

# JHUMING: THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL TRAIT OF THE MELURI VILLAGE.

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## **Abstract**

***Jhuming or Shifting Cultivation is the most commonly agricultural practice among the Tribal's. It is one of the oldest modes of cultivation known to the Human civilization. Jhuming or Shifting Cultivation is also called slash and burn. The various Government agencies and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) are sensitizing about the advantages and disadvantages of the Jhuming and importance of conservation of forest and its eco-system. Jhuming, which may be contributing to the global warming. Jhuming is also widely practice by the Meluri Village and is an integral part of their Social and Cultural practices. The terrace cultivation is steadily replacing the Jhuming, but still the daily life of the people is revolving around the Jhuming activities. In the near future replacing the Jhum Cultivation may disrupt the Social and Traditional practices of the Meluri Village, letting to chaos and anarchy in the society. This paper tries to look into their Social and Traditional aspect in Jhuming, which plays a pivotal role in the daily activities of the Meluri Village of the Pochury Naga Tribe of Nagaland..***

**Keyword: Celebration, clearing, harvesting, land ownership and sowing.**

## **1.INTRODUCTION**

Jhuming or Shifting cultivation which is practiced by the tribal's is also called as slash-and-burn. It is a labour intensive form of agriculture that involve selection of site/land, clearing of forest, burning, sowing, weeding, harvesting and planting for one or two years and the land is left to fallow for years depending on the availability of the land.( J.D Saul,2005. p.126). Prof. Sapu Changkija has pointed out that, "jhum cultivation was

practiced only in a demarcated area", and further went on to say that, "Jhum has all been about a democratic and traditional mode of farming for the Nagas. If we discard this, it may disrupt our culture". (Aküm Longchari, 2017, p.1). Jhuming is a well organized and regulated social system of cultivation, ensures the involvement of the whole Village community in a participatory manner, building a bond among various social group in the society creating social cohesion that has with stood the ravages of time and modernism. (O.P Singh and B.K Tiwari, 2002, pp.45-46)

Phek is a District in the State of Nagaland covering an area of 2026 sq.km and is bounded by Zunheboto District in the North, Manipur State in the South, Myanmar in the East and Kohima District in the West. There are more than 119 recognized villages in Phek district, with a total population of 1, 63,418 and density of 81 per Sq.km. Phek the district Head-Quarter is 145 k m away from the State Capital Kohima. ("Statistical Handbook of Nagaland". 2018, p.27) The district is inhabited by two major tribes, the Chakhesang and Pochury and other sub-tribes like Kheza, Chokri, Sumi and Poula. ("The Khuzha/Kheza committee". 75 anniversary. 2014, p.1)

Meluri the Head-Quarter of the Pochury Naga, is at the distance of 66 km away from Phek Head-Quarter and 166 km away from the State Capital Kohima, and situated at the attitude 25.687,823 and longitude 94.632,217. Meluri is one of the oldest and biggest villages of the Pochury Naga tribe. It is the Head Quarter of the Pochury Naga, a sub-division under Phek district. Meluri and Khumiasü are the two villages recognized by the Govt. of Nagaland under Meluri jurisdiction. Meluri village is 1km away from the Meluri Head-Quarter and Khumiasü village is 3km from the Meluri Head-Quarter. According to the 2011 census the two village has a

population of 3130 (Meluri 2723+ Khumiasü 407) with a sex ratio of 955 and literacy rate of 52% (58% male & 46% female). It has 41% (1124) of working population, who are engaged in either main or marginal farming. ("Meluri Village Village population-Meluri-Phek", Nagaland-census 2011, www.census2011.co.in>...>meluri: n.d)

## 2. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY.

Though enough research had been done on the Jhum Cultivation of the Naga people in general, not much of a research is done on the Jhuming activities of the people of Meluri group of the Pochury Naga. Studying the Jhuming practice of this group of people, will help in understanding their Social, Cultural and Economic activity.

The people of Meluri Village practices Jhuming for their sustenance. Jhuming, the main stay of their economy is replacing by terracing and orchard farming.

The other objective is to study the function of the Village Chief (Kajiwa) who makes rituals and abstinence for the well-being of the Village.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

To achieve this objective, both primary and secondary sources of information are applied. To gather the primary data, few selected elders are interviewed and questionnaires are distributed to educated and leaders of the Village. Direct participation in the social activities like festivities, rituals and observation method was also followed.

For the secondary sources books, magazines, booklets, village customary records, church records, visit archive, library, and any record related to the problem of study are collected and analyzed.

To achieve the goal and collection of data, the following stages are followed:

1. Stage-I: Data collection (visit library/archives/collect journals).
2. Stage-II: Field visit (visit village/conduct interviews).

Apart from these, individual and group interview are conducted during the field visit.

## 3. RESULTS/DISCUSSION

Jhum Cultivation is practiced by the Meluri Village since time immemorial, and is an integral part of their tradition that all festivities and social gathering are in tune with it. They have a vast Jhum area of 12 circles namely- Khunyuo, Rhühzhu, Jjirü, Ngarahsü, Kütsünachi, Lozü, Krieji, Sienyisü, Müürküzhe, Nazhu, Rohzalesü and Kürüwusü. ("*Müluori nyushu nyusho lasipha*", 2003, p. 28) A man from his childhood to old age spends most of his days in the field and almost all his religious ceremonies are designed for the production and increase of his crops. (J.P Mills, 1982, p.75)

Landlessness was never heard off, except of small land holding. Every household have sufficient to sustain for a year, in rare instances, if the supply run short (not able to sustain for a year) the relatives and neighbours helps in such dire straits, (Zapuvisie Lhousa, 2020, pp.1-2) in return the poor work for the rich and are paid in kind (paddy) or in cash.

The jhum circles are cultivated in sequence. Every household owns a land in all the jhum circle and no one dares to cultivate the jhum circle, other than the selected circle by the Chief and Elders of the Village. The Chief and the Elders makes sure that it is not jumble-up leaving one circle to the next. In rare case the circle is jump to the next as decided by the Chief, Village Elders and Astrologers (Sarünyi Küchieri) who foresee bad omens like, poor harvest or famine, insects, rodent and animals that may destroy the field. It also skipped to the next site/circle, if a person starts clearing the forest before the Chief makes a ceremonial rite and the violators are punished by imposing fine. The skipped jhum circle is cultivated only in the next circle. (Siarütho Nyuthe and Vithosie Nguori Jan. 5<sup>th</sup> 2020, personal communication)

The Jhum circle is as old as the Village itself. The rotating of the Jhum circle is a continuous process, where the starting and the end thus not arise. Through this Jhum circle one could calculate ones age by how many times the circle of his birth are cultivated minus the skipped circle if any or by identifying one's peer group through

these Jhum circles. (Kuorütho Poji, Dec. 17, 2019, personal communication) The Jhum circle brought under cultivations are very large in area. The characteristic of jhuming is letting to fallow for a long period of time, shorter period of cultivation, rotation of field rather than of crops, mixed cropping, exclusively of human labour, no artificial irrigation and its characteristic, firing the field before sowing. (Bela Malik, 2003, pp. 287-315)

The land boundaries of each plot are divided by water shed, mountain ridges, stream and footpath and also by erecting a small stone to mark the boundary. In cases of boundary disputes, the elders and the adjacent owners bear witness to the dispute and are settled on the spot.

The land is owned by the Individuals, the Clans and the Khel's. The Individual owned the maximum land area of the village. The Meluri Village is divided into four Khels namely Khutsori, Phrütheri, Zhiekuri and Zhitshüri. The word Khel is an exogamous group among the Ahom. (J. H. Hutton. 2003, p 451) Among the Pochury Naga of Meluri Village, Khel is a group of people who share the same migratory origin and are settled in a demarcated area within the Village and have their demarcated land area, and is a mixture of all Clans. No exogamy is followed among the Khel except the Clan members. Each khel owns a common land in their own khel area but every individual irrespective of the Khel own the land in the village i.e., the Khel owned the land only in the demarcated Khel area, but an individual owns the land in all the Khel areas.

The Chief is selected by the Elders of the Village from the Tsouri Clan. He remains the Head of the Village till death. The day today affairs of the Village are decided in the Müzaluo (gathering of the Elders of the village) in the name of the Chief. The Chief in consultation with the Elders of the Village decides' which Jhum circle to cultivate. (J.D Soul, 2005, p.126) He makes a rite- locally known as atso zaana, early in the morning, on the sixth day of Nazu festival (it is one of the most important festival of the Pochury Nagas' celebrated to mark the end of the year and the beginning of the New Year. These days the festival is celebrated on the 27<sup>th</sup> of February every year) and in the afternoon the Second Chief (Kaji Sheshiwa/Anyuziawa) leads all the able men of the village and each khel constructs a wooden resting

place (Rüna chüna) on the way to the new jhum field. ("*Müluori khonyo thi wuleh*". n.d, p.41) The next day, before the falling of the trees, they scattered iron pieces to divest the spirit plight. (H. Bareh, 1970, p.77) Great care is taken while divesting the spirit plight, for it may cause sickness or even death. After which only they start clearing the jungle for cultivation.

The trees are cleared in the month of March and one sunny day, probably the first week or second week of April, the jhum field is burn. The day before or on the day of firing the jhum field, the four khels of the village clear the jungle (Bhawelee) at the edge of the jhum field from spreading wild fire. The next day onwards, the left over burn-wood and leaves are pile-up and burned again, getting ready for sowing of the seeds. They build two types of huts-Tsolo Phrü (triangular hut) form the left-over burns of wood and the other called Aphrütsa made of thatch, for protecting themselves from sun, rain and storing the harvest. Some jhum field are so far, that they walk hours to reach the field but never stay for the night in the jhum field, but it's not genna (social obligation of 'Does and Don'ts') to stay for the night in the jhum field.

Nyitsokhu/ Shephie khu (firing or sowing festival) is celebrated on 13<sup>th</sup> April every year- a ceremonial sowing of the seed. On this day only the women folk of the village perform the ritual. The eldest women of the Nyutheri clan make a ceremonial sowing (Shephie) early in the morning and the other women of the village sow during the day, carrying only Biejükhu and Akhuotsa (types of basket) making sure that no seeds/grain is spilled/dropped on the way. This festival being a ceremonial rite, the actual sowing of cereal and millet are done on the first day of May onwards but vegetable, yam, (apia) and maize are sowed, soon after the Shephie khu. (Sowing festival) Jhuming being a mixed agricultural method in a single plot of land, they grows rice (Atsuo), millet (Atsedha), red leafed millet, (arhü) giant red millet, (khuozi Kürümia kümüruwa) giant white millet, (khuozi Kürümia Kümüjiwa) ginger (Aso), chilly (Sürüso), brinjal (Agaji), bitter gourd (Ajiabu), pumpkin (Khurüni), cucumber (Amüzhü), beans (Akürah), tapioca (Atsorüzo Kütsawa), tomato (Wijiküto), ladies-finger, sesame, jobs-tear (Ashedha), etc. (Kuorütho Poji, Dec. 17, 2019, personal communication.)

For sowing the seed, they don't plough the top soil, but dig a small hole with a hoe for sowing. Men, women, boys and girls of the same peer group of 5-10 who are from the same khel, join together to work in rotation for each member. (J.P Mills, 1982, p.75) Songs are sung in praise of each other while working. (Kuorütho Poji, Dec. 17, 2019, personal communication)

The equipments used for jhuming are very simple. It included axes, dao, (anyuh), hoe (Amükhuh) and rakes (Asüha) for clearing the jungle. (J.D Soul, 2005, pp.128-129) Planting of crops differed according to the nature of the crops. The millet (Atsedha), are grown in the gentle slope and silt soil near the bank of river Tizu, Jiji and Araju which provided fertile land for cultivation. Dry paddies (Suomüdha) are grown in the clay soil and Yam (apia) are grown in the chalky soil or stony area.

To sow the millet, gourd is used as container and a man or woman broadcast the millet and is covered-up with soil by a small hoe (tütse mükhu) as they move up. As for the dry paddy (Suomüdha), a very small basket (akhorü) is tied around the waist for containing the paddy seed for easy picking and sowing. (Siarütho Nyuthe and Vithosie Nguori, Jan. 5<sup>th</sup>2020, personal communication) A small hoe dig a hole in the ground and seeds, covering the seed with earth as they work ahead. (J.D Soul, 2005, p.128) Maize (akhuozhi) bottle gourd, (asuzza) red gourd, (achisho) white gourd, (arünyi) cucumber, (amüzi) ginger (aso) and chillies (sürüso) are grown in patch in the jhum field, (J.P Mills.,1982, p.87) along with millet, dry paddy and yam(Apia). Yams are cultivated by every house hold and they make sure that land for yam cultivation is shared among the family members and relatives. The different varieties of yam (apia) cultivated are Dharuopia, apiasuo, Kürapia, apiatsa and atsotü.

Once the seed sprout-out and grows into plants, the weeding is done continuously until it is harvested. Weeding is a simple process, for they pull-out the weeds and overcrowded seedlings with bare hands. Chasing away of the birds and wild animals is done for they may eat or destroy the harvest. (J.D Soul, 2005, p.128)

Tsate Khu (festival) is celebrated in the first week of August to mark the beginning of new harvest season. The festival lasted for four days. ("*Müluori khonyo thi wuleh*". n.d, p. 44) Millet is the first to be harvested by August and soya beans and the Naga dall/rice bean are

sowed on the harvested land. They are of bushy grass family, harvested by December-January. Maize, giant red millet and giant white millet is harvested from September to November, dry paddy in October, Jobs-tears in November and yam in December - January. (Kuorütho Poji, Dec. 17, 2019, personal communication) The harvested crops is stored in a granary (J.P Mills, 1982, p.48) built outside the village in groups, within the village fence. A separate storage for yam (phiashü zeh) are built near the house or are stored inside the front room (awiepa) in a raised platform to keep away the pigs; it's here they feed the pigs and are chased out of the house after feeding.

Reaping/ harvesting of dry paddy are done by stripping the seeds into the basket straight from the stalks. For millet the whole head are torn by hand and rub between their legs until the seeds felt off. Dao are used for reaping jobs-tears, (J.D Soul, 2005, p.129) red leafed millet, (arhü) giant red millet (khuozzi Kürümia kümüruwa) and giant white millet (khuozzi Kürümia Kümüjiwa) are cut and dry for a few days before they are harvested. They are grown mainly for brewing drinks.

The cotton is grown in the old field i.e. in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year, (Kuorütho Poji, Dec. 17, 2019, personal communication) on a poor soil at the low hot slopes. Cotton picking festival (akükhia küzeh khu) is celebrated in the first half of the month of November, on that day the women folk picks the cotton, carrying in their cloths and shawls. (J.P Mills, 1982, pp.78- 87)

Vikhou Kübrü festival is a one day celebration in the last week of December (Müdhuo) to mark the end of the jhum circle (Kuorütho Poji, Dec. 17, 2019, personal communication). This is a common hunting day or ceremony. (H. Bareh, 1970, p.77) In the evening after the hunt, the weapons are washed and foods cook by the fresh water brought by the young boy for the occasion. The water is shared among the villagers. The celebration signifies the end of the year and to begin a fresh for plentiful hunt. ("*Müluori khonyo thi wuleh*". n.d, p.47)

Millet the stable food of the people for years is losing its popularity and is fast replacing by rice and commercial crops like maize, Naga dall/rice bean and ginger. Millet the stable food of the people is stored even for half a century to tide over during famines and drought. The

maize and ginger which found easy market are brought down to the commercial market like Dimapur and Kohima for cash or exchange rice and other essential commodities.

The Jhuming activities are in harmony with the social practices of the people of Meluri, where the Chief, (Kajiwa) the Second Chief (Kaji Sheshiwa) and Elders who plays an important role in the society. The Chief (Kajiwa) and the Second Chief (Kaji Sheshiwa) blessed and guide his people. Their status are so sacred that they are not to speak loud, leave his plate and cups empty nor share with other, nor think of making love, head-hunt or curse the people, for his people will not suffer of sickness or famine or shortage of food grains. They are the guardians of the Social, Economic and Polity of the people and without their blessing, guidance and involvement, the society may face hiccup if the chieftainships cease to exist.

Jhum cultivation is still the most important source of economic sustenance of the people. But of late, with the coming of the new system of administration and education there was a decrease in Jhum cultivation. The opening of Administrative offices and Schools, people took up Government jobs and Education, letting to shortage of worker, thus less land was brought under cultivation. With gradual increase in population and demographic changes, the land holding systems have change over the years. The land area brought under cultivation is decreasing year after year. The reason might be the migration of the people from the Village to Towns. The Government, through its agencies like the Agriculture, Horticulture and Forest department should take up more pro-active steps, by encouraging the farmers to take up marketable crops like maize, (akhuozih) yam, (aphia) Naga Dall, (rice bean) tea and coffee and tree plantation, where the soil and climatic condition suits the area.

The other reason for the decrease in the Jhum cultivation might be the coming of the Christianity. The Christian ideals could not accept the old social obligations and 'Genna,' (Do's and Don'ts while making offerings to the spirit) making it difficult to co-exist and co-cultivate with the Animist, (traditional religion) in the future it may even result in cultivating of the jhum circle their separate ways. (Meluri Village Baptist Church Platinum Jubilee. "Vüwa Nüh Kuumze Zhühku", 2013,

pp.12-13) The coming of Christianity have disrupted the Socio-Cultural activities to some extent, but being an integral part of their life, the foundation on which their Society was build, have not changed much.

The Chief (Kajiwa) still play an important role that he is consulted for all decision making and is highly regarded in the society. The Chief (Kajiwa) is assisted by the Second Chief, (Kaji Sheshiwa/Anyuziawa) the first Sower, (eldest woman of the Nyutheri clan) the first Harvester (a family lineage of Nguori clan) and Elders of the Village, who advice the Chief (Kajiwa) on all occasions.

## **5.CONCLUSION.**

However more intervention is needed of the Government, to come out with an alternate means of livelihood which is sustainable, marketable and environment and eco-friendly. The NEPED (Nagaland Empowerment of People Through Economic Development which is formerly known as Nagaland Environment Protection and Economic Development) Project of 1994 which makes a major impact in the Agro-forestry practices where the grass root level and even women groups were made aware to save and renew forest, conserve soil, wildlife and biodiversity. Such a project which involves the whole Village in the decision making must be encouraged. Seminars and workshops are to be conducted to make the people aware about the Government welfare schemes, financial and technical assistances on enhancement of productions and conservations. Thus jhuming which is labour intensive and less productive have to look for an alternate means of agricultural practice, without affecting the social and cultural fabric of the society.

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