



Katie Garrod

Location: A small yet significant tribe, the 1,200 Akyuang Ari Naga inhabit the three villages of Heinkut, Jagram, and Ngachan within the Leshi Township in the Naga Self-Administered Zone of western Myanmar's Sagaing Region. The special zone was established in 2008 after a change in the nation's constitution. The area is remote and rugged, and although the Akyuang Ari homeland is only about 25 miles (40 km) in a straight line from the Indian state of Nagaland, impenetrable jungles make the journey almost impossible to make. On the Myanmar side, the area may soon open to the outside world, with a major road being constructed from Leshi down to the Chindwin River at the town of Tamanthi.¹ If it is completed, Leshi will suddenly become accessible to new people, ideas, and trading opportunities.

Identity: Tribally and culturally, the Akyuang Ari are considered part of the larger Tangkhul Naga group, but their language has branched off over the centuries and is now very distinct from Tangkhul. While

acknowledging a broad historical association with the large Naga and Tangshang ethnicity, consisting of about 200 tribes that spread far into northeast India, the Akyuang Ari are proud of their distinctive culture and identity within the larger cluster.

Language: The Akyuang Ari Naga speak their own distinct language, which is significantly different from other Naga varieties in the area. Many use Tangkhul Naga as a second language, even though the two languages share only a 52% lexical similarity.² Akyuang Ari Naga enjoys widespread use among the members of the tribe and is not in danger of dying out.

History: Headhunting was rife among the Naga people in this remote part of Myanmar, with raids causing the population to remain low and live in constant fear of being attacked. Many villages were constructed at the top of mountain ridges for security, as the elevated position enabled them to see any approaching enemies. Although headhunting was officially outlawed in 1969, tribal hostility

continues to simmer below the surface, with occasional outbreaks of violence despite most Naga people in the area now being more peaceable since they adopted the Christian faith.

Customs: Despite their poverty, Akyuang Ari Naga women take pride in their appearance and love to wear their best traditional red dresses with dozens of necklaces during festivals and special occasions. Because of its isolation and poverty, in 2020 the entire Naga Self-Administered Zone had only two doctors to serve its 130,000 residents. In August 2016, an outbreak of measles killed 44 children as the disease wreaked havoc among the unvaccinated population.

Religion: Although almost all Akyuang Ari Naga people claim to be Christians, in Myanmar a family must declare a child's religion at birth, which often leads to such designations being nominal religious labels rather than representations of a living faith. The Akyuang Ari Naga became Christians in the 1960s and 1970s, as many Naga tribes converted throughout the region. Traditionally, many tribes worshipped the sun and moon, which is now formally called the Donyi Polo ("sun-moon") religion. The elaborate headdresses of some groups are designed to show their adoration of the sun.

Christianity: Although all three villages contain at least one church, the influence of Animism persists among the Akyuang Ari Naga. Almost all members of this tribe profess to be Christians, but because theirs is not a written language, no portions of the Bible exist in their heart language, which has adversely affected the growth of Christianity among them. The Tangkhul Naga Bible was first printed in 1989, but most Akyuang Ari Naga people are unable to understand it. The only Christian resource known to exist in Akyuang Ari Naga are audio recordings produced by the ministry Global Recordings.



Population
in Myanmar:
1,200 (2024)

Location:
Sagaing Region

Language Family:
Tibeto-Burman

Main Religion:
Christianity (95.0%)

Christians:
1,140 (95.0%)

OVERVIEW

Population:
1,200 in Myanmar
(2024 Joshua Project)
1,000 (2004 Ethnologue)

Other Names:
Ngachun

Location:
Sagaing Region:
Leshi Township

Main Language:
Naga, Akyuang-Ari [nay]

Dialects: 0

Scripture:
Jesus film:

Global Recordings:
Naga, Akyuang Ari
#23295

People ID: 20576

