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Location: Three thousand Makury Naga people live along a strip of land straddling the Myanmar-India border in the far west of the country. Most inhabit 12 villages within Leshi Township, with a few villages in each of Lahe and Homalin townships. Makury territory “is rugged and rocky with deep valleys and swift streams. Due to the mountainous terrain, transportation and communication are a challenge.”¹ An additional 4,000 Makury people live in the Indian state of Nagaland, concentrated in Kiphire and Phek districts. A succession of towering peaks and treacherous canyons on both sides of the border mean that the Makury in each country have little contact with one another.

Identity: The spelling of this group is usually rendered “Makuri” by researchers, but tribal leaders themselves want their name spelled “Makury.” The tribe is said to be related to the Longphuri Nagas, with whom they often share the same villages. Significant historic and cultural differences exist, however, and in turn, both the Makury and Longphuri Nagas acknowledge historical kinship with the large Yimchungra tribe, who number 68,000 people across the border in Nagaland.

Language: Linguists have noted that the Makury vernacular, which consists of six dialects, “has a high language vitality. All the people have positive attitudes toward their mother tongue, and children are learning Makury as

their first language.”² One source has suggested there are 40,000 speakers of Makury in Myanmar and 25,000 in India,³ but these extremely high numbers are not supported by other research. The Makury language is distinct from all other Naga languages and shares only 30% lexical similarity with Longphuri Naga and 17% with Para Naga.⁴

History: The Makury “trace their origins back to the village of Kiusukiuin in present-day Nagaland at least ten generations ago, according to tradition.”⁵ From there, they sent out colonies to the Myanmar border area. Three main migration routes are said to have been used, and today three subgroups can still be identified from those early settlers. Although the Makury and Longphuri Nagas are neighbors today, in 2019 a tribesman said the strife between the two groups “dates back to headhunting times when the Makury were forced to flee their villages and find refuge in Longphuri villages. Now, because they are more numerous, the Makury pose a threat to the Longphuri by banning their language and traditional dance.”⁶

Customs: Many tribes in Myanmar have traditional tattoos, but the Makury designs were unique to them. Men “had human figures on their shoulders and various patterns of horizontal lines in zigzag patterns on the inner forearm...applied so fellow Makury could recognize them in the heat of battle.”⁷ Makury

women, meanwhile, were given face tattoos “as a rite of passage into the afterlife.”⁸ One unique Makury belief is that eating dog meat will remove bad blood from a person’s body and protect him against malaria.

Religion: A 2011 report noted that 90 percent of Makury people were Christians, with Buddhists and animists each claiming five percent of the population.⁹ As Nagas in the area rejected their animistic beliefs, they embraced both Christianity and Buddhism, “thanks to contact with western Naga tribes (Baptists), Kachin missionaries (Catholics), American missionaries (Church of Christ), and Burmese Buddhists. This trend caused them to discard traditions that were difficult to reconcile with their new faith. Each case of proselytization needed to be approved by the village chief.”¹⁰

Christianity: The Gospel was first proclaimed among the Makury people in 1950. Early progress was painstakingly slow, with new believers often being severely persecuted and ostracized, as tribal leaders feared the new faith would upset the spirits and bring calamity upon their community. Today, 90 percent of Makury people in Myanmar are Christians, with most belonging to Baptist and Revival churches. The Makury New Testament was published in 2018, and having God’s Word in their heart language has established the faith of many believers who previously used Burmese Bibles.



Population
in Myanmar:
3,000 (2025)

Location:
Sagaing Region

Language Family:
Tibeto-Burman

Main Religion:
Christianity (90.0%)

Christians:
2,700 (90.0%)

OVERVIEW

Population:
3,000 in Myanmar (2025)
2,500 (2004 SIL)

Other Countries:
4,000 in India

Other Names:
Makuri, Makuri Naga, Makware, Thau

Location:
Sagaing Region: Lahe and Leshi townships in the Naga Self-Administered Zone; Homalin Township in Hkamti District

Language:
Naga, Makuri [jmn]

Dialects: 7

Scripture:
New Testament 2018

Jesus film:
None

Global Recordings:
Naga, Makuri #5177

People ID: 20597

