Introduction

This work is an ethnoarchaeological study that aims to understand the cultural traits of the Southern Nagas inhabiting the four hill districts of Manipur State, North-east India. In the Indian context, the study of the tribal groups for purposes of understanding their behaviour is of great importance, inasmuch as such studies are an invaluable source of data for archaeologists, anthropologists and scholars in related disciplines and help in recording fast-vanishing cultural institutions and traditional practices. The documentation of these practices is utilized towards the understanding of the archaeological record of this region.

Towards the end of the 19th century, T.C. Hodson carried out research on the Southern Nagas. His invaluable book, The Naga Communities Of Manipur (Macmillan and Co., Ltd., St. Martin’s Street, London: 1911), still continues to attract attention and admiration. Subsequently, scholars worked on selected aspects of the Nagas and no comprehensive work exists till date. Five decades of political and cultural changes have led to many realignments, especially in the area comprising the Naga communities of Manipur. Thus, communities like the Aimol, Anal, Chote, Lamgang, Monsang, Moyon, Tarao, etc. were earlier not classified as belonging to the Naga group. Hence, it is the endeavor of the present work to update the shortcomings of previous workers and to understand the cultural complexities of the various Naga communities of Manipur State.
THE STUDY AREA

The Nagas are a group of more than forty Mongoloid communities speaking Tibeto-Burman languages, who inhabit a contiguous landlocked country between the longitude 93° E to 97° 24' E, and latitude 23°42' N to 29°30' N, and is enclosed between China, India and Myanmar (Naga Students’ Federation 1995). The Nagas are, at the moment, placed under five administrative areas in two countries, namely, Arunachal Pradesh (Northern Nagas), Assam (Western Nagas), Nagaland State (Central Nagas), Manipur State (Southern Nagas), and Myanmar (Eastern Nagas).

The Southern Nagas, whose culture forms the subject of this research, consist of all the sixteen Naga communities of Manipur. They are (1) Aimol, (2) Anal, (3) Chiru, (4) Chothe, (5) Kharam, (6) Lamkang, (7) Mao, (8) Maring, (10) Monsang, (11) Moyon, (12) Poumai, (13) Tangkhul, (14) Tarao, (15) Thangal, and (16) Zeliangrong (United Naga Council: LUI-NGAI-NI: 1995). Of these, the Tangkhul is one of the most dominant groups, and thus has been chosen as a model for an ethnoarchaeological study of the Southern Nagas. The Naga communities are concentrated mainly in the four hill districts of Manipur, namely, Chandel, Senapati, Tamenglong, and Ukhrul. Of the total land area of 22,327 sq. km of Manipur, the Nagas are in possession of 15,519 sq. km. The altitudes of these hills varies from 833 m to 3017 m above mean sea level.

The following regions have been taken into consideration:

(i) Ukhrul: It has an area of 4544 sq. km, and a population of 109,952. The Tangkhul Nagas inhabit this district.

(ii) Senapati: It has an area of 3271 sq. km, and a population of 206,933. The Kharam, Mao, Maram, Poumei, and Thangal Nagas inhabit this district.
(iii) Chandel: It has an area of 3313 sq. km, and a population of 70,734. The Anal, Chiru, Chote, Lamkang, Monsang, Moyon, and Tarao Nagas inhabit this district.

(iv) Tamenglong: It has an area of 4391 sq. km, and a population of 85,572. The Zeliangrong Nagas inhabit this district.

Aims of the Study and Methodology

The main aim of the present study is to record the various ethnographical aspects of the Nagas in general and the Southern Nagas in particular from the perspective of Ethnoarchaeology with the Tangkhul Naga community serving as a model. Besides the attempt to correlate the findings with the cultures of other neighbouring groups, the basic reason behind this research work is to understand and interpret material data better.

The study area, that is, Chandel, Senapati, Tamenglong, and Ukhrul districts of Manipur, had been surveyed and explored intensively for four seasons in between 1993 and 1997 (October & November 1993, April-September 1994, October-December 1995, and November 1996-February 1997). Detailed survey sheets are prepared in order to document all possible facets of their culture. These included their systems of governance, religion, settlement and subsistence patterns, social background, technology, cultural relics, and ecology. Care was taken to interview a number of tribal elders, specially septuagenarians and octogenarians; people from different age groups, representing all the Naga groups of Manipur State. Photographic documentation of important cultural events and of their material culture has also been taken. Above all, an attempt has been made to correlate these findings with traditional practices of other neighboring Naga communities and Southeast Asian peoples.
Results

This is the first comprehensive work on the Southern Nagas which brings together a wide range of evidence to put forward a complete picture of their culture in the region under study. As a result of this work, it was noted that the Nagas came to their present habitat from Southern China via Northern Thailand. Taking into consideration the area under study, it was noted that each village has a simple political organization with a ruling chief acting in consultation with village council. Further details regarding the political structure was also delineated. Aspects of the social and religious life were also highlighted and support evidence provided by previous scholars. A detailed analysis of their economic life, technological organization, and settlement patterns was also undertaken, which will be of importance to field archaeologists if and when they go for reconstruction of models to understand archaeological record.

Organization of the Dissertation

The thesis is divided into eight chapters:

Chapter one, INTRODUCTION, provides background information on the present research including the terms used such as ethnoarchaeology etc. It also provides an introduction to the study area, and puts forward the aims of the study and methodology adopted.

Chapter two, GEOGRAPHICAL FACTS, deals with the physical features, minerals, environment, and flora and fauna of the study region.

Chapter three, ETHNIC BACKGROUND, discusses the origin of the Nagas, their relationship with the people of Southeast Asia and
discusses issues related to anthropometry, and general physical and linguistic characteristics of the community.

Chapter four, POLITICAL ORGANIZATION, describes the prevalent mode of chieftainship, village administration, regional organization, disputes and warfare, and the dormitory system.

Chapter five, SOCIAL PRACTICES, provides information on festivals, coiffure, clothing and adornment, tattooing, division of time, dreams and omens, and feasts of merit.

Chapter six, RELIGION, deals with ways of worship, birth and naming ceremonies, rites and sacrifices, and mortuary practices.

Chapter seven, SETTLEMENT AND SUBSISTENCE PATTERNS, dwells at length on the settlement pattern, agriculture, technology, manufacture of pottery, fishing and hunting, and food habits.

Chapter eight, CONCLUSION, presents the results of the research, and discusses the scope for further studies.