and the stone monument. Besides, there was also the attempt to see the transformation or replacement of the stone monuments with wooden posts. Naga tribes such as the Angami, Sema, Lotha and Rengma had the practice of erecting wooden posts as well as the stones as a commemoration of certain events or associating them with individual status. Among the Lotha Nagas, the "*Social Genna*" was held in which stone dragging one important aspect which was then accompanied by ritualistic aspects of sacrifices of *mithun* and grant of feast to the entire village. The numbers of "*Social Genna*" indicated the wealth of the individual and in order to visualize it, stone was erected. However when suitable stones could not be found, wooden posts were erected instead (Mills 1922: 144). On the basis of these traditions, Hutton later argued that

wooden posts might have first been used by these tribes and came to be replaced by stones since the Nagas realized that stones provided more permanency and at the same time, given a belief that life or virtues resides in stones which are incorruptible in contrast to wood which is dead and corruptible (Hutton 1926: 72).

Hutton (1928) also suggested that both the stones and the wooden posts are part of the same fertility cult. These appear together at Dimapur among the Angamis, Aos, and other tribes, while in the Sema tribe the male posts were represented by the carved house post and the 'Y' posts appearing as the sacrificial ones. Among the Lotha and the Sangtam Nagas, occasional Y-shaped stones are found as well as ordinary menhirs. In this connection, Hutton once again pointed out that the monolith and the Y post are found together in Madagascar and among the distant colony of the Malay race. This, however, would be impossible if it were not due to superimposed cultures, one of which is, in Assam, of comparatively recent origin (Hutton 1928: 93-94).

We also know of some of the carved stone monuments in the Naga Hills from the writings of Hutton (1921, 1923, and 1926). Many of the stones in Dimapur depict the images of the elephants. Hutton pointed out that the images of the elephant might have symbolized the need of the elephant to haul the huge blocks through the forest from the Diphu gorge and the sacrifice of the elephant to the holocaust of ceremony of which the "*lisu genna*" (ceremonies performed by an individual as the highest but one of the latter of ceremonies by which social status is acquired) can be at the most microcosm. Besides, the other megaliths which depicted the scenes of a fight between tigers and elephants were part of the spectacle performed at the festivals of the Ahom king (Hutton 1922: 55-70). Further, Hutton comparing the carved monoliths of Dimapur, Jamulguri and Kigwema suggested that these monoliths had close relations however on the presence of the image of the Hindu god on the Jamulguri monolith and from the more decadent nature of its remains as compared to Dimapur, he suggested that by the time it was erected, the influence of Hinduism had reached and therefore the carvings had to be ceased (Hutton 1923: 150-159). The assumptions of the relations were also made on the

basis of the similar incised figure supposedly of “enemy tooth” and “spearheads” from the Kigwema and Dimapur monoliths (Hutton 1926: 74). However, Hutton also argued that the carved monoliths of Dimapur could not have possibly done by the Nagas unless under the command and craftsmanship of the plains (Hutton 1922: 55-70), which clearly contradicts the carved monoliths of Kigwema which lies in the middle of the Angami region having no direct links with the plains.

Milton Katz's (1928) however attempted to look at the origins of the stone structures and the wooden posts in relations to the “*Genna*”.⁷ He pointed out that among the Tibeto-Burmese culture there are three discrete elements of ‘*Genna*’. One, ‘*Kenna-Penna*’, two, the *social* ‘*Genna*’ and three, the erecting of memorials. Now *kenna-penna* is a curious and special form of taboo, the former a species of quarantine and the later an obligatory holiday. When the *Kenna* was observed, no members of the *kenna* may depart nor can outsiders enter. Interactions between villagers and strangers are abrogated. *kenna* may either be rigorous and mild and either directed towards outsiders or the villagers themselves or a mutual observance between the husband and the wife. On such occasion, there was abstinence from sex. On the day of the *penna*, no work may be done and such *gennas* may vary in days. As far as the *social gennas* are concerned, a series of ceremonies are performed through which prestige springs. Such *social gennas* are the instruments to chief means of social advancement.

The early Tibeto-Burman hosts assimilated a stone culture born among the western Munda-Mon-Khmer, into whose lands they came. The Aka, Dafla, Miri, Abor, and Mishmi, latest of the intruders, do not have stone memorials, nor have the intermediate Garo and Kachin. That the Mikir and Kachari erect them may be attributed to their location between Khasis and Nagas; the monuments of the Kachari might be a heritage from the Kingdom of Kamarupa, established near the Munda districts.

⁷ A social-religious complex of taboos, called ‘*Genna*’ by the English writers. An Assamese term which also signifies and to meant an act of worship.

Katz therefore suggested that as far as the history of southeastern Asia with respect to *Genna* is concerned, Mon-Khmer peoples held the area in ancient days, where they evolved *penna and kenna*, and erected great stones, dolmen, or menhirs, to their dead. They were disrupted by invaders from the north, of different speech and different culture, who settled, as the ancestral Burmese, Karen, Chin, Lushai-Kuki, and Nagas, in lands wrested from the Mon-Khmer. These invaders brought with them a religion which centered in the performance of an annual cycle of ceremonies, mainly agricultural; diverse sorts of sepulchral monuments in wood; phallic posts and phallicism. They not only assimilated *kenna* and *penna* from the aborigines, traits which harmonized with their emphasis on communal ceremony, but elaborated them; they partly replaced their own wooden memorials to the dead by stones derived from the Mon-Khmer; and developed into *social genna*, which absorbed certain *kenna* and *penna* factors. The Burmese, won to the religion of Buddha, and the Meitheis, who became Hinduized, do not exhibit this development, which centered among the Naga tribes of northern Manipur. In time there came a second wave of Tibeto-Burman peoples, similar in culture to the first, comprising the Bodo-Garo, Mikir, Kachari-and the Kachin. The Mikir and Kachari assimilated the stone culture, which reached its peak at Dimapur; while the Garo in part retained their proper culture, in part were colored by the culture of India. The Munda of Chota Nagpur however, still erects the memorial stones (Katz 1928: 580-601).

Thus Katz's study is important in that it provides different approach to that of Hutton whose writings on the stone structures is based on single root of origin i.e. European Megaliths. Though Katz's approach is also restricted by his understanding of the *social gennas* and the stone structures through the perspective of conquest typical of the 19th century colonial role itself, it is interesting, particularly the concept of the *gennas* which is in a true sense part of the social ceremonies closely associated with the erection of the stone structures.

From the above outlook of the colonial writings on the practice of stone erecting in the Naga Hills, some of the issues that come to light are the predominant idea of "diffusion", the relation between the wooden forked post and the stones and the subsequent transformation and substitution of stones over wood. The similarities as well as the

variations among the different tribes in the functions and use of stones in different forms with no explicit references can be seen in the colonial writings. The stone structures are therefore confined to the domain of descriptions. From the colonial point of view, the living megalithic traditions among the Nagas were considered “pristine” as compared to Europe which had lost its traditions hundred years before. To see for themselves the living traditions was so exciting. With this in mind, they began documenting and describing but in the midst of this excitement, the larger concepts, the unseen world, symbolism and the relation of the stone monuments and the people was negated. The major accounts of the colonial only indicate the parallel relations of the stone monuments within the larger aspect of the Naga ceremonies of “Feast of Merits”.

The obsession with diffusion needs to be also understood and located within the context of the 19th century European disciplines. The changing method and the new perspectives that sprang up in Europe itself had its implications. For example, the evolutionary thought of the 19th century anthropologists was attacked by those who have become known as diffusionist and functionalist anthropologists. The diffusionist anthropologist took up the position that culture is borrowed and does not emerge in similar forms in different societies by spontaneous growth due to certain common social potentialities and common human nature. Their theory was that an invention was made by one people (not by a number of peoples) in one place (not in different places) at a particular moment of their history, and that it diffused partly or wholly from this people to other peoples (Iyer and Ratnam 1962: 35). Such diffusion aspect was not merely confined to the study of cultural similarities but also themes such as “megaliths” were related within the domain of single root. Such strong implications had effect even on professional anthropologist such as Christopher Von Haimendorf who actually came to the Naga Hills particularly with the intention of studying megalithic traditions though he made extensive notes, photographic and film records of the Nagas.

The Naga ethnographic tradition remained an amateur one but it was also this amateur professional in the Naga Hills that also saw and permitted the development of professional ethnographic tradition and allowed professional anthropologist to enter the

field (West 1994: 77). The ethnographic tradition in India and elsewhere also facilitated and paved a conducive environment in developing anthropology as a viable academic discipline in Britain.

The ethnological works by colonial officers on the Naga Hills thus contributed in providing three Professors and one Reader from its ranks at home. Hutton became William Wyse professor of social anthropology at Cambridge from 1936 to 1950 (Misra 2004: 35). Furer Haimendorf was appointed as a reader in oriental and African Studies in 1949 and within months of his initial appointment, he was made Reader, and then Chair of Asian Anthropology in the School in 1951 and remained as professor until his retirement in 1976 (Macfarlane and Turin 1996: 549). Hodson succeeded Haddon as a reader in ethnology in 1926 in the University of Cambridge but chose to teach social anthropology and later succeeded to new professorship in 1932 (West 1994: 78). Mills was appointed as a Reader in Language and Culture with special reference to South-east Asia in the school of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London in 1948 (Rizvi 2004: 65). He also played an active part in the work of the Royal Anthropological Institute and held the position of President from 1951 until 1953 (Haimendorf 1960: 381).

2.6 Post Colonial Era

The production of knowledge on the stone structures of the Nagas even in the post colonial era has seen little change. There have been tendencies to reproduce the same kind of knowledge of descriptions of the colonial era and are merely confined to the study of the existing practices. This is however not to negate its importance but only to question on the lack of a theoretical perspective and an extensive research which would provide a paradigm shift. The little change that has come has been with the beginning of the archaeological investigations and the subsequent excavations of the mortuary remains and burials.

There are no substantive writings particularly on the stone structures of the Nagas except for few and scantily devoted descriptive pages in every book that focuses on the cultures

of the Nagas. The practice of stone structures among the Nagas does not seem to have escaped scholars who devote at least a few pages but does not catch their eye so as to deal comprehensively on the theme. Therefore, it is not surprising to see the use of word, such as “Megaliths of Nagas” “Feast of Merits” which can at least increase the pages of the books and one cannot dismiss the writers for missing out on one of the most important aspects and prolific practice of the Nagas.

As early as 1984, Alemchiba opined that one can infer that the archaeological material in north Cachar hills and the megalithic cult in the hills of Assam south of the Brahmaputra is perhaps to be associated with the migration from the east, or south east, to west ending in the Khasi and Jhantia hills and the areas therefore can be linked linguistically as well as culturally with Indo-China. The Khasi and Syntheng of those hills, though completely isolated by the flood of Tibeto-Burmese languages spoken all around them in Assam and across Burma eastwards almost to the Salween river, speak an Austric language akin to the languages of South East Asia, Indonesia and Oceania. Alemchiba further pointed out Middle Colani descriptions of stone funerary jars at various spots in Indo-China. Similar group of similar jars are found to be in the north Cachar Hills in an area which seems to have been occupied by the Khasi before moving west into their present habitat.

Therefore though the Khasi can show no jars among their many and magnificent megalithic ossuaries but in view of their intractable nature of the gneiss of the Khasi hills as compared with the sandstone of the north Cachar, it is not surprising if the jars have had to be replaced by cists and by cromlechs in rough stone. The funerary jars of north Cachar are often obviously and intentionally phallic and perhaps in this way linked up with the monolithic remains of Dimapur and Jamulguri and with stone and wooden erections of the Naga tribes (Alemchiba 1984: 8). Therefore from such inferences, one can notice the tendency to relate the stone structures in relations to linguistic similarities. The shackle of the homogeneity tendency is not loosening from the discourses of the study of the stone structures not only of the Nagas but also amongst the various ethnic groups that inhabit the region of North East of India.

From studies that have been undertaken on the megaliths of Nagaland, the stone structures can be broadly classified into the following categorizations having its own meanings and functions:

1. Menhirs particularly associated with memorials and commemorative events.
2. Stone enclosures for resting as well as acting as a watch tower.
3. Megaliths associated with the funerary and ritualistic aspects.

These divisions were however never marked by any explanations which could go beyond the visual practice and thus are confined within the trend of descriptions. Watijungshi Jamir (1997) looked on the megalith traditions within the framework of the great social event known as the feast of merits where a series of feasts was given to the entire village by an individual or a household to be eligible to erect the stone in memory of his dead ancestors or in the name of living husband and wife or in connection to a particular social events. She categorized the existing megalithic practice among the Angami Naga into seven types with different functional types namely:

1. Menhirs (Memorial)
2. Sitting enclosure (Resting)
3. Sitting platform (memorial sitting platform, cenotaph)
4. Cairn (Watch tower, sitting place)
5. Rectangular sitting place (Memorial sitting place constructed after the feast of merits”
6. Stone tomb of single, double and multiple burials (Burial)
7. Vertically raised stone (Village gate)

She confined herself to documenting the existing megaliths both in the Kohima and Phek district where in the five localities of the Kohima district occupied by the Angami Nagas, there were about 52 menhirs in Jotsoma, 75 in Khonoma, 256 in Mezoma and 117 in

Viswema of which she does not indicate anything of one region. Of these, the tallest menhir is found in Khonoma which measured 5.28m in height, 0.78 m in breath, 0.48 m in thick and the smallest measured about 0.28 m in height, 0.33 m in breath and 0.10 in thickness. Similar to the Angamis, she also documented the megaliths found among the Chakhesang Nagas of Phek district where she pointed out that there were about 59 menhirs in old Phek village, 62 in Khezakhenoma village and 39 in Kirkuma. In both the regions, the kind of the stone used was sandstone. No further interpretation was put forward other than documentation and a simple description of the existing monuments. However, interestingly, she suggested that the traditions of erecting the megaliths will not be extinct since, it is related to the idea of perpetuating the memory of an individual and ancestors (Jamir 2006: 104-111).

The same kind of narrations of the colonial writing of the great feast “Feast of Merits” continues to be the central thrust. These ceremonies which are popular among the Angami and the Chakhesang Naga could be given only by those who were capable of doing so. This act would not only enhance social status but also the fertility of the soil. Fertility and the rich harvest were closely associated. However, in order to be eligible to erect the stone, the giver had to complete certain procedures such as offering pre-celebrations, identification of the right stone and abstinence from sexual intercourse with the spouses. In doing so, the Angami and the Chakhesang Nagas had a belief that the spirit of the stones would not be angered (Venuh 1965: 58-62). The same beliefs and traditions is also found among Anal and Maram tribes of Manipur where the merit seekers had to undergo a series of sacrifices pertaining to purity such as killings of *mithun* (considered as a prestigious animal), refraining from sexual contact between the spouses etc. which in other words is to observe the sanctions and restrictions of “*Genna*” for a year prior to the erection of the stone where a man had to live a separate life from his wife. A memorial stone was also raised by the performer of the feast of merit during his life time (Devi: 1998, 2004). A similar practice of erecting the stones and the ceremonials of the feast and the ritualistic aspects also exists among other ethnic Naga tribes of Manipur such as Mao, Tangkhul, Liangmai and Poumei (Sharma 2007: 112-113).

The third category of the stone monuments of Nagaland is associated with the funerary and ritualistic aspects. These remains can be termed as the mortuary place where different ritualistic aspects might have taken place till the recent past. This area has seen less attention of scholars but from what has been done, the attempt has been to understand the variations and the mode of burials. The mortuary remains of Jotsoma, Khonoma and Mizoma are some of the excavated burial sites in Nagaland. In Jotsoma, both primary and secondary burials were excavated of which the majority of graves were earth cut, aligned with dry stone-walling on all sides forming a rectangular structure and paved with flat capstones of sandstone. The Grave I revealed evidences of primary burial with the body placed in an extended position and the Grave V produced an adult in extended position and oriented in the east-west direction. The artefacts included carnelian bead, spearhead, points and machete lying at the right corner of the body (Jamir 2006: 449-463). As such, the finds of material items like carnelian beads, cowries and conch shells which are not locally produced and available suggest interregional trades (Jamir and Vasu 2008: 323-339). The excavation in Chungliyimti, a settlement also yielded artefacts like buff-coloured wheel-made pottery of kaolin clay which is typical of the 'Ambari ware', beads of glass, tile, jade, agate, carnelian and poshan, spillite celts and iron tools which are not locally available and therefore suggested the existence of inter-regional trade and exchange (Jamir and Aier 2009: 5-9). One of the objectives therefore was also to trace the connection and diffusion of ideas, technologies and practices not just within the sites but even as far as South East Asia. In doing so, they compared Solheim's works on Bau-Malay pottery dating back to about 3000-2500 BC associated with the Austronesian speaking groups who stated that it had a strong influence on North East India. Given this hypothesis, they suggested that the Changki potters in Nagaland retained the same as living traditions. Mortuary differences particularly burials in smaller dimensions that was interred with fragmentary parts were suggested to be of unnatural deaths particularly victims of wars. Therefore, he suggested that the treatment given on the burials in terms of the amount of expenditure may not necessarily suggest the status and identity of the individual but may suggest the circumstances of the death (Jamir 2006: 457). This argument again was put on the basis of the ethnographic evidences of the existing practices and beliefs among the Angami Naga.

The mortuary remains in Nagaland have also been viewed to ascertain the elements of affinities and differences of the various groups which might have acted and indicated as ethnic markers. This marker was located particularly with references to designs, styles and decorative motifs of the pottery productions from the ethnographic viewpoints and the similar types excavated from the mortuary remains.

The other aspect they attempted to see was through the pottery styles and decorative elements which may indicate ethnic markers and further suggest the trading relations and contacts between the sites. From the ethnographic point of view, Jotsoma and Kirkuma village does not indicate any history of pottery making but the archaeological finds in Jotsoma and a twin urn burial unearthed at Kirkuma village suggests trade relations between the sites (*Ibid*: 460).

One significant shift in the study of the megalithic traditions of Nagaland as contrasted with the colonial concept of “diffusion” is the emergence of a new trend and direction of approach which attempted to show indigenous origins and authorship of the megalithic traditions. This indication was provided by the study of the Angami and the Chakhesang megalithic burial tradition which provided a diachronic model of the shifts in changing modes of subsistence and their cause-effect relationships to the megalithic building activities and the mortuary practice (Jamir and Vasa 2008: 323-339).

In summing up, it is evident that North-East region of India needs a greater attention archaeologically. There are numerous issues that need to be urgently addressed such as building up a theoretical perspective, collaboration of scholars of the regions, since it is evident that, similar artefacts have been excavated from most of the sites which may indicate close relations. However, this is also not to negate the variations within both the macrocosm and microcosm. The need to look at the material items not just within the region but as far as South East Asia and to trace the routes whether by migration or diffusion becomes imperative. However this is also not to negate the diachronic model of the shifts in changing modes of subsistence over a period of time and the relationship between the stone structures and the mortuary practices as a result of the adaptation to the environment and also because of similar social demands. The need to be well acquainted

with both the archaeological and the ethnographic data becomes significant in order that the direct and parallel co-relations of ethnography and archaeological data can be avoided.

The current approach of archaeological investigation in Nagaland with an attempt to validate myth of origin needs a very close and elaborate examination. The use of folklore, mythology and oral traditions need critical analyses since traditions also changes in a modified version. The stone structures however in particular bear a very significant meanings in the context of the Nagas. Some stones mark the origins or the dispersion of tribes or sub groups, while some other are characterized and associated with wars or legends and still other have less dramatic historical events. There are also stones which are believed to inherit powers which cannot be less than the idea of the magical ability. The meanings are not merely demonstrated by stones but there is the practice of erecting wooden posts which equally might have been used like the stones to transmit meanings and perceptions which was very profound to the group(s) or individual(s) who erected them.

Likewise from the point of durability and the longevity of the stones, like many other cultures before the dawn of inscriptions and writings, inscribed or images in stones were used to transmit social memory. Though such inscribed stones are absent among the Nagas, it is important to note that the Nagas were attempting to display meanings which are then reflected and recorded through the medium of oral stories, folklore and legends. It is therefore imperative not only to pursue oral stories but also harmonize folktales and legends particularly which reflects the stories of unfortunate person like sofunuo (Blackburn 2009: 263-65)⁸ in the Angami folktale and the Peace stone which today

⁸ Sofunuo in the Angami folk tale was an unfortunate woman who with beauty and skills in weavings married a man from Mao tribe in disobedience to her parents. She bore a child and brought prosperity to the village but the villagers continued to slander her. When her husband divorced her, she along with her son walked several days to her father's village. She and her son were found dead but she appeared in her father's dream and told him that if she becomes a wood, she will mingle and rot with the earth and so must become a stone. Her father later found stones in place of the body. The next day, the villagers dragged the stones and got it erected as a memory in the village. For more detail, see Blackburn 2009.

remained erected in Chingphoi village of Mon district ⁹. Such stones represents not only of individual story though blurred but also of events at a particular time of history which are meaningfully represented even today.

With this scope, the need to re-address the approaches to study of the stone structures become imperative in order that larger meanings, symbols, ideology and whole relationships can be understood not just within the transparent world or things as existed now but within the world and framework of how it was and to see the processes of transformation, change and relation through time and space.

⁹ The Konyak village of Chingphoi and Longphang at one time was at war. Many people of Longphang were killed and taken as slaves. The village of Longphang therefore erected a stone in the vicinity of Chingphoi village and vowed never to cross the stone and raid the village. They also pleaded symbolically that until hair grows in the stone and their population increases like sands, their village need not be attacked by Chingphoi.

Chapter Three

Vidarbha Stone Structures-A Landscape Perspective

The region of Vidarbha is located between 19° 26' N and 21° 47' N and 75° 56' and 79° 23' E which forms the eastern and north western parts of the state of Maharashtra. It is enclosed on three sides by higher lands which carve out for it a distinct regional entity separated from the hilly Satpura on the north and the Maharashtra plateau on the west. It is predominantly composed of black soil and geologically the region is covered by the three main formations of the Archeans, Gondwana and the Deccan trap. It is a typical Deccan trap with flat-topped and terraced features and much of its undulating plateau is drained by the rivers Wainganga, Wardha, Tapi and their tributaries.

This chapter aims at understanding the stone structures of the Vidarbha region within the lens and perspective of the ideo-symbolic nature of the burials within the larger aspect of the landscape. This approach I believe would create a scope in enhancing and generating an understanding of the traditions of the Vidarbha region and the larger south India stone structures of the ideo-symbolic nature and the ritualistic aspects which so far the scholars have treated poorly. In doing so, it may offer a new perspective in understanding the socio-political and economic scenario of the time. It may also help unravel the religious and ideological aspects in which the stone monuments in a landscape may have been perceived in multiple forms and acted to continuously re-enforce the memories within a much longer span of time though the perceptions and meanings itself may have undergone various changes in time and space and were adopted in various modified forms.

I begin by pointing out that the stone monuments have been placed in the landscape for the purpose of visibility, a visibility that would connect the very landscape and the people vis-à-vis domination and domestication of the landscape by the very act of structuring such monuments. I argue that the monuments were also meant for permanence in the landscape as indicated by the very elaborate and substantiated human expenditure invested for such monuments which then provided for the social identity and social

attachment to places in the wider landscape. The chapter also aims at further investigating the ideo-symbolic nature of the burials which may not only throw light on the social structures of the society but which may also actually influence the social structure amongst the living.

The stone structures in Maharashtra are mostly confined to the Vidarbha region. This region includes about 89 megalithic sites and 9 identified chalcolithic sites. Mostly the region is predominated by burials but there are sites like Takalghat-Khapa, Raipur-Hingna, Naikund, Bhawar, Khairwara and Bhagimahari which are characterized by both habitations and burial sites. Chronologically, the stone structures of the Vidarbha region can be pushed back to the 8th or 7th century BC to about 3rd and 4th century BC derived through the radio carbon dating which is 300 centuries later than in peninsular India. While the stone structures of the peninsular India started about 1000 BC, which coincided with the emergence of iron technology in India. Scholars have opined that Vidarbha seemed to have been occupied by the megalithic people with no chalcolithic-megalithic or neolithic-megalithic overlap (Singh 1984: 39) but recent excavations at sites like Shirkanda Nagpur have pointed out the possibility for existent and continuity of Chalcolithic-megalithic habitation (Suvrathan 2009: 168 Appendix 4.2).

Peninsular India offers quite a variety of stone architecture like dolmens, dolmenoid cists, urns, menhirs, topikals, stone circles and the passage graves while in Maharashtra, stone circles with cairns fillings appear to be of a standard type whilst a variety of internal structure and forms even within such stones circles (like circle within circle, chamber within circle cists within circle etc.) is evident (Walimbe 1992: 125). Stone structures in India, particularly in peninsular India have been extensively studied by scholars with much emphasis on the authorship particularly in relations to diffusion and to the cultural contacts and affinities which brought about this very tradition. As early as the middle of the 19th century, Meadow Taylor claimed the origins and affiliations of the megaliths in India to that of Europe within a framework of a single cultural influence and diffusion. Migrations and diffusion became powerful arguments and the need to justify was then derived from the affinities of the structures and burials excavated and explored. In most

of the areas that he encountered the megaliths were presumed as a singular cultural trait having a single origin whose roots particularly lay in Europe.

One fundamental argument that was asserted was in terms of the same roots of the three general classes of the European Scytho-Druidical remains and those of the Nilgherries, Rajan Kaloor and Hegaratgi (Taylor 1989: 8) which then demonstrated the landscape of a particular race or people. The local dynamics and the historical processes of a particular region such as the Vidarbha have not been studied independently. I do not impose the complete negation and isolation of the Vidarbha region from the rest of the sub continent but perhaps in doing so there is a scope for a new perspective of understanding the landscape which was often altered and used and thus shaped the history of the region through time and space. The landscape that I argue is both the physical, particularly of the stone structures and the landscape of the mind, such as the myths, memories and stories.

3.1 Stone Structures as Permanence in the Landscape

Perhaps, in order to draw attention to the stone monuments within landscape determined by human actions, it is significant to understand the selection of a particular landscape that needed to be transformed and which actually fitted and fulfilled the purpose and needs of the builders.

One feature of the stone structures at Mahurjhari is that the stones are located both in the hills and the plains. Within this division, locality 1 was situated to the east of the village consisting of about three hills of low altitudes having at least forty stone circles and very interestingly, all these stones were executed on the top of the hills and none is on the slope (Deo 1973: 3; Mohanty 2004: 106). Besides, 72 of the known 83 sites in the state are concentrated in the hilly and forested regions or wasteland (Walimbe 1992: 125). In a similar fashion, among the stone structures of the peninsular India, such as in the Palani hills of Tamil Nadu, generally the dolmens were erected on rocky slopes and rarely on the plains (Kumar and Kumaran 2007: 48) while Kulkarni also reported on the stone circles found located in regions where the rock bench is high or where the hills are nearby (Kulkarni 2002: 110).

In such cases, we may have to assume that the location and selection of top of the hills for the building of monuments was purely intentional and was meant for the purpose of visibility. This act indicates not just the domination and domestication of this landscape but also the larger transformation of the landscape into the landscape of death and the domination of death now within the reach of the living either through the cognitive or through the physical presence of the stone structures in the landscape itself. The mortuary remains (death ritual) are related to the control of resources, both environment and human and can be significant parts of the cultural landscape even after the long completion of the death rituals which in other words means these are no longer understood by the community. These serve as cults of memory and also become or are interpreted as a new ideology. People manipulate the existing monument for new cultural purposes and thus the past continuously influences the present. From the archaeological perspective, death rituals are significant not only because they may crystallize values and social structures of a community for an experimental monument but because they leave physical remains that may influence or organize human behaviour or are manipulated by human behaviour for much longer than the ritual event itself (Levy 1989: 155-161).

The art of the transformation of the landscape into the landscape of death also suggest the desire for the durability and the permanence of the stone structures in the landscape. This is evident from the painstaking architectural plans and structures of the stone monuments. Tremendous efforts were invested in such erections, but for the people who undertook this work they were also introducing to the world an architecture which would endure. Participation in such projects should not simply be viewed in terms of “amounts of labour invested in different scales of monumentality because each stone erected and every portion of ditch carved out of the natural rock would have marked individual biographies and an altered understanding of the landscape” (Richards 1996: 193). Such a case might have been with the megalithic people of the Vidarbha. They were not merely erecting the stones, but the importance of the rituals and the religious aspects, had to have results which were intended to last forever and were referenced to something beyond their immediate experience and daily life. By such acts of toil and energy expenditure, a specific place in the world was given permanency and a sharper physical definition

through monumental constructions. Such a landscape actively shaped the living and acted as a medium of transmission of conscious understanding of the landscape of the present.

In spite of the fact that the stone circles in the Vidarbha region were situated in different locations, the pattern of their construction seems to have been uniform showing less deviation in respect of the fillings which in most the cases was black clay capped by a pebble filling (Deo 1973: 59). The purpose of this permanence in the landscape is displayed by the Raipur chambers which were meant not for a short period of time but for a longer duration as indicated by the elaborate constructional plans. The megaliths were usually raised with huge sized boulders and in the periphery were supported underneath by smaller stones to maintain and keep the stones erect and upright. Besides, some of the megaliths had an additional typological feature such as in megalith 7 of Raipur where a stone alignment with many courses was seen encircling the central chamber to its full height and with a large flat stone used for this alignment to give the impression of a compact wall-in-chamber and also to support the standing stones (Deglurkar and Lad 1992: 11). Similar constructional plans are evident even in the megaliths of other Vidarbha sites such as Dhamma. Megalith 39 demonstrated a very peculiar and interesting plan in which the inside and outside of the larger juxtaposed circle boulders were given support of smaller boulders (Gupta and Kellellu 2005: 65).

Such innovations and techniques can only explain the desire to keep the stones for a very long period of time, not only for that particular time but also for many generations to come. The very fact of the selection of the big boulders itself indicates the efforts for the purpose of visibility and permanence attempting to create a conscious relation with the landscape of death even when the physical remains may have been vandalized and destroyed.

3.2 Understanding the Symbols and Symbolic Burials

Symbols serve primarily as instruments of communication: "symbols, including icons, rituals, monuments, and written texts, all convey and transmit information and meaning to their viewers" (Robb 1998: 334). The production of monumental space and landscape indicate a transformative process in which material, symbols and signs are exchanged,

symbolically grounding a given perceptual order. The landscape provides the order of differentiating and distinguishing between different elements. Decoding the symbolic aspects may actually answer the webs of social structures prevailing in the past. Therefore socially, we need to incorporate symbols more fully into our understanding of social relations. It is important to ask, what relation do grave goods have to the circumstances of death, social relations among survivors, ideologies of death and burial, and other factors? How do we then construct the symbolic representation of the stone burials in which the grave goods or the skeletons are absent? How do we construct the relations between the symbolic world and the physical world?

One of the fundamental objectives of an archaeologist is to unearth the antiquities in the burials through which the past can be constructed but there are also instances in which the burials are devoid of any antiquities which make it nearly impossible for any hypothesis. To understand these, it also becomes important to ask what might have led to construction of such megaliths devoid of burials and other artefacts. The burials of the Vidarbha have an interesting character of such representation in which some of the stone burials seemed to have been more symbolic in nature than the actual burials or the interment of goods with skeletons. Megalith 8 in Khapa was devoid of any antiquities including pottery which are common finds in the megaliths of India. In this megalith, the top pebble filling was completely washed out with the brownish clay fillings exposed to view (Deo 1970: 131). In a similar fashion in megalith 1V and V from Raipur, no skeletons were found except for few artefacts including a lamp and the excavators themselves suggested that it was only a symbolic burial (Deglurkar and Lad 1992: 141). Such symbolic burials may have been constructed before the actual decease of the individual they were meant for. However, this may again led us to ask the question, why are the stone burials devoid of basic artefacts such as pottery not to speak of human skeletons? The symbolic burial may not have been accorded to all individuals except for those in the higher rungs of megalithic society. It is thus possible that the status of an individual during the life time was significant in the symbolic expression of the burials with or without any artefacts.

Megalithic burials also have a distinct character of unequal distribution of artefacts as clearly evident in the case of Megalith 1 at Mahurjhari which contains very few funerary items as compared to Megalith 3 which has rich artefactual deposits. In megalith 3 of locality 1, there was a cluster of eight pots of micaceous clay kept close to each other at a depth of 0.80 m. These were all found in a badly crushed state and did not contain anything except black earth. The most noteworthy feature of these pots was that each of them was found to have been covered with a lid-cum-dish of the black-and-red ware fabric (Deo 1973: 7). Some burials were rich in the finds of artefacts, such as Megalith 4 of locality 111 which was the most rewarding in terms of the yield of antiquities and distinctive pottery shapes (Ibid: 10). Megalith 6 gave very interesting and exciting finds. The brown clay filling had a thickness of about 1.02 m. It yielded mostly micaceous red ware pottery besides a few sherds of black and red ware. The south east and the south west quadrants gave the remains of a very carefully interred human skeleton. The skeleton was oriented in the east west direction with the head to the east and the portion below the thighs missing. Over the chest of the skeleton was found to have been placed horizontally a dagger with an iron blade and a copper hilt. Near the skeleton were recovered golden necklaces, spiral earrings, iron spears, spike ladle and nail parer. Besides these gold and iron objects a beautifully made fresh pounder of red sandstone was found to have been kept to the west of the left leg of the skeleton (*Ibid*: 11). Suvrathan (2009) has pointed that if the grave goods suggest a rigid system for expressing rank or gender, the burial of artefacts with the dead was a flexible means of displaying socio-political and economic status. However, In another way it could also mean that the range of artefacts found in the megaliths represents an attempt to replicate the range of items used in daily life tools, weapons, items of daily use, ornaments, pottery as well as symbolic items (Suvrathan 2009:128). This implies that there was a conscious attempt of the megalithic people to reproduce the same items and tools of the living even amongst the death and thus create a parallel world between the two.

3.3 Burials as Ideology

Archaeology becomes an interesting discipline when scope is given for multiple interpretations and not merely confining to a single one. It is impossible to entirely know the past and reconstruct it in its pristine form. Within this framework of multiple interpretations, I have attempted to bring out multiple perspectives in understanding the ideological trends of the Vidarbha stone burials particularly the ideologies which might have reflected and influenced the mode and disposal of the dead bearing various implications even amongst the living. The Vidarbha stone burials comprise mainly stone circles or cists characterized by both primary and secondary burials. By primary burials, it meant the interment of the body right after the death without an actual manipulation of the body while the secondary burials involve more complex procedures in which the remains of the skeletons are collected after decomposition and interred in the same or another grave. This procedure also involves exposing of the bones and finally collecting them and re-interring the fragmented bones. It is interesting to see that variations in the mode of disposing the dead can be seen even within the same site.

In the stone circles of localities 111 and 1V of the Mahurjhari megaliths, the skeleton was found to be intact while in localities 1 and 11, none of the skeletons excavated was found to be intact (Deo 1973: 15) which suggested that they were interred and buried after exposure. Was this a co-incidence or an intentional selection of the location for the separate burials of the primary and the secondary skeletons? If the location was an intentional selection then the perceptions of this location by the megalithic people would also differ. From the point that the expenditure of energy and time could have been invested more on the secondary location than the other, it can be assumed that the secondary location might have been more sacred ritualistically and socially connected with the people of Mahurjhari. It is also possible that the span of time between the interring of full skeletons and the fragmented bones may have possibly been a period of rituals and mourning. This period may have been an auspicious and important time in which the final rite(s) for the deceased was performed and enacted creating a space for collective responsibility and effort. Such rituals may signify or act as a symbol to facilitate the passage of the spirits of the dead to the next life or final resting of the dead

away from the world of the living. It may also signify belief in the power of the interred skeletons with rituals performed and an association with the ancestral beliefs of facilitating the world of the living in various spheres of life such as hunting, warfare, fertility etc. However, the act of the selection of skeleton remains or the secondary burials may not always be associated with the ancestors but also with the element of death alone i.e. the living might have believed that the soul of the spirit world was often difficult, dangerous and troublesome and therefore the funerary practices could facilitate such a journey (Midgley 2008: 124).

In their funerary practices, the megalithic people seem to have indulged in an elaborate funerary ritual as evidenced by the layout of the stone circles. In the megalithic sites such as Takalghat, Khapa, Raipur and Naikund, the constructional pattern appears to have involved the placement of reasonably big boulders in a circular plan and then the filling of it by clay capped by pebbles to such a thickness as to cover up half the height of the peripheral stones. In the centre, they sometime made a depression in which very fragmentary bones were deposited. These were sometimes also placed in a copper dish or a vessel of the micaceous red ware (Deo 1970, 1973; Deo and Jamkhedkar 1982; Deglurkar and Lad 1992). This possibly demonstrates the desire of the megalithic people to house the spirits of the dead or ancestors for a very long time. The enclosure with big boulders and capping the fillings with the pebbles might have been an attempt to keep the burials undisturbed and immovable. Hence, this monument embodies the remarkable characteristics of the dead being both conceptually below and physically above ground.

Having said this, such elaborate mortuary rituals will have implications even amongst the living since it constituted a particular arena for social activity within the overall totality. Ritual activities form an active part of the social construction of reality within the social formations and may be conceived as a particular form of the ideological legitimization of the social order serving sectional interests of a particular group (Shanks and Tilley 1982: 130). The reconstruction of social organization through the identification of roles (whether in the burials, crafts specialization or settlement hierarchies) are being continuously reinforced by the recurrent social practices (Pearson 1982: 100) such as the mortuary practices.

3.4 Time, Space and the Reworking of the Landscape

Landscape provides memory, identity, social order and transformation. Studying the myths and memories inscribed in a contemporary landscape can contribute dramatically to a better understanding of the complexity and antiquity of local traditions of landscape. It acts as symbols, ceremonial terms which create and express socio-cultural identity (Ashmore and Knapp 1999: 15). The placing and erecting of the monuments in the landscape may have symbolized and could have been used in the creation, reproduction and articulation of the order and social structure. The perception of a particular landscape changes but at another time the same landscape is reworked creating a continuous attachment without a break. Is it because of the shift in the change of the ideological approach and attitude towards the dead or is it a mere way of representing space? Such reorganizations may explain the need to invoke the past in order to meet the social demands of the present. The activity of both ways such as the reuse and manipulation of the burials and at the same time the desire to be close to the burial sites are evident. The manipulations and reuse of the burials in the Gangapur megaliths (Suvrathan 2009: 132) was one way of ritual communications asserted to keep the meanings closely associated in the landscape itself.

Besides the reuse of the grave and the reworking of the landscape, the builders of the stone structures had a long term strategy of the significance of the landscape as indicated from some of the symbolic burials which were intended to be used for the future and thus clearly displayed their social attachment with the landscape. Interestingly, in Kanyathirtham, two burials were exposed-a cairn burial and a stone circle with no skeleton which the excavators believed were laid for future use (Walimbe, Gambhir and Venkatasubbaiah 1991: 99). In fact at Raipur, five circles with no filling were built most probably for future use. Such nature of the burial would only convey a long term strategy for the use of the landscape.

Myths and traditions and the understanding of the contemporary landscape become significant since the landscape itself is immovable and that very landscape allows for the re-interpretation of the history of the past. Megaliths in many part of Andhra Pradesh are

called “*Rakshasa gullu*” or “*Rakasi gudi*” which literally mean “temples of the demons” while in the Kurnool district the megalithic monuments are known as “*Rakshasa guttalu*” which means “graves of demons” (Rao 1988: 4). Similar local terms are also known in many parts of India. Such perceptions of a particular landscape might have come down from the prehistoric period with altered names and meanings but were also continuously reworked giving similar meanings to the landscape and never forgotten. It is also important to note that it is possible that some of the practices might have continued to be reworked from the earlier chalcolithic period throughout the megalithic phase but the same practices were being reworked in more elaborate and complex forms.

It is significant to note that some part of the lower extremity of the body in the burial 16 trench 5 and burial 24, trench 7 of chalcolithic Chandoli were seemingly cut out before burying (Deo and Ansari 1965: 147) and this practice of removing the lower extremities was frequently encountered in the stone burials of Vidarbha. In the case of most of the primary burials at Mahurjhari, the lower extremities were removed which was a peculiar trend and a feature of the chalcolithic burials of western Maharashtra (Deo 1973: 60), but such practices seem to have continued and in a more elaborate form. The epoch of the elaborate megalithic burial complex saw the deposition of the remains of the deceased in graveyards rather in the house floors as the customs has been in the chalcolithic communities (Kennedy 1975: 4) and by the megalithic period, the landscape was transformed into a more complex form with a more elaborate nature of rituals and ceremonies and a more complicated attitude and perceptions towards death and the landscape of death itself.

3.5 Social Differentiations and Identities: An Ethno-archaeological Consideration of the Living Tradition

Pre-historic monuments, such as the stone monuments, which act as material remains of the past transmit history, myths and memories either through numerous perceptions and local understanding of the landscape or even through adoption of the practices in various modified forms which needs to be taken into consideration. This is also not to negate

similar practices that have evolved or developed in isolation because of similar social demands or subsistence but if we do not consider and study living practices, this could create a lacuna in throwing light on past practices.

Within this framework, I would like to throw light on some of the living practices of megalithic traditions amongst the tribals such as the Madias and Gonds which may provide a scope in investigating into the past practice of stone monuments. Moorti (1994) attempted to understand the functional role of the megalithic in a cultural system by adopting Binford's method of classifying megalithic artifacts into technomic artifacts, sociotechnic artifacts and ideotechnic artifacts. Analyzing 186 excavated burials, he indicated that 32 were symbolic burials due to the absence of skeletal remains while in 71 burials the skeletal remains were too fragmentary to be analyzed. The remaining 83 burials produced 184 individuals buried in single, double and multiple burials. These contained individual skeletons numbering 40, 17 and 26 respectively in these kinds of burials. Calculating the artifacts of sociotechnic, technomic and ideotechnic categories in each burial, Moorti concluded that the artefactual association differed in each burial and even in the funerary monuments. He felt that the funerary monuments were used as symbolic carriers of power and social differentiation and that megalithic society was organized into a ranked society as was also evident from the tools found in the burials.

However, from the point not of the funerary goods and items but from the nature of identity representation through the stone arrangement, the cases can be clearly drawn even among the living practices of the Madias. The Madias occupy the hills and plains of Chandrapur and Gadchiroli districts of Maharashtra and belong to the larger ethnic group known as Gonds who are distributed over Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra (Kulkarni 2002: 197). Madias means "forest dwellers" who do not like to abandon their habitat. They can be subdivided into two groups- the Bada and the Chota Madia. The former lives in the far flung areas of the hill tracts and forests while the latter is more connected with the process of modern development. The main subsistence of the Madias are cultivation but also other strategies such as collection of honey, gum and *mahua* flowers, *tendu* leaves (Geetali 2001-2002: 89).

The memorials erected by these groups included menhirs, stone seats, cromlechs, dolmens and stone circles. The Madia Gonds of Bhamragad, Gadchiroli erect two varieties of memorial stones which are menhirs (vertically standing stones) that included both dressed and undressed types and dolmens. Apart from the stone memorials, the practice of erecting wooden pillars as memorials is also prevalent (*Ibid*: 90). The Madias strongly believed in the continuity of life even after death and the sense of continuous relationship with their ancestors. The belief that the soul remains in the air where the deceased lived is inherent. One of the reasons for the disposal of goods and articles in the graves is also the belief that the dead people lived in their graves (Kulkarni 2002: 108). In the common memorial place the Madias always erect the memorial stones for the dead as commemoration and once or twice a year these stones are wrapped with new clothes and in every festival and ceremony, cooked food and new clothes are offered to the memorials of the dead (*Ibid*: 109). Such rituals are reminiscent of the megalithic burials of Mahurjhari, where the practices of reopening of the burials were prevalent. In Mahurjhari, all the three burials excavated of locality A had secondary skeletons along with fresh funeral offerings. Burial number 10 also revealed two primary burials of which one was inserted at a later date. From the circumstantial evidence, it was suggested that the elaborate ritualistic burials were often post-monsoonal and post-harvesting activity (Mohanty 2005: 106-107). Therefore, sometimes it is possible that such reinforcement of the rituals are worked which then allows connecting with past memories, in other words, permits a perpetuation of memories.

Amongst the Madias, one of the fundamental features that decides the size and location of the stone memorials are social status and age. Individuals having high social status occupy places in front, their monuments are large in size and beautifully decorated while the monuments of children and adolescents are erected in the last row and are generally small in size and without any decorations (Kulkarni 2002: 110). The person having the most important status in the society was commemorated with a taller stone. Therefore, the more popular the person, the taller the stone erected. However, the height of the stones also depended on the longevity of a person's age. The person who died at a very old age was demonstrated through the height of the menhirs. These stones were either

quarried from the mountains or the river bed and in most cases the rock was granite. However, in some cases, wooden pillars were also erected having similar symbolic meanings (Geetali 2001-2002: 89-92). The height of the stones which decides the fate of the individuals or circumstances is also reminiscent of the practice and belief amongst the Khasis of Meghalaya where the height of the stone depended on how big their wishes were granted by their ancestors. The bigger the wishes granted, the bigger the stones were and the smaller the stones, the smaller the wishes granted.

Similarly, among the Gonds of Bastar, Chhattisgarh, the *Kalk-Urasna* is associated with the ceremony of erecting the megaliths. Some of the criteria involved for this ceremony are the economic condition of the family, agricultural productivity of the year and the numbers of deaths occurred since the last *Kalk-Urasna* ceremony. In most cases, the stones were of amorphous shape. The new memorial stones were erected in clan-wise in east-west direction in continuation to the existing one which indicated the housing of the spirits in one extended family. It was believed that the spirit remained alive even after death and unless it was given a proper place to rest it would harm the living. However, wooden posts are also erected symbolizing a temporary housing of the spirits and after a period of time were then uprooted in the belief that the spirits do not anymore require the temporary house since a permanent house has been erected (Kumar and Bajpai 2003: 77). It is also believed that the soul grows and dies like a living person and that the memory stones would gradually grow in size as a proof for the growing of the soul and the falling of the stone would itself imply the death of the soul. Fixing of the new memorials was also determined by the sequence in which deaths had occurred (*Ibid*: 78).

The alignments of the stones in relations to the social differentiation among the living is a demonstration of the construction of identity as individual, family, clan and lineage where the stones as mediums are being used to materialize such divisions and further legitimize existing categorizations. Such identities can be continuously re-enforced even when the actual ceremonies have passed or are forgotten since the biographies of the individuals, family, clan and so forth are already being carved out through the erecting of the stones.

Landscape can be also reworked giving both the individual and community identities. Social or kinship identities can be constructed through the particular mode of practices. The past especially through the ritual communication is often used to naturalize and legitimate hierarchies of powers and inequality which would otherwise be unstable. The dead are often an important part of the past in the present especially in the form of the ancestors, deities and other supernatural beings. The construction of visible monuments, commemorating them collectively or individually is one means of giving them material expressions and recognition in the affairs of humans. The dead consequently are susceptible to manipulation by certain groups to maintain or enhance their influence over others. This can be done by idealizing certain aspects of the past through the dead.

The landscape can thus, be manipulated and reworked by the living in order to fit the order and fulfill the needs for social construction and identities. The crucial point is therefore not to draw any parallels between the Vidarbha and the living practices amongst the Madias, but a matter to ponder where past landscapes were altered and the landscape could have continuously defined the individuals, group and the communities through such representations of the dead and the burials. While the ideological trends and the conceptualization of the dead are not entirely possible to surmise for past Vidarbha, we could somehow make possible a hypothesis of the meanings of the dead, the spirits and the ancestors which are intrinsically inter-related.

3.6 Megalithic Cremations

Besides the practice of the burials, the tradition of cremation of the dead was in vogue amongst the inhabitants of Vidarbha. Such traditions were not because of the restraints and limitations of space but because of social differentiations and even ritualistic aspects. Comparatively, cremation requires a larger expenditure of resources such as wood for fuel and arrangement of the pyres for the total and complete cremations of the body. Having said this, it becomes imperative to ask as to what might have led the megalithic people to practice cremations in the light that they are very few as compared to the practice of the burials? Megalith 7 of locality IV of Raipur is evidence of one such practice where the remains of the individual interred in this circle are recovered in the

form of small bone chips and some bones were reduced to powder stage all beyond positive identification, reconstructions or any morphometric assessment, combined with some long bone chips which exhibited fissuring and distortion indicating exposure to fire in the “flesh-on” or “green” condition (Deglurkar and Lad 1992: 128). The selection of the body for the cremation which indeed requires and entails community response, effort and time may be just a demonstration of the social status of the person cremated. The other aspect of such cremation could be also a simple way of displaying rituals or an awesome sight.

With these few instances, we conclude the builders of stone structures of Vidarbha made a conscious attempt to appropriate landscape to its most advantage. The stone structure was meant for short term and long term memory. This is further substantiated by selection of location within the landscape and their architectural plan that indicated a desire for permanence, durability and visibility. In other words, landscape would connect both living and dead and memory enforced continuously. The elaborate modes of burials also suggest conceptualization of death in a strong manner. The cult of dead may have been used to bring social harmony.

Chapter Four

Interpreting the Stone Structures: The Case of the Nagas

4.1 Topography of the Study Area

The state of Nagaland with 16,527 sq. km is located in the extreme northeastern region of India with Kohima as its capital. The state has common boundaries with Myanmar in the east, state of Assam in the west; Arunachal Pradesh and part of Assam in the north and Manipur in the south. Nagaland is home to more than 16 different tribes. The distinctive character of each tribe is its own tradition, custom, language and dresses which is apparent to the visitors. The state lies between 23°54'-26°24' E and 92°26'- 94°39' N.

Nagaland has compact landmass formed by the rugged hill ranges of the Patkai in the north-east and the Dorial range in the south-west forming a watershed of two great rivers of Asia- the Brahmaputra in the north and the Chindwin-Irrawaddy of Myanmar in the south-east as well as deep gorges formed by the rivers-Doyang and Diphu, which flow into the Brahmaputra and the Tizu river which joins the Chindwin. The hill ranges are mainly of Eocene, Oligocene and Miocene sedimentary rocks, especially sandstone and calcareous splintery shale. The topography is highlighted with hill ranges and narrow valleys and deep gorges, all covered by dense tropical rain forests (Jamir 1997: 104).

The climate in Nagaland remains salubrious throughout the year. However, the climate remains humid and rainfall is common during monsoon season. The annual average rainfall varies from 2000 mm to 3000 mm. The state receives maximum rainfall during the four months from June to September. Strong winds blow from the northwest in February and March. In winter, temperature doesn't drop below 3.8°C, but frost is common at higher altitudes. The temperature ranges between 16°C-31°C in summer and 4°C - 24°C in winter.

The area of my study is confined to the two districts, Mon and Kohima. The district of Mon covers an area of 1786 sq. km and is bounded on the north by Sibsagar district of

Assam, on the south by Tuensang district of Nagaland and Myanmar, on the east by Myanmar and on the west Mokokchung district of Nagaland. To the northeast lies the Tirap district of Arunachal Pradesh. Mon is located between 26°45'N-95°06'E and 26.75°N-95.1°E and has an average elevation of 655 metres. The district with the exception of foot hills and the foot hills is hilly with steep slopes, low lying areas with undulating hills that characterize the is the home to the Konyak Nagas.

Mon district has a fairly moderate climate with warm days and cool nights. Rainy season sets in the month of May and lasts till October. From November to April, the district has dry weather with relatively cool nights and bright and sunny days. The average relative humidity is 76 percent and the average temperature is 24.4 degrees Celsius and with an average annual rainfall between 2000 mm to 3000 mm, mostly occurring between May and October.

Kohima district has a more moderate version of a humid and subtropical climate with a pleasant summer and not too cold in winter either. The months of December and January are the coldest when frost occurs and in the higher altitudes and snowfall occurs occasionally. There is heavy rainfall during summer- July–August and the temperature range on an average between 26°C to 32°C. The district is located between 25°40'N-94°07'E and 25.67°N-94.12°E. It has an average elevation of 1261 metres above the sea level.

Kohima village called 'Bara Basti' or 'large village', which is the second largest village in Asia forms the northeastern part of Kohima urban area today. The Bara Basti is divided into '*Khels*'¹⁰ or localities. There are four of them, namely- *Tsütuonuomia*, *Lhisemia*, *Dapfütsumia* and *Pfuchatsumia*. They are termed shortly as T, L, D, and P *Khel* respectively.

¹⁰ Khel is a geographical division within a village.

4.2 An Ethnographic Field Survey

In order to understand the practice of erecting stones among the Nagas and particularly among the Angamis, Chakhesang and the Konyaks, an ethnographic field survey was undertaken. Three localities were chosen: Kohima village (Bara Basti), Chingphoi village and Chui village. Kohima village or Bara Basti is located in Kohima district which is 74 Km away from Dimapur, the commercial hub and city of Nagaland. Kohima is inhabited by the Angami and the Rengma Nagas but the practice of stone erecting is more prominent among the Angami Nagas. The second village surveyed was Chingphoi which is about 44 km and Chui village 9 km away from Mon respectively. The distance of Mon is about 354 km from the state capital Kohima which means that the Konyak inhabits the extreme east while the Angamis and the Chakhesangs the extreme south of the state of Nagaland.

However, the purpose of choosing these two districts, one in the east and the other to the south is to throw light on some of the elements of practices which are actually distinct at some point while at the other there seem to be also similarities in the experiences. Therefore, the focus is also to locate the point of divergence and convergences even within the context of the Nagas. The stone structures of Naga Hills and Khasis Hills have been pushed back to about 1250 AD (Devi 2004: 124). Many of these stone structures stand to this day but the lack of consciousness about these stones as archaeological remains have led the people to random destructions. Similarly, clearing of the remains either for the construction of houses or roads is rampant and because of the rapid expansion of human settlements. This is demonstrated by the fact that the areas where stones are distributed are overshadowed by houses, roads, shops and so forth. The mass conversion to Christianity has also brought about marked social changes. The social structure and the earlier practice of stone erecting has no more significance and relevance except for sporadic occurrences in the peripheral areas of the state. As such, it merely stands as a relic of the pre-literate Naga society.

The writings on these practices have been meager and the lack of substantiated documentation has added and contributed to it losing its importance in the Naga society.

As a result we can actually notice that people inhabiting near i.e. vicinity of the stone structures would carry back the stones for personal use such as construction of houses, roads or for other purposes. For all these reasons, this practice among the Nagas is fast becoming a relic of the past, hardly valued and drawing no historical significance. One of the objectives of my ethnographic survey was to document the existing and surviving stone structures both by means of photography and recording its location through a hand held GPS (Global Positioning System). Further, people who have participated in the stone erections were interviewed with a set of prepared questions. Voices of such participants were recorded through a recorder and the questions rephrased again to make sure that their answers to the previous questions were correct and in the affirmative.

On the issue, particularly the relevance of the stone structures in the present society, the Angh of Chui Village whose palace is situated across the stone structures, responded with much excitement on the power the stone inherits and the ability to bring both good and catastrophes. With an equal zest and sense of superiority, he recalled the stories and memories of how the heads of victims during village raids lay deposited underneath the stone structures.

One of the reasons why the practice of stone erecting has ceased to be popular amongst the Nagas is the influence of Christianity. Nagaland today is dominated and comprised of about 90% of Christians. These include not just those who are formally converted but also those who are born within a Christian family and therefore consider themselves to be Christian by birth. As early as 1926, Mills who was also one of the first or the first to coin the term "Feast of Merits" (West 1994: 69) was critical of the missionaries particularly the American Baptists whom he held responsible for the sudden cessations of the feast of merits and the subsequent erecting of wooden posts or stones. Mills lamented that the culture of sharing of the riches by the wealthy with his fellow villagers had stopped and that the granaries of the rich men were filling with rotten rice (Mills 1926: 157). Therefore, the zeal of Christian missionaries towards the eradications of the so called conventional beliefs and practices is one prominent factor that has contributed to the cessation of such practices.

Therefore, in the succeeding discussion, based on the existing documents as well as the knowledge generated from ethnographic field survey, an attempt is made to elaborate on the practice of stone erecting among the Nagas, the subsequent transformation of the landscape and the various perceptions that are attached with them and which represented the understanding of their environment and their histories in their own terms.

4.3 Representation of Life and Death

Death is more than a biological end point as it represents a complex mass of beliefs, emotions and activities and has specific meaning for the social consciousness, and is also object of a collective representation. Death is experienced and dealt with in a variety of ways by different cultures, and it is only too well known that universal concepts cannot be applied.

Like any other society, the conceptualization of the death was very strong among the Nagas, where varieties of beliefs and activities were clubbed together. The idea of death itself encompasses the idea of soul, stages of mourning, funeral rites, and disposal of body and the aftermath of death.

4.3. A. *The Body and the Soul*

For the Nagas, life does not cease with death, rather death was perceived as a journey to another world, another life and at times having an equal vitality to the world of the living. The journey to the world of the dead is often a difficult journey. When a Konyak Naga died, his being splits into three different spiritual entities. The first element is the 'Soul' or '*Yaha*'¹¹, to which most of the personality attaches, immediately sets out on a complicated journey to '*Yimbu*'¹², the 'land of the dead', at the gate of which the dead are stopped and questioned by the powerful guardian of the neither world (Haimendorf 1953: 43). Such perception of *yaha* and *yimbu* and the occasional visit to the land of the living is very strong among the Konyaks even after 60 years of advent of Christianity to the

¹¹ The element of soul or spirit subdivided into *Kahshih* which is more a malevolent one.

¹² 'Land of the Dead' where the souls go after a person died. A popular belief among the Konyak Nagas

region. Shamans can enter the 'land of the dead' in dreams and in trance, and occasionally they are able to recover a soul or *yaha* which has been kidnapped by some spirit while straying from a sleeping body. The absence of the *yaha* does not immediately cause death, but this separation cannot last longer than a few days and is fraught with danger. Life in *yimbu* does not last forever, for there too, people die, and then go to another 'land of the dead' not accessible to the shamans of this world. While the *yaha* thus vanish into more distant regions, another part of human, remains attached to the skull and is capable of benefiting the survivors in various ways. It seems that a residue of energy remains in the skull, and which constitutes the soul-substance attached to the skull of a dead person. This is the central idea why the Konyak Nagas valued the skull as the most important part as we shall see below.

The periodic feeding of the skulls, both of relatives and of slain enemies, is also indicative of the belief in the power of the soul-matter which remains on this earth while the *yaha* has long settled down to a new life in the next world. Apart from the *yaha*, there is still another element, which may manifest itself after a man meets a violent death. This is called '*Hiba*', and can best be translated as 'ghost'. When a man is killed in war and his head is taken by enemies, the Konyak Nagas believed that the soul comes back as it was a sudden death and that the ghosts of such a violent death does not easily go to the 'land of the dead'. Such idea of the proactive and immortality of the soul may have led the Konyaks to actually hang the warrior's arms on his funeral monument with the belief that the soul of the warrior on his way to *yimbu* may have to fight and slay once more those he has killed in this life.

Among the Angami Naga, a person who died during child birth or by falling from a tree or was killed by wild animals was not allowed to be buried within the precincts of the village but the rites were subject to similar provision where the flesh of the cattle be killed at the funeral rites (Hutton 2003: 229). The Sema Nagas on the other hand conceived that the soul as a shadow was separable from the body and may even occupy a leopard or a tiger during the life, which actually implies the habitation in the human body manifesting a sort of dual existence. However once a person died, it may sometimes take the form of a hawk in which the soul flies away to the 'hill of the dead' (Hutton 2007:

208). The Sema Nagas also believed that the good souls go to the east towards the rising sun while the bad one goes westward. Similar to the Konyaks' belief, for the Sema Nagas, the soul goes to the 'hills of the dead' and from there passes to another world, sometimes conceived as celestial although more often as subterranean, where they continue to exist as they did in their mortal lives. With them they take those of their worldly possession, the souls of themselves that have been buried with them or placed on their graves, and all the '*mithun*' (*Bos frontalis*)¹³ that have been sacrificed or killed accompany them (*Ibid*: 211). While the Lotha Naga conceived that the dead had no knowledge of what goes on in the world and can only jealously watch the disposal of their property but at times have the capability to strike and also capable of punishing the living by infesting sicknesses (Mills 1980: 120). The concept of dead therefore was a belief in a future state of the immortality of the soul, and that spirits often visit the land of the living during festivals and occasions (Godden 1897: 194).

4.3. B. Mortuary and Funeral Rites

The practice of formal disposal of the dead through the mode of burials among the Konyaks was absent before the dawn of Christianity. Such practice came into existence with the influence of the Christian missionaries. The doctrine of Christianity which focused on the concept of cleanliness and separation of the dead from the living actually was the step for the adoption of the formal mode of burying the dead.

Formerly, Konyak Nagas believed that the dead could not be separated from the living. Such idea is manifested by the practice in which the body of the dead were carefully wrapped in leaves of the thatching palm (*livistona jenkinsiana*) and put among the trees of the boughs situated at a respective *morung*¹⁴ or in the specific location for a particular clan. After seven to eight days, when the body had decomposed enough, the head was detached from the body; the skull was then cleaned by the children of the deceased or by

¹³ *Mithun* (*Bos frontalis*), a unique bovine species used for ceremonial purposes, highly valued and plays important role in economy.

¹⁴ *Morung* is a bachelor dormitory where social learning and disciplines were imparted and inherited. It equally has the function of divisional office of the village administration.

the relatives. The cleaned skull is put in the village cemetery a spot close to the village but surrounded by the forest in a stone receptacle specially made for it. This receptacle was a solid canonical sandstone block 60-90 cm. and 60-121cm. in girth with an arched recess hollowed on one side to hold the skull. When erected this recess is closed with a piece of flat stone kept in place by bamboos pegs driven into the ground and the whole is covered by a canonical sheath of thatching palm leaf, stiffened with bamboo slats, exactly like those put over the box shaped skull cists (Hutton 1927: 61-64). The stones are grouped without apparently, any definite orientation. Stones were regarded as a place where soul dwelt and was capable of fertilizing the crops, cattle and the inhabitants of the village.

In a similar manner, almost all the eastern Nagas ¹⁵ exposed their dead on bamboo a platform, leaving the body to decay; and the skull was preserved in the bone house which was found in nearly every village. The bodies were first placed in wooden coffins, like boats, and exposed suspended on trees outside the village till completely desiccated, after which the obsequies took place. The Nagas of North Kachar on the other hand buried the dead at the very doors of their houses, in a coffin made of a hollow tree trunk. A large stone was rolled over the top of the grave and in this manner most of the village streets were full of these unhewn tombstones. Bones were usually preserved in these little houses or buried and were supported by three or four smaller stones placed upright. Such a practice was the demonstration through which the Nagas calculated the greatness of their ancestors by the size of their tombstones.

The treatment of the dead also differed according to the circumstances of the death. Among the Angami Nagas, a person who died falling from a tree, killed by animals or during war was kept below the tree and the head was not detached or put in the pot but buried up to the rim in the ground. However heads were detached if only that person held an important role in the village community. In the event of the death of a pregnant woman, the body was taken out through the back of the house, and buried without any

¹⁵ The eastern Nagas comprised of groups like the Konyak, Khiamniungans, Yimchungrus, Phom, Chang and Sangtam.

ceremony whatever, while children dying within five days of birth were buried inside the house (Hutton 2003: 216). The Lotha Naga had a similar practice because they could not bear the thought of children lying out in the rain and the cold (Mills 1980: 160) while among the Konyak Nagas; heads of children were not detached. For the Konyaks, warriors were esteemed very high in the societal organization. The ability to take greater number of head trophies was considered to be a brave and great act. When such warrior (s) died, there were two either ways in which the burials were done.

In the first place, effigies of a person(s) were carved out from wood and dressed in cloth shawls and aprons, tasseled ear-decorations and tattoos. During such occasion, the widow of the deceased stayed in this hut for at least ten days or at least up to two months after the death of her husband, and went back to her house only for eating and sleeping. Secondly, a huge monolith was erected on the grave of the deceased and on it goods such as spears, daos (sword) and basket used during the life time were hung on the graves.

While among the Angami Nagas, graves were mostly marked by a wall of flat stones. Funerary goods such as baskets and other objects used during the burial are also placed around it. The large covered basket probably contained the clothes and other goods of the deceased. When a man of any standing died in the village, none of the inhabitants left for three days during which the body was kept in the house. Then, after a feast to the whole community, the body was taken to the burial ground and interred, and the stone tomb of about 91 cm to 121 cm high, was built over the grave. Godden (1909: 195-96) recorded that on the occasion of the dead of a standing man all the men dressed in their war habiliments made a great noise and jumped. They shouted and said that spirits has come and killed their friend. They would then challenge the spirits that if he would show himself, they would spear him. With similar vociferous speeches and war whoops, they continued cursing the spirits and striking the earth with their swords. In such a manner, the Angami Nagas attempted to defy the spirits that caused the death. Godden has given an account of the song in this manner:

*If today we could see you, we would with these swords and spears kill you.
Yes, we would eat your flesh! Yes, we would drink your blood!*

Yes, we would burn your bones in the fire! You have slain our relatives.

Where have you fled to? Why did you kill our friend?

Show yourself now, and we shall see what your strength is.

Come quickly, to-day, and we shall see you with our eyes,

And with our swords cut you in pieces, and eat you raw. Let us see how

Sharp yours sword is, and with it we will kill you.

Look at our spears, see how sharp they are: with them we will spear you.

Whither now art thou fled? Than thou, spirit, who destroyest our

Friends in our presence, we have no greater enemy. Where are you now?

Whither hast thou fled?

When a man died after a long illness a platform was raised within his house, on which the body was placed covered with a cloth. Both during night and day the body was watched with great care. A large supply of provisions as well as articles to which the dead was specially attached were placed in the grave. This also included women in which case clothes, ornaments including necklaces, weaving shuttle and spinning stick for cotton along with cotton thread were buried.

The custom of feeding rice and beer did not cease there but continued for a prolonged period of time. The virtues of the dead were frequently rehearsed, and the heirs and relatives made lamentation for many months after the death. Such conceptualization was so strong that on the death of a warrior, his nearest male relation took a spear and wounded the corpse by a blow with it on the head, so that on his arrival in the next world he would be known and received with distinctions.

Such mortuary practices and burials among the Nagas have been scantily excavated. Therefore, ethnographic documents of the past in the form of monographs remained an important source. However, some of the practices and belief is retained by the Nagas

especially the belief in soul matter and the placing of goods in the graves especially by the Konyak Nagas. However, ritual such as wounding the corpses have completely ceased with formal introduction of Christian burials. Such living practices then become fundamental in validating the written records.

4.4 Stone Monuments: Multiple Utility, Multiple Perceptions

Stones structure by Nagas were appropriated not within a context of single purpose though there is substantiated evidence where sometimes wooden posts were substituted for the stone structures for reasons of easy accessibility and less human resource and energy expenditure. However, this substitution does not negate the evidence of the appropriation of the stones for various purposes, meanings and perceptions.

In order to understand these multiple purpose, it becomes imperative to bring different structures having their own functions. Such specific structures do not however retain a single function but tend to intertwined and overlap with the other of which we shall discuss below. Therefore, to comprehend this complexity, stone monuments among the Nagas are classified into the following categories.

4.4. A. Memorial or Commemorative

These types of stones mainly consist of menhirs or upright stones (vertical). By memorial and commemorative, it imply numerous events and sets of practice such as stone monuments associated with the village establishment, feast of merits, menhirs particularly associated with perpetuating the memory of the dead and warrior stones.

Among the Konyak Nagas, the practice of erecting stones constituted the most significant basis for the establishment of new village or settlements. It is for this reason that in almost all the Konyak villages even today, one notices the stone monuments which have come right from the establishment of the village. Infact, the erecting of the stones before the set up of a village was regarded as the first most significant criteria. The belief of such practices was to prevent degeneration of the village or settlements. It was also regarded as an object which had the power to bring peace and prosperity for generations

to come. Such a practice remains as living tradition in which stones are erected in the event of establishment of new villages or settlements. Such stone is called '*Pinlong*' or '*Wanglong*' which in literary sense meant 'foundation' or 'marker' stones. This stone however was not merely a foundation or marker but constituted the most significant and sacred place involving a complex set of rituals and ceremonies. Initially, only a single or at the most two stones were erected but gradually these stones proliferated and the location itself was transformed into a more ritualistic and complex space within the landscape. It was transformed into a place where the warriors both before and after the raids assembled invoking the spirits to aid during the raids. The harvest of the heads during the raids had to be first brought and placed in the stones and thus rituals performed.

However one of the most important and prominent features of such a practice was that an ordinary person was not eligible to erect a stone except for those who have taken head trophies during the raids. The numbers of stones erected were therefore equivalent to the number of head trophies.

The second category of commemorative stones among the Nagas is the erecting of the stone monuments particularly associated with the feast of merits or a community feast, popular among the Angami, Chakhesang, Mao, Maram and the Anal Nagas (Devi, 1998, 2004). In order to be eligible to erect a megalith, a person or household had to perform a 'genna' which conferred social status. In order to do so, a person had to undergo a series of ceremonies and steps which were more costly than the preceding one and included *Kreghaghi*, *Kinoghe*, *Pichiprele*, *Thesa*, *Zhatho*, *Lishe* and finally *Ketseshe* (Hutton 2003: 232) among the Angami Nagas. These are the requisite ceremonies to be eligible to erect the stone monoliths. Such feasts could only be thrown by a person having exceptional prosperity in rice, cattle and pigs as the expense is extremely high.

Before the celebrations, the stones are kept identified. The Angami and the Chakhesang also believed that the spirits of the stones had the ability to come in dreams and reveal his name and place. After such identification, workers were called to levy and quarry the stones into the right shape and size (Venuh 1995: 58-62). On the day of the pulling of the

stones, the entire village dressed in their decorative clothing went to the site while women followed with rice beer. The urge everyone feels is that not only for the occasion of the pulling and erecting of a stone, but for thereafter, he is to share the prosperity and power of the man who foots the bill (Dewar 1966: 267). Before an actual pulling ceremony, chicken or other animals were sacrificed and the spirits of the stones were called to follow. If the stones could not be easily pulled, it was taken as a sign of refusal of the spirits of the stones to come. The spirits of the stones then would show themselves in dreams to the owner of the stone and finally when the demands are fulfilled such as sacrifice, stone pulling is continued. It should be noted that among the Angami and the Chakhesang Nagas, stones categorized into male and female are erected. This is indicative of the meaning that erecting a single stone was in contrary and in 'abhorrent to nature' (Katz 1928: 596). The same may also reflect the desire for uniting man and woman or may even signify the meaning of fertility. The practice that the female stone when put upright should not be higher than the male stones may simply indicate the general physical appearance and not actually the idea of predomination of women.

Now, when such stones were erected, the need to look for an appropriate stones becomes eminent to fit into the meanings for which the stones were erected for. The desire of erecting the stones was not merely the desire to acquire or climb the social ladder, but other meanings are embedded. Such meanings are actually displayed by the types of stones selected and preferred.

Stones monuments for the purpose of perpetuating the memory of an individual or the warriors were also erected by the Nagas. Among the Angami and the Chakhesang Nagas, monolith of the warrior and the fortune teller were erected on the road side of the terrace field. While for the warriors, the numbers of monoliths were the indication of the number of the heads trophies taken during the life time and for the fortune teller, the numbers were erected to as many as heads taken by the entire village (Venuh 1995: 58-62).

Among the Angami Nagas, stone platforms locally termed as *Kwehu* and *Baze* were also erected particularly for the memorials to the dead. Such a stone platform are built in the form of mound of earth leveled at the top and surrounded with a circular wall and

sometimes paved with stones over the stone. The idea of these stones surrounded by the walls on all sides was actually meant to house the spirit of the dead. As indicated in the previous discussion, for the Nagas, spirits were immortal and therefore the desire to house the spirits was a significant activity (Hutton 1926: 76). To this day, among the Angami Nagas even before death, his/her tomb is made however such tombs resemble the modern Christian tomb.

4.4. B. Stone Monuments: Representation of Fertility

The concept of fertility of human, animal and agriculture was very prominent amongst the Nagas. These fertility stones however were sometimes intertwined with the feast of merits particularly among the Angami and Chakhesang Nagas and the warrior stones with the Konyak Nagas. The concept of fertility was one very powerful element and is evident not just within the stone monuments but also in the demonstration of wood carvings which were explicit in its sexual nature and erotic forms. Among the Konyaks, the idea of fertility can be seen in the wood carvings of the morung where the effigies of men and women are depicted in a state of compromising nature and in complete nudity.

Stones portray a more vivid picture of the idea of fertility amongst the Nagas. One reason may be that stones were more durable. However, the prominent idea lies not in its durability but the belief of the spirits the stones inherit and the ability to manifest its magical power. The idea that life and virtues reside in the stones is also very eminent. Such a conceptualization at times was much beyond fertility and involves a more profound way of understanding the ideals and appropriation to meet the desired beliefs. Among the Konyak Nagas, the fertility stones (Menhirs) were erected in front of the morung. Heads of enemies were exposed after successful raids in the stone platform (Hutton 1922: 223) (see also table no 5 and figure no 5). More often the stones were phallic in resemblance clearly indicating that they were meant to enhance the fertility. The enemy head skull was rested in a sandstone cist and rites were performed by the elders and warriors by pouring rice beer into the mouth which was intended to be a magical means to blind the victims. Haimendorf (1968: 97) recorded such pronouncement of rites in the following manner.

“May your mother, may your father, and may your elder and younger brothers all come, may they drink our beer and eat our rice and meat”.

Such a rite was performed with the intention to compel the spirit of the victim to call and invite his/her relative so that they too could also be victims of victor in a similar manner. It was also in the belief that the spirits of the deceased could be used to fertilize the soil.

In a similar vein, for the Angami Nagas, the use of stones as a receptacle for the soul for the dead man is but a step to its magical use as a means of promoting fertility of the crop. Thus for the Angamis, memorial stones of dead relatives seem to be erected, as a general rule, in the rice fields. The stones that are put up by the giver of the feast of merit seem to be definitely phallic and to be intended to communicate to the soil and to the participants in the feast, the prosperity of the community (Hutton 1926: 78). The belief inherent was also that the soul of the dead is utilized to fertilize the soil and promote the crops. The bigger the stones, the greater the magic of the stones was one dominant factor in the selection of the stones. Therefore, the idea of fertility among the head stones, menhirs of the Angami or the wooden posts (carved wooden soul figure) effigies among the Lotha Nagas, Angami Nagas is actually a chain of similar beliefs but in different ways (Hutton 1927: 61).

4.4. C. Stone Circles and Enclosures: Resting and Watch Towers

These types of stones are very popular among the Nagas mostly comprising of circular stone platform, cairn or rectangular which acts both as a resting place and a watch tower. Such stones are found on the road sides of the fields or forests. In many cases, these stones are also believed to be shared by the spirits of the dead and thus the concept of dual sharing is epitomized i.e. the living and the dead. Among the Konyak Nagas, it is known as '*Nalak*' literary implying a 'resting place' while the Angami Naga further classify into three categories:

Dahu: This kind of stones was more or a less rectangular pyramidal building which the clan could use as a coign of advantage during a riot with another clan and thus fulfilling the purpose of the watch tower.

Tehuoba: A raised level space for dancing sometimes surrounded by separate squared stones on which men could sit and discuss public affairs.

Kwehou: This kind of rectangular stones also known as memorial sitting place is usually constructed after giving feast of merit (Hutton 1926: 75).

4.4. D. Burial Chamber Tombs

The Angami and the Chakhesang Nagas constructed these type of tombs with stone arranged one after the another to form a crude structure while in some cases, huge flat stones are placed and thus covering the entire platform. Among the Angami and the Chakhesang Nagas, varieties of chamber tombs were constructed. There were single, double and multiple chambered tombs for single, double and multiple burials (Jamir 1997: 104-111).

The Konyak Nagas on the other hand leave the dead bodies to decompose and after the disintegration of flesh the skull was detached and no attention was paid to other bones. The skull was then placed in a hollowed block of sandstone, which stood among similar urns on the edge of the village. For three years the skull was fed with rice, meat and rice beer by the kinsmen on every occasion of feast and ceremonies. The selection of the skull was in the belief that the spirit resides in it. However the victim of the village raids, person dying after falling from trees, killed by wild animals or the head trophies that were taken was treated in a different manner as has been pointed out in the preceding discussion. The same practice and beliefs apply to other Nagas as well.

However drawing some inferences from the few excavated record of burials, one can actually see the similarities in what have been discussed and the excavated burial chambers. In Jotsoma, majority graves were earth cut, aligned with dry stone-walling on all sides which formed a rectangular structure, paved with flat capstones of sandstone. The Grave I revealed evidence of primary burial with the body placed in an extended position and the Grave V produced an adult in extended position and oriented in the east-west direction. The artefacts included carnelian bead, spearhead, points and machete lying at the right corner of the body (Jamir 2006: 452). From the finds of material items

like carnelian beads, cowries and conch shells which are not locally produced and available, the excavators suggested that there was an interregional trade (Jamir and Vasu 2008: 331). From the nature of the differences in the burials from the point of energy expenditure in the mortuary treatment, Jamir categorized them into two levels of energy expenditure:

1. Form of the interment facility
2. Handling and disposal of the corpse

From this perspective, the burials in smaller dimension and interred with fragmentary parts were suggested to be of unnatural death, particularly victims of wars. Therefore, the treatment given on the burials in terms of the amount of expenditure may not necessarily suggest the status and identity of the individual but may suggest the circumstances of the death (Jamir 2006: 457). However, from what has been discussed, there seem to be occurrences of both these features. A more elaborate expenditure was given to a person having a higher status such as warrior or socially standing man in the village. Different treatment in burials was also given to women and children. This point is further substantiated in the light that as per the Naga tradition, person dying unnatural death such as falling from trees were actually buried on the same spot or a little distance or so.

From the evidence of the elaborate earthen jar burials, Jamir once again suggested that the treatment was given only to the beloved siblings of the family where initially the corpse was laid on the wooden platform for natural and complete decomposition after which the disarticulated bones was collected in the jar and buried. Although a more elaborate procedure was involved, this may not indicate the status or positions enjoyed by the deceased during life time (*Ibid*: 460). Such a hypothesis however cannot be applied to the other Nagas such as the Konyak Naga, as we have seen the different mode of disposal of the dead.

From the preceding discussion, we have seen that stone structures in the context of the Nagas were not merely confined to a single belief or activity; rather it constituted a web of socio-economic and religious objectives. It has often been argued that Naga society

was based on an egalitarian societal organization. However, can we really contest the construction of identity and scaling of status through stone erecting? Is there a possibility of taking stone structures as a socio-economic and religious landscape? Can such constructed landscape influence the society through a medium of collective memory or do we merely view it as material remains with no stories?

The thrust is therefore also to see these webs and different perceptions which are intertwined with the others. Intriguingly, as we have seen, there are variations even among the Nagas which encompasses series of beliefs and activities but these webs seem to be a chain of similar practices with a similar meaning and objective but through different experiences.

4.5 Stone Monuments: Through the Lens of Landscape

4.5. A. Selection of the Location

Talking about the physical landscape of the Nagas, it is very interesting to see in which these stones were erected. Such stones were not randomly erected but a careful look at the physical landscape of these stone structures indeed shows and indicates a careful selection and execution of the landscape/locations. Among the Angami and the Chakhesang Nagas, the stones were erected in places of public thoroughfare with a purpose of visibility by the people. Among the Angamis, there is actually evidence of selection of the graves often situated in landscape that were especially beautiful.

However among the Konyak Nagas, a more elaborate selection of the landscape for such execution was a prominent feature. Stones particularly menhirs were either erected in the proximity of the *Angh*¹⁶ palace or near the morung (Haimendorf 1938 :350) which have a higher altitude from the rest of the locality. It is not merely a selection of the landscape but a selection of the stone itself is of fundamental significance in this experience. Stones both in anthropomorphic and phallic features were deemed necessary which would then rightly fit the meanings and objective that the stones were erected for. Menhirs among the

¹⁶ *Angh* system among the Konyak Naga is the monarchical head of the village ruled through a hereditary system. The chief *Angh* however enjoy and controls several villages as his territory and sphere of influence.

Angami and the Chakhesang Nagas were put in a row and in alignment on the way to the paddy field especially with the belief of fertilizing the crops and perpetuating the memories of the dead.

4.5. B. Sacred and Ritualistic Space

Among the Konyak Nagas, stones could be erected by warriors who were able to bring head trophies during the raids. He was eligible to erect the number of stones depending on the number of head trophies he took during the raids.

One of the fascinating facets of the practice of stone erecting among the Konyak Nagas is the transformation and appropriation of the stone structures as sacred location in which rituals were performed and a series of ceremonies enacted creating a space for communal identity. Apart from stones erected at the time of establishment of the village, a person was eligible to erect the stones if one has taken human heads during the raids. The numbers of stone erected were equivalent to the number of heads. As such, the stones tended to multiply through time. Such practice has completely stopped and no trace can be found except for stone structures as relic of the past. Such a location formerly a settlement marker was transformed into both a sacred place and space for ritual activities.

4.5. B. (1) Stone Structures as Sacred Space

By sacred here, it implies more of sacrosanctity whereby the stones structures were not interfered with by commoners in any circumstances. It was perceived that the stones had the power to generate both good and bad events in accordance to how they were treated. It was believed that spirits resided in stones and was capable of inviting natural calamities and phenomenon. Swearing and cursing near the stones was inviting doom and one's own death. Similar perceptions of stones as holy are also evident among the Maram and Tangkul Nagas which no one dares to swear falsely on them. The sanctity of stones and the location was highly regarded and esteemed for fear that spirit of the stones would strike them (Hodson 1911: 189). It was the holy space in which contact with the deities was assured (Morris 1974: 16). These beliefs generated a sense of fear amongst the inhabitants not only about the natural calamities but also fear that would become an

intrinsic factor and later allow people to conceptualize these stones in multiple ways connected and transformed into more complex ritualistic space.

Even to this day, people believed that the spirits reside in the stones capable of inviting catastrophes. One such belief can be drawn from a recent incident. In 2005, the NSCNs (National Socialist Council of Nagaland) fired upon each other near the Chui village and when asked by the people to vacate the area, to their dismay the firing continued. The then king of the village, Wangkhao Konyak sat on top of the stone platform and raising his head towards the sky invoked the spirits to come and intervene on behalf of the villagers. Suddenly, the clear sky poured out its wrath with heavy rain, storm and thunder. The incident is the talk of not only the Chui village but the Konyak Nagas even today.

4.5. B. (2) Stone Structures as Ritualistic Space

As already outlined in the preceding discussion, the performance of rituals and ceremonies became an important element in the understanding and practice of stones structures among the Konyak Nagas. The location of stone structures became a centre in which rituals and ceremonies were performed and thus transforming into a very significant part of people's lives. Warriors before going for raids would seek blessings near the stone structures. Even after the raids, the heads taken were either deposited and stones erected on it or were displayed in separate place meant for housing the heads. However, the heads would first have to be brought back and placed in stone structures allowing the warriors or the priests to perform sacrifices. Awesome sights were created by means of singing low tune folk songs, dancing and encircling the stones holding the decapitated heads. When a head was brought into the village, the spirit of the slain victim was told, through chanting and prayer, that his relatives no longer cared for him, so he should feel welcome among his new friends. By the same token Naga warriors, upon discovering their own comrades among those slain by enemies, removed the heads to prevent them from falling into rival hands. Such rituals were also a way of invoking 'spirits of the dead' and their blessings. Furer Haimendorf (1969: 98) gave an account of rituals and rites that actually took place in 1937 in Wakching village of Konyak tribe.

“.....the next day, all the men of the village dressed in their ceremonial clothes and ornaments painted their bodies and faces with lime. In solemn procession the heads was carried to the either to two stones standing in front of the chief house or to the upright stones newly set up in the ritual place. There, the senior descendant of the village, acting as priest, cut of small pieces of ears and tongue and called on the kinsmen of the dead man. He took a small chicken and sprinkling the blood on the stones, repeated the same incantations. Next, he examined the intestine to see whether the omens were propitious for the slaying of more enemies. The carcass of the chicken was left lying on the stones.....throughout the day there was dancing and feasting and the whole village observed a day of abstention from works on the fields.....”

Hodson (1911) mentioned the existence of avenue of stones in the prosperous village of Maram of which one particular monolith in the avenue was associated with hunting luck. The inhabitants before hunting party would attempt to kick a pebble on top of the stone. If they succeeded in this, it was believed that their venture would be successful (Hodson 2007: 186).

4.6 Constructing Identities

The appropriation and the practice of erecting the stones becomes a medium through which identity of individual as well the identity of the group were constructed. Such identity can be constructed within three levels: individual, kinship and societal organization.

Within an individual level, the erecting of stone could define the status of a person for whom the stone was erected for. Among the Konyak Nagas, the sheer erection of stones eligible for those who took the head trophy was one way in which his identity gained ground and social status becomes more imminent in the social milieu. Although among the Angami and the Chakhesang Nagas, the experiment was different but the perceptions and meanings were very similar since erecting of stones indicated the status of an individual. The criteria for erecting stones were that a person has to provide a series of feasts known as feast of merits to the entire village or community which involved a mammoth expenditure. Such criteria and act was considered as a point of eligibility for erecting the stone monuments. Locating individual as giver of the feast, one can content

the vertical position of an individual in the horizontal societal organization. A person who already had credentials of feast of merits and erected stones had first privilege of tasting the food in the social gatherings. Such givers may have been regarded in high esteem in the society and which then paved an easy entry in the decision making of the community.

Among the Angami and the Chakhesang Nagas, stones were also erected in accordance with kinship or lineage. Stones were erected in a row or in a group which explicitly indicated the kinship attachment and bonding even within a community. Such a practice is also a desire to maintain the status and at times throwing light on a particular group or family's wealth and prosperity and thus allowing this group(s) to hold an important status within the larger community.

The ceremony of erecting stone monuments not only produces individual and kinship relation but interestingly it can act as platform for a particular community to come together. One can actually propose that stone pulling ceremony can infuse and instill a sense of belongingness and open up space for common expressions and strengthen shared beliefs and practices. On the day of pulling the stone, all young and old members of the community were expected to come (Jamir 1997; Venuh 1995). The entire community would dress themselves in full traditional clothing and thus displayed and re-enforced the material cultures of the group(s). It reflected and manifested community identity. It was this time that people swallowing their pride and differences came together in merry making and further strengthened the community bond and communal identity.

The stones that were erected particularly among the Angami, Chakhesang, Anal, Maram and the Mao Nagas can be also viewed to understand the social and economic condition of a particular village. Such was the case that only the wealthy could throw the feast of merits which was a criterion for erecting the stones and as such the number of the stones erected can roughly throw light on the number of wealthy villagers residing in a particular village or locality.

4.7 Stone Structures as Ideal of Social Memories

The stones erected as a symbol of an individual status would also create a relationship and construct an individual identity within the group. From the point of landscape as permanence, the erecting of stone provided for the social identity and may continue to reinforce identities. Even today, people in villages have the tendency to identify stones and create a relation with a particular person and group. In some cases, it is impossible to identify the stones erected by a particular person however the linkage is often made because stones erected itself become the identity of a person(s) or group(s) and thus events of the past are recreated and carried down through oral, tradition and memories and often because the stones are visible in the landscape and people are socially attached to it.

The second category of stone structure is the practice of putting up slabs of stones or enclosures close to the vicinity of the village or on the road site of the village found among Nagas which have been scantily explored. Among the Nagas, circular stone platforms are erected a distance away from the villages. These stones may act both as ritual place and also as a meeting place where important decisions are taken. Often men assemble in this place before the hunting game and perform rituals in order that the hunting would be fruitful. Besides, important decisions and strategies are also discussed both before and after the hunting. These locations also become a resting place for the villagers as well as the travellers. This platform (stones) then becomes a location where past events are consciously or unconsciously reproduced and stories pass on since these past events are already embedded in the stones and the locations. The same type of the stones are also believed to be the resting place for spirit or soul of the death which again brings the concept of interference and influence of the dead on the living. At the same time, use of the same structure both by living and the dead and thus creating a relationship so that dead becomes an integral part of the living. Therefore it is interesting to see the ways in these enclosures are perceived in multiple forms and not merely a resting place.

Asombang (2004: 301) similarly has pointed out the use of megalithic circles at Saa-Machub in north-west Cameroon as a meeting place for the village. Very similar to the stone enclosures found among the Nagas as already described, these stone enclosures were also the place where hunters met before leaving for the hunt and rituals performed in order to enhance the chances of a fruitful hunt. It was also the place where hunters butcher the meat after a hunt. He further pointed out on the unanimous testimony of locals of the use of stone circles as a Council Chambers and acted as a meeting place for both the elders and nobles where important decisions was taken which pertained to welfare of the society (*Ibid*: 303). Therefore, stone structures of the Nagas with these experiences were also a place through which collective decisions were taken. The stones enclosure which was a product of the collective efforts was collective in ownership and not individual and therefore the production of memories of events and stories would therefore be collective in nature. The stone structures were therefore the medium through which social orders and cohesion were maintained and shared in the society.

One of the fundamental perspectives is also to understand the social conditions for such commemoration or construction. The same kind of architectural plan can be imitated and even manipulated by the people alive in order to fit the existing views, perceptions and ideology in the process of time and as a result of this active re-imagination, relation of past and the present were being continuously reconstructed. The need to look at the locations of these stone monuments should be re-addressed since when viewed from different directions, it may have different implications and form different perceptions for the person. However, this is also not to negate the construction of relation between the dead and living which has early been discussed.

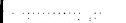

Finally, one of the objectives of the ethnographic survey was also to understand if such stone structures of the past had any relevance and meaning in the context of present society and the interactions of people with this landscape which has been a paramount sacred and ritualistic space of the recent past. As indicated earlier, the cessation of the practices was also because of the advent of Christianity and with its unwavering and relentless effort to break down the practice. By far, it has been possible to do so, although

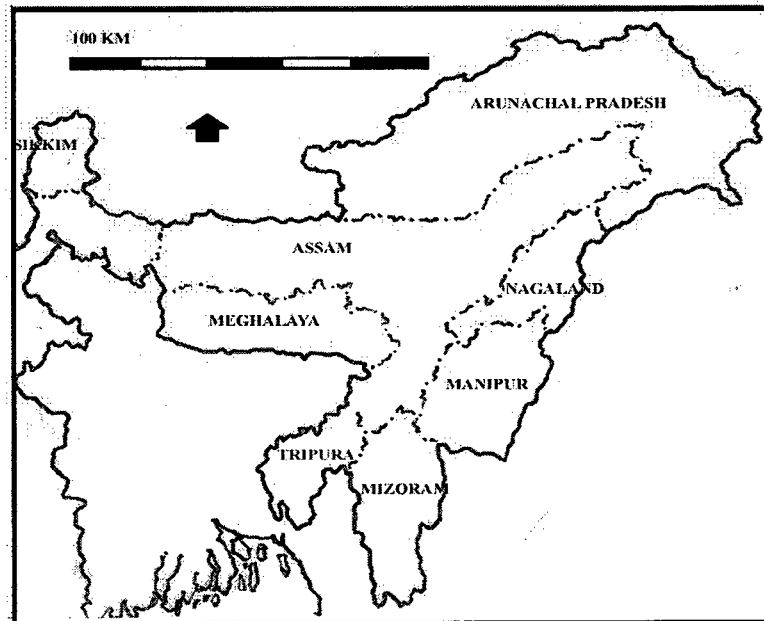
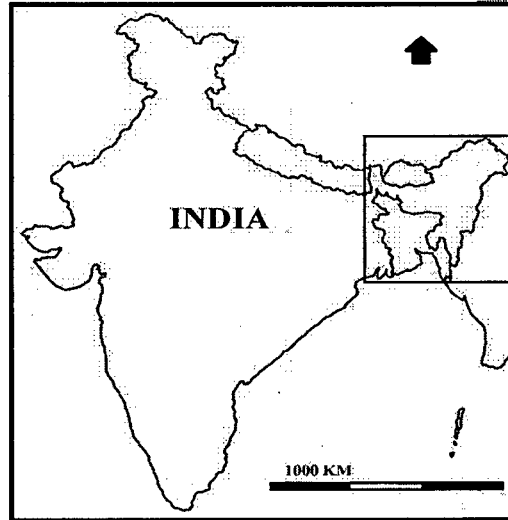
the memories both at the individual and the collective level cannot be dismissed for nothing. The stone structures of Chui village in Mon district are located and surrounded on all sides by the morung, Angh's house and the church within proximity of merely 100 metres to each other. It is interesting to see the appropriation of the modern Christian church by the locals as a place of sanctity and sacredness but built near the former location of stone structures which was once a prominent space for rituals and display of a similar attitude of sacredness and sanctity. Though Christianity has been powerful to break down the practices, the locals in neither way cease to appropriate the stone structures not merely as memories but even through the unbreakable perception of the stone structures as embodying supernatural forces both capable of bringing good and catastrophes even today (See figure no 1).

Therefore, the locals appropriate both the church and the stone structures as equally befitting by the very act of recent incident of invoking the spirits by the Angh; standing on the stone platform as already narrated. It is also significant to note that the perceptions and an equal beliefs in the spirit occurs not only because Christianity itself was of recent but most importantly, the very fact of stones structures that have remained as a visible monuments within the landscape in which memories and stories are embedded. The stone itself is a mechanism of this very story telling.

Finally, from the preceding discussions, the erecting of stone monuments of the Nagas cannot conform to a single perspective of understanding. The stone erecting encompasses multiple perceptions through which they understood the world of their own. In one way, it is a nucleus of socio-economic and religious activity. The conceptualization and representation of life and dead strongly influenced the mode of disposal of the dead as well. Therefore, it is also possible to address and emphasis that stone as a single mechanism was embedded in it as a web and a mass of issues interrelated and connected but also experienced in multiple ways with multiple perceptions and purposes.

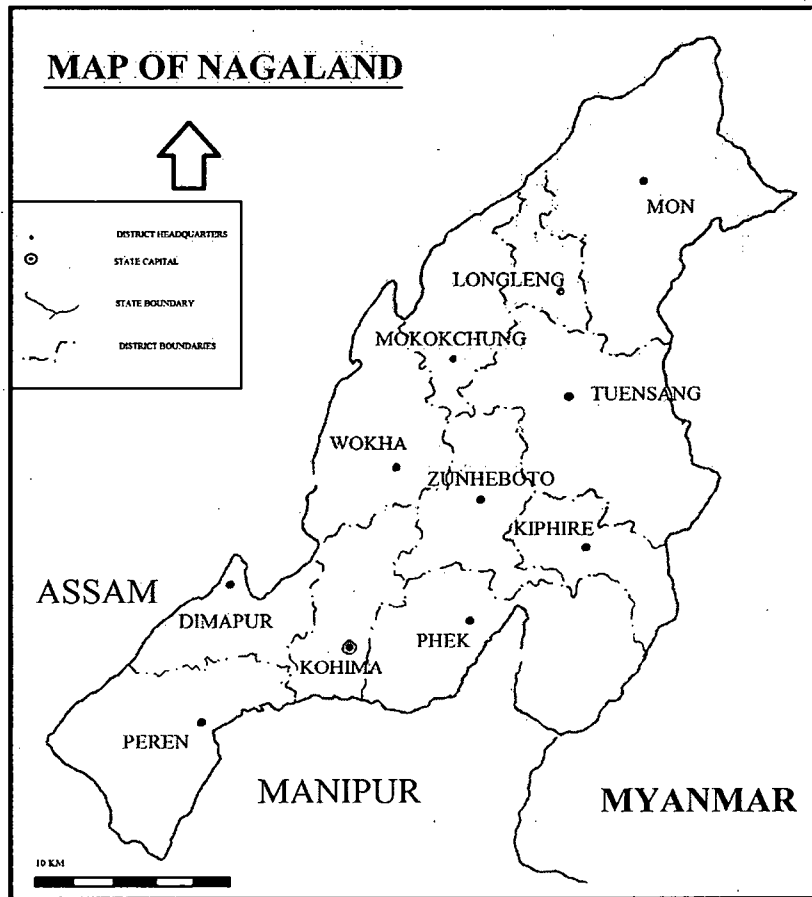
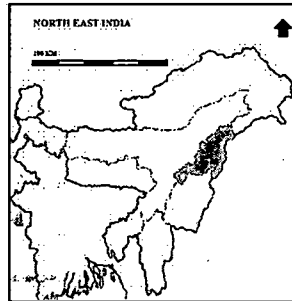
MAP OF NORTH EAST INDIA

LEGENDS	
	INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARIES
	INTER-STATE BOUNDARIES

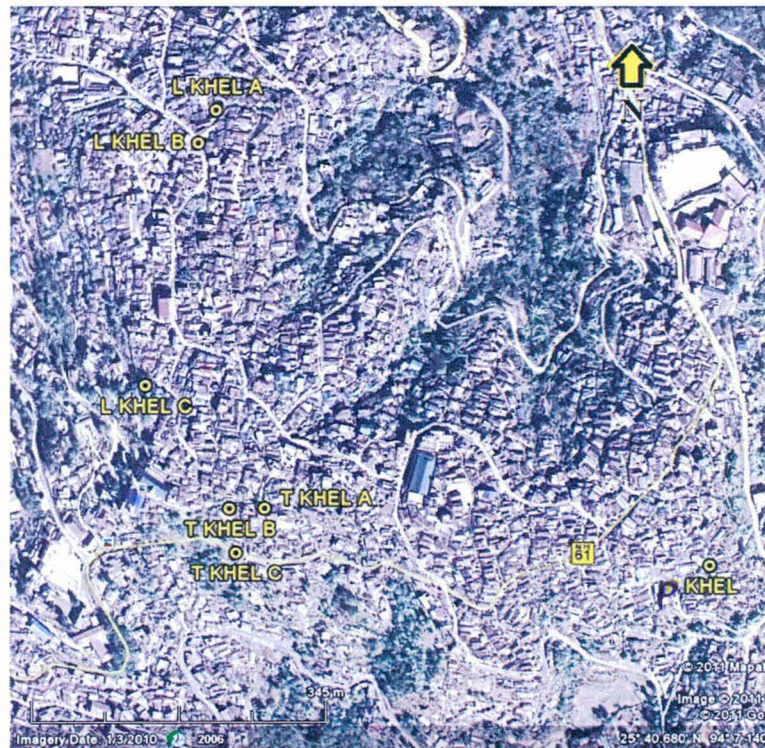
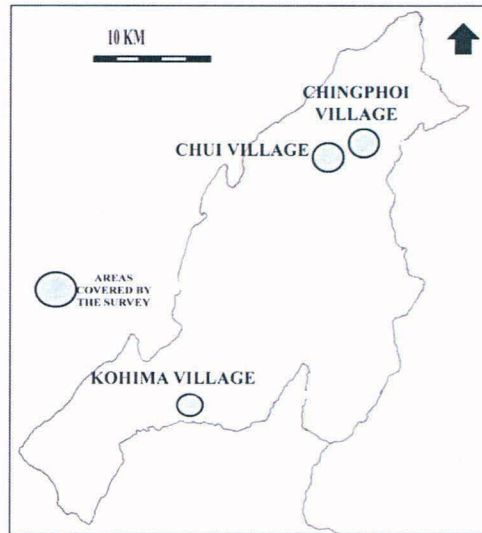


Map 2

LOCATIONAL MAP OF NAGALAND



Map 3



DISTRIBUTION OF STONE STRUCTURES IN KHELs OF KOHIMA VILLAGE

Table 1: Standing Stones that are mostly connected with memorials and fertility stone

Tribes	Local Names	Structural Types	Function
Angami	Tsiese	Menhirs, Stone alignments	Memorials, stones which also serve as the village deity
Chakhesang	Zhothotsu	Menhirs, alignments avenues	Commemorative, stones raised by person who have given Feast of Merits
Konyak	Pinlong	Menhirs	Commemorative, fertility cum a deity
Rongmei	Soang	Menhirs, alignments	Memorials
Anals	1. Tutangkam 2. Lungpatha	Menhirs Small menhirs with enclosures	1. Memorial stone in honor of the Feast of Merits giver after his death 2. Small menhirs erected by the giver of feasts during his lifetime
Marams	1. Beitung	Menhirs associated with dolmens menhir	1. Witness stones 2. Memorial stones

Table 2: Stones having independent meanings

Chakhesang	Kosa moro	Monolith alignment along a stone platform	In commemoration of personal event
Angami	Kharu	Vertically raised stones	Connected with the village gate
Konyak	Chingmei Long	Small menhir	Oath taking stone especially after the warfare between villages

Table 3: Stone structures that have functional aspects as resting place, watch tower and the meeting place for the village.

Tribes	Local Names	Structural type	Function
Angami	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Thehouba 2. Badze 3. Kwehou 	<p>Stone enclosures</p> <p>Stone platform</p> <p>Rectangular stones platform</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Resting 2. Memorial sitting platform, a cenotaph 3. Memorial sitting place constructed after giving the feast of merits
Konyak	Nalak	circular and rectangular stones	Resting
Chakhesang	Khoho	Raised platform	Meeting place for the Khel members

Table 4: Stone structures that are associated with burials

Tribes	Local Names	Structural type	function
Angami	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Miapu mokhru 2. Mia kenie mokhru 3. Mia kekhra mokhru 	<p>Single chambered tomb</p> <p>Double chambered tomb</p> <p>Multiple or more than two chambered tomb</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Burial chamber for one person 2. Burial chambers for two persons 3. Burial place for clan or family members
Marams	Arou atu	Small cairn with dolmen	Grave stones
Chakhesang	Verosa or Nhose	Small cromlech or table stone	Sitting place raised in memory of the dead person

Table 5: Stone structures that are related to supernatural power and forces

Tribes	Local Names	Structural types	Function
Konyak	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Longkhao 2. Thaolong 	<p>Table stone/ dolmens</p> <p>Heaves of small menhirs</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Connected with heads and ritual space 2. Connected with village establishments which were usually transformed into head depositing location which also acts as a ritual space cum sacred alter.
Marams	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Atuchaga Kamatei 2. Atu amai ogija phugung khei 	<p>Horizontal flat stones</p> <p>A pit with a capstone</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Holy stone 2. Place where decapitated heads were buried
Tangkhol	Rihai	Rectangular/quadrangular stone and earth platform	Judicial cum ritualistic sacred altar
Liangmai	Atugra/atukra	Dolmen associated with a menhir	Oath taking stone which is also regarded as deity or holy stone
Chakhesang	Tsotagwu	Dolmens associated with menhir	Connected with supernatural power commonly called kezakhenoma
Mao	Okimaki	Dolmen.	Commemorative, connected with peace negotiation over head hunting

Notes: The table shows various structural and functional aspects of the stone structures of the Nagas. In cases, similar stone structural types are used for different social aspects. The table also shows similar structural and functional aspects but different local terminology because of the distinctive dialects.

Plate 1



Figure 1. A huge stone known as ‘*Longkhao*’ also known as ‘flat stone’ meant for ritual space. The Morung and a modern church in the background. Location: Chui village (Konyak Naga). Mon, Nagaland. Courtesy: Author, 2010.



Figure 2. A flat stone also known as ‘*Longkhao*’ where heads were also deposited. Location: Chingphoi village (Konyak Naga). Mon, Nagaland. Courtesy: Author, 2010.

Plate 2



Figure 3. Pile of upright stones with a church in the background. New stone was added for every head taken. It was also a sacred and ritualistic space. Location: Chui village (Konyak Naga). Mon, Nagaland. Courtesy: Author, 2010.



◀ Figure 4. A stone alignment erected after giving a series of feasts by individual or household. Location: Kohima village (Angami Naga). Kohima, Nagaland. Courtesy: Author, 2010.

Plate 3

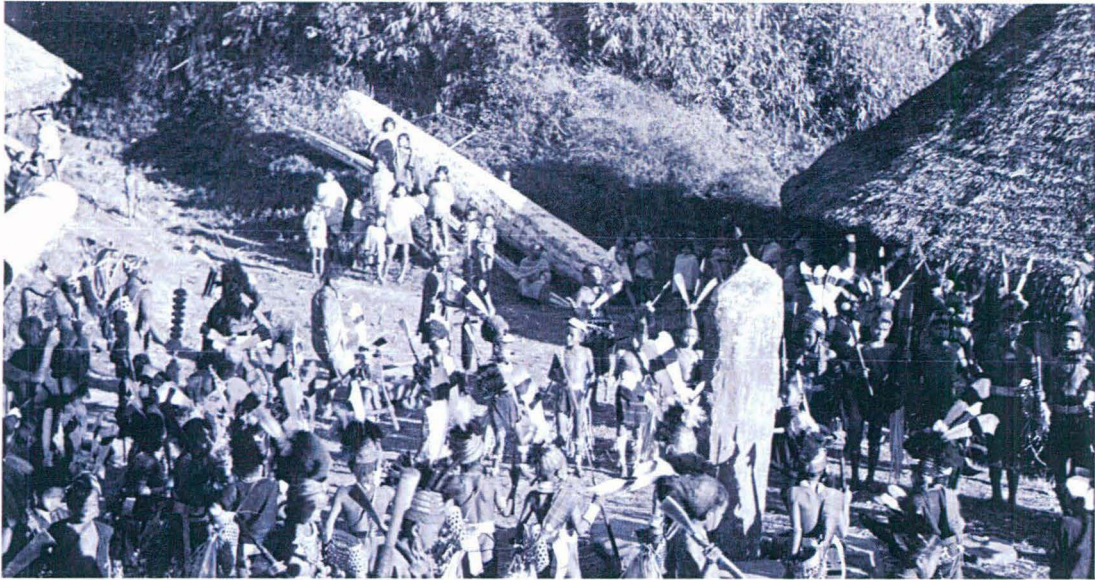


Figure 5. A group of men dancing and encircling the monolith celebrating head taking event. Location: Wakching village (Konyak, Naga). Mon, Nagaland. Courtesy: Furer-Haimendorf, 1936. Source: SOAS, digital archives.

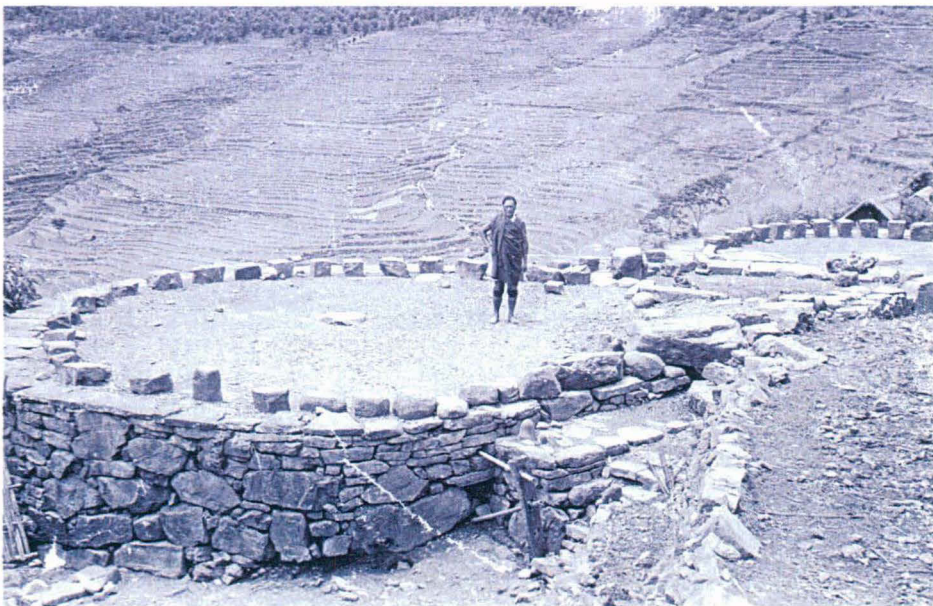


Figure 6. stone circles built by people who has given a feast of merits. It had the purpose for sitting as well as for public meeting. In the background are the terraced fields. Location: Khonoma village (Angami Naga). Kohima, Nagaland. Courtesy: Furer-Haimendorf, 1936. Source: SOAS, digital archives

Plate 4



Figure 7. Monoliths erected on a small squared platform after series of feasts and also to perpetuate memory of ancestor. Location: Khonoma village (Angami Naga). Kohima, Nagaland. Courtesy: Furer-Haimendorf, 1936. Source: SOAS, digital archives.



Figure 8. Graves of Angami man confined by a wall of flat stones. Basket belonging to the deceased and the goods used during the burial were placed. Location: Chakhabama (Angami Naga). Kohima, Nagaland. Courtesy: Furer-Haimendorf, 1936. Source: SOAS, digital archives.

Plate 5



Figure 9. Stones erected as a symbol for love affairs during the deceased life time. Location: Chozumi (Chakhesang Naga). Phek, Nagaland. Courtesy: Furer-Haimendorf, 1936. Source: SOAS, digital archives.



◀Figure 10. Monoliths erected to commemorate successful raids. Location: Hongphoi village (Konyak Naga). Mon, Nagaland. Courtesy: Furer-Haimendorf, 1936. Source: SOAS, digital archives.

Chapter Five

Stone Structures in the Naga Hills and Vidarbha: Divergences and Variations

To relate Vidarbha and Naga Hills is a challenging task instead. If one looks at the nature of production of knowledge itself, it is not surprising that for Vidarbha the knowledge is massive, directed by extensive archaeological excavations while in the case of the Naga Hills, it is driven by ethnography for reasons not only for lack of archaeological investigations but also because it is a living tradition. Therefore the purpose is rather to understand the phenomenology of these two societies behind the practice of stone structures irrespective of the academic orientations of both. An attempt has been made to understand the variations among the Nagas, Nagas and Khasis and finally draw on the Nagas and Vidarbha. These may throw light on the multiple perceptions and meaning in spite of the similar or different material aspects in different societies.

One of the prominent writings that has emerged and dominated over the decades has been the method of looking at cultures in terms of a homogenized understanding which has attempted to unfold in the historiography section. Subsequent arguments had similar tenets with the powerful invocation of a culture-historical approach obsessed with diffusion which argued that one culture borrowed from the other.

Such a trend is evident in the 19th century when the thought of the evolutionary anthropologists was attacked by those who have become known as “diffusionist” and “functionalist” anthropologist. The diffusionist anthropologist took up the position that culture is borrowed and does not emerge in similar forms in different societies by spontaneous growth due to certain common social potentialities and common human nature. This clearly demonstrated the idea that innovations or inventions was made by one people (not by a number of peoples) in one place (not in different places) at a particular moment of their history, and that it was diffused partly or wholly from this people to other peoples through migrations and exchanges or through the trans cultural visitors.

This implies that to every cultural trait there is a root and that the purpose of the anthropologists is to find and explore those roots. Iyer (ed., 1961: 35) pointed out how Smith (1911) proposed the diffusion of culture and traced back similarities in different cultures to their diffusion from a single source that is Egypt which is also to say hyper diffusions. Perry (*Ibid*: 35) in a similar fashion followed the same model but laid stress on megalithic culture. Such ideas have been debunked by many scholars on the ground that such a theory leaves no place for the capability for innovation by a particular society and also on the ground that why some cultural items diffused while others did not?

The purpose of this chapter however is not to revolve within the debates but rather emphasis on the multiplicity of cultures particularly with reference to the stone structures and understands the multiplicity in the perceptions and appropriations. In doing so, it is the purpose of this chapter to also understand how different societies inculcate certain practices restricted and defined by the conditions of the environment and ecology of the landscape.

Chapters three and four respectively have discussed some of the aspects and elements of the stone structures of both in Vidarbha and the Naga Hills and offered some perspectives particularly in relation to ideologies, identities and memories from the perspective of stone structures as constructed landscape. These two regions have in fact provided with the variations both in the functional and structural models. Therefore the variations in the functional and structural aspects may also explain and induce the variations in the perceptions of the two societies. However, the thrust is also to see the variations not within these two cultures alone but bring out certain elements that are inherent even amongst the Khasis who share a geographical proximity with the Nagas.

5.1 Variations at Home- The Case of the Nagas

It is important to note that in the preceding chapters, the term 'Nagas' was used as an ambit representing the entire conglomerated groups in order to provide a general framework of the phenomenon. However this is neither to negate nor undermine the

multiple components that are inherent amongst the different communities characterized by totally varied and incomprehensible languages and different societal organization. Therefore the use of the word may encompass the entire Nagas which today is defined under one ambit or specific groups that are associated with the practice of stone structures.

For the Nagas, the affiliations of inter tribals are based on the proximity of geography to each other but most importantly on the common myths and oral traditions of origins. There is also a tendency to affiliate inter tribals on the basis of the similarities in linguistics. The classic example of which are amongst the Angami, Mao, Zeliangrong, Chakhesang, Rengma who called themselves the *Tenyimia* based on both the common myth of origin and languages.

Now the origins of the Nagas is veiled and shrouded in mystery and only bound by common myth of origins of which most of them is associated with stones or a wide opening space. Legend accounts that migrations of the Nagas took place in three different successive phase and waves. The first being the Angami, Chakhesang, Lotha, Rengma, Sema and the Zeliang who crossed the Chindwin river and came to the place known as “*Samsok*” which literally implies a “parting place”¹⁷. The second wave of migration consisted of the Aos, Chang, Khiamunggan, Sangtam, Tikhir and the Yimchunger who crossed the Patkai range along the course of the Tizzy river and entered the present settlement¹⁸. The third wave consisted of Konyaks and the Heimi who went up along the river Tunai (Chindwin) and some of them moved towards the western side following the Hangnu river (Nshoga 2009: 25). Similarly another legend accounts of a specific stoppage or a space through which the different groups passed. For the Aos, they believed

¹⁷ Nshoga pointed out that the Nagas parted to different places among whom the Lothas moved ahead of the other groups, erected monoliths and abandoned the village. The Semas taking the similar routes when encountered with the abandoned village with the monoliths erected assumed that they were erected by the spirits and therefore named it as ‘*Terhouchiesemi*’ which meant ‘spirits erected stone village’. See for more detail; A. Nshoga 2009

¹⁸ These groups inhabit the eastern part of the present Nagaland except for the Aos who does not come under the ambit of Eastern Nagaland.

that they originated from ‘*Longterok*’ or ‘six stones’. The Angami believed they came from *Kezakenoma* and dispersed in Maikel which is now in Mao area of Manipur (Hodson 1911: 8). Here stones are erected as a significant place of dispersion. For the Konyak, they believed that they passed through the “*Alam kaphen*” or “*Longphang phenyu*” which is literary translated as ‘large stones’ (Wangsha 2003: 3). Therefore, if one looks at the myth of origins, the significant of stones as an eminent entity is explicit. However far from the myth of origins, stones are associated with different social aspects in the Naga society.

While such variability and multiplicity exists, the thrust and discourse of the study of stone structures as argued in the preceding chapter has merely been restricted and confined with the association of the feast of merits though it has its own peculiarity. It comprises of various others structural and functional implications which needed to be looked at from different perspectives and encompassing complex ritualized activities. Therefore in attempting to define and drawing on the different elements, and some of the peculiar divergences both within and across cultures, the term ‘stone structures’ has flexibly been used but this does not imply and convey the totality which sums up everything or that it has only one meaning and perception.

From the point of both structural and functional aspects, amongst the Angami and the Chakhesang Nagas, the practice of erecting the monoliths in alignments on the side of the road to the fields or stone structures constructed as a resting place or watch towers may not necessary have any relation with that of feast of merits. However, from the lens of this feast of merits, such desirability for the monolith to be erected which is eligible by a series of ceremonies and feastings is totally absent among the Konyak Nagas. While for the Konyaks, the erecting of the stones was ascribed by the number of war achievements, for the Angami and the Chakhesang Nagas, the feast becomes an eligible criterion.

This throws light on two representations; firstly, both amongst the Konyak, Angami and the Chakhesang Nagas, social status is attained by fulfilling such criteria. In other words, the identity of a person was defined and constructed vis-à-vis fulfillment of the desired criteria ascribed and in commonly recognized by the society and therefore eligible by any

individual. Secondly, the prominent objective of such participations and the rituals is also to enhance the fertility. Fertility is not just conceptualized within the realm of agricultural productivity but also the fertility of human and cattle. The fertility however was conceptualized differently. While for the Angami and the Chakhesang Nagas, wealth particularly agricultural productivity and cattle accumulated are redistributed through the very act of feast of merits with the perceptions that such actions would enhance in the future surplus and fertility. While for the Konyaks, the fertility rest in the particular front portion of the skull, which is either displayed or deposited and the stones erected on top of it and rituals performed. Such representation was based on the beliefs that the spirits of the slain could absorb and invite the other members of the family or village which then could fertilize the soil to a higher degree. It might therefore be argued rather that the final goal and objective of the feast of merits and thereafter erection of the monoliths amongst the Angami and Chakhesang and the stone structures associated with the warfare achievement amongst the Konyak is one but with different a approach. As such, the divergence is mostly evident in its experiences but with a different objective.

The other determinant factor for the obsession with the fertility of agriculture, cattle and human amongst the Nagas particularly the Konyaks could be well said for the poor harvest. Such famines, hunger and scarcity of the past is a popular lore among the Konyaks even today. Among other reasons, two factors could be attributed for the concept of fertility and good harvest. Firstly, it was impossible to cultivate the hill and rugged tracts in the absence of agricultural tools. Secondly, the warring nature and disputes between villages could have restricted the inhabitants to freely go and attain the land for fear of surprise raids.

Therefore, it is possible to suggest that the warring nature of the Nagas in the past had nothing to do with the territorial expansion; but for more of the prestige which are then related with the concept of fertility of soil, cattle and human. Fertility of human and the desire for population growth could also throw light for the frequent loss of lives and thus more people could enhance the security of the settlements and these elements are represented through war achievement in war and the eligibility to erect the stones.

5.2 Functional and Structural Dimensions of the Stone Structures: Nagas and the Khasis

Such variations in the functional and structural aspects are also evident not within the Nagas themselves but also in other regions as well. The stones structures of the Khasis are distinct from that of the Nagas in terms of ideologies. Godwin, Austen has remarked that among the Nagas, stone monuments were erected in which they were arranged and placed gradually decreasing in size from left to right. Their number may be odd or even without disturbing the symmetry of the monuments as a whole which is not the case with the Khasis stones for these have the highest centre and one or more on either side are always in uneven sets (Austen 1875: 145). The stones of the Khasis are mostly of granite and sandstone which are locally available. The Nagas particularly the Angamis prefers to erect the stones in even numbers.

The variations therefore are not merely confined to the ideological but also the structural dimensions in some cases. Though Austen and other colonial administrator's proposed certain elements, purposes and perceptions for the erections of these stones as already emphasized in the preceding chapters, the more elaborate and wholly understanding has failed to emerge. Austen further states that amongst the Nagas, the prominent objective was propitiation to the manes of their ancestors. This is true however the larger domain of the other perceptions does not surface.

The stone structures of the Khasis can be divided into three categories with their own functions.

1. The funeral pyres

The funeral pyres may consist of both dressed and undressed stones depending upon the means of the family. These pyres are placed outside the village of the deceased, on a hillock or in a clear space and near the road and about 121 cm or 151 cm high (Clarke 1874: 483).

2. The cists containing the pots of ashes

The second category of stone consist of a circle or square of upright stones, fitting as closely with one round or square flat stone on the top. They vary in size from a few cm diameters to 182 cm or 213 cm. Such type of sepulture involved a facility

in which the ashes of the families are collected from time to time. At first the ashes of a man are probably kept in small cists and after a few years, a great general family ceremony is held, and the ashes of the various individuals of the family are collected from the smaller cists. However the ashes of both man and woman are collected in separate jars and both these jars are then placed in one large cist. The ashes of the women's ashes were usually kept next to the door indicating the matrilineal practice (*Ibid*: 284-85). The person who carries the bones is not allowed to turn round but must proceed straight to the cairn. On reaching, sacrifices are performed by washing the bones three times which are then placed in an earthen pot. The lower jaw-bones of the animals which have been sacrificed are then placed inside the cairn and the door shut (Roy 1936: 390).

3. *The monumental groups*

Khasis stone monuments consist of mainly two general type viz., the upright slab and the horizontal slab. The upright slabs are commonly grouped in threes or fives and are nearly always oblong, with the tallest in the middle of the row. The upright and horizontal slabs are often combined to form a single monument and thus the whole group of stones forms one indivisible monument, which may be the monument of one individual, a household, or a family. Families retain a history of the monuments which belong, to the family, and thus in a small degree of the names of their ancestors. Such family monuments may be repaired, added to, or rebuilt from time to time. They are not necessarily placed where the family ashes are kept in cists, or near such cists; but they are usually at no great distance from the village where the family dwells (*Ibid*: 486).

Like the Nagas, for the Khasis the indestructibility of life-matter, and, more than that, in the indestructibility of life itself is very strong and inherent (Roy 1936: 391). The stone structures of the Khasis-Jhantia are therefore closely linked with the ancestral worship (Mawlong 2009: 197). Ceremonies relating to the dead are invariably cremated and their subsequent interment of the bones in cists and cairns is called *Mawshyieng*. The *Mawshyien* is however a temporary repository for the final resting is the clan cists or *mawbah*. This *mawbah* symbolizes their identity and continuity as a group. However

independent stone erecting such as *mawbah*, *mawlynti*, *mawnian* and so forth were raised by the dominant and the founding clans or group *jaid bakhrav*¹⁹ and no other could do that (*Ibid*: 196-197). The other aspect of the Khasis practice is that stones erected whether for the purpose of commemorative or funerary are given proper names unlike the Nagas who do not name the individual stone.

One character of the Khasis monoliths was also in terms of the display of gratitude for which the monoliths were erected. One of the occasion for the erection of the monoliths was that the Khasis at the time of distress such as illness or other catastrophes would seek the intervention of their long deceased family members or the ancestors to intervene on their behalf and therefore had very little to do with fertility. Rituals were conducted by means of breaking eggs or by ways of animal sacrifices. Now when the benefits were trivial, they erected stones in smaller size and if the matter was impressive then the size of the stone monoliths also increased (Austen 1872: 127). The act of erecting the monoliths was therefore an act of acknowledging the benefits of the spirits of their ancestors. Monoliths are also erected by an individual who might have fallen sick and vows to erect a monolith in the event that his illness is healed and his health restored. From the point of perceptions of fertility, the manifestations of the concept of fertility is very explicit amongst the Nagas as evident from the erection of the stones in pairs symbolizing male and female and a close link to fertility of both agriculture and human fecundity. The Khasis however rarely erect the stone in pairs though the concept of fertility is not entirely absent.

A close purview on both the practice of the Nagas and the Khasis would suggest and indicate very different perceptions of their ancestors and functional aspects of the stones. For the Khasis, the relations with their ancestors were based on the mutual exchange of deeds, the concept of “give and take” and therefore the strengthening of the relations with their past ancestors depended on the amount of their answered wishes. While for the Nagas, it was an instrument through which the blessings of their ancestors were not only

¹⁹ For more details, see Mawlong 2009.

acknowledged but also in the belief that such an act of gratitude would further fertilize the soil. However, the concept of a promise to the spirits for erecting the stones as in the case of the Khasis and a mutual exchange of deeds are absent. Austen (1872: 126) recounts the incident of the erection of large slabs of stones near Cherrapunjee by the clan of Kur known as the Nongtariang in dedication to a woman who though during her life was not famous for any particular reason but whose virtues began to appear after her demise. It was believed that the economic or the standard of the villagers began to grow after her demise and thus never failing to reward the villagers. As such, as an acknowledgement, the villagers have erected these slabs of stone structures. Such incident substantiates the point which I have attempted to argue and demonstrate about the different experiences of the two societies.

Similarly, the Angami Nagas have the customs of burying the dead along the paths to the fields or in front of their houses and constructing the graves in the form of stone platform which could be use by the passerby and strengthen the connections with the dead and thereby enhance the fertility of the crops (Rao 1990: 119). Such perceptions and practice are absent amongst the Khasis and therefore validate the strong perception of fertility and the representation that is inherent with the Nagas.

However one of the distinctive features of the stone structures is the identity experiences. For the Nagas, the feast of merits and the achievement in the warfare becomes a core criterion of one's identity. It is this that reflected and defined an individual status of the society though there is a tendency of affiliations of a clan and household through the achievement of this feat. The Khasis however do not have such criteria on the basis through which one's status could be attained. Unlike the Nagas, particularly through the burials, for the Khasis, the unifying force of family and clan is very strong. There is the vigorous and conscious attempt to maintain identity and continuity of the group through the very medium of separate clan cists burials called *mawbah* and a separate *mawbah*, *mawlynti*, *mawnian* cist burials for the dominant and the founding clan. Therefore, in both the cases, there is the conscious attempt for social continuity with its different experience in the constructions of identity but for the Nagas an individual identity being

at the foreground while the Khasis the group identity particularly the clan. The experiences are also due to the different societal organizations. As in the word of Mawlong (2009: 196) “the stone invariably erected amongst the Khasis with the tallest in the centre flanking the either sides represented the maternal uncle of the clan which then embody the social continuity and the unity of the matrilineal ancestry”. Therefore, it can be argued that the variations among the Nagas and the Khasis appear mostly in its ideological differences and distinct social aspects though the structural features seem to be and are similar.

5.3 Phenomenological Experiences of the Stone Structures: Naga Hills and the Vidarbha

To understand the stone structures of the Naga Hills and Vidarbha, it is pertinent to note and understand the nature and directions through which academic discourse has been undertaken. Most of the academic orientations on the Nagas are mostly ethnographically driven because of the very fact that the practice is either of recent past or in some case remains living tradition. In contrast, as far as Vidarbha is concerned, we are dealing with the region where the stones structures are concentrated in very large numbers and have a time framework of about 8th or 7th century BC to about 3rd and 4th century BC with different structural and functional aspects which are completely absent as compared to the stone structures of the Nagas. It is also important to note that by one phenomenon the desired definition is not to argue for a similarity in the structural and functional models but to also say that stone as a material aspect and a medium through which multiple perceptions are represented in different societies.

5.3. A. Problem of Chronology

One fundamental aspects of archaeology is to understand the chronology of a particular site, regions or the chronological framework of a particular culture which would actually unlock mysteries or affiliations of material entity, elements of both similarities and differences through various contexts of cultures. However from the point of chorological association between the stone structures of the Naga Hills and Vidarbha, it is entirely different with different time context.

The chronological span for the habitation of the Vidarbha region is 8th or 7th century BC to about the 3rd and 4th century BC based on radiometric dates. As Suvrathan (2009) has pointed out that the Vidarbha megaliths have undergone transformative changes through various stages of interpretation and reinterpretation of the landscape though after the end of the early historic period, megaliths were no more constructed and there was no more reuse of the megalithic structures as evident by the lack of artefacts. The landscape however may have been interpreted differently in later times or in most probable case adopted as stupa, sati and hero stones (Suvrathan 2009: 141; Rajan 1982: 72).

The chronology for the archaeology of Nagaland in terms of the settlements as of now is only to be content with the dating through radiometric dates from Beta Analytic Inc., Miami and Birbal Sahni Institute of Palaeobotany, Lucknow through which the sites of Phor, Movolomi and Khüsomi have been pushed to about the 7th century AD while the chronology for other sites such as Chungliyimti and Kezakhonoma are awaited. The archaeological investigation of these sites has been undertaken taking note of the common myths of earliest settlements and dispersion of the Nagas of which the detailed findings are yet to be published. However, the stone structures of North east India specifically have been pushed back to about the 12th century AD (Devi 1998: 124) but which even today have also survived as a living tradition. Rao (1990) has also pointed out the date of 1296±100 years BC from the post Neolithic levels from Marokdola in the Khasi Hills where a single cultural horizon has been noted using cord grooved kaolin pottery in close proximity of monoliths with the table stones in front. This carbon sample was found at a depth of about 1.3 meters from the surface which was then tested by the Birbal Sahni Institute of Paleobotany (Rao 1990: 120).

Taking note of such a gap between the two societies, and the scarcity of the reports particularly on the archaeology of Nagas and Nagas inhabited areas; it becomes obscure to completely draw on some of the core variations and therefore, emphasis would be given to understanding on some of the material aspects and the perceptions that could be inherent in both these societies.

The problem rests not only on the factor of chronological gap but also in terms of the mode and the nature of the academic discourse itself. While the Vidarbha region has been extensively excavated and studied, the stone structures of the Nagas on the other have been meagerly noticed by the scholars. The production of knowledge is more ethnographically oriented both for the past and the present. Most importantly, taking considerations of the two regions, we are also speaking of the ecology and the topography which are very distinct and different from the other which could actually influence the practices and experience it in a very different way.

5.3. B. The Appropriation of the Landscape

In every society, one of the basic characteristics for settlements or for any other activities is the selection of the landscape. It is the desire for any society to appropriate to the full advantage of the actors and generate the maximum benefits from their surroundings. While doing so, it is important to also understand how ecology and the landscape may also govern the social and economic relations of that particular society.

A pivotal social theory on the landscape has been pointed by scholars as to how the landscape could be perceived and experienced by people and thus construct socio symbolic dimensions (Ashmore and Knapp 1999: 1). This also means that in such constructed landscapes understanding the relation of human with nature and the larger dominant ideologies and perceptions and the consciousness of identity, place, myths, memories within the sphere of landscape conceptions and the meanings ascribed to it through time and space becomes significant. Identifying with the landscape does not just happen but requires works and repeated acts that expand relations between the places and the people (Tilley 2006: 14).

To understand culture, one has to understand the dynamic relations among the various components of the environment which helps us to understand the interaction of human with the nature in terms of survival strategies (Singh 1986: 64). Forbes (2007) in his study of the Methanites has pointed out that the patterning of settlements in relation to each other and the relationships of settlements to their landscapes are vital. Towns,

villages and cities of Methanites do not occur randomly in their landscapes but are located, for instance, in defensible locations or at strategic positions relating to natural features, transport networks and so on (Forbes 2007:179).

The stone structures of Vidarbha within this perspective have been explored by many scholars putting forth arguments for the strategic selection of the landscape and ecology and not as such of random settlements. Megalithic sites were situated either in the vicinity of perennial rivers or in locations having the natural resources (Singh 1986; Moorti 1994; Suvrathan 2009) and thus the ecology itself influenced the social relations and the economic activities. Vidarbha is chiefly characterized by heavy rainfall, rich natural vegetation, rugged hills terrain, mainly drained by Wardha, Penganga, Wainganga and their tributaries and the whole plain is dominated by black soil and rich sandy soil. Fertile agricultural areas of Vidarbha conform to the distribution of megalithic sites and especially habitation cum burials.

In a similar fashion, with concern to the Nagas, if one has to look within the conscious selection of physical landscape, then it has to be looked in terms of the village settlements. For the Nagas, the selection of a landscape with the hill top and an overview below is one of the most important features. The selection of the traditional village settlement also are determined by the availability of cultivable land, the proximity to the water spring, virgin soil, free from land disputes, availability of sufficient land and forest and finally free from the influence of the evil spirits (Nshoga 2009: 57).²⁰

Therefore it is no wonder to suppose why the Konyak Nagas would have a settlement on top of the hills overlooking the other villages or at defensible post. Like the Vidarbha which have particularly demonstrated a conscious attempt to settle in areas abundant in mineral resources and fertile plains for agricultural activity as evident from the finds of rice and other crops. For the Nagas, availability of cultivable tract becomes eminent.

²⁰ The belief in evil spirit is very common among the Nagas. Before any settlements, the site is rejected if the omens of the dreams were nightmares. Before actual settlement, rituals ceremonies by sacrificing animals were performed by the priests or the eldest member of the village to drive and cast away the evil spirits and invoke the spirits of blessings. See for more detail Ngosha 2009.

Agriculture particularly jhum cultivation is one of the most important means of subsistence. Like any other tribal groups, the Nagas economy is predominantly agrarian in character. The use of land is the nucleus of all socio-economic activities and work participation (Shimray 2004: 10).

5.3. C. Social Differentiations and Identities

From the archaeological excavations and the interpretations that followed, the nature of the productions and the social relations of Vidarbha are indeed complex. Moorti (1989-1990, 1994) has pointed out that in the case of south Indian megaliths; the socio-economic dynamics of the society seems to have been based on elaborate and organized society. The technomic, socio-technic, ideo-technic artefacts in the grave burials which indicate and represents unequal distributions are the manifestations of a ranked society.

From this point of view, the identity of a person or a group were not only constructed in his life time but also represented in the burials. Thus, stones became a vital mechanism through which the status or identity of the person(s) were highlighted and even legitimized by the society. The other perspective could be also the symbolic nature of the goods itself and merely replications and reflections of the goods used during the life time (Suvrathan 2009: 131). However, if we are to assume as the reflections of the status during the life time, it becomes pertinent to also assume that the past communities in Vidarbha people were also attempting to create a space for hierarchical status in the mortuary practices as substantiated by the unequal treatment of the mortuary itself. Besides this, there may also have been an attempt to not only control and mark territories but also pave the way for affiliation to social group as Chattopadhyaya (1996) has also pointed out in the case of the earliest subsistence of Mahadaha and Damdama, Ganges valley which were abundant in lakes and aquatic food such as tortoise and fish. Therefore, on this basis he argued that the beginning of the mortuary practices and the formal cemeteries have its origins from the desire to control the resources. Further he argued for the existence of a corporate group and the rights to productive and reliable but restricted resources legitimized by lineal descent from the dead (Chattopadhyaya 1996: 473).

Within the framework of control of resources, it is also possible to suggest that past people in Vidarbha were not only attempting to control the resources but also consciously attempting to construct a common group identity and attach and identify themselves with the place and thus create conscious relations with the landscape. The identity of the social group therefore may have been imagined and constructed in a similar fashion. Yet from the unequal representation of the burials both in terms of the artefacts, disposal and the energy expenditure and the treatment of the burials, as Moorti (1994) has argued for ranked society and social differentiations, the stones may not only have been a biography of each individual but also provided an identity through which the living recognized and represented through the act of not only more energy expenditure but also displayed by the grave goods.

For the Nagas, one purpose of erecting the stone especially among the Angami Naga is also to perpetuate the memory of the ancestors through which it could fertilize the soil. However in doing so, we can also assume of the perspective through which it become a mechanism where his and his household identities are constructed. Those way identities are then tied and linked to their ancestors and thus there is a continuous attempt and tendency to construct the genealogy of the family and groups and a process of active imagination of the past taking place. In other words it was a given social ladder; transparent and conscious, through which a person could and attain a social status and thus carve one's identity. Such a person or household who has undergone a series of ceremonies has the privilege to display and add splendor and elaborateness of their embroidery as well. Besides, he and his family were entitled to embellish the house with carved posts and beams. It is significant to note that such privileges were bestowed upon those who performed the feasts and none were entitled however wealthy and rich they may have been (Mills 1935: 134).

5.3. D. Structural Dimensions

The elements of the stone structures may also indicate the possibility of the technique and the organization of the society. The stone structures of Vidarbha consist of various structures and dimension both accommodating burials and symbolic though the dominant

stones are associated with the actual burials. The structures predominantly consist of the stone circles (Walimbe 1992: 125) but also other structural trend such as dolmens, small tumuli without lithic appendage existed. The case of the Nagas however predominantly consists of menhirs, monoliths, stone circles²¹ and dolmens having its own functional aspects.

Such variability in the structures essentially reflects the different social aspects and perceptions of the two societies. For the Nagas, as demonstrated in the preceding chapter, the stones comprise of both the sepulchral and non sepulchral. But from the lens of the non sepulchral monuments, they are commonly associated with resting place on the roadside to the field or near the forest. The other purpose of the non sepulchral apart from the feast of merits is also meant for meeting places which are usually in the form of circular or rectangular alignments of stones. From the point of the subsistence economy, Nagas other than the Angami and the Chakhesang mostly practice shifting cultivation which requires that a once cultivated tract of land be kept for a certain period of time or so depending on the availability of the land. This helps in the non exhaustion of the fertility of the land when the rotation for the same plot of land comes back. One aspect is therefore, in every road leading to the fields, the need to construct stones for the villagers becomes imminent. The other desired objective of the stones constructed in the forest or far flung site from the habitat is also the practice of hunting which the Nagas are engaged in.²² Since the forests with potential for hunting are situated distance away, stone platforms are erected to discuss the strategies and decisions both before and after the hunting game. It is also a location where the hunters could rest and wait for the others as well.

The purpose of such exemplification other than the feast of merits which is related with agriculture and fertility, is also to explain how necessary stones erections are and related

²¹ Stone circles among the Nagas are associated mostly with the resting place however the practice associated with the burials were prevalent among the Angami. Among the Konyak human skulls were either displayed or housed in the storage or deposited and the stone erected on top.

²² Hunting is practiced amongst the Nagas but this is not to say that the fruits of hunting game are the main subsistence. Agriculture remains the main nucleus of subsistence and economy.

to both hunting and the jhum cultivation which again is distinct from that of the Angami and the Chakhesang Nagas but most importantly which could also be one of the divergence with the Vidarbha stones as far as the functional aspects are concerned.

The other aspect of non sepulchral forms is the stone enclosures meant for public meeting. It is the place where important decisions pertaining to the welfare of the village are decided. Like the morung among the Konyak where decisions are taken presided by the Angh (Chief) of the village (Wangsha 2000:8), the stone enclosures amongst the Angami Naga have equivalent and similar functions. Therefore, it becomes an important location where unanimous decisions of the village were taken. Therefore, it is logical to suggest the societal organizations of the village which confirms and based not on the hierarchical order but on the common platform of expressions and decisions though as I have suggested in the preceding chapter the tendency to construct a distinct individual and social identity through the medium of the feast of merits and the subsequent stone erecting of the stones.

Such hypothesis is not possible to put forth for the case of Vidarbha, as the archaeological remains indicates the existence of social differentiations in the material distributions of the burials. Besides, there is sufficient evidence to substantiate on the societal organization which may have been hierarchical comparatively more than the Nagas.

Vidarbha stone structures consist of mostly the burials with or absence of the skeleton remains as indicated by the archaeological evidence. Some of the features of the burials are:

1. The presence of the skeleton remains in single or multiple burials
2. Absence of the skeletons therefore which are more symbolic in nature
3. Reopening of the graves and manipulations of the remains
4. Practice of both primary and secondary burials

Thus from such features, it is appropriate to state that the mortuary treatment in Vidarbha was very elaborate with multiple perceptions for various reasons as already discussed. Various features has also been discussed and hypothesis for conscious attempt in selection of the landscape, the societal organization, construction of identities both at the level of individual and the group have been pointed out.

However, from the point of representations of death in both these societies, there seem to be similar perceptions of death and the afterlife. Such evidence does not conflict both in terms of the ancestral worships and the beliefs in the spirits of the dead. The other popular belief could be also in terms of housing the dead. Such aspects are evident from the way back to the Neolithic life that lay in the rituals of the dead who were buried in urns. The idea that the spirit of the dead should be given a location as in life and the chamber of the dead should be a prototype of the home is reminiscent of the neolithic and the chalcolithic burials. Though the concept of dead may have been a significant element for both Vidarbha and the Nagas, fertility of agriculture, cattle and human was more important than dead to the Nagas. Therefore, stones are mostly related within this understanding and aspect which may not be in the case with Vidarbha. One of the characteristics of Vidarbha stone structures is that, the burial sites outnumbered the habitational sites which is very peculiar and may indicate an elaborate disposal of the dead. One reason though for the discovery of more burials than the habitational could be also because of the inclination of explorations to find more burials than the habitations as the trend of the belief was that the megalithic people were nomadic (Singh 1986: 98). The other reason could be also because the present populations might have either occupied the habitation sites.

It has also been argued in the past discourses that for such a complex nature of the stone structures in south India and in the Vidarbha region, it would be impossible to assume them as pastoralist or sedentary groups. To build such a complex stone structure, there needs to be sufficient energy expenditure and hence possible only with a settled life. Botanical remains from these sites also indicate an agriculture-based economy. Both kharif and rabi crops were cultivated (Mohanty and Walimbe 1993: 94). Similarly, pathology also confirms the dietary composition of both plant and animal food. Besides,

at Bhagimohari, faunal remains particularly cattle bones were found in large quantity along with both winter crops such as barley, lentil, common pea and summer crops such as rice, horse gram, black gram and so forth. Taking this evidence, it is possible to suggest that an agricultural economy dominated while also not negating cattle pastoralism to a certain extent (Thomas 1993: 117). Moorti (1994) has also argued for the same in the case of south India megaliths as far as economy is concerned. Likewise Naikund and Brahmagiri have reported the evidence of rice (Singh 1986: 65).

From such evidence of the nature of burials and agricultural activity which could be only possible with settled life; and therefore drawing inferences may suggest that complex stone burials were possible because of the settled agriculturalists. In Europe the genesis of long barrows were attributed to the proliferations in agriculture (Midgley 2008: 40). Bradley (1998) in a similar vein also suggested for a parallel between agriculture and genesis of the megalithic traditions (Bradley 1998: 67). However, in the case of Vidarbha, one cannot suggest for the parallel relation of agriculture and genesis of stone structures but it can be pointed out that such complex stone structures could be only possible with settled life.

However, it is correct that amongst the Nagas, the practice is associated with agriculture particularly with the cultivation of rice. The concept of the fertility is inherent and is the most desired objective of the rituals though it produces various elements and dimensions. Besides, today, if one looks not only at the practices of stone erection but also at the different festivals and ceremonies amongst the Nagas, most of them are either agricultural or fertility related. These are seed sowing festival, harvest and post harvest fertility and so forth. Agriculture comprises one of the main components of the Naga society and therefore the fertility of the soil through which it is displayed by different elements and rituals become significant. The concept of dead (spirits of the ancestors), fertility (agriculture, cattle and human) and the social prestige (identity of individual, family and clan) are knitted and embedded within this single performance but with multiple perceptions and objectives.

Assuming this perspective, both in Vidarbha and among the Nagas stone, structures were in some ways related with the agricultural activity. But the dominant experience for the Nagas was the feast of merits which is converting the material wealth into social prestige and identity (Shimray 2004: 18). The spirits and the gods have particular relationships to the concept of the fertility among the Nagas. It is the symbol of fertility and the mechanism through which this fertility are exchanged and spread to the fellow villagers and community. Now the 'Y' or the forked ²³ shaped post of the Sema, Lothas representing the women can be related to the Angami understanding of cutting effigies of men and women and also to that of the Konyak wood carving of both male and female (Jacobs 1990: 83) and thus a strong signifier of fertility. The stone structures of the Vidarbha may however indicate a more profound way of understanding the dead and the desire to separate the living and the dead, as dead may have been conceptualized as a polluting element and therefore necessarily a different entity and should be separated and thus less associated with fertility. Now if one looks at the living traditions of the Madia Gonds of Bhamragad, Gadchiroli district, one would notice the inherent concept of dead which is the very purpose of the stone erecting (Geetali 2002: 89-92). This is however not to draw a parallel tradition between the two.

From the features that have been outlined and discussed, one can only remark that different societies located both in similar or different time and space may have different meanings and perceptions of the practices. However on some of the peculiar similarities, the assumption and hypothesis for a similar root is not logical as there are certain elements and traits in different societies which are an inherent part which can be achieved in a certain period of time without any intervention from the other. The concept of ancestral worships for one is a popular trait in many societies. However, the perception and the mechanism through which it is manifested can be very different in different societies as already argued within the context of the Nagas, Khasis and in Vidarbha. In a

²³ Wooden post in 'Y' or forked shaped erected amongst the Sema, Lotha and the Ao Nagas representing that they have given a feast of merits. It has similar representations as found among the Angami and the Chakhesang Nagas who practice the method of erecting monoliths instead.

similar vein, stone structures as a mechanism for displaying meanings for one society may be single while the other may have a multiple perceptions of the same as the case may be amongst the Nagas where meanings in spiral and multiple forms are clubbed together.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

The use of stones which stretches back to prehistory was thus appropriated in multiple ways. Such stones were not simply erected but it was a means through which the builder understood their world, cosmos, religious activities and so forth. Stone was the medium through which their knowledge of the world was displayed. Stone structures as a past relic can therefore be a vital source in understanding the past societies. It can help understand the ideologies and social relations. Stone structures that are related with burials can help understand the social organizations of the past societies since the burials are the reflection of the activities by the living. Burials are the repositories of the goods that have been used by the living and therefore a clear reflection of the ideologies.

One of the trends that has dominated the study of stone structures in the Indian subcontinent is the general idea of diffusion. While the colonial writings mostly supported the idea of diffusion having a single root and that root lays in Europe, by 1960's with a greater advancement in the discipline, there was a more to understand the particular race to which these stone structures could be associated with. On the one hand there was a claim for Druidical, Scythians and the Celts authorship of the stone monuments while on the other there was a counter claim for the indigenous innovation by the Dravidians especially with the distribution and concentration of the stone structures in south India. Recent studies however have attempted to understand the ideologies and their relation with the larger landscape.

Similarly, the knowledge produced in the Naga Hills by the colonial ethnographers and enterprise more or less emphasized on the idea of diffusion and monolithic understanding that was associated with the Stonehenge. The living practice of stone erecting in the Naga Hills was a trace that was left of the past and therefore for colonial enterprises, the need to understand this practice was a significant part of their endeavour. It was thought that understanding the stone structures in Naga and the Khasi Hills would then explain the phenomenon of the Stonehenge. The post colonial era saw little changes. The idea of

diffusion does not dominate this sphere but the stone structures have largely been studied within the framework description of feast of merits and the larger dominant representation and ideologies has failed to emerge.

Looking at the stone structures in Vidarbha, it is important to note that the stone structures has been carefully selected and executed. There was a conscious attempt on the part of the builders to erect the stone monuments that could provide visibility. This argument is based on the fact that the location selected was usually hill tops. The other aspect of the Vidarbha stone structures was also the desire by the builders for a permanency of the stone within the landscape as evident from the nature of its constructional plan especially the Raipur stone structures which was supported on all sides with strong boulders (Deglurkar and Lad 1992: 11). Such extra effort by the builders can also explain the desire for a permanence and if necessarily, for future use and reuse of the same. They were therefore constructing stones that were intended to have reference beyond their daily life and immediate experience and stones that could last forever. Each stones erected was the biography of an individual and the stone as receptacle of that story and event.

The burials in the Vidarbha also consisted of various forms of interment of the skeletons. Equally significant is the presence of grave goods. However, there are also burials which completely lacked grave goods and therefore which are more symbolic in nature. Such grave goods are not only representation of the social status of the deceased but also a reflection and replication of goods that were used during the life time of the individual. Therefore, the living was also creating a rigid social differentiation which could be based on the socio-political and economic status of the individual during lifetime his/her and flexible representation of it in the burials.

Vidarbha stone structures also provide evidence for the interment of skeletons which involved both primary and secondary burials. Therefore, secondary burials which required greater human energy expenditure, effort and time could be a location considered as ritual and sacred space and more socially connected. The time span between the primary and secondary interments of the skeletons may be a time of rituals

and thus at one point displaying a collective responsibility. It was an auspicious period where the final rituals and rites of the decease were performed.

Equally significant for the Vidarbha burials was the strong association with the cult of the dead. The concept of the dead as a polluting element and therefore deemed for separation from the living may have been strongly prevalent. Such element can be drawn from the existence of more burial sites than habitation sites. Thus, at one point of time, there was a conscious attempt to create the 'landscape of the dead' as different from the 'landscape of the living'. However, such landscape of the dead continuously influenced the living with association of these burials as either 'abode of ancestors' or the 'landscape of their loved ones'.

The constructional pattern of burials at Takalghat, Khapa, Raipur and Naikund appears to have involved the placement of reasonably big boulders in a circular plan and then the filling of it by clay capped by pebbles to such a thickness as to cover up half the height of the peripheral stones (Deo 1970, 1973; Deo and Jamkhedkar 1982; Deglurkar and Lad 1992). This is indicative of the desire not only for durability but also the desire to house the spirits and dead as a separate entity. The concept of indestructibility of the spirit is inherent. An attempt therefore was made to construct a house for the dead and rituals performed to facilitate the spirits to another world.

It can also be suggested that a particular landscape can be reinterpreted in multiple ways for a longer period of time. If today, one looks at the stone monuments in India, there are instances in which the stone structures are perceived in multiple ways. For instance, in Andhra Pradesh the stone structures are called "*Rakshasa gullu*" or "*Rakasi gudi*" which literally mean "temples of the demons" and in Kurnool district the stone monuments are known as "*Rakshasa guttalu*" which means "graves of demons" (Rao 1988: 4). Similarly, if one looks at the living practice of stone erecting among the Madias of Chandrapur, Maharashtra and the Madias of Bastar region, Chhattisgarh, there may be possible elements of the past practice particularly the perception and representation of the dead. Therefore, the need to understand this present landscape and practice becomes imperative. While this is not to suggest for a parallel relationship between the past and

present, the need to understand this living practice is equally significant. Landscape particularly which are an integral and significant part of the living can be reworked, reinterpreted, altered and given new names and significance and necessarily not forgotten.

Stone structures can be appropriated for multiple purposes and with multiple meanings. Therefore a monolithic understanding is not possible. Different societies may appropriate differently for different purpose influenced by the social relations and the environment of that particular society. Even within a particular society, such variations are evident. The Nagas for one have societies in which such variations in the practice are manifested. Stones with different structural dimensions for different functions are erected among the Nagas. It has been argued that, among the Konyak Nagas, stone in single or twos were erected at the time of village establishment or new settlement as marker. The belief in the spirits that dwelt in the location and stones are fundamental for this practice. The stone in which the spirits reside was a sacred location. For the Konyak Nagas, these spirits were capable of bringing both reward and catastrophe depending on the treatment of these stones. Therefore, swearing and cursing near or at the stones could invite unnatural phenomenon and catastrophe. It is therefore possible that this intrinsic fear which is both conscious and unconscious allowed people to transform into complex ritual space. It was transformed into a space where they could encounter and invoke the deity. With the transformation of this space, more rituals followed and stone previously single proliferated. Achievement in warfare was associated with the stones. Any person who has slain an enemy and taken a head was allowed to erect stone and the number of heads taken was equivalent to the number of stones erected. It was also a means through which a warrior could carve one's identity. Heads were placed on the stones and rituals performed in order to satiate the spirits and find favor. The heads of the victim were intrinsically linked to the concept of fertility where the spirits of the slain victim could be used to fertilize the soil and invite more victims to fall prey to the victor.

Similarly, one of the purposes of the stone erecting among the Angami and the Chakhesang Nagas is fertility. This fertility was conceptualized not only within the realm of crops but also fertility of human and cattle. However, a person or a household had to

undergo a series of feast of merits to be eligible to erect the stones. This stone erecting at another level was also an entry point to attain a higher social status. The same stones were conceptualized as dwelling place for the spirits of the ancestors. Stones were thus used as manes which would guarantee fertility. The partaking of the feast was perceived that fertility would be assured to both the giver and the recipient. It is therefore possible to suggest that feast of merits acted as a medium through which wealth are redistributed and social harmony attained. But at another level, stone erecting defined the identity of a person and legitimized the social status in the social organizations.

Besides, stones enclosures in circular and rectangular types are erected among the Nagas. These stones are used as a resting place, watch tower and meeting place. This stone structures which are used by the hunters both before and after the hunting game becomes a location where strategies are discussed. Often men assemble in this place before the hunting game and perform rituals in order that the hunting would be fruitful. The same stone structures are used not merely by the living alone but perceived as a resting place for the soul of the dead. It is therefore possible to suggest the continuous influence of the dead and dead as an integral part of the living. It is also plausible to suggest that this location becomes fundamental where past are remembered and reproduced since stories and events are embedded in the stones and in the location. Similarly, the stones which were meant for public meeting played a vital and eminent role in transmitting memories of the past. The stones enclosure which was a product of the collective efforts was collective in ownership and not individual and therefore the production of memories of events and stories would therefore be collective in nature.

Therefore, it is evident that both among the Konyak and the Angami Nagas, one basis for stone erecting is belief in the cult of the dead and its ability to fertilize crops, cattle and human. However, I argue that though they have a similar objective, both these societies undergo a very different experience that is alien to the other. Such variation can be also pointed out in the level of identity construction and experience. Stone erecting was a medium through which identity was represented and expressed but the identity was felt differently. While for the Konyaks, warfare achievement associated with an act of 'courage and bravery' was crucial but for the Angami and the Chakhesang Nagas,

'selflessness and generosity' was vital in this expression. The understanding of the social aspects of both this society therefore becomes imperative. I also argue that the act of stone pulling particularly among the Angami and the Chakhesang Nagas is the manifestation of collective identity. The clothing worn on the day of the stone pulling is also a conscious attempt to reinforce the material culture of the group.

Such variations in the perception and appropriation can be also pointed out with the Khasis who shares geographical proximity with the Nagas. Though stone monuments are associated with the ancestral belief both among the Nagas and the Khasis, the perception is represented differently. For the Khasis, it is based more on the strong notion of 'give and take'. This is substantiated by the fact that a Khasi would undertake a vow to erect a stone in the event that illness is cured or prosperity given. In some cases, the size of stones also depended on the degree of prosperity and answered wishes (Austen 1872, 1876). The separate clan cist burials called *mawbah* and a separate *mawbah*, *mawlynti*, *mawnian* cist burials for the dominant and the founding clan (Mawlong 2009: 196) among the Khasis is an explicit attempt to continue as a social group and thus maintain separate identity which is completely absent among the Nagas. Among the Khasis the underlying principle of social organization based on matrilineal line is an important feature in this departure. Therefore, the stone structures of both the Nagas and Khasis may manifest similar structural plans but may have very different ideologies.

Vidarbha stones exhibit various structures which are absent among the Nagas. Both societies are distinct temporally and spatially. However, there are elements which could be both similar and different. One of the findings of the study was the appropriation of stones in multiple ways. Vidarbha stone structures are mostly sepulchral while the Nagas stone structures consist of commemorative type while burials are also not absent. Both these societies represent spirits as indestructible elements capable of bringing catastrophe and reward even after death, but such representations are more profound in Vidarbha. This is further substantiated from the evidence of more burial than habitation sites though the reasons could be that the past habitations are occupied by present settlers or because of the nature of academic discourse which has inclined towards finding burial rather than habitation sites as the 'megalithic' societies were assumed to be mobile. From the

elaborate burials, it can be suggested that concept of the 'cult of the dead' was very profound in Vidarbha. Such perception in ancestor's spirit is also inherent among the Nagas. However, the concept of fertility formed the basis of the stone monuments among the later. Stone erected to the deity of the ancestors were intrinsically linked to fertility. The same stone was a mechanism through which identity was carved and attained. Vidarbha stone structures do not support this hypothesis. Identity may have been constructed and status represented in the burials. But for the Nagas, one could consciously erect a stone as one's identity during his lifetime after giving series of feasts.

One of the features of the stone structure of the Nagas is the structural type associated with public meeting and resting. This stone structure which was used for meeting of the elders throws light on the social organization which was based on collective decision making. Therefore, it can be suggested that among the Nagas, at one level the social organization in the past may not have been rigid and there was an attempt to collectively participate. However, at another level, stone erecting by individual which was a ladder to social status could and may have influenced the decision making. Such a hypothesis for Vidarbha is not plausible as indicated by the unequal distribution of the grave goods which could indicate for social differentiation but most importantly, stone structures for the purpose of meeting place was either not practiced, destroyed or not traceable.

I also argue that stone structures as constructed landscape within the landscape can influence the living for a longer period of time. Stone structures can act as a vital mechanism for the transmission of past event and memory through its monumental representation in the landscape. In this experience, it is possible to draw out the case of stone structures of Chui village in Mon district of Nagaland. The stone structures are located within 100 metres from the modern church. The church has played a vital role with the history of eliminating the age old practice and enforced a new understanding of sacredness and sanctity. However, the stone structures which were formerly a sacred and ritual space are equally appropriated as sacred like the church. Therefore, stone structures as visible and permanent continuously transmit this memory and create a relation with the past.

From the present study, it is imperative to note that stones can be appropriated differently by different societies. The stone erecting as a phenomenon and prolific in different cultures cannot be viewed within a monolithic understanding rather it encompasses different perceptions and embedded with multiple meanings. A particular society may appropriate the stones within the context of beliefs and practice of that society which can both be similar and different from another society. Stone therefore is a mechanism through which this knowledge is represented and interpreted consciously. It is a receptacle through which feelings, emotions, events and so forth are manifested and continuously passed down through stories and oral traditions. Therefore, stones as a past relic are a reliable source embedded in it with many stories.

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