Chapter -1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Oral traditions are exceptionally rich source of knowledge among the Nagas. Nagas like the rest of the tribal communities of the northeastern region share a common feature of having only the spoken language with no script of their own. It was only from 19th century, when the region was annexed and brought into the fold of the colonial rule that the local languages began to transcribe using the Roman script (Aier. 2012:227). What was before is just the word of mouth, passed on from one generation to another. These oral narratives constituted the history of the Nagas. To better represent the Nagas’ pre-colonial past, it is imperative for any researcher to uncover through such local historical sources. Therefore it becomes necessary to decoding the past by innovating an unconventional method: the use of oral sources. Jan Vansina’s text, *Oral traditions: a study in historical methodology* (1965) is a crucial methodological intervention of how oral traditions can be an aided source in reconstructing a society with scarce written evidence. Vansina argues for the equal value of oral source of history with the written records. Naga tribes during the pre colonial period had multiple social and cultural interactions, which are intertwined in diverse sources. These records which are reposed in the material, oral and written text, must be studied conjunctively and comparatively to gain a more complete understanding of the past of Nagas.

Engaging oral sources became synonymous with writing a new kind of history. Oral traditions provide an emic perspective, an insider’s view, which, although subject to alteration through generational transmission, still offers a self-portrait of a society’s history (Mason 2000: 244). Thus, for the societies with no written records, and whose past is interwoven in its oral traditions, the incorporation of such narratives be considered together with archaeological, historical and other pertinent available evidence and the full weighing of all this evidence must establish that it tends to favour or disfavour a cultural affiliation. This thesis aims to put forward that an interdisciplinary approach is essential to account the pre colonial Naga history. It makes use of
the oral traditions as a bridge in between archaeological study and the available documentary sources in the historical reconstruction of the region.

Oral traditions are verbal memories that firsthand observers have passed along to others. These are actually historical accounts that are transmitted from one generation to the next through word of mouth. They can be in the form of praise poems and songs telling of the heroic deeds of an ancestor, a clan or a whole community of people. This oral accounts open up an important window onto the past and as noted by Schapera (Schapera 1962: 147) it even contain much details that may not be found in written record. Oral sources inform ones understanding of the past in myriad ways. It can provide formative lessons in history, society, as well as cultural and religious practices. The details they shared on geography and spatial terminology can drew attention to environmental, political and economic landscapes, and gives data on genealogies, migrations and trading patterns which could not have been obtained from any other source. In the view of Vansina, “Oral traditions constitute important primary hypothesis that have to be confirmed by independent evidence such as that uncovered by documentary or archaeological research.” (Vansina.1985:196)

However, one can argue that the investigation of oral tradition that relates ancient settings lacks a strong disciplinary infrastructure, and the historical veracity in oral traditions has been argued. Ronald Mason (Mason 2000) advocates for archaeology as a science and insists that if the oral traditions/ histories of indigenous societies are not testable in the manner of archaeological hypothesis, they should be rejected. Mason citing Lenclud (1997: 62) states that “…societies that do not write their history produce narratives about the past that are exempt from critical scrutiny ,…..these narratives cannot [Therefore] assume the function of reflexivity that are associated with historical consciousness. In this sense, their history is tradition not because it is oral or undeveloped, but because it is shut off inside a lived relationship to the past and consequently to itself” (Mason 2000: 263). On the other end, it favours a more humanities like archaeology as cultural history, arguing for the inclusion of indigenous accounts of the past (Echo – Hawk. 2000)

We cannot totally deny or accept oral tradition as an aid for archaeological reconstruct but, as Whitely (2002: 413)commented towards a more thoughtful position we can come to “a middle
ground that retain epistemological rigor and the capacity for analytical judgment, while being open to enhancement by legitimate oral tradition, considered as a fund of additional evidence and explanation. Over-emphasis on hard science risk neglecting vital evidence that might greatly enhance explanation of the past. But free for all relativism, where each account is as good as any other and is only accountable to criteria of judgment”. These oral traditions if treated seriously may yield a whole new area of inquiry, which supported by known ethnographic facts, could be the impetus for a different kind of culturally focused archaeological research and in the process, entirely new, and explanatorily rich line of archaeological research may emerge. (Whitely 2002: 413)

1.2 Use of oral traditions in archaeological researches- a global perspective

By far the greatest amount of work linking oral testimony to the archaeological record has taken place in the New World, particularly America and Australia (Moshenska 2007: 91). Legislation to protect Native American and Aboriginal sites from destruction or plunder has led to a greater level of dialogue between indigenous peoples and archaeologists, and attempts at reconciliation and mutual understanding. One of the central parts of this strategy is the appreciation of indigenous oral traditions as historical sources of value in the interpretation of past landscapes, environments and events. (Mason 2000, Echo – Hawk 2000)

The first archaeologists to work in the American Southwest had a keen interest in the relationship between Native American oral traditions and the archaeological record. Archaeologists such as Victor Mindeleff, Frank Hamilton Cushing and Jesse Walter Fewkes, by the end of 19th century, routinely collected information about Native American oral traditions and used it in their research to help interpret the chronology, function, and cultural affiliation of the archaeological sites they investigated. However, in the early 20th century many cultural anthropologists like Kroeber (1917) Lowie (1967) began to discount the historical value of Native American oral traditions. Archaeologists were influenced by the attitudes of cultural anthropologists, and for many decades, oral traditions were generally ignored in archaeological research. (Anyon, Ferguson, Jackson, and Lane 1996)

The final decade of the last century, however saw a dramatic increase in interest among scholars in exploring oral literatures for information about ancient events. Renewal of interest in the
Historicity of Native American oral traditions grew with the works of e.g. Wiget (1982) Teague, (1993) Bahr et al. (1994). Indicative of this work is Teague's analysis of the oral traditions of the O'Odham and Hopi, oriented toward increasing our understanding of the cultural events and processes of the period before documentary history in southern Arizona. Teague (1993:436) concluded that, "oral histories can be shown to conform to...archaeological evidence to an extent not easily attributed to the construction of an after-the-fact explanation for the presence of numerous ruins throughout the region. These histories reflect direct knowledge of events in prehistoric Arizona." Her article represents the renewed respect archaeologists are beginning to afford native accounts of traditional history. Such publications integrate knowledge derived from archaeology with knowledge from oral traditions, revealing in some cases, vastly richer deceptions of human history that can be uncovered through the archaeological record alone or oral traditions alone. (Echo- Hawk 2000)

The use of oral traditions as part of the direct historical approach in African archaeology has become a popular method. Schmidt (1990) has reasoned three folds for the usage of oral tradition in African archaeology. Firstly, on the cultural change of the society only during the last century, thus more intact historical systems of thought then many other areas of the world which have a longer history. Secondly, as the society began to become literate towards the beginning of 20th century, the African archaeologist had to look at the indigenous history primarily coming from oral accounts recorded by educated elites, missionaries, travellers and administrators. Thirdly, the richness of oral traditions about specific places and events in history has inevitably enticed historical archaeologist to use such sources in locating and in explicating the function and meaning of sites. All these make a congenial environment for the use of oral traditions in African studies.

The 1960’s and 1970’s were marked by great optimism for the potential integration of archaeology and history. This could partly be attributed to significant advances in the study of African oral traditions, mainly by Jan Vansina’ work Oral tradition: A study in historical Methodology (Vansina 1965), Oral historiography (David 1982) and Joseph Miller’s The African past speaks: Essays on Oral tradition and history (Miller 1980).
Vansina formulated an interdisciplinary approach that used archaeology, oral traditions, historical linguistics and other ethnographic data in African history (Vansina 1965; 1967) and unquestionably provided the earliest, best reasoned justification for the use of oral traditions with archaeology. Location of sites through the use of oral traditions on the landscape (Vansina 1965:72) was one of the earliest examples. In the recent years a great deal of messages about African values, value systems and history was conveyed using proper usage of oral traditions. Ogundele’s Settlement Archaeology (1989), Andah’s Oral Traditions and West African Culture History (1979), Law’s Traditional History (1973), Afigbo’s Oral Tradition and The Political Process In Pre-colonial Nigeria (2002), Trigger’s, Beyond History: The Methods of History (1968), are some indispensable examples highlighting the value of oral traditions in the reconstruction of African History.

There is no doubt that a real history is embedded in oral traditions, and that this is the same history that archaeologists study. Oral traditions contain cultural information about the past carefully preserved and handed down from generation to generation within a tribe. The archaeological record contains material remains of past human behavior that provide physical evidence for many of the same events and processes referred to in oral traditions. Since oral traditions and archaeology have inherent limitations, combining them in research can create knowledge that goes beyond what is possible using either source by itself.

1.3 Oral traditions as a source in archaeological reconstruct of the Nagas

Discussing the oral traditions of the Ao Nagas, the Ao Nagas talks of “Longterok otsu” (‘long’- stone, ‘terok’- six, ‘otsu’- story, Aos are believed to have originated from the six stones) an oral tradition of how they came into being. This oral tradition of Longterok is linked to the Ao Naga ancestral village of Chungliyimti (presently in Tuensang district of Nagaland, inhabited by the Sangtens). The oral narrative of “longterok” is so central to the Ao world-view that in Ao folklore, songs, narratives and all other customary practices are traced to Longterok. The oral narrative of Longterok and Chungliyimti among the Aos tells of the segmentation of the society into clans and kinship groups, origin of village polity, cultural and social customs and beliefs, warfare and the details of the migrations of the Aos. From Chungliyimti, Aos settled for a short period at Aonglenden and then at Koridang (oral narratives on settlement at Aonglenden and
Koridang discussed in later chapters). It is from Koridang that the Aos separated to different village settlements, presently dividing it into 6 ranges, from the highest- Ongpangkong range, to the lowest, Japukong and Tsurangkong range (also the youngest range), which borders with the plains of Assam (the division of ranges was done during the colonial period for better administration). These oral narratives gives details of geographical markers, place names, genealogy, contacts, exchanges and names of persons, giving testimony of the historical events. It helps us in understanding the early settlement pattern and the driving forces behind the selecting and settling in an area as well as the reason of abandoning them (in some cases). Whenever settlement is made, it involves involvement of people and the clans, adaptable environment and landscape for economic practices, availability of water resources, capacity of the land to hold the population and defence. While studying the pre colonial history of the Nagas, it is important, as Sharma (2006) has pointed out the need to develop a concept of history which goes beyond information and description and tries to analyze the existing data on economy and society in a manner which reflects upon stages of development and socio-economic formations.

The aim of this thesis is to examine the spatial relationship in the form of settlement pattern, trading contacts, environment and the like and to work out on how it relates to social, political and economic structure and what role it plays in determining and in changing these structures of the early Nagas. It will be an attempt to determine the social significance of material artefacts.

Oral tradition of the Aos talks of certain groups like Nokranger, Molunger who settled in different parts of the region and subsequently dispersed to different areas. There is an unclear history of such groups which are greatly mentioned in the oral narrative. According to JP Mills in his book Ao Naga, these stories give rare glimpses into the early history of the hills, and throws light on the complicated question of the origin and composition of the Naga tribes. The present research tries to trace one such group; Molunger, by locating and conducting archaeological excavation at one of its habitation sites, viz. Noksenkeni (longjang village, Mokokchung district). The oral narratives of such dispersed groups along with the archaeological data are collaborated in identifying its historical content, its relations with the neighbouring Ao community, and calibrate its time period (through radio carbon dating), which indirectly reflects upon the history of the Nagas.
The historical validity of such events of migration and settlements of village sites, dispersal of different groups, its settlements and abandonments of sites, the contacts and interactions within and outside the region of the Nagas and such other events, as recorded in the oral tradition are referred to as legitimate oral documents by the Aos in reconstructing their past history and in justifying various social and cultural practices. Such narratives are continuously scrutinised and in the event of any disagreements, validation and verification of the story is sought from the relevant village (Aier: 229). These oral narratives of the Nagas are subject to verification by the community, whose history unfolds through a narrative. The thesis supports the use of oral tradition by linking it to a shared past, and supports the argument by Aier (2012:228) that they are not totally ‘shut within a lived past and to itself’ (Lenclud 1997: 62), but continuing to have a relevance even in the present.

1.4 Intersection of written records

Written documents deserve comparable status along with oral sources as records that can be analysed for valid evidence about human history. Most of the hill area societies in the northeast like the Khasi- Jaintia and Garo societies, various Naga tribes, tribes of Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh, have a problem of reliable historical evidence. For the reconstructions of the history of these societies as Sharma (2006: 84) rightly pointed out, it would be innovative in interpreting the oral sources and making use of ethnography along with the information from the available sources from the surrounding areas with which these societies needs must have had economic interactions, which will open up new frontiers of studies in the society and economy of these areas.

Reconstructing the pre colonial history of the Nagas, requires the comparative use of archaeological, oral evidence and the available literary documents, combining in such a way that, between them, they lead to a new line of understanding that would not have been possible through either source alone. Secondly, a fruitful tack would be to apply the principle of convergent verification which implies that, facts or findings should be affirmed through recourse to multiple and independent strands of information and through the application of multiple methods of investigations (Mason 2000:262). The following thesis will show how the
interpretations emerge at the point the evidence contained in the three data sets (oral tradition, literary documents and archaeology) converge and how oral traditions serve as the link between the material and literary sources.

Pre-colonial northeast saw three important monarchies in the Bhramaputra valley, in Manipur and in Tripura flourished during the 13th to the 18th century. These monarchies maintained their own official records, which remained as an important source for researchers working at this period in the region. The Ahoms ruled the Brahmaputra valley for almost six hundred years endowed with a well developed political sense, recording the chief events of the reigns in its officially compiled chronicles called as the Buranjis. This gives not only useful information about the various aspects of Ahom rule in Assam but also about its interactions with the various hill tribes in and around the Ahom territory.

Besides the Buranjis, the monographs written by British ethnographers and administrators in the late 19th and early 20th century becomes an important source of reference. Writings by Hutton (1921 a and b, 1923) and Mills (1926) were the first, compiling monographs of the Naga people in a comparative manner. Later American sociologist and missionary Smith (reproduced 2002 originally 1925) and German anthropologist and administrator Führer-Haimondorf (1969) did additional studies. Even though there are limitations to their writings with Naga perspectives, any writings on the Nagas today will have to rely on these monographs.

Writings on the history of Assam during the pre independence era like for example the works of Sir Edward Gait, A history of the Assam (1905), Alexander Mackenzie's The North East Frontier of India (originally published in 1884 under the title “History of the Relations of the Government with the hill Tribes of the North East Frontier of Bengal”) is also useful in providing some information on the early colonial Naga society and economy, its contact and relationships with the neighbouring regions.

The Nagas mentioned in the chronicles of the Ahoms (1228-1819) were politically with reference to only the northern segments, viz., the Nocte, Wancho, Konyak, Lotha and the Ao (Imchen 2006: 119.) The Buranjis of the Ahoms, referred to the Naga tribes with whom they came into contact by their Assamese names like the Paniphatias, the Torphatias, the Doyingias,
the Hatigurias, the Asringayas, or the Charmgayas, the Dopdarias, the Namsangias, the Tablungias, the Jaktungias, the Mulungias, the Namsangias, the Tablungias, the Jaktungias, the Mutons, or Kulungs, the Paniduarias and the Borduarias. According to Gait (2011: 325), during the early days Nagas were distinguished by the names of the passes through which they descended to the plains. These names do not have any relation to the names used in present time. This research also tries to look into the aspects of the Naga Ahom relations by identifying the names mentioned in the Buranjis with the present Naga groups or villages. Secondly, there must have been some sort of relationship between the two, the research will try to bring out the kind of relationship the two had taking into account the text, oral narratives and the archaeological source. It also attempts to confirm the written text and oral narratives from the archaeological sources of material study.

Another important aspect of the thesis is to dwell into the impact towards the Naga society and economy by having contacts with the lowlands (Ahom) and how their territory and identity was maintained. This research will explore, albeit briefly, the role of ethnic group boundary maintenance in interpreting indigenous responses to Ahom contact. It shall examine the ways with which the ethnic behaviour is expressed in the material record and how it is identifiable in the archaeological record. Also, in contrast to isolated setting, intergroup interaction can be seen to promote the foundation of social group identities and boundaries.

1.6 Ahoms interaction with the Nagas according to literary sources

The Buranjis of the Ahoms reveals contact of Sukapha with the Nagas, on the slopes of the Patkai hills, when the Tangsas, Noctes and Wanchos of Tirap District (Arunachal Pradesh) offered opposition to the advance of the Ahoms. This is one of the earliest contacts of the Nagas with the Ahoms which took place in 1228 and throughout their rule these kinds of clashes continued. It was through the Naga hills the Ahoms made their way to the Brahmaputra valley and it was through these hills they had to maintain relations with Burma. Any unwarranted attack from the east was through this route. Thus the Naga Hills were a strategic area for the Ahoms. The Ahom ruler therefore had to be on constant guard on this frontier in order to avert any foreign attack. To deal with such group of people, the Ahoms might have tried to maintain a
cordial relationship for their economic and political benefit (Gait 2011: 336) “since the route that lay through the Naga country to Burma was very much important both for strategic and other reason” (Devi 1968: 43). The policy of the Ahoms for the Nagas was no doubt a policy of conciliation backed by the display of force and in most cases even rewarding the rebellious Nagas, when they made their submission, with presents. Thus the Ahoms adopted a conciliatory policy with the Nagas and most of the tribes around them (Bhuyan 1990: 33).

Nagas use to swooped down constantly and looted villages lying within Ahom jurisdiction. The Ahom kings retaliated by directing military forces into the hills. Violent battles ensued, killing or capturing a large number of hill people. More often, however, the Ahom army would find the hostile village completely deserted, as its inhabitants, not keen on confronting the superior Ahom forces, had already taken refuge in the jungle or moved to higher altitudes. The Ahom army was usually able to recapture some of the stolen goods, and took revenge by setting the abandoned village ablaze. Yet hill peoples regrouped quickly and their thatched houses were quickly rebuilt; it was only a matter of time before they gained sufficient strength to pillage the plains again (Devi 1968). In order to ensure safety of the frontier of the kingdom, the Ahoms action whenever any disturbances took place in the frontier (Devi: 21). A significant aspect of this was the institutionalization of the Duar. The duar (literally ‘gate’) was a significant aspect of the Naga-Ahom relationship. Each duar comprised clusters of villages and was directly linked by roads to the Ahom capital. There were fourteen such Duars covering the Nocte, Wancho, konyak, Phom, Ao and Lotha segment. They were known in several groups according to the names of several duars through which they came down to the plains. The Naga tribes bordering the plains were in constant contact with the plains through these duars for trade purposes. They carried on trade in their hill products like cotton, betel-leaves, ginger yam and salt and in exchange for them carried back the articles in which their hills were deficient. Thus the Nagas derived considerable profit from their economic relations with the Ahoms. By April 1861, the duars were closed to the Naga traders by order of the commissioner of Assam (Mackenzie 2003: 97).

The Ahoms also adopted the system of posa and khat to the Nagas. Realizing that the hill people raided the plains to seize goods which did not exist in the hills or were available in only small quantities, the posa system, therefore, permitted the hill people to obtain a share of the produce
of the fertile lands of the duar areas. The system of Naga-Khats was where revenue-free lands and bheels (fishing waters on the plains) along with fisherman paik, were granted to the Nagas. The Naga- Khats were managed for the Nagas by Assamese agents, called Kotokis, who were posted by the Ahom government. The kotokis superintended the land held by the Nagas and made what they could out of it in return. The Nagas in their trading expeditions used to deposit their weapons at the houses of the kotokis and reclaimed them while returning to the hills. The Naga Khat holder’s record also shows that, there were three villages under Mokokchung District that hold khat as well as enjoyed khat money since the British rule till 1973-74. The name of such khat holders in Mokokchung District were Changki, Longsemdang and Nokpu village.

Though clashes with the Nagas were a matter of common occurrence it was only with those villages which gave trouble to the Ahoms. In general, Nagas were never subjected under the Ahoms (Gait 2011: 314; Bhuyan 1990: 34) rather they were one of the most trusted and favoured by the Ahoms (J.N. Phukan: personal communication 2012) who were even recruited to important Ahom administrative posts of Barphukan. There is no occasion when a tribe invoked the help of a foreigner against Ahom rule. On the other hand, there are instances when a tribe or village invited the intervention of the Ahom government in its inter-tribal conflicts. The Ahoms thus dealt with the Nagas in diplomacy and adopted the conciliatory policy in the case of the Nagas. (Bhuyan 1974: 34)

1.7 Significance of oral tradition in Archaeological research in Nagaland – “Longterok” and excavation of Chungliyimti

One of the earliest documented ethnographic records of Chungliyimti is the work of J H Hutton in his *Diaries of Two Tours in Unadministered Area East of the Naga Hills* (1986) where he pointed out its archaeological potential. What followed much later was the archaeological exploration carried out at Chungliyimti by V. Nienu (1974) reporting the evidence of stone, bowls, pestles, stone ball, hammer stone, querns, mullers, whorls, scrapers, cores, flakes, terracotta and stone smoking pipes. Later in the year 1992, under the guidance of T C Sharma and M Alemchiba, the Dept. of History and Archaeology, North East Hills University, Kohima Campus and the Directorate of Art and Culture, Govt. of Nagaland, undertook archaeological
study of the site, which reported evidence of grinding stones, spindle whorls, pottery vessels, beads of rear stones and earrings (IAR 1992). In the year 2008 a major research program was initiated jointly by the Anthropological Society of Nagaland and the Directorate of Art & Culture, Govt. of Nagaland where archaeological excavation was carried out at Chungliyimti, under the guidance of Tiatoshi Jamir.

The excavation revealed a settlement that was inhabited from ancient up to modern times. The tool assemblage from a stratified context is predominantly lithic with being iron rarely used. Evidence of a few unfinished stone celts (both sandstone and phyllite), it would appear that the technique of tool grinding was known to the early inhabitants of Chungliyimti. Beads made from glass, tile, jade, agate, amethyst, carnelian and poshan, spallite celts and iron tools were also reported.

Pottery evidence indicates a complex of traditions ranging from coarse, simple and twisted cord marked wares, basket impressed and geometric and paddle impressed design as well as some wheel made pottery. Besides the wheel-made variety, trading in hand-made pottery is further known by the presence of a few uncommon pottery types such as the perforated ware, the ‘wash’ type, and the appliqué and punctated types.

Evidence from flotations samples revealed charred remains of both wild *Oryza* sp (cf. *nivara*); *Oryza* sp (cf. *rufipogon*) and cultivated rice (*Oryza sativa*) and millet (*Setaria* sp.). In addition there was also presence of introduced cereals such as wheat (*Triticum aestivum*) and barley (*Hordeum vulgare*). Radio carbon dating of the site was carried out from the charcoal sample, assigning a date of 980-1061 A.D (Aier and Jamir 2009). Besides Chungliyimti there are various ancestral settlement sites which have been dated (Radio carbon) in Nagaland like Khusomi (530+–40 (BP), Khezakeno(500+–50 (BP), Phor (Old Phor 230+– 60 (BP) cal.AD 1640-1680) New Phor 1980+–40 (BP) cal. 30BC-60 AD), Laratvu 1170+–60 BP cal. AD690-1000) and Laruri village having rich oral sources behind them. (Aier 2014:233)

Thus oral traditions incorporate the cultural knowledge of many ancestors at multiple levels of signification. Similarly, archaeological sites incorporate a complex record of past human
behavior embedded in artifacts and archaeological deposits. Both oral traditions and archaeology thus constitute sources of knowledge that have intricate structures that must be systematically and carefully analyzed in terms of their own internal logic in order to use them in scholarly research.

1.8 Methodology of the research

- The Ao Naga villages which had contacts with the Ahoms, were studied in detail to understand the cultural contact and its influence.
- Attempts have been made to use oral tradition in identifying and exploring ancestral sites and sites which are known to have had contacts with the Ahoms.
- Literary sources which are in Ao vernacular, the early colonial ethnographic and scholarly works of the area, the Ahom Buranjis etc. were referred.
- Intensive village to village survey and systematic archaeological explorations around those areas which are referred in oral narratives were documented in greater details for checking the veracity of the evidence.
- Archaeological excavations were undertaken on some of the potential sites for cultural sequence, collecting material evidence in stratified context which includes botanical and faunal remains for the reconstruction of human behaviour, subsistence and environmental reconstruction of the region.
- Collections of artefacts were made through field expeditions during explorations and excavations of the sites which were analyzed in detail for interpreting the past.
- The chronological frame of the sites is fundamental to any further interpretations of cultural succession and hence charred grains and charcoal samples were collected from excavations for Absolute dating

1.9 Outcome of research

The research reconstructed some aspects of the pre colonial society of the Ao Naga using the data originating from oral narratives, literary text and archaeological material evidence. A better understanding of Naga-Ahom relations with special reference to socio-economic and political history has become possible using multiple lines of evidence from these sites and region. This has in addition also helped bridging the gap between the Ahom kingdom and the hill tribes from
the historical perspective. The dynamics of oral tradition in reconstruction of the past has once again been reiterated by the present investigations undertaken by the candidate in tribe of the Aos in Nagaland.

Not much work has been done in the region where sources like the oral tradition and literary sources are corroborated in the study of archaeology to understand the society and economy of the Nagas during the pre colonial period. Though preliminary in nature, this research is one of the first works of its kind, where a multidisciplinary approach has been employed by making use of the data sets from archaeological investigations, oral traditions and written text. These three becomes indispensible companions to bridge the divide between the pre colonial and colonial history of the Nagas. Coupling oral traditions and the text with the archaeological material evidence, it has become possible for recovering ephemeral sites providing basic data bank on the historical material culture, and understanding their spatial relationships with material culture.

The material culture, like the style and forms of ceramics form the important component in order to recognize the probable economic development, study on the cultural contact and interaction of the people, within and outside the region (with the plains in the lowlands), which eventually has led to reconstruct some aspects on the early Naga society and economy during the pre colonial Naga period. New insights and discoveries can be obtained at the point where archaeological, oral tradition and documentary sources meet and when the different strands of evidence come together and are verified in a rational explanation. The integration of the data that are emerging from material culture through excavations, literary sources, both contemporary and their commentaries and folklores as well as oral narratives which are actually a fossilised chain of thoughts deeply ingrained in the mind of the people who have been inhabiting the region for a very long period of time “since times immemorial”. It is this very set of data that can only address the issue of reconstruction of the past, especially for the region where oral narratives are the predominant “literary source” to compliment ancient written documents in the region.