CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION
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8.1. RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

In this thesis, an attempt has been made to study cultural traits of the Southern Nagas inhabiting the four hill districts of Manipur State, Northern India. An important aspect of this research lies in the use of ethnoarchaeology, by which the material culture of the Nagas is extensively documented and used as a source of analogy for reconstructing lifeways are fast vanishing. This work is important in so far it documents these rapidly vanishing traditions, items of material culture and even ethnobotanical data.

Over a period of five years, the seventeen Naga communities of Manipur which comprise the Southern Nagas were studied. Of these, the Tangkhul is one of the most dominant groups, and thus 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, viz, Chandel, Senapati, Tamenglong, and Ukhrul, which together constitute the study region. Of the total land area of 22,327 sq. kms of Manipur, the Nagas are in possession of 15,519 sq. kms (United Naga Council: Lui-Ngai-Ni: 1995). The altitudes of these hills vary from 833 m to 3017 m AMSL.

The study area was intensively explored over a period ranging from 1993 to 1997. Detailed survey sheets were prepared in order to document all possible facets of their culture. Naga system of governance, religion, settlement and subsistence patterns, social background, technology, cultural relics, and ecology were studied in detail. The Southern Nagas were also compared with the Hmong and Lisu communities of northern Thailand whose cultures the
The author studied for four months at a stretch starting from December 1997.

As a result of this work, it was noted that the Nagas possibly came to their present habitat from southern China via Chiang Mai area of northern Thailand. The influence which the mountainous regional physiography and climatic conditions has on settlement patterns was pointed out here. Taking into consideration the area under study, it was noted that each village has a simple political organization with a ruling chief in consultation with a village council that represents heads of clans. Further details regarding their political structure was also delineated. Aspects of the social and religious life were highlighted, and also support evidence provided by previous scholars like Hodson (1911) and Elwin (1969). Emphasis is laid on methods of warfare practised, which include motivations for the practice of head-hunting. In addition to this, codes which regulate every aspect of village life are delineated. The reasons for the erection of commemorative structures and burial practices are highlighted and thought to be of use for understanding the Megalithic phase in India.

A detailed analysis of their economic life, technological organization, and settlement patterns was also put forward. The study highlights the importance of the Naga subsistence economy which is based mainly on hunting-gathering. Tools and weapons employed and different methods used for hunting, fishing and trapping game, and collecting plant resources are discussed. In this respect, importance has been given to the collection of ethnobotanical data, which highlights exploitation and use of edible and non-edible plants. In addition to the political and social organization, craft specialization such as pottery manufacture and use is studied in detail. This was found to be of great importance from an ethnoarchaeological point of view.
This work presents a body of data which can be utilized by archaeologists and ethnographers for reconstructing past lifeways. In particular settlement and subsistence patterns, burial and commemorative practices and ceramic technology are of importance here. The Naga culture presents a wealth of information of immense use to archaeologists, ecologists and ethnographers. This thesis forms the first step of documenting this culture, keeping in mind it is potential for the construction of models which can be used for interpreting archaeological data.

8.2. Discussion on the Scope for Further Studies

From the experience I was fortunate to encounter, it is my opinion that there are tremendous avenues available for archaeologists in the Northeast, in particular the Southern Naga region. It must be realised that, owing to drastic changes taking place in the social environment, there is an acute need to record in detail the cultural heritage of the people in question. As such, one must endeavour to contribute one’s mite in preserving and rejuvenating the concerned culture through ethnoarchaeological and anthropological studies.