

KHIAMNIUNGAN NAGA

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Worawan Simarjoj

Location: Approximately 11,000 Khamniungan people inhabit about 30 villages in the three townships that compose the Naga Self-Administered Zone in Myanmar's Sagaing Region. The tribe's territory extends over a wide mountainous area straddling both sides of Myanmar's border, ranging from the Patkoi Hills to the Chindwin River. The majority of Khamniungan people live in Nagaland, India, where 63,000 were counted in the 2011 census.

Identity: Also known in Myanmar as the "Nokaw," the name Khamniungan is a compound of three words meaning "source of great water." After countless generations spent living in poverty and violence, the Khamniungan found peace after converting to Christ, with a 2003 book recording, "They are emerging as the most coherent group of all the Nagas, culturally, territorially, and structurally."¹ Some scholars consider the Khamniungan to be a subgroup of Konyak Naga, but they speak a different language and hold to a separate ethnic identity.

Language: Although they are geographically close, the Khamniungan vernaculars spoken in Myanmar and India are only

partially mutually intelligible due to limited cross-border contact. Khamniungan is most closely related to Ponyo and Lainong Naga, with which it shares a 72% and 62% lexical similarity, respectively.² Many Khamniungan people can also speak English, especially in India where different Naga tribes often use English to communicate with each other.

History: According to a detailed Khamniungan legend, a huge flood once deluged the earth after people ignored the warnings of a toad,³ but a remnant survived by ascending the Yakkо mountains in today's Nagaland. The Khamniungan were once notorious slave traders who sold the weapons they seized from kidnapped Burmese and other people. Headhunting was still extant among the Khamniungan in Myanmar in 2007,⁴ and despite the British banning the practice in 1935 and the Indian government in 1960, headhunting continued in India until at least 1990, when a boundary dispute between the Khamniungan and their Yimchungra neighbors was settled by headhunting.⁵

Customs: Until recently,

Khamniungan women were tattooed on the face as a coming of age and on the legs at the time of marriage. The Khamniungan also "tattooed their warriors as a badge of honor after battles.... An image of a tiger was given to a hunter who had killed one of the beasts, and the image of a man adorned those who returned from battle with the head of an enemy."⁶

Religion: Because of their remote communities and reputation for violence, the Khamniungan in both Myanmar and India became Christians much later than most other Naga tribes. For centuries they were bound by spiritual darkness, sacrificing to a host of demons in a futile bid to secure their blessings and protection. At harvest time, "everyone would eat at the house of the *meya*, the official who dealt with headhunting, and if the harvests were not good, the people would sacrifice to the skulls and paint them with chicken blood."⁷

Christianity: In 1947, a man named Khaming became the first known Khamniungan Christian. By 1952, five churches with 410 members had emerged, and just three years later, there were 17 churches. The Good News of Christ's salvation flourished, and in 1967 it was said, "The Khamniungan Church numbers more than 5,000 members, among them many former headhunters who found God's abundant pardon at the foot of the Cross."⁸ Today, nine out of ten Khamniungan families in Myanmar profess faith in Jesus, while the 2011 Indian census revealed an astonishing 99.3% of Khamniungan people living there were Christians. The Khamniungan Bible was completed in 2005, and Asia Harvest printed and delivered 5,000 copies to churches in Myanmar in 2019. A Khamniungan church reflected that "we had been praying for 52 years to receive Bibles, and 97% of congregations did not have a single copy. The Christians said this was one of the greatest days in the history of the Khamniungan people. To God be all the Glory!"⁹



Population
in Myanmar:
11,000 (2025)

Location:
Sagaing Region

Language Family:
Tibeto-Burman

Main Religion:
Christianity (88.0%)

Christians:
9,680 (88.0%)

OVERVIEW

Population:
11,000 in Myanmar
(2025 Joshua Project)
10,000 (2010 SIL)

Other Countries:
63,000 in India

Other Names:
Kalyo Kengu, Khemongen,
Kheongmongan, Khamiangan,
Khamiangan, Makware, Nokaw,
Para, Tukhemmi, Welam

Location:
Sagaing Region: Lahe, Leshi and
Nanyun townships in the Naga
Self-Administered Zone

Language:
Naga, Khamniungan [kix]

Dialects: 7

Scripture:
Bible 2005
New Testament 1981

Jesus film:
Naga, Khamniungan

Global Recordings:
Naga, Khamniungan #4166

People ID: 17169

