RESEARCH PAPER

Lest We Forget: An Estimate of Vikuosa Nienu’s Contribution to the Archaeology of Northeast India

Tiatoshi Jamir

The present paper is the outcome of a small documentary research that the author undertook since the year 2009 on the early life and academic foundation of an archaeologist – Vikuosa Nienu, wherein his contribution to the archaeology of the region seem like an unfamiliar one to the majority of us from Northeast India. But the value of his work stands out for two reasons – firstly, prior to this research, no archaeological investigations had ever been conducted in Nagaland beyond mere archaeological reconnaissance. It was a time when political situations in Nagaland were tense, and field archaeology at that time was considered problematic and challenging. Secondly, this pioneering work is laudable because of its theoretical underpinnings of three dominant paradigms – culture-historical, processual and behavioural archaeology where Nienu gained exposure as a student at the University of California, Berkeley and at the Grasshopper Pueblo Field School during the early 1970s. The paper thus, examines Nienu’s formative years at the School of Archaeology, New Delhi, and thereafter his field experiences, academic environment and the major paradigms that shaped his understanding of the region’s prehistory in the course of his later research.

Introduction

The author got to read the work of Vikuosa Nienu’s for the first time by sheer chance at a book fair during one of the Naga Horbill Festival. Part of the occasion also exhibited archival materials held in the possession of the Department of Art and Culture, Government of Nagaland for those interested researchers pursuing studies on Naga history, culture and society. Ever since curiosity grew to learn more of Nienu’s work from former colleagues in the Department of Art and Culture, retrieving information to the regions he travelled and the excavations he undertook. For those who knew him, he was often considered as a man preoccupied in his own idiosyncratic ideas but certainly Nienu was much ahead of his time! During the exploration programs to Phek and Kiphire Districts of Nagaland, in every remote village, his presence became all the more conspicuous after elders of the village narrated accounts of his early fieldwork in the area. Nienu’s association with the village and the observations he made and the insights he drew from their cultural memories to identify and excavate ancestral sites demonstrates his true spirit and training in anthropology. Barring from previous surface reports made on the ground stone tools by Barron (1872), Balfour (1929), Hutton (1924, 1926, 1928) and others, his report on the discovery of an archaeological site at Chungliyimti stood as the first pioneering effort followed by other sites.

Efforts were made to find Nienu’s work through the internet, looking for any traces of his past works and came across his PhD thesis titled *The Prehistoric Archaeology and Human Ecology of Nagaland* (1983), University of California, Berkeley along with a book *Thirty Years into Yesterday: A History of Archaeology at Grasshopper Pueblo* (2005) that mentions of his participation as a student at the Grasshopper Pueblo Field School in 1975, an excavation previously directed by Raymond Thompson, and later by William Longacre and Jefferson Reid.

Considering the political situation of Nagaland and the work undertaken by Vikuosa Nienu at that time, his pioneering research is commendable not only because the degree was earned from a University in the West at that time but also due to its theoretical underpinnings. His attempt to view the prehistory of Nagaland from an ecological perspective, the opportunity that he got to receive the New Archaeology package from eminent archaeologists such as William Longacre, John Desmond Clark, Glynn Isaac and others, his practical exposure to the processual paradigm, particularly at the Grasshopper dig site during the early mid-1970s and his experience as a graduate student at the University of California are noteworthy attentions that deserves more than a casual glance.

Early beginnings and training

At a time when Jawaharlal Nehru assumed political prominence, the 1940s and 50s were also a period that saw the emergence of Naga nationalism and the start of insurgency in Nagaland. The Naga National Council (NNC) memorandum to Lord Mountbatten, then Viceroy of India for an Interim Government and the declaration
of Naga Independence on August 14, 1947, thereafter leading to armed violence by the Indian military forces in the 1950s are few noteworthy events (Vashum, 2000; also see Iralu, 2000). Such was the political environment of Nagaland when Vikuosa Nienu grew up as a young boy in New Phek village.

Vikuosa Nienu was born in New Phek on February 2, 1942, but his parents later moved to Sohomi village between 1946 and 1947 to start a new church. Adino Phizo, daughter of A.Z. Phizo was his first school teacher. Completing his School education in Phek and Pfutsero town and graduation from the Southern Asia Bible College, Bangalore he initially served as the Headmaster of Ketsapo Middle English School (Phek District) for three years, thereafter as Extension Officer in the Office of Industries in 1966 posted in Wakching Village, Mon District, Nagaland. In 1967, he joined the Department of Art and Culture, Government of Nagaland (erstwhile Cultural Research & State Museum) and volunteered to oversee the archaeological projects (largely preservation) when D’Silva, the then Education Secretary, Government of Nagaland came up with the idea to send him to pursue further studies in Archaeology on deputation. Making the best of this opportunity, he undertook a Post-Graduate Diploma in Archaeology from 1969–71 at the School of Archaeology, New Delhi where Nienu received his field training. During the three seasons of excavation that he attended at Purana Qila, they were taught under the guidance of well-known figures like B.B. Lal and B.K. Thapar (Figures 1, 2 and 3). As part of the course, Nienu submitted a dissertation titled *The Neolithic Cultures of India* in 1971 for which he was awarded Gold Medal for topping the list in the Post-Graduate Diploma at the School of Archaeology. This changed his life as a dedicated professional archaeologist ever since.

On his return from the School of Archaeology, Nienu was appointed as the Investigator of Cultural Research and Officer-in-charge of Archaeology at the Department of Art and Culture till July, 1974. He then left for the United States in September, 1974 with a view to pursuing further studies.

**Studies at University of California (UC), Berkeley**

UC, Berkeley, saw Nienu obtaining two Master Degrees before joining the PhD program at the same Institute. The two degrees were in South & Southeast Asian Studies in 1976 followed by Ecological Anthropology in 1978. Getting the John D. Rockefeller Fellowship (later named Asian Cultural Council) between 1974–1982 doctoral degree was conferred to him on December 17, 1983 by the University of Berkeley, California. Nienu shares his academic experience upon his arrival to the US, “By the time I arrived in the US in 1974, the concept of “New Archaeology”, often identified as “American Archaeology”, was making giant strides, leading traditional “historical” archaeology of recording, cataloging, photographing, describing, fixing time-lines of, and preserving, the findings to a rigorous scientific approach to studying and solving/explaining the discoveries. The principal theorist was Lewis Binford, in the US. At the same time, in England, David Clarke was making headway whose major contribution was a rigorous application of General Systems Theory. In the US, a few important learning centers had already emerged in the forefront, namely the University of New Mexico (Binford’s), the University of Arizona (Longacre, etc.), and particularly at the UC Berkeley, headed by Desmond Clarke and Glynn Isaac. I was fortunate to be exposed to both the worlds of “traditional” archaeology and “New Archaeology.”... This was a giant step in the field of archaeological studies, generally, but more so person-

![Figure 1](V. Nienu’s own private collection).
ally that made a tremendous impact in my profession as an archaeologist” (Nienu, personal communication, 18 April 2016).

At UC Berkeley, he was trained under the tutelage of John Desmond Clark and Glynn Isaac, both British, and both considered stalwarts in Old World prehistoric archaeology, while George F. Dales, a leading expert on Harappan studies who led the South Asian Archaeology at UC was his research supervisor. Particularly inspiring to Nienu was the wide knowledge and experience of Desmond Clark in the fields of prehistory and ethnography that inspired him to become involved in these fields in a much more meaningful way. Equally important was Glynn Isaac from whom he benefitted stimulating personal academic discussions. Prof. Isaac was also largely instrumental in securing supporting grant from the L.S.B Leakey Foundation (1979–80) for Nienu. Moreover, he also received additional grants from Ford Foundation, Exploration Grant (1979–80) and The National Geographic Society, Exploration Grant (1979–80) for his field research and his visits to educational institutions and research laboratories across the United States.

From these supporting fellowships, he was able to support his formal training in field archaeology. Among his fond memories was his trip to Arizona in 1975 to participate in the excavation of the Grasshopper Pueblo, an Apache Native American site, where the excavation was directed by William Longacre and Jefferson Reid of the University of Arizona Archaeological Field School (Figure 4). This was a school well known for its field methods, particularly the analytical methods and techniques as well as the theoretical tools used for reconstructing human behavior and culture. Shortly afterwards, in 1976, he attended the excavation of a Middle Palaeolithic site at Tourtoirac, Périgueux, France under the leadership of Prof. Francois Bordes, University of Bordeaux, France. Excavation techniques were geared towards handling delicate sites (and remains), such as disturbed or damaged sites, especially dealing with early prehistoric remains. He also served as a Research Associate, Department of South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley from 1975–1980.

Nienu was fortunate to be exposed to both the Old World and the New World Archaeology at some of the best institutions in the world trained by the most prominent professionals in the field. Though Nienu knew Binford only through his writings, however, Michael Schiffer, a student of Binford, who was two years senior to him had the opportunity to interact during the Grasshopper Pueblo digs. Both Vikuosa Nienu and John Olsen attended the Grasshopper Pueblo digs and did their doctoral programs at the UC Berkeley, California.

Figure 2: V. Nienu (3rd from left, last row) with excavation staffs at Purana Qila along with B. K. Thapar (middle, first row) (V. Nienu’s own private collection).
Within two years of completing his studies at the UC Berkeley, Nienu was about to return to Nagaland and conduct a major research project sponsored by the National Science Foundation (USA), but the proposed project was derailed because the political situation prevailing at that time was extremely dangerous, restricting movements in Nagaland and surrounding regions. Nienu's accounts of the fieldwork reveals the conditions under which the work was carried out at that time: “Even while our digs were in progress at Mimi cave site, war broke out between a particular insurgent group and the Indian Armed forces, a couple of miles away from the cave site, forcing us to flee and this incident was not an exception. It happened frequently, disrupting our field schedules and our field objectives... The undesirable political situation in Nagaland took a nose dive the years following and continued unabated for the decades to come. This undesirable turn of events, especially having to abandon my pet project, funded by the National Science Foundation, disappointed no less which led me to seek employment outside of my profession where compensation was much more lucrative than in the academic fields, and have continued since” (Nienu, personal communication, 10 September 2014).

During the short meeting with Nienu on February 3, 2016 (Figure 5) he shared his personal views on why he quit archaeology. “I never intended staying on in the US; instead, I planned to return to Nagaland and start a College. But my wife Wonjano Ezung preferred to stay on for the sake of the children’s education. As for me, to teach on a regular basis in an American University, it was expected for one to specialize in New World Archaeology; in which case I was not!” What was also revealing was the source income, which Nienu honestly admits: “During those days, the salary of an Assistant Professor in a University in the US was not very attractive”. Disappointed with the failure to execute his major archaeological research program in Nagaland supported by the National Science Foundation and hence the need to seek better employment elsewhere, Nienu joined the US Chamber of Commerce as a representative from 1984–85 and was hired by a company named AMCOR, Petaluma, CA where he became the District Manager (1985–1995) and later became the Regional Director, Genutech, Capitola, CA from 2000–02 and thereafter the Director, Marketing and Sales, Berkeley Daily Planet, Berkeley, CA (2003–04). A major turn of event took over his life in 1997 after he had a fatal car accident but miraculously survived. In between these periods, he also taught briefly at the Golden Gate Seminary Department of Intercultural Studies (1994–96) and Department of History, Patten University (1995–96) as Adjunct Professor.

Even though retired, he still serves as an ENERGTEC Consultant, while at the same time he is also a member of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAA). He did teach at a number of universities, at their requests, but taught subjects other than archaeology, except at the University of California, Berkeley where he is visiting scholar of ethnoarchaeology since 2013. At other institutions, he taught mainly World Religion and Anthropology, Cross-Cultural Communications, and Multicultural Studies.

**Nienu’s contribution to NE Indian archaeology**

With a view to pursue further studies after his Master’s program at UC Berkeley, he commenced working on his doctoral research at the same University. While the data generated from Nienu’s field archaeology was inadequate to provide a comprehensive dataset for the entire...
region of Northeast India, yet his interpretative concepts and methods of explanation are well demonstrated in his work, which on presumption was mainly guided by his exposure to processual and behavioural archaeology during the Grasshopper Pueblo Field School.

Vikuosa Nienu’s experience at the Grasshopper was a turning point in his theoretical understanding of the subject. His knowledge of settlement system and site formation process is borne by his observations on the sites he investigated. In his background to the research, Nienu was aware of the importance of the region and its bearing to the prehistory of the region. What he also notes was the active political insurrection in the entire Northeast India region for the last several decades that severely affected fieldwork both in scope and success.

With no archaeological work undertaken prior to this research which initially stemmed between 1974–1980, Nienu’s doctoral research The Prehistoric Archaeology and Human Ecology of Nagaland (1983, also see Nienu, 2014; 2015) therefore, deserve few additional observations. His consideration of the region’s ecology suggests that his emphasis on the region from an ecological perspective cross-cuts administrative boundaries and a focus more towards a broader relevance of the concept of settlement system. This notion is clearly borne in Nienu’s (1983, p. 1) own remarks when he states, “The region commonly known as South Asia and Southeast Asia has been the scene of an absorbing complexity of human activity for a very long time. The whole region demonstrates an exceptional cultural and linguistic diversity today, and probably has done so for many millennia in the past. The terms such as South Asia or Southeast Asia are employed purely in a broadly geographical sense and do not convey much meaningful usage for many purposes, particularly on anthropological and archaeological enquiries. This ambiguity in the definition has created much confusion and inconsistency both in the literature and in interpretations”.

In order to provide a more integrated picture of the region of Northeast India as well as to place the area within the broader frame of Indian and Southeast Asian prehistory, the primary objective of the work was directed towards: i) determining the antiquity of human existence and formulating a chronological and cultural sequence for the area, ii) trace the man-land environment relationships existing within the boundaries of the study area with particular emphasis on the subsistence and settlement patterns, iii) seek evidence of cultural contacts with other outlying regions – Northeast India, Southeast Asia and China through time, iv) determine if this region was a nuclear area for early domestication of plants – rice and other crops, v) to investigate the continuity of prehistoric settlement patterns through present ethnography. Other secondary objectives of his research were to examine the distribution of sites and the range of artifacts and other materials associated with them in order to establish both the chronological sequence and economic patterns in the area.

One aspect of his investigation was to verify the structure of the biophysical environment, to see how this might affect prehistoric and ethnographic settlers. It also assumed that human behavior could be viewed as an
adaptive response to the environmental variability and the pattern of settlement and subsistence represent an aspect of this response. A complex subsistence system seen ethnographically, suggests the existence of a parallel development in the archaeological context. For example, even though rice is the staple crop for the Nagas, it is not uniformly grown among those living in Tuensang and Mon Districts of Nagaland where taro (*Colocacia antiquorum*) and millet (*Setaria italica*) supplemented rice, while some villages grow no rice at all, subsisting almost exclusively on Job’s tears (*Coix lacryma-jobi*) employing simple tools in *jhum* (slash-and-burn) fields (also see Nienu, 2014, 2015).

It was with these views in mind that he undertook his own field surveys in the districts of Nagaland. Because of the impassable forest, vegetation and difficult terrain, a large part of the survey area was conducted on the basis of information obtained from villages. Knowledgeable persons were employed as guides. Localities in the vicinity of past and present water sources and courses, passes, rock overhangs, rock shelters, caves, lake margins, valley-ridges, raw material sources, isolated rock bluffs, large boulders etc. were systematically examined in a region-wise manner. These surveys enabled him to locate numerous sites in the three main study areas sampled by him. Out of the 33 sites reported, listed below are the principal sites examined and subject to trial digs:

i. Study Area-1: Purakha, Sutsu, Laruri, Satuza, Washelo, Mimi cave and Phokhongri rockshelters.

ii. Study Area-2: Chungliyimti, Changsang, Tobu, Longe and Maksha (identified as a prehistoric rock-art site).

iii. Study Area-3: Rajbari site.

Nienu’s substantive contribution to the archaeology of the region is seen from his work at the site of Purakha, Laruri, Chungliyimti, Zholap khen (Mimi) and Rajbari site which deserves some special mention here. His grasp of site formation processes within the sites investigated is also well reflected in his field observations: “Preservation is, therefore, an exception rather than the rule especially when dealing with the kind of terrain where the entire physiographic feature is characterized by steep slopes which are prone to intensive surface erosion caused by a number of factors including natural as well as human agencies. In such erosive environments where almost a hundred percent of prehistoric settlements are situated on higher slopes, all the organic remains are lost, leaving only the more resistant stone artifacts scattered over the eroded surface or deposited elsewhere often hundreds of meters away from the actual activity/habitation areas” (Nienu, 1983, pp. 75–76). The cultural materials excavated from these sites establish the stratigraphic position of the objects in the Naga Hills for the first time.

Purakha is located in Meluri sub-division of Phek District and it is an open-air settlement situated on a plateau-like spur with an altitude of 1652 m on the main ridge of Zipu mountain. The Tizu River is the main river flowing below the site about 4 km below. Recent excavation undertaken years after Nienu’s excavation revealed similar evidence.

*Figure 5: The author with V. Nienu (right) at Dream Café, Kohima, February, 2016.*
(see Jamir, et al., 2014). Of the three localities excavated, Locality-2 seems to have provided a good vertical sequence from the deposit (Figure 6). Two-meter square units were spread over the excavation area. Artifacts from Locality-2 listed in Table 1 and the stratigraphy profile (Figure 7) provides a good vertical distribution of the artifacts from Purakha. Among the cultural repertoire, grinding stones, hammerstones, ground/polished stone axes, a spindle whorl, fabricators and a large percentage of potteries characterized by thick and crudely fashioned vessels bearing cord impressions on the surface. Report of an iron piece along with a slag was found from the upper levels of stratum (2) associated with few ground and polished stones with a charcoal sample from a post-hole dated 1390 ± 200 BP (Sample P-3122, Layer 2; Comments: Stuiver calibrated: AD 430 to 780). Stratum (3) revealed ground and polished tools along with two choppers and an edge-ground tool (Figures 8 and 9). Associated with this assemblage were large quantities of charcoal fragments dated to 2580 ± 200 BP (Sample P-3123, Layer 3; Comments: CRD 1 o: Stuiver calibrated: 900 to 420 BC) (Hurst and Lawn 1984: 225). Also reported from stratum (4) comprising of the basal deposit were two choppers, a spindle whorl, and an edge-ground tool.

Not far from Purakha is Laruri (also known by the name Lüradvü), another site situated at an altitude of 999.7m and right above the Tizu River. Excavation of the ancient settlement revealed a four layer stratum associated with ground stone tools and cord mark potteries (stratum 2 to 4). Such stratigraphic relations of the cultural materials is also confirmed by the author and his team’s 2009 excavation at the same site associated with a rich ceramic assemblage (both paddle and cord impressions), ground stone tools made from spilite, jar burials and a range of wild and domestic faunal remains such as Sus domesticus and Sus

Table 1: Vertical distribution of artifacts from Purakha (Source: Nienhuys, 1983).
scrofa, Cervus sp., Muntiacus muntjak, Bos indicus, Bubalus bubalis, Bos frontalis, Gallus sp. with $^{14}$C date of 1170 ± 60 BP (see Jamir, et al., 2014).

Another site excavated by Nienu which drew the potential of cave sites in the karst terrain of Mimi formation is the site of Zholap khen below Mimi Village (Figure 10). A two-meter unit was set up around the mouth of the cave. Deposit of the cave extended to a maximum of 85 cm with few quantities of potteries and an extensive ash level right above the lower level deposit. Despite careful screening using a 5mm mesh, no stone tools or debitage were reported.

The archaeological significance of Chungliyimti (Tuensang District) first signaled by J.H. Hutton in 1923 during one of his early visit to the village in November in his account *Diaries of Two Tours in Unadministered Area East of the Naga Hills* (Hutton 1986, originally published in 1929), was later revisited by Nienu (1974) who carried out the first archaeological exploration. Although the work was largely of a salvage recovery type, the assemblage...
reported by Nienu consisted mainly of pestles, grinding stones, hammerstones, smoking pipes in association with cord-mark potteries.

Apart from establishing a chronological sequence, Nienu’s work at Rajbari (also see accounts by Grange 1839; Godwin-Austen 1874) was also to obtain information on the structural remains and other activity patterns associated with the monolithic structures and also to trace, if any, the presence of prehistoric occupation underlying the historical period (Figures 11 and 12). Excavation was conducted within a grid of one meter square in arbitrary spits of 10cm and excavated to five layers. Large quantities of wheel made potteries (both coarse and fine) were reported divisible into – reddish brown, yellowish red, creamy buff, black, grey and dark brown wares bearing stamped and incised designs, criss-cross patterns, wavy lines (zig-zag) and groove lines. Some sherd indicate the presence of slip while burnishing appears to be present on some black sherd. Two 14C dates obtained from charcoal samples are available for the Rajbari site: Sample P-3124, Layer 4, 1530±180 (Comments: Stuiver corrected: AD 270 to 660) and Sample P-3125, Layer 5, 1300±180 (Comments: Stuiver corrected: AD 570 to 940) (Hurst and Lawn, 1984, p. 225).

Although unable to publish two decades ago because of a major automobile accident, mention must be made of Vikuosa Nienu’s much-awaited publication Naga Cultural Milieu: An Adaptation to Mountain Ecosystem (2015). This ethnological account of the Naga people and culture has won commendable reviews from James A. Matisoff, a well-known linguist on Tibeto-Burman describing it nothing less than a “splendid ethnography with a certain confidence that the resilient and adaptable Naga peoples will somehow preserve the essentials of their culture for generations to come” (cited in Nienu, 2015). As a native-born Naga whose interest in the natural environment, ecology, and Naga culture is longstanding, Nienu grew up experiencing a typical Naga life. The Preface to the book enumerates at length this unique experience that Nienu (2015, p. x) had when he writes, “I did everything a Naga

Figure 9: A chopper from Purakha Locality-2 (Source: Nienu, 1983).

Figure 10: Ground plan of Mimi cave complex (Zholap khen) excavated by Nienu during the 1970s (Source: Nienu, 1983).
subsistence cultivator did in both terrace and *jhum* (slash-and-burn or swidden) cultivation, including tilling, sowing, planting and transplanting, hoeing and plowing, weeding, and harvesting. I also knew how to build terrace fields and irrigation channels. I worked in most of the crafts, including basketry, and excelled at them. I participated in group hunting and fishing, house construction, bridge and footpath construction, and many other group based activities.

I crossed countless rivers, climbed many mountains, and roamed the deep forests, which Mildred Archer referred to as “dark and mysterious”. The only activity, in which I did not participate, directly, was headhunting as a warrior, but I was nevertheless indirectly affected by it”.

In a way not previously achieved, the book draws a critical “insider” or “indigenous ethnographer” perspective to understand the dynamics of one’s own people,
their history, culture and society through his own lived experience and knowledge. Besides others, his noteworthy emphasis are on Naga world view, cosmology, ritual and ecology; the use of symbols in Naga culture and the subsistence economy of the Nagas demonstrates his early training in ecological anthropology at UC, Berkeley. His attempt to relate cosmology and ritual to the ecosystem brings to mind the quintessential ecological framework of Roy Rappaport’s *Pigs for the Ancestors: Ritual in the Ecology of a New Guinea People* (1968) in drawing the centrality on the adaptive value of culture and ritual in the study of human ecology (also see, Rappaport, 1979). In drawing reference to this relationship, Nienu (2015, pp. 155–157) draws an example, “Every newly couple must perform a specific rite in a ceremony known as *Sengkhu* (Rengma), held the first December after the marriage, when the harvest has been done and crops brought home and where a small pig is sacrificed... The majority of rituals and ceremonies (of the Nagas) are connected to calendar-determined, cyclical subsistence-related activities and relate directly or indirectly to ecology”. He also draws this ritual-ecology dichotomy and its adaptive mechanisms with reference to head-taking ceremonies that are so highly valued in Naga culture. Head-taking was directly connected to their cosmological belief system whereby the soul matter, which is believed to reside in the head, adds soul power to the community with multifarious benefits such enhancing fertility of land and thereby crops, cattle, and human fertility.

Nienu’s deep respect and appreciation of Naga spiritual heritage also find expression in his understanding of the use of symbols in Naga culture. He asserts, “Naga worldview provided a system of symbols, in a cultural context, by means of which meaning and order in their world was established” (*ibid.*, p. 252). He then select few animal representatives and their use in Naga material culture to examine their symbolic meanings: the ‘mithun’ (*Bos frontalis*) because it represents power, masculinity, prestige, nobility, peace and wealth, it is primarily a sacrificial animal (also see Simoons and Simoons, 1968); the ‘tiger’ symbolizing masculinity and fierceness; the ‘python’ as a symbol of fertility and wealth; the Great Indian Hornbill (*Dichoceros bicornis*) as an emblem of bravery.


Every Naga child who grew up during the 1940s and 50s have been a witness to the Second World War (also known famously as ‘Japanese War’ and fought in parts of Northeast India) but particularly, the aggressive momentum on the Naga political issue and the inhuman atrocities committed, which as a result left indelible scars in the minds of many of that generation. Nienu’s life as a young teenager who grew up in the village would have been no indifferent to these series of militarization events that took place in the Naga Hills (as a case of personal experience, (also see Sema, 2015, pp. 18–22). Although preoccupied with other matters of concern, Nienu’s sensitivity and concern towards the deep-rooted political nature of the Indo-Naga political affairs is borne from his three lengthy newspaper articles *Spears Cry Out* (2007), *Spears Cry Out Revisited* (2012) and *The Indo-Naga Political Issue: Now or Never?* (2012).

**Conclusion**

The primary intellectual element behind Vikuosa Nienu’s work is essentially his efforts to outline and explain the prehistoric situation of Nagaland from the standpoint of cultural adaptations, and the other dynamics involved in the functioning of human societies from his knowledge of the environmental context of sites and the larger geographic areas for investigation around Nagaland derived from extensive regional surveys. Questions of chronology, cultural affinities and contacts and the reciprocal relations of human adaptations in the archaeological datasets of the region and how this problem could be resolved and reinforced from ethnographic parallels emanating from the same region were Nienu’s primary concern. Particularly important is his views on the indigenous development of plant and animal domestication drawn from ethnographic observation of wild food resources and their resource exploitation strategies and the need to undertake more detailed studies on well stratified sites like the Mimi caves and Purakha, an open-air settlement. Although for want of more absolute dates, his work revealed a definite existence of a long cultural and chronological sequence associated with the Neolithic period, a date suggested from 4000–500 BCE. The dates obtained for Purakha establishes for the first time a neolithic antiquity for the site.

It is probably fair to say that Nienu’s work has remained unfamiliar to many archaeologists of the region more so because of his inability to carry on further with professional archaeology for reasons aforesaid but his contribution, which is implicit in his work, have now gained the reputation not only as the first pioneering figure in Nagaland but also his seemingly modest efforts to transcend and present a comprehensive prehistory of Northeast India in general. While his ecological approaches to the sites under study are well discussed, his concern on the ethnic identity of the people under study is also apparent from his proposition that the present population represents a continuity of the prehistoric period as attested at most sites.

People who continue to work in Northeast Indian archaeology acknowledge the extent that the region can contribute to global archaeological issues yet all that is left are the extent of works that is hardly visible to the world archaeological community. It is here that Vikuosa Nienu’s work adds yet another milestone to the blank...
pages of Northeast prehistory and later historical periods. As a result, rather than rejecting previous body of works altogether, future effort should be directed towards expanding what is already established, with potentially better conceptual tools and methodologies to further the understanding of the region’s archaeological past, the people, and their multiple histories.

Acknowledgements
My sincere gratitude to Dr. Vikuosa Nienu for patiently sharing accounts of his early childhood and later professional training at various Institutes, both in India and abroad through frequent email correspondence and the lengthy discussions that followed in Kohima in early February, 2016 and also for providing me with the necessary photo images for this publication. Several people helped in trying to obtain images of Grasshopper Field School. I owe my gratitude to Prof. John Olsen Regents’ Professor Emeritus, School of Anthropology, The University of Arizona, who initially replied to my query and further prompted me to write to Prof. Jefferson Reid, Distinguished Professor Emeritus, School of Anthropology, The University of Arizona on the Grasshopper Pueblo Field School images. I must gratefully acknowledge Prof. Reid for taking all care and effort to obtain the permission from the Arizona State Museum, The University of Arizona on the 1975 Field School image of Dr. Nienu; to Jannelle Weakly, Curator Photographic Collection, Arizona State Museum, The University of Arizona for technical assistance and the necessary photo captions to be incorporated and finally the Arizona State Museum, The University of Arizona for granting permission to publish the photo image of Dr. Nienu at Grasshopper, 1975. Although not entirely in vain, I wish to also thank Dr. Michael Wendorf, the students’ supervisor at Grasshopper Field School, 1975 and a close friend of Dr. Nienu who previously made all effort to locate the Field School images of 1975.

Competing Interests
The author has no competing interests to declare.

References


Iralu, DK. 2000. Nagaland and India: The Blood and the Tears. Published by the Author.


Nienu, V. 2014. Discussions on Nagaland Fieldwork and Early Life at the School of Archaeology. (email) (Personal communication, 10 September 2014).


Nienu, V. 2016. Discussions on exposure to the teachings of New Archaeology at UC, Berkeley. (email) (Personal communication, 18 April 2016).


