CHAPTER VI
Many scholars from different parts of the world made attempts to trace the origin of the megalithic monuments which are found in various parts of the world. Of them, Glyn Daniel, Alexandre Bertrand, Baron de Bonstetten, General Fidherbe, James Ferguson, T. Eric Peet, Heinach Solomon, De Mortillet, Elliot Smith and W.J. Perry may be mentioned. Some of them want to place its origin to a people who spread from north to south. Some others consider its origin to some races who had come in contact with the Romans. While another scholars suggested that megalithic cultures originated in different parts of the world.

Discussion on the origin and interrelations of these megalithic monuments has only become possible, naturally, as their existence and distribution was gradually appreciated. It was the European megalithic monuments that were first known. As early as 1864 the French archaeologist Alexandre Bertrand argued that megalithic monuments in Europe were all built by one people who spread from north to south; and the following year, when the Baron de Bonstetten published his famous
In 1872 General Faidherbe drew the attention of archaeologists to the Algerian megalithic monuments; he too maintained that all megalithic monuments from Africa to northern Europe were the work of one people who moved southwards from the Baltic. In this same year James Fergusson published his Rude Stone Monuments in all Countries. He had become interested in megaliths as part of his general study of architecture, and was convinced that they all were part of one stylistic phase of architectural history. Fergusson confessed that upto 1872 'no royal road has been discovered which leads to an explanation of our megalithic antiquities', but was nevertheless convinced of one thing, 'that the style of architecture to which these monuments belong is a style, like Gothic, Greek, Egyptian, Buddhist or any other' and that the megalithic monuments of the world 'were generally erected by partially civilized races after they had come into contact with the Romans, and most of them may be considered as belonging to the first ten centuries of the Christian Era'.

Fergusson's dating was not accepted by many archaeologists, but his idea of architectural style rather than a migrating people as the linking factor was widely canvassed. Le Hottilet, in 1874, at the Stockholm Congress of Prehistoric
Archaeology, put forward the view that megalithic monuments in different parts of the world were due to the work of different people with different cultures, and what was diffused over the world was the custom of building such monuments and not the builders themselves. This idea of the spread of what may be termed a megalithic 'influence' was widely canvassed at the end of the nineteenth century, most people bringing this influence from the east Mediterranean western Asia, while Solomon Reinach reversed it and sent it eastwards from France.

In the present century the problem of the diffusion of megalithic monuments can be seen best against the general study of diffusion of culture to which archaeologists and anthropologists has given so much thought. Professor E. Eric Peet, when he wrote his *Rough Stone Monuments* forty years after James Fergusson, discusses the megalithic 'influence' or megalithic 'style' idea, but rejects it. After very careful consideration he says, 'it thus seems the most probable theory of the origin of the megalithic monuments is that this style of building was brought to the various countries in which we find it by a single race in an immense migration or series of migrations'. While advocating this view, Peet was unable to decide whence this migrating 'race' came from; the east, northern Europe, and Africa were all considered and the
negative conclusion arrived at that 'it is probable that the problem will never be solved'. Sir Grafton Elliot Smith and his pupil, W.J. Perry, who between them spent a lifetime in advocating that civilization was due to the spread of a master-race from Egypt, rapidly and easily incorporated the megalithic monuments of the world in their theses.

Archaeologists and anthropologists have not unnaturally reacted against the monocentric hyper-diffusionism of the Elliot Smith - Perry school, and there not many who today regard the megalithic monuments of the world as remains of wandering Egyptians. Nor is it possible to speak of a megalithic race, if the world race is used, as it should be, in its strict physical anthropological connotation of a group of people with heritable physical characteristics in common. The physical types associated with megaliths and buried in them differ widely, as we shall see, even in a small area like western Europe. But if we set aside the extravagances of a megalithic race in the physical sense, and what seems to most people the extravagancy of the migrating children of the sun from Egypt, there remains the question, are the megalithic monuments of the world the result of the spread of people (or influences) from one centre or are they not (Daniel, 1963: 23-25)?
To trace the origin of the Khasi and Naga megaliths, some scholars have taken recourse to hyper-diffusionist theories: H.N. Ivor Evans made a comparative study of the megalithic monuments found in Malay Peninsula, with those of Indonesia and North-Eastern India (Ivor Evans, 1927:101). He sees close parallels in the monoliths and the table stones found in all three regions.

AFFINITIES

Recently the problem has been put into fresh perspective by Wheeler's excavations in southern India, and by Gordon Childe's discussion of the Indian megaliths in relation to those of Europe and south-west Asia. It is indeed possible though not approved, that the porthole cists of the Indian Deccan are derived from those of western Asia, despite the disparities of time and place; but this does not necessarily imply world connexions between the structures in different parts of the world designated as megaliths, save the use of large stones, and that this use of large stones might well have arisen independently in different parts of the world. What is most important, is that we should not assume a connexion between two traits in two cultures unless we can prove that the traits are formally, constructionally, and functionally
identical, and can demonstrate the chronological and geographical possibilities of connexion. It is by no means impossible that megaliths originated in southern Europe and spread to India, Indonesia, and Japan; but before we can assess the different points of view about the unity or disunity of megaliths, we need careful analyses of the structures in different regions (Laniel, 1963:25-26).

Here our concern is with the megaliths found among different Naga groups of Manipur. F.M. Schnitger, who studied the megaliths of Nias in southern Sumatra, notes that the common factor of the 'feast of merit' ceremony ardently followed by the Nagas and Nias megalithic builders. By way of comparing the two regions of Nias and North-eastern Indian megalithic cultures, he notes that "even the most superficial consideration teaches us that the cultures of Nias is related to that of the Nagas of Assam. In both countries social life is largely dominated by the megalithic institutions and the necessary feast and ceremonies involved by them. In Nias this is much more true than in Assam, for among the Nagas there are only a few tribes (such as the Angamis), who possess a highly evolved megalithic culture. Among the Nagas as well as in Nias the accompanying assignment of rank assumes a prominent place. In spite of the differences which exist between the Nagas and
the people of Nias, the similarities between their megalithic cultures are so striking and are so numerous that there can be no doubt of their relation. They must at one time have had a common land of origin and this can have been nowhere but in the valley of the Irravaddy. . . Not only ethnologically but also anthropologically the people appear to be related. . . I am inclined to include Naga, Niassians, Dayaks, Phillipipnosos and Tormosians in one large group." (Schnitger, 1964: 145, 150, 152).

R. von Heine Geldern who wrote extensively on the relationship of the megalithic cultures of South-eastern Asia with those of North-eastern India, had pushed the hyper diffusionist theory to its extreme when he suggested that the erection of megaliths was part of a great primitive religious movement, which was sometimes undoubtedly carried by migrants, but was often passed from one tribe to another: "megalithic culture was promoted by a sort of prehistoric missionary activity" (Heine Geldern, 1935: 314-315).

Furer Haimendorf recognises that the megalithic culture of the Nagas represents a particularly ancient form of the megalithic complex so widely spread over South-eastern Asia; a form found only in a similar state of development on
a small island of Nias and perhaps on Luzon in Philippine islands (Haimendorf, 1935:215-222). He further draws a close similarity in the carving of a buffalo or mithun horn motif on the megalithic monuments of the Nagas and those found in Indonesia. To him, the carve heads are not merely ornamental but commemorative of animal sacrifices and thus their value is not only aesthetic but definitely symbolic. He agrees well with R. Von Heine Geldern in ascribing the symbolical character to the art of the early megalithic culture of Southeastern Asia as a whole. Prof. Haimendorf concludes that the idea associated with megalithic ritual for gaining prestige for the living and for establishing links with the souls of the dead are at the root of the megalithic cultures of Indonesia and thus suggests a unity of the megalithic complex extending from the Naga and Khasi hills over Nias and Sumatra to Flores, Ambon and Ceram. Haimendorf further observes that the megalithic complex found in Assam and in many other parts of Southeastern Asia appeared thus not as an accidental aggregation of various cultural elements, but as a well co-ordinated system of customs and beliefs, a philosophy of life and nature (Haimendorf, 1945: 74).

Walter Ruben (1939) inclines to the view that the custom constructing megalithic tombs reached India by way of Palestine and Persia in the early Iron age and one of its
branches moved eastwards as far as Chota Nagpur and the other moved into Southern India. He believes that the ancient Asian tombs and the megalithic cultures of the Mundas had a western origin and spread from there during the iron age further eastwards into Assam.

In a sense all megalithic practices are associated in one way or another with the cult of the dead all over the world. That itself is not a sufficient ground to establish close relationship between any two megalithic cultures having a common origin. Prof. Haimendorf admits of the fundamental differences between the Khasi and the Naga megaliths inspite of their typological similarities in the menhirs with a table stone in front as they served altogether divergent social and ideological functions. It is our view that we have to look into these social and ideological aspects of different megalithic cultures before aiming to establish togetherness or even a common origin.

Archaeological evidence has also been used to trace the origin and distribution of megalithic cultures in India and Southeastern Asia by Heine Geldern (1935:308) followed by Furer Haimendorf (1945:83). They identified the spread of the older neolithic tradition characterized by the shouldered
celt type with the Australoasiatic and the new or later quadrangular adze type with the Austronesian speaking groups in India. Furer Haimendorf argues that the position of the shouldered celt in the Indian context is not clear, but he agrees on the possibility of co-relation of the culture of the late neolithic celt with quadrangular section with the speakers of Austronesian languages. But so far there is no archaeological evidence available to support his theory and so it remains hypothetical.

So far it has not been possible to distinguish two separate cultural layers characterized by the neolithic shouldered adze and the late neolithic quadrangular adze types anywhere in Southeastern Asia, much less in India (Lani, 1960: 101-102; Sharma, 1967:126-28). So we have to wait fresh evidence from these regions to establish relationship between the neolithic and megalithic cultures in these two regions.

Various forms/types of megaliths found in Manipur among different Naga tribes, are associated with elaborate feasts of merit. In some cases these megaliths are accompanied by a series of feastings. Feasting by definition, is a major feature of the feast-of-merit. Such type of feast-of-merit are also performed by wealthy people in the Chin Hills.
of Burma and a pregnant cow or mithun is also sacrificed in one of the feasts as done by the Mao Nagas. The Chins do not erect stone monuments, but the house of the merit-seeker is adorned with certain long platforms and carved fences. Carved forked planks, to each of which is tied a sacrificial mithun, are erected in the front yard of the house. In Chin Hills, as among the Mao Nagas, feast is a means of raising the social status standing of a household, and it focuses on the propitiation of the household-spirit (Lehman, 1963:144,178 and 181).

According to H.R. Heekeren (1958) two separate megalithic cultures, the 'younger' and the 'older' were spread across Indonesia in prehistoric times. He also believed that the older type has survived in some places up to the present day. In his description of the older megalithic culture included dolmens used as sacrificial altars or as memorials, menhirs, uprights of wood or stone (sometimes in rows or circles, the intervening space often being used as a place of assembly or for dancing), the stone seats consisting of horizontal stone and one or more vertical ones as back supports, these seats being intended for the use of prominent living people, and the souls of the dead. Festivals associated with the monuments centred around the sacrifice of cattle, with forked
sacrificial poles of wood (and occasionally stone) use to te­
ther buffaloes about to be sacrificed. Paved roads and plat­
forms, round dwellings, and burial of the dead near dwellings
are other associated characteristics.

The 'younger' megalithic culture of Indonesia also
includes dolmens, together with stone sarcophagi and stone

cists used as graves, stone statues of ancestors, menhir sta-
tuettes, the art of weaving, beads of glass and cornelian,
and burial in flexed and extended positions (van Heekeren ,

Megalithic monuments are widely distributed in Indo-
nesia. Dolmens consisting of a flat horizontal stone resting
on one or more vertical ones are found in Nias, Sumba and Flo-
res, where they serve as memorials and/or as sacrificial altars
(Van Heekeren, 1958:66). The Okimaki/Okiamaki (dolmens) stone
monuments raised in connection with the peace negotiation over
head hunting after performing the last and the greatest ( in
the series of the feasts-of-merit) feasting ceremony, found
among the Maos (Ememais) may be compared with those dolmens of
Indonesia which were reported by van Heekeren. The villages on
Samosir island in North Sumatra also have high protective walls
with low narrow entrances (van Heekeren,1958:78), as in the
case of Mao, Maram, Liangmei and Pounais villages. Also on
Samosir, dolmens are arranged in circles and used as seats for chiefs. The "spirit seats" of Java and Bali, which consist of a thick horizontal stone and an upright for support of the back, may also have a similar ideology to the Kathi-Tokhu of Mao Naga, *rou Atu of Marams and Taideli Atu of Liangmei Nagas. Furthermore, Tutangkam, the Chosotu, Shenu Tusoms, Tisum, Chosouchu, Anhu and Maran Luncs, all upright stones found among the Anals, the Maos, Liangmeis, Marams, Fousais, Chakhesangs and Tangkhuls may also be compared with the untooled menhirs erected in Sumatra in honour of the wealthy living or of the dead.

CHRONOLOGY

The dating of the megalithic monuments was a very uncertain problem for a number of years. Initially the megalithic monuments of South India were supposed to be the work of the Druids and Scythians. As more and more archaeological data was available, the picture became more and more clear, especially on the basis of the excavation of Brahmagiri by Wheeler who proposed 200 B.C. as the probable date of megalithic culture. But Gordon and von F. Haimendorf push it back to a period between 1100 and 700 B.C., when according to them the iron using people came to South India from the Mediterranean.
It may be noted, in this connection that Aiyappan was also inclined to propose that the megaliths might go back to the neolithic times. A similar phenomenon seems to have happened in the far off Kashmir where the menhirs were found to have been erected towards the end of the neolithic period. An intermediate stage of the contacts between the megalithic and chalcolithic has been to push back the antiquity of the megalithism both in the south and north of India.

In Japan megalithic tombs were constructed well into historic times and written sources survive about them. The Emperor Kotoku in the middle of the seventh century A.D. prohibited the building of great stone tombs in Japan because of the waste of labour involved (Daniel, 1963:19).

Some megalithic monuments has been dated firmly on the basis of carbon-14 method of reckoning the chronology. In north east India, so far one C-14 date is obtained from the post neolithic site at Marakdola in Khasi hills by S. N. Hao. There a single cultural horizon has been noted using cord-grooves Kaolin pottery, in close proximity to the monoliths with table-stones in front. Carbon samples recovered from this cultural horizon at a depth of 1.3 metres from the surface, were tested (by the Sirbal Jahni Institute of Palaeobotany

This date is applicable to the site of Karakola alone and the date can not be extended to entire north eastern India even the Khasi hills as a chronological mark either for the beginning or for the end of the megalithic culture in this region. It can only indicate that megalithic culture was flourishing in the Khasi hills at least in the 13th century whereas in Manipur megalithism is practising till today by various Naga tribes inhabiting in different parts of the state.

So far chronology of the megaliths found in eleven different Naga tribes of Manipur is concerned, it is very difficult, at this stage, to give the exact date of their erection.

The megalithic sites in Manipur have not so far yielded any inherent evidence of chronology. Because the excavation of some megalithic sites in this area to understand the cultural status and chronology of the megaliths of Manipur was not possible, as the megalithic fields in every village under survey are considered as living monuments and they are protected by the villagers. The villagers are not inclined to accord
permission to dig or disturb the megalithic structures even in the deserted megalithic fields.

In this context, it is not possible to indicate an absolute date, for the megaliths found in various parts of the Manipur. However, as most authorities agree, the megalithic culture of Manipur is undoubtedly a prehistoric tradition and in this land-locked isolated corner of India, the prehistoric tradition has survived as a living tradition performing very significant socio-cultural role among the Naga tribes of the state. Even the influence of modernization and spread of Christianity among them have not been able to diminish the social value of the megalithic tradition among the Nagas of Manipur. The survival of the prehistoric tradition among the Naga societies of modern time seems to be possible because of the fact that erection of megaliths is found to be associated with the attainment of status in the society as well as the erection of stone monuments and their wooden substitutes still serve various other important social functions.