



Scheme for “Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage and Diverse Cultural Traditions of India”

Form for National Inventory Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage of India

A. Name of the State

Nagaland

B. Name of the Element/Cultural Tradition (in English)

Pre- Sowing and purification Festival

C. Name of the element in the language and script of the community
Concerned, if applicable

Nazhü (Naga languages are written in the Roman script)

D. Name of the communities, groups or, if applicable, individuals concerned
(Identify clearly either of these concerned with the practice of the said element/cultural tradition)

Pochury-Naga of the Müluori (Meluri) group celebrate and observe Nazhü. The rituals and taboos associated with the festival are observed only by the followers of the indigenous religion *Lanyiri Nale Kūviri*. The Christians do not observe the rituals and taboos associated with the festival. The other Pochury groups do not celebrate this particular festival. However, each group celebrates a host of pre-post harvest festivals within their group.

E. Geographical location and range of the element/cultural tradition (Please write about the other states in which the said element/tradition is present)

Phek district of Nagaland is the geographical habitat of the Pochury Naga. Spread over 30 villages with an approximate population of 21844, the Pochury Naga collectively speak seven different languages and dialects within the community defining themselves under linguistic identities, otherwise, collectively group themselves and unite under the nomenclature of Pochury. Undoubtedly, there are some shared cultural affinities among a few groups, but each group exist quite independent of each other in respect to land, customary laws, socio-cultural practices, and origin stories, with the language of Meluri being the common lingua franca spoken among themselves. This is a recent development since the last century when the first written script of the Pochury and bible was translated into the Meluri dialect. Other than linguistic and socio-cultural differences, each group celebrate their own festivals.

Nazhü festival is confined only to Meluri group which number three villages. This particular festival is not celebrated elsewhere.

F. Identification and definition of the element/cultural tradition of the India

(Write “Yes” in one or more boxes to identify the domain(s) of intangible cultural heritage manifested by the element. If you tick ‘others’, specify the domain(s) in brackets.)

- i. (**Yes**) oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage
- ii. (**Yes**) performing arts
- iii. (**Yes**) social practices, rituals and festive events
- iv. (**Yes**) knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe
- v. (**Yes**) traditional craftsmanship
- vi. other(s) (**N/A**)

G. Provide a brief summary description of the element that can introduce it to readers who have never seen or experienced it

Nazhu is the premier festival of the Pochury Naga group of Müluori (Meluri), Nagaland. It is celebrated over a period of ten days. Until the time Christianity reached the Naga tribes in 1872, Nagas practiced their indigenous faith of animism and held their sacred beliefs in nature, various deities and spirits.

One such group is the Pochury-Naga of Meluri village who have steadfastly continued to follow the indigenous faith against the backdrop of the Christian majority. The festival of Nazhu is celebrated by both converts and animists Pochury alike, but in the case of the *Lanyiri nale Kūviri*(followers of the ancestral religion), the ritualistic content, taboos, and socio-religious practises of Nazhu are held sacred to this day, otherwise shunned and abandoned by the converts. Both groups however, celebrate in singing, dancing, community feasting and playing of traditional games, particularly, tug of war.

A unique feature of the festival is the erection of a bamboo totem to symbolize the male child. Only those households with a male child are eligible to erect the tall bamboo structure. This is the time when young people get engaged and marry. The festival period starts with the preparation of rice brew, slaughter of animals for the festivities while craftsmen engage in making utility baskets for use in farming activities, along with other craft products for gifting or sale. In every household the women are busy pounding baskets of rice, millet, jobs tears and other pulses for the festivities and men engage in crafting bamboo mugs for drinking rice brew.

At a certain day ordained in the course of the festival, the menfolk of each sector in the village will go into the forest and bring back a creeper vine to be used in the tug-of-war. The vine will be kept on the outskirts of the village and carried to the venue where the games will take place. Young boys will keep watch over the vine until the day of the games arrive. There is much

merriment and display of strength between the teams for the winning spot. When the winning team emerges the vine of the victors is chopped into small pieces and distributed among themselves. Each member will place the piece of vine next to the wine pot or rice container in their households. This gesture is to propitiate good will of the omnipresent and bountiful blessings upon themselves, in order that the wine pot in the metaphoric sense, will not run dry or that the rice will be plentiful for the household until the next Nazhü.

- H. Who are the bearers and practitioners of the element/Cultural Traditions? Are there any specific roles or categories of persons with special responsibilities for the practice and transmission of it? If yes, who are they and what are their responsibilities?

There are no professionally trained teachers to give formal instructions in a school like setting. Parents and elders of the community are looked upon as teachers. The authority and wisdom of elders are not supposed to be questioned, traditional wisdom being experiential wisdom- wisdom filtered through the experience of life. The positive aspect of complying with the conventional belief in the unquestioned authority of elders results in the uniformity and consistency of community living. But the role of the headman among the primordial faith followers is paramount to the conduct of certain ritual practices involved in the course of Nazhü festival.

- I. How are the knowledge and skills related to the element transmitted today?

J.

By the community members themselves through the oral traditions under the guidance of the elderly lot and village headman.

- K. What social functions and cultural meanings do the element/cultural tradition have today for its community?

For the followers of the indigenous religion it is the embodiment of their sacred beliefs and socio-cultural practices. It is a way of life that continues to hold true. To the Christian majority, it symbolizes their cultural roots.

- L. Is there any part of the element that is not compatible with existing international human rights instruments or with the requirement of mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals, or with sustainable development? I.e. describe any aspect of the element/cultural tradition that may be unacceptable to Law of the country or may be in opposition to practicing community's harmony with others.

No. The essence of the festival other than the observance of taboos and socio-religious rituals upholds community sharing, bonding, gifting and purification of the self.

- M. Your Project's contribution to ensuring visibility, awareness and encouraging dialogue related to the element/cultural tradition.

This project is a first in the documentation of Nazhü festival as it is celebrated and observed by the small community of 30 odd families who are followers of the indigenous religion in Meluri. There are very few pockets in Nagaland where indigenous religions continue to be practiced today. Naga Christian communities in general, celebrate their festivals but without the primordial rituals associated with the celebrations.

The Meluri community on the whole, are infused with resurgent cultural pride, realization in the importance to its continuity, preservation and safe-guard. With this encouragement, the Team was able to solicit the full support and co-operation of the Christian dominated community elders, Village Council, and the youth who went the extra mile to assist in the documentation process. We are encouraged that the film will draw visibility and engage dialogue on safeguarding, preservation and continuity on one of the lesser known festivals of Nagaland.

- N. Information about the safeguarding measures that may protect or promote the element/cultural tradition

a. (Write "Yes" in one or more boxes to identify the safeguarding measures that have been and are currently being taken by the communities, groups or individuals concerned)

- i. (**Yes**) transmission, particularly through formal and non-formal education
- ii. (**Yes**) identification, documentation, research
- iii. (**Yes**) preservation, protection
- iv. (**Yes**) promotion, enhancement
- v. (**Yes**) revitalization

- b. Write about the measures taken at local, state and national level by the Authorities to safeguard the element/cultural tradition?

Presently, at the local level, the community has taken on the responsibility in earmarking a special event - Pochury Cultural Day to preserve their heritage and coincide with Nazhü. This event highlights through cultural competitions and performances such as dancing, singing, indigenous instrument playing and making, traditional games, crafting and different elements of the intangible heritage, to teach the younger lot to appreciate and learn about their cultural roots. While the spirit of competitiveness generated by cultural competitions have had a positive impact not only in generating interest and knowledge, but also excel in the chosen field.

- O. Write about the threats, if any, to the element/cultural tradition related to its practice, visibility and future longevity. Give facts and relevant reasons based on the current scenario.

Modernization and conversion among the off springs in the present community of primordial religion followers, is the primal threat to a way of life that has journeyed from the ancient past of the community to the present.

When questioned, the parents have this to say, that their children need to find acceptability and not be misfits in the larger socio-religious milieu. Conversations with parents who see themselves as the last remnants of an ancient tradition admit to this. Presently, the youngest adult family head in a community of 40 households is 38 years old and the oldest at ninety years.

- P. Safeguarding measures proposed

(This section should identify and describe safeguarding measures to protect and promote the element/cultural tradition. Such measures should be concrete and can be implemented to formulate future cultural policy for safeguarding and promoting the element/cultural tradition in the state)

- **Documentation and cultural mapping of the community should be taken up before the knowledge keepers are gone. The emphasis on lesser known communities and the languishing intangible heritage.**
- **An inventory of Knowledge Keepers and intangible culture experts of each state must be compiled. The Village Councils/Panchayats must be on board to identify and empanel them within their locations and submit to the State Culture department.**
- **The Zonal Cultural Centers can be the nodal agency to house the inventory region wise.**
- **Culture must be incorporated into the school curriculum ideally from classes between 3-6 when a child has developed the sense to question, is perceptive to new subjects, by class 6 the content is imbibed and there are less academic pressure before pre- middle school.**

- Cultural competitions can play a positive impact on student life as well as the community and should be a mandatory feature in the school or college calendar of events.
- Transmission and safe guarding through community based learning programmes.
- CSR towards funding, conservation and preservation.

Q. Community Participation

(Write about the participation of communities, groups and individuals related to the element/cultural tradition in formulation of your project)

There are several authorities, groups and individuals who have immensely contributed in the formulation of the project. The first individual with whom the conversation started is Mr. Nyuvisei Nyusou, of Meluri. He has been assigned as guide and interpreter. Through him the initial contact with the animists members of Meluri was struck for their consent to document the observation and celebration of Nazhü by the followers of the indigenous religion since 2012.

With the consent from the identified group around late 2013, the village Chairman of Meluri Village Council Mr. Rholetho was informed and his co-operation solicited.

With the necessary permission, the project was constructed and duly submitted around mid 2014 to SNA under the said scheme.

During the filming of the festival, the *Müluori Nyusho Kügharü* (Meluri Village Cultural Institution) and Village Council, rendered all possible assistance in soliciting the participation of the Meluri public and villagers who whole heartedly participated.

The film contains certain practices which have been abandoned. The Meluri Women Organization overwhelmingly participated in enacting those rituals which have been discontinued even among the animists of Meluri.

Mr. Tsuosekhu Kakiri leader of the indigenous religion of Meluri made himself available during the filming process. Sadly a month after the film shoot he passed away. The followers of the old religion remain without a titular head until a year has passed away before a new headman is selected.

R. Concerned community organization(s) or representative(s)

(Provide detailed contact information for each community organization or representative or other non-governmental organization that is concerned with the element such as associations, organizations, clubs, guilds, steering committees, etc.)

- i. Name of the entity-
- **Meluri Village Council**
 - **Müluori Nyusho Kügharü**
- ii. Name and title of the contact person
- **Mr. Rholetho, Chairman, Meluri Village Council**
 - **Mr. Sierhosie, Secretary, Müluori Nyusho Kügharü (Meluri Village Cultural Institution)**
- iii. Address (same addresses)
- **Meluri, 797114, Phek District, Nagaland**
- iv. Telephone number
- **Mr. Rholetho, Chairman- 9862204900**
 - **Mr. Sierhosie, Secretary- 8974267720**
- v. E-mail- **N/A**
- vi. Other relevant information- **N/A**

S. Give information of any Inventory, database or data creation centre (local/state/national) that you may be aware of or of any office, agency, organisation or body involved in the maintenance of the said inventory etc.

Negative.

T. Principal published references or documentation available on the element/cultural tradition
(Books, articles, audio-visual materials, names and addresses of reference libraries, museums, private endeavours of artistes/individuals for preservation of the said element, publications or websites)

There is no available publication on Nazhü Festival. The findings of this document would most probably be a first.

Signature:

Name & Designation: ...Sentila...Yanger.....

President

Name of Institution (If applicable): TRIBAL WEAVE

Address: ...29-Duncan, Circular Road,

Dimapur...-797112, Nagaland.....

NAZHU- The Festival of the Pochury-Naga of Müluori

Introduction:

Throughout world communities, practitioners of ancient indigenous faiths are embracing mainstream religions. In the process, the primeval tenets, beliefs and ritualistic practices deeply rooted around nature, and held sacrosanct in respect for the environment are disappearing. Until the time Christianity reached the Naga tribes in 1872, the Naga communities followed indigenous faith practices and held sacred a pantheon of gods and benevolent spirits. The spread of Christianity slowly converted believers of the primordial religion to the new faith. Today, among the indigenous population of Nagaland, Christianity accounts for 95% as oppose to 5% of animists who practice the indigenous faith.

With conversion the pagan practices and rituals associated with the ancient religion are distant memories now abandoned by the converted. Even the celebration of festivals in the early years of Christianity was shied away from by many Naga communities, citing ritualistic practices of the old religion conflicted with Christian creed. Today, Naga communities are expressing their cultural worldview in hosting and celebrating respective tribal festivals, adapted to their present, without the pagan rituals of the primordial past. These celebrations have created by default, a diversity of cultures and festivals, now tapped by the state government to promote cultural tourism in the country's biggest cultural festival, "The Nagaland Hornbill Festival- Festival of Festivals".

Origin of Müluori:

In the origin narratives of *Müluori* (Meluri), that the people migrated to their present habitat from Rengma area in the distant past, is a tradition entrenched in their oral history. The *Müluori* group claim of shared cultural identities in migration, language, culture and tradition with two other Rengma diaspora groups, namely, *Tüphruri* (Sohemi) of Chakhesang community, and *Mipfüri* (Lephory) of the Pochury. This is corroborated by J.P. Mills, colonial anthropologist and administer, who identifies them as the Eastern Rengma, in his account -The Rengma Nagas. Under increasing influence exerted by the dominant Chakhesang tribe, *Tüphruri* has been absorbed into mainstream Chakhesang culture and consequently, today, *Tüphruri* is commonly known by its official Chakhesang name *Sohemi*.

The legend tells of an incident on a day when the women folk were drying paddy in their courtyards, a white stag (*akhruo*) appeared in the middle of the village and bolted across

several bamboo mats before escaping into the wild. Seeing this, a few men who were home that day came together to give chase and stalk the strange animal. After three days of relentless chase, whenever the exhausted hunters considered giving up, the elusive animal would reappear intermittently within striking range and the chase would once again resume drawing them further afield. At the end of the third day, the weary hunters were met by their families who had trailed them hard on their heels with food and drinks. The tired party rested there for some time and henceforth, the place is named *Riehze*, which means “to lodge” or “to relax”. In all likelihood the hunters missed the animal, went back and subsequently returned to establish a new village. However, the inhospitable condition created by the presence of ants forced them to abandon the place. *Riehze* was later nicknamed *Mietsaluo* which means “ant’s field” or “ant’s ground”. From there they shifted to another place at a lower elevation. There a buffalo was slaughtered and after feasting together the three groups, *Müluori*, *Mipfüri* and *Tüphruri*, went their respective way.

The place in which they celebrated their parting meal is known as *Kütsape*, meaning “eating place”. From *Kütsape* a group arrived at a temporary encampment called *Lokruju*. A reconnaissance group further explored towards the east while scouting for a better settlement finally arrived at *Zhepruso*. In what is today the original settlement of the present *Müluori* village, the scouting party found groves of bamboo in the vicinity. Tradition has it that while clearing the foliage to get a better view of the landscape, they chopped off a bamboo. To their utter astonishment grains of paddy gushed forth from the hollowed bamboo segment. True to its name, that particular species of bamboo is called *Atsuo* meaning paddy. In connection to this phenomenon the people named themselves as *Müluori* which literally means “people of abundance, plentiful or bountiful” and *Mülüozhie* alludes to ‘a place of abundance’. An *Alo* (stone monument) at the highest point in the village center *Hiezü* marks the site commemorating the founding of *Müluori*.

Several groups of people also migrated to *Müluori* after the first Rengma settlers established the village. Some of the other people who arrived after the Rengmas were *Sapo*, *Khury* and *Küjury*. In due course of time they became bona fide citizens of *Müluori*. Though different cultures had merged and evolved into a common identity as people of one village, traces of their cultural distinctiveness are still conspicuous in the forms of folk tunes, folklores, organization of clans, and use of personal and family names.

The *Müluori* group is dispersed among six clans namely- *Tsuori*, *Nyuwi*, *Ngouri*, *Pojiri*, *Nyusouri*, and *Nyutheri*. The major population live in *Müluori Amyupewa* (Meluri village), *Riehuope Khel* and the daughter village of *Khumiasü*, established in 1977, with a population of about 400 and 100 households. In *Azhiewi Ri* the old village of *Müluori*, there are four *Khels* (sectors) *Khutsori*

Khel, Phrütheri, Zhiékuri, and Zhitshüri Khel. It is the habitat of the practitioners of the old religion and recent converts of former members are also to be found here.

The population of the *Laniri Nale Kütsotü* (believers of the ancestral faith) living in the old village of Müluori numbers 28 households. Out of this, 18 households are with families, 3 houses habited by widowers and 9 households are headed with widows. The small community of 28 households are under the guardianship of *Tsuosekhu Kajiri*, a spirited and wiry 78 years old. As titular head he assumes the role of spiritual guardian and mentor whose wisdom is sought and abided by the collective. As the spiritual mentor, he will take upon himself and observe certain self purification rituals with abstinence of particular food and wine for the common good of the collective. To outsiders he's simply referred to the 'Village Raja'.

The town of *Müluori* being the administrative headquarter of the Pochury people increasingly sees a number of people from *Müluori* village, who continue to settle at *Müluori* town every year.

The Festival of Nazhu

The biggest and important Nazhu Festival of the Pochury-Naga from Müluori merits attention in that, it continues to be observed by a small group of people who barely keep alive the ritualistic practices associated with the ancestral religion. It is quite uncommon in the Naga milieu to find today, a defining group of people living together collectively practicing the ancestral faith. Only a few places are to be located and the old village of Müluori is such a place.

In the *Azhiewi-Ri* (old village) of *Müluori*, the *Laniri Nale Kütsotü* (believers of the ancestral faith) of the Pochury-Naga, resists conversion. It's practicing members steadfastly live under the primordial creed, but face a new challenge in that, children by the time they reach adolescence are increasingly embracing the Christian faith. To be accepted in the larger social milieu and peer allegiance, are reasons often cited in accepting the Christian doctrine with the young. In a travesty to their primordial creed, parents condone the assimilation into the larger Christian milieu. Their contention that times are changing and social acceptability will present better opportunities for their off springs. With dwindling membership, particularly of the young, the *Laniri Nale Kütsotü* are faced with the inevitable that the ancient faith could possibly end with them.

Around the early part of 1946, a missionary by the name of Sare came from the Chakhesang-Naga village of Chizami. He was not allowed to enter and returned on the 21st February 1946. He sang songs and left the next day. The evening of his departure, an old man's house called Pürtho went up in flames. Interpreted in the primordial worldview and likening it an "unusual

occurrence', on 23rd February the villagers observed the *mene genna* (no field work taboo). Taking it for an ominous sign, seven households converted to Christianity on 24th February 1946, the reason being, they no longer desired to follow the fore fathers ancestral beliefs. Following these events, Christianity slowly spread among the people. The early converts moved away from the old village to establish the present new *Müluori* village, which is within close vicinity of the old village and commonly referred to as the Christian *Khel*. In the beginning, the old village resisted and framed strong and rigid diktats on the people to stop the missionary effort. However, in the subsequent decades, the followers of the ancestral religion have become a minority and continue to face challenges on their faith.

The belief in one Supreme Being who is omnipresent and omnipotent is reverently addressed as *Nyi Nyiaza Küjiwa*. In the conventional expression of the name *Nyi*, is a courteous form of address used in addressing grandfather. It connotes the highest degree of respect and honour in social and kinship relationship. In the same way *Küjiwa* means 'the Great One' referring to the greatness of *Nyiaza* who is God Himself. Normally the exhaustive name of God is not uttered in vain and in vague context. All prayers are addressed to *Nyiaza* alone and when prayers are offered the name *Nyi Nyiaza Küjiwa* is called. In that sense *Nyiaza* enjoys the exclusive prerogative of worship and reverence by the people. For example, before every meal a prayer would be offered, "You are the first to eat and drink, may you shower your blessings upon us", and then a portion of beverage and victuals are placed on the ground as offering to Him. The attribution of a human form or personality to a god in the analogical association of *Nyiaza* with a wide variety of natural phenomenon, elements, matters, rituals and beliefs is indicative of its transcendent and inherent nature that diffuse itself into the entire cosmos. (*Rümatho Nyusou, Excerpts from; Nyi Nyiaza Kujiwa or Saküüwuowa?*)

In *Müluori*, Christians also observe the erecting of *Awuthrü* (bamboo totem) before the *Nazhu* festival and at *Akhaku*, community dancing and celebration. Earlier the Christians after conversion did not observe *Nazhu*. But the changing scenario of the last few years, the mainstream Christian community of *Müluori* has loosened its grip, and revitalized the celebration of *Nazhu* as a cultural heritage in their present worldview without the pagan rituals. On the other hand, the practitioners of the ancestral religion remain steadfast and celebrate *Nazhu* as decreed in their primordial ethos, but not without facing new challenges themselves. Many of the signature elements of *Nazhu* are discontinued in the absence of younger membership. Most importantly, the male *Morung* institutes and female dormitories, the marriages that take place in *Nazhu*, the bathing and grooming rituals of female dormitory members, have been abandoned.

Notwithstanding the changes brought about in the contemporary milieu of the Pochury Naga of Müluori, *Nazhu* as it is celebrated today in its new avatar and continuing elements of the ancient is keenly celebrated by all.

Events in *Nazhu Khou* – Stages of Preparation

In the traditional past, the announcement of *Nazhu* festival would be made known on the last day when the feast of merit was performed. After the feast, the dates for the *Nazhu* Festival were announced not necessarily coinciding with the present schedule.

Nowadays, the dates for the *Nazhu* festival has been fixed by collective consultations with the village people, hence the 20th February is the fixed date for the community to start the preparations. The small community of the *Laniri Nale*, continue to observe *Nazhu* from 24th February to 5th March.

The festival is defined by various functions and stages of preparation. The most symbolic and unique element common to all is heralding in of *Nazhu*, with the erection of a bamboo totem *Awuthrüu*, that resembles a giant wind chime hung from a tall bamboo. In Christian homes the totem is erected any day from the 20th to 24th February. For the *Laniri Nale*, the totem goes up on the 24thFebruary with all the formalities completed on this day.

Awuthrüu



It is a profound indicator to the festival as well as, to the collective habitat. The eligibility to erect *Awuthrüu* are homes having male children meriting up to the age of 14-15 years. It alludes to a male head count in the habitat registry, sending out the message to say - 'here is a male resident who can be accounted for in the head count". In the past men who had taken enemy head trophies were not eligible to erect the totem.

The totem is made from a straight and tall bamboo, with no imperfections. Only men go into the forest to select the perfect bamboo with sharp eyes looking for a tall plant. When a bamboo is selected it is chopped down, trimmed of ancillary branches with the tapering end left intact to hang the *Awuthrüu*, a giant wind chime.



Scouting for a tall bamboo plant to erect the Awuthrüu





Cutting bamboo



When the bamboo is trimmed down it is carried back to the respective home and the wind chime is prepared to be hung from the tapering tip. The *Awuthrüu* is made from *Athekeu* dried

hollowed gourd, with the bottom sliced in half to create an inverted bowl, several tubes of *Aluoti* elephant grass reeds measuring approximately 8-10 inches dangle around its circumference. Right down the center hangs an *Awakhu* diamond shape pendant cut out from bamboo bark. When the pole is erected the wind chime is steered by the *Awakhu* as it twirls with the passing breeze. Clubbed with the chimes and the twirling movement the people allude it to the dance of the male child



Attaching the wind chime to the tapering end of the bamboo



Erecting the bamboo totem



Tying food offerings onto the totem

Food parcels wrapped in *Arunga* leaf containing sticky rice and 6 pieces of pork fat are tied to the bamboo totem and offered to God to in an emblematic act of prayer for his blessing. Although Christians erect the bamboo poles they disassociate from the rituals of food offering. It is important to the animists that the erection of the totem is completed on the 24th February.

In the days leading to the festival men and women are engaging themselves in various tasks. Once the festival begins, under the demand of primeval practices even chores such as fire wood collection, crafting works, or brewing of rice beverages will not be permitted. With these datelines, the women community of *Ahziwi Ri* busy themselves in weaving new textiles.



Groups of women come together to pound and clean several varieties of rice and millet for the feasts, brew huge quantities of rice beverages for the festival and women stock up firewood for their homes and for community bonfires. In the days leading to the start of the festival, water

will be fetched from the village water sources collected and stored in assorted large vessels and tall bamboo water jars.



Stocking up firewood



Crafting Awuthrüu

The men craft new bamboo mugs for drinking rice wine, make *Awuthrüu* wind chimes if there are male children in the house, weave different utility bamboo baskets, most importantly to replace old ones for home use in the year ahead, because the end of *Nazhu* would bring in the

agrarian duties. Some of their efforts will be for sold in the nearby town of Müluori, or gifted to near and dear ones.

Making bamboo wine mug



24th February.

The first day of Nazhu is *Küsüshie*- cooking food for the dead. On this day rice wine is brewed, different varieties of rice and sticky rice pounded and cleaned. Men slaughter the animals for the festival such as pigs, buffaloes, mithuns, and the choicest cuts kept aside. The collection of firewood is prohibited from this day till the end of the festival because it engages venturing into the forest and is hardwork. In the evening women cook food for the deceased family members. The dead are remembered in the festivities and the respect held for the deceased is amply displayed with the first feast cooked for the deceased family members. The choicest meats are cooked but the lungs will not be offered. The *Laniri Nale* hold the belief the dead do not like lungs because it's light weight without a meaty texture and so doesn't absorb curry flavours. Therefore, being tasteless offering the lungs is akin to holding the dead in low esteem without honouring and showing them respect.

Fish items and all portions of meat without the lungs are cooked with salt and chillies and prepared without tasting, being ritualistic ceremonial offerings one cannot taste it without the dead eating it first. When the meal is ready, *Arunga* leaves are placed on top of the lid, as well as, on the wine pot. The leaves are symbolic to a plate and cup so the dead may partake the food and wine.

In the evening, the families who have erected *Awuthrüu*, only after all the house work is done, will offer food to God and tie the parcels on the totem. Depending on the number of male children in the family that number of parcels will be tied. Each food parcel wrapped in *Arunga* leaf will contain sticky rice, rice and 6 pieces of pork fat. Prayers are invoked for God's blessing as the food *Nyiazakhuo küthuo* which means 'the hanging of Nyiaza God's basket offered to the Supreme Being *Nyi Nyiaza Küjiwa*.



Making a leaf cup

The *arunga* leaf is sacred to the Pochury and has multi purposes. It is used in many *gennas* for wrapping iron pieces, ritual food offerings, drinking rice wine, eating etc. The leaf is folded to make a cup for drinking rice wine. When making it, the stem is to be broken otherwise the person will be labeled a heartless man. After making this fold and tying into a knot the cup is ready for drinking. There is even a competition held for this leaf in the last week of July. On the appointed day, the youth from the village will go into the forest in search of the biggest leaf. The next day the biggest leaf along with the others are strung out in a decorative manner in the different *khels* (sector) On that day the young people will abstain from field duties and take part in drinking competitions.

25th of February *Nyiephakhou*- (the male ceremonial day).

The food prepared for the dead the previous night will be shared by women members of the household along with the young children both girls and boys. But the fathers and adult male members are forbidden to eat it. If they take this meal they will return empty handed when they go fishing and hunting. Preparations for the festival like the slaughtering of animals, fetching water, preparation of food and rice wine will continue till that day only.

In the evening, the girls of the dormitory will not sleep inside the host's house. Instead, they will sleep outside the dormitory using bamboo mats on which paddy grains are dried to barricade themselves.

26th of February is *Khuji* (Big ceremonial day)

This is the day when the men will first go and cut the vine *Khaluli* to be pulled in the tug of war between the different *Khels* (sectors) of *Azhiewi Ri* on the 2nd of March .After a full morning's meal to energize themselves for the labourous work ahead, all the men except the very old and infirmed, will go to cut a giant creeper vine and carry it back to the village leaving it in the *Asieku* (outskirts of the village boundary). Women are forbidden to participate in the ritual. The vine that the men cut in the forest is already marked prior to the festival. Prayers are offered to the Supreme God for his blessings, the protection of the collective habitat from natural disasters and sickness as the vine is brought down.



The vine being brought down



The men pulled it up the hillside until the clearing is reached. The vine is cleaned up and trimmed. Some of the men will cut bamboo, remove the green cover and with a thin sliver craft headbands called *asounyi*, to decorate themselves. Triumphant in their task, singing with gusto

a special song meriting the occasion, they carry back the vine to the village and leave it in the *asieku* (outskirts of the village boundary).



Making asounyi, a bamboo head band

Prior to this, much earlier in the morning, the young girls sleeping outside rise very early and go to the spring well some distance away to bathe without eating a morsel. They carry a change of newly woven skirts and clothes as well as macerated bark pulp to bathe with, and the special leaves that their fathers collected from the wild as talisman to ward off evil.



Bamboo mugs are taken along to bring back water for their mothers to wash their feet. At the outskirts of the village, leaves are tossed at the malevolent evil accompanied with curses and spitting warding it off not to follow them.



As they approach the spring well, the leafy talismans are hidden in the bushes to be collected on their return. Arriving at the water source, they assist each other to wash, bath and groom. Wearing new clothes they frolic, dance and play games.



On their return they carry back water in the bamboo mugs and collect the leaves. As they approach the *Asieku* (village boundary), with a repeat of the earlier curses the remaining leaves

are thrown giving warning to the omnipresent evil not to follow them inside the village or harm them. The mothers wash their feet in symbolic acknowledgement to the dutiful and respectful daughters.



While they were away bathing, the parents build a new fireplace and cook a feast of the choicest meat cooked with ginger, fish with ginger and sticky rice to feed their daughters. This is also friendship day when best friends express their friendship and bonding by sharing food and feeding each other. With each mouthful of rice and meat, the girls declare their trust, closeness and friendship with these words as they feed each other ‘ you are my best and first friend”. In the evening, the young men of the Morung (male institute) gather in the respective village square to dance, sing and drink around a bonfire.

- **The tradition has been abandoned because the female dormitory system is no longer practiced in the absence of young girls who no longer follow the ancestral faith. Today, the festival of Nazhu is celebrated without this signature element.**

27th of March - *Akhakhou* (Day for drinking rice wine)

The 27th is *Akhakhou* or wine drinking day. Groups of women who pounded rice together in the preparation for Nazhu will come together and visit each other’s homes, drinking rice wine out of cups made from leaves.



It is also marked by the ritualistic observance of what is known as *Nyiaza khou küthou* literally meaning “the hanging of *Nyiaza’s* basket” It is a ceremonial offering in which strings of food such as rice and meat are wrapped in *arunga* leaf and hung on the door frames. This offering of food to *Nyiaza* God is an emblematic act of prayer for his blessings. Early in the morning before anything else, without taking a drop of water and food, the mistress of the house will conduct the ritual. She will make an offering of sacred wine *külakha* to the Supreme God *Nyiaza* to propitiate his blessings and bountifulness. The ritual wine is prepared on the 25th night and made from sticky rice and *Arhü* seeds. It cannot be consumed by anyone. Taking the ritualistic contents she places it in an *arunga* cup. At the front door she takes a bit of the offering throwing it with these words ‘ Lord are the first to eat and drink, I offer you this wine you drink it first, may you shower your blessings upon us’. The cup is then tied to the front doorway.

She repeats the same ritual at the back door. She also does not overlook the dark corner of the house where *Mürawa*, a metaphor to an orphaned spirit resides, tears an *arunga* leaf folds it, and strings it up in the corner saying ‘you also take this’ Thereafter, she builds a fire to prepare the food and drink water if she desires. In the worldview of the *Laniri Nale*, the front door of the house symbolizes the male space in the conduct of rituals when offerings are made. Food parcels will merit rice or sticky rice with six pieces of pork fat. Offerings made at the backdoor is the female space meriting five pieces of pork fat, sticky rice or rice when hanging food offerings to God.

Two of the oldest members *Akhruotewa* from each *khel* (sector) will go house to house with a tall bamboo cup for measuring rice wine and collect it in large jars. Out of their free will, not only wine but rice, meat and bean chutney is given out by generous households which will be distributed between them. These home visits results with a huge cache of wine jars that are placed in the dancing arena of the village square. Drinking is allowed only when the dancers fall in exhaustion and can no longer dance.

In the evening, men of the *Nyutheri* clan, starting from the lower section of the village will dance going around in circles until they reach the upper section of the village *Khutsori Khel*. During these dancing sessions, a widow remembers her deceased husband with sadness. She places a newly woven shawl for the occasion in the dance venue, alluding to his presence that he is also dancing with them. Returning home with the shawl she tosses rice wine to him saying these word ‘Your friends are dancing!’

28th of February - *Rülamüloa*

28th February is *Rülamüloa*- the day of nuptials. Young boys are duty bound to guard the vine *Khaluli* left in the village boundary on the 26th. Taking beverages and bean chutney they will guard and check that nobody damages or cuts the vine. The vine holds a special place in the beliefs and practices. If the vine is damaged and the person or persons responsible caught, a heavy fine is penalized. The sacred attachment to the vine extends even to death if found guilty of the act without attracting any repercussions on the injured party. Before returning, they will go and bring back *wiephrü* (bamboo) from the forest and carry it home for use on the 2nd of March.

In the evening of the marriage day, the parents of the engaged *Morung* boy will take several foodstuff and meat and leave it in the new home for the couple build by the father of the groom. The bride's family will go and cook a meal for themselves with the provisions left behind by the groom's parents. After feasting and dining, the smart and able members from the bride's side are chosen to take cooked buffalo skin and the prepared feast to the *Morung*. They will take extra precautions making sure not to alert or be accosted by the inmates. If they are caught, it will indicate the *Morung* men have proved their manhood, strength, alertness, and smartness. In failure they will be branded weaklings. After the 3 year initiation period, *Morung* inmates are permitted to marry on *Rülamüloa*. They will not be eligible to give a feast on that day, but at a later date in March. The marriage will not be consummated and the bride will stay in the new house with her closest friend until the *genna* period is over, when the husband will join her.

In the absence of the male *Morung* institute and female dormitory system, marriages under the primeval tenet are now abandoned. The last person to be married under the ancestral creed is Chuvithou Ngouri , 51 years old from Müluori. A former *Morung* inmate of *Azhiewi Ri* , he got engaged on 25th July 1991, and was married on 28thFebruary 1992, on the designated marriage day at Nazhu. He later converted after 7 years on 19th December 1999 and took baptism on 31st December 1999.

In conversation with Chuvitho Ngouri of Müluori

In the interview he shares his experience.-

" I had also crossed the eligibility period having stayed at the Morung for the stipulated 3 years but I got married, the last non-Christian according to the ancestral faith on Rülamüloa , 28th February 1992. Today the practice no longer exists and marriages are conducted in the Christian doctrine."- Chuvitho Ngouri



Chuvitho Ngouri

The 28th of February is now designated as the official day of Nazhu by the Müluori community of the Pochury- Naga. The community of Müluori both Christians and the *Laniri Nale*, collectively celebrate the one day Nazhu festival on this day. On the 28th of February 2015, the festival was a 2 day special edition which was held jointly clubbed with the Müluori Cultural Day and Nazhu Festival 2015 together.

In the 2 day special edition of Nazhu 2015, special guests and neighbouring villages of Lephori the sister village of Müluori, and Aghekho were invited to re-bond traditional goodwill and

friendship ties. The community effort in safeguarding its intangible cultural heritage was encouraging with several competitions held in various categories namely; traditional indigenous games, dance, song, fire making, cotton spinning, and tug of war. The celebrations culminated with a huge community feast.

Many trophies were won in various competitions by the participating teams. Besides the competitions there were performances in traditional instruments, throat singing, songs from the elders and dances by the neighbouring villages.

1st of March is *Azheküjü*.

The three day *genna* period starts from the 1-3 March and the 1st of March is *Azheküjü*. Before the *genna* period starts in *Azhiewi Ri* the old village, if there are guests, strangers and Christian off springs living in the household, they must leave the house from the evening of 28th February. They can return only after the *genna* period is over. For the next three days, no stranger or visitor is allowed to enter the village and nobody is entertained in the homes of the *Laniri Nale*. It is the period of self purification by the collective to purge themselves in preparation for the New Year's *Jhum* (slash and burn) and wet paddy cultivation. The events in the next few days of Nazhu will focus and revolve around begetting bountiful blessings, good harvest, protection from injury on the self, from sickness and disease, from natural calamities and directing positive energy on the well being of the collective habitat.

On this day, an important ritual is conducted which is of profound importance to the collective habitat and to the Christian population as well. It will define the course that the community will embark in the new agrarian calendar. Early in the morning before the break of dawn, the ' Village Raja' will leave the village without speaking to anyone, and go deep into the jungle to scout for a suitable area where the villagers will till the year's *Jhum* cultivation. The site would have been surveyed by him much prior to Nazhu but he shares it with no one. When he reaches the spot, he chops different species of *ashito* and *aulachi* wood, marks the spot and returns to the village. In the morning, the villagers will not eat until he returns with the awaited news. When he shows up, they will go to his house where he will show them the species of wood from where it is collected and informs them the spot has been marked by him. It is on this site the villagers will built a *machaan* (resting place) for the villagers to rest on their way or while returning with heavy load from the *Jhum* field. The Christians also wait and receive this piece of information and make preparations to clear the jungle in their respective plots. There are no taboo restrictions for them and they begin the task of clearing soon after.

The *Kaji Künyiewa* (assistant Headman) will announce to everyone to return to their homes and eat. He rounds up all the able bodied men and heads out to the chosen spot to construct

the *machaan*. After gathering and stocking up the constructing materials they return to the village. In the days following the construction, the second Headman accompanied by selected traditional fire makers will lit a fire to observe the smoke and rising flames and forecast whether grievous injury will inflicted the villagers, or if the harvest will be bountiful. On completion of the *machaan*, the young men will bring back pinewood and other timber to their respective *Khels* to build a bonfire.

For the *Laniri Nale*, the observation of Nazhu continues till the 5th March and until then the fields are not attended to. After several days of restrictions to work with implements, men are allowed to make wooden implements and handles for machetes, in preparation of the field work ahead with no food restrictions to take chilly in the morning meal. In the evening the men will dance and sing around the fire and have a meal of rice with fish and ginger.

2nd of March *Kharünyu*

Early in the morning, the *Khaluli* vines lying on the road side which were cut on 26th of February, will be carried to the village by the men. The bamboo brought by the young boys on 28th February will be cut into 4-5 feet in length and sharpened to a spear tip by the fathers for the boys to pierce the vine. Like a target practice, the boys stab at the length of the vine with the bamboo spear to break and soften the vine. The spearing is done with the intention for the vine to snap easily when the tug of war is pulled in the evening.

In the morning the young men extend a helping hand to any farmer whose fields requires the extra attention before taking food. The evening winds down in dancing before retiring

The firewood gathered by the couples who were married on the 28th and stocked at the village boundary before Nazhu, will be brought to their new homes with the assistance of the youth and already married females. Other male members of the *Morung* will get to work in cutting no other timber but oak trees for the construction of the female *machaan* (platform).

Food restriction *genna* is observed on this day. Barring rice, fish, ginger and salt the villagers will abstain from eating meat, leaf vegetables, yam, chilly and other food items in the course of the day. In the evening, the tug of war between females and males will be played until the already pulverized vine breaks. If the vine does not break during the game, it receives further pounding treatment with the pestle of the rice mortar. When the vine eventually breaks, it is cut into small segments and distributed among the *Khel* members. The tapering part is kept aside to be used as bindings in the construction of the female *machaan*. After the tug-of-war, the chopped segments of the Khaholi vine is taken to the respective homes and placed near the rice and water containers to begat a good year of bountiful harvest.

3rd of March- *Zulaküchu (field)genna day*

The *genna* for the purification of the field is observed on this day. Where there is a water source in the fields, it merits a *genna* ceremony that must be performed otherwise the year's *Jhum* (slash and burn cultivation)will not be bountiful. The division of work is between those youth, not performing the field *genna*, who will construct the *machaan* (sleeping platform) for the girl's dormitory with the materials collected the previous day. For those performing the *genna* in the fields, this day nothing is accepted or taken from anybody not even water if offered by anyone. He must remain purified, cleansed without the intake of pollutants in order to conduct the rituals. At the water source, he will offer three, six, nine or twelve pieces of iron wrapped in *Arunga* leaf. When wrapping, the leaf is torn on either side of the stem, to tie the parcel. Placing the offerings of iron pieces in the water, he will loudly invoke "God, I have brought these for you please accept it". Saying these words, he heads straight for home without looking back. Reaching the village, he will not enter his home, but tell the children to inform the household that he has arrived. The household until his return will refrain from eating and lighting the fire. From outside a nearby house, he further instructs the children to have their food and to wash all the utensils. After the children inform him that they have done what he has asked them to do, he will enter the house and light the fire. His wife will start cooking a meal. When the wife gives him a cup of rice wine, he will first offer a prayer to God like this "You are the first to eat and drink, may you shower your blessings upon us" and a portion of beverage is left in front of him.

4th of March- *Kümünyikhu-* (End of ritual day)

The construction of the sleeping platform for the female dormitory was highly significant. Only a man of means, because of the high expenses involved in playing host, and given the feast of merit for six times can host the female dormitory *Alashie* . He would merit putting up of decorative wooden panels with distinctive motifs over the front and sides of his house to signify his achievements. Wearing special textiles would also be eligible to both his wife and himself particularly, a black dyed textile for the lower skirt for his wife. Before Nazhu, the new appointed host would get ready to stock food and wine for the welcome feast in honour of his wards. This day the girls would spent it in the house of the newly appointed host. They would carry food to the host's house to be cooked for themselves in the course of the day. The girls abstain from laborious work nor engage in building the *machaan* by the men for their use. They will dine on the feast given by the host and his wife. The eldest girl among them will be given her share first followed accordingly till the youngest. Food parcels are prepared and given out for the parents by the host.

In the evening the new host would invite the young *morung* boys and ply them with wine. In playful banter the girls would hand feed the men in between gulps of rice beverage with rice and gravy. As they leave, the girls cannot resist the last mouthful of feeding them with sticky rice stuffed with hot chillies. With their mouths burning but taking it in good humour, the men depart with sweet revenge in mind sing with gusto “only a chilly, only a ginger plant” alluding the burning heat from the chilly to a mild ginger.

After their departure, married women in the age group of 30-40 years would join in the feast. They too would be plied with rice wine and food. The last batch to partake of the wine and feast were the married men in the 30-40 years age group. Many songs would be sung in the course of the evening finally culminating with dancing in the village square.

Today this tradition is no longer in practice with the discontinuation of the *morung* and *Alashie* female dormitory culture.

5th of March- *Khaji* (The first day of field clearing)

Khaji means the first day of jungle clearing for the new *jhum* field. But if a death has occurred during the festival, no one will go to the field but spend the day in their homes.

For the adolescent boys it is the day for an *Ariekühuo* (picnic). The parents will pack the best cooked meat and food which they will take to the edge of the village boundary *Asieku* and spread the picnic. When they get there, they will build small lean-tos for shade, gouge themselves with the food the whole day doing nothing just what they desire to do, and return home in the evening. Because of this occasion, when young children are reprimanded by their parents for showing no inclination to work blame it to “*Nazhu Ariekühuo.*”

The Way Forward

With the celebrations drawing to an end every *Nazhu Khou*, it prepares the community to another year in the agrarian calendar. The coming days of hard toil will fade the festive memories of *Nazhu* for a while before it rekindles again. The community of Müluori can take comfort in the thought, that the shift in their approach to bring back *Nazhu* adapting it their present, is the encouraging direction to follow. In the knowledge that with collective participation they revitalize inter-generational transmission, protect and safeguard the intangible cultural heritage of *Nazhu Khou* in the coming days.

The following document, Nazhu : Festival of the Pochury Naga of Müluori has been documented under the Scheme for Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage and Diverse Cultural Traditions of India 2015 – 2106 and supported by Sangeet Natak Akademy.

Documented by
Sentila T. Yanger
Tribal Weave, Nagaland
18th March, 2016