



Location: Approximately 500 members of the little-known Olo Naga tribe inhabit several villages within Nanyun and Lahe townships in western Myanmar’s Sagaing Region. An additional 1,500 Olo Naga people dwell just across the border in the northeast Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, although one source says they number 7,500 there.¹ In India the Olo Naga are commonly known as the Laju tribe after the name of one of their principal villages.

Identity: The battle for Olo Naga identity offers a fascinating insight into the challenges faced by many groups. The Naga and Tangshang tribal collectives pressurized the Olo to come under their banners, but they decided to remain distinct from both. In India, the Olo were long considered a subgroup of the Nocte tribe, but they opposed that classification and, in 2013, were one of five groups granted status as a Scheduled Tribe in their own right.² A linguist remarked: “Ethnic identities can be quite political. The larger the population the more political power, so there is often pressure from politicians to combine ethnic identities (and even enforce the use of languages people don’t understand). On both sides of the border there are many distinct languages being subsumed under larger ethnic identities.”³

Language: The Olo say their language is distinct from all other varieties in the area, although

some consider it a mere dialect of Nocte. In 2011, only 26% of Olo people in India were literate, including just 10% of women. A breakthrough both spiritually and in relation to preserving their language occurred when the Olo Nagas partnered with the Evangel Bible Translators, a small agency in Nagaland. The subsequent publication of their Bible has given a sense of pride to many Olo people and motivated them to learn to read.

History: The Olo Nagas living in India today claim their forefathers migrated from Myanmar as early as the 13th century.⁴ Olo parents traditionally arranged marriages for their infant children by “selecting a bride and making a public announcement to ratify the betrothal. However, as the couple grew up, both parties were free to have affairs with other young people of the village. If the girl fell pregnant from such a liaison it was seen as a good sign, indicating her fertility.”⁵

Customs: For many generations the Olo have used large log drums that are open on both ends. The drums “produce intricate rhythms but were never used purely for making music. Rather, the drum was the arbiter of village life. It was beaten to warn those working in the fields of the approach of raiders, to alert villagers if fire broke out, to announce a death, to call council members together, and for certain ceremonies connected

to headhunting. Each occasion had its own rhythm, known to the villagers, and its sound carried far into the hills.”⁶ The faces of Olo Naga girls were tattooed at puberty as recently as 20 years ago.⁷

Religion: Bound by the desire to appease demons, for centuries the Olo on both sides of the border practiced headhunting and made human sacrifices to the spirits that controlled their lives. An ethnographer wrote in 2017: “Victims purchased for sacrifice were kept in the house of the owner, well cared for and fed, but kept in stocks to prohibit escape. On the appointed day, victims were drugged with opium or drink or beaten into insensibility, led to the front of the verandah of the house, and decapitated.... Bodies were divided up and the bones, flesh, and entrails sold as charms or divided among clansmen.”⁸

Christianity: Although most Olo Naga families in Myanmar are now professing Christians, tribes with strong animistic backgrounds often produce nominal believers who struggle to break free from the darkness of the past. In India, the 2011 census returned 95% of the Olo Naga (Laju) community as Christians. Although their New Testament was published in India in 2010 using the Roman script, and the full Bible is now available, low literacy rates among the Olo Nagas and border tensions make it unavailable in Myanmar for all practical purposes.



Population
in Myanmar:
500 (2025)

Location:
Sagaing Region

Language Family:
Tibeto-Burman

Main Religion:
Christianity (80.0%)

Christians:
400 (80.0%)

OVERVIEW

Population:
500 in Myanmar
(2025 Asia Harvest)

Other Countries:
1,510 in India

Other Names:
Awla, Aaway, Hasik, Laju, Lazu, Lazu Naga, Ohlo, Olo, Olo Nocte

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

Language:
Naga Nocte, Laju [njb]

Dialects: 5

Scripture:
Naga Nocte Bible
New Testament 2010

Jesus film:
None

Global Recordings:
Naga Nocte, Laju #14569

People ID: 21373

