

According to one researcher in 1991, there were 15,000 Dzala people living in the north-east part of the Buddhist kingdom of Bhutan.¹ They inhabit the highlands along the upper course of the Kholongchu River in the Yangtse District. In 1995, Yangtse was granted administrative status as a fully-fledged district of Bhutan. It was previously a sub-district of Trashigang, and it is often referred to as Trashi-Yangtse. The part of Bhutan inhabited by the Dzala is extremely poor. Many visitors say it is like stepping back to medieval times. Life is simple and slow-paced. One tourist publication unflatteringly describes the main town of Trashi Yangtse: 'It takes 10 minutes to visit the entire town. . . . Just north of the *chorten* is a bazaar area with a few shops. A tall, elaborately decorated Bhutanese-style *chorten* sits beside a small stream, spanned by a concrete bridge, and doubles as the town's vegetable market. A few eating and drinking shops and a spartan guesthouse mark the end of the town.'²

about 8 kilometres [5 mi.] upstream from its confluence with the Kurichu. According to local lore, the village is named after *khoma* 'desirable one' coveted by [the Buddhist sage] Padmasambhava during his legendary peregrinations through Bhutan.³

The Dzala language has yet to be placed in a specific linguistic group by researchers. It seems to share many characteristics with other Tibeto-Burman languages in the area, but it also displays significant differences. The Tsangla people, who are found in large numbers in eastern Nepal, 'make a perennial joke about the Dzala and their language because of the near homophony of the name Dzala and the Tsangla word *zala* "monkey".⁴

Tibetan Buddhism has been the spiritual stronghold over the Dzala people for more than 1,300 years. Buddhism entered Bhutan from Tibet, and visits from lamas and monks from Tibet, India and Nepal maintained and strengthened Buddhism here over the centuries. The Dzala people



Population:
18,800 (2000)
24,100 (2010)
31,000 (2020)
Countries: Bhutan
Buddhism: Tibetan
Christians: none known

Overview of the Dzala

Other Names: Dzalakha, Dzalamat, Yangtsebikha

Population Sources:

15,000 in Bhutan (2001, G van Driem [1991 figure])

Language: Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Himalayish, Tibeto-Kanauri, Unclassified

Dialects: 1 (Khomakha)

Professing Buddhists: 100%

Practising Buddhists: 70%

Christians: 0%

Scripture: none

Jesus film: none

Gospel Recordings: none

Christian Broadcasting: none

ROPAL code: DZL

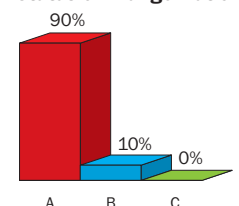


Yangtse—which shares the name of China's longest river by coincidence—borders the north-east Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh. The Dzala language is also spoken as far west as the Kurichu River in Lhuntse District. The speakers of Dzala in Lhuntse, however, refer to themselves as the Khoma, and to their language as Khomakha. Khomakha has been listed as a dialect of Dzala. 'The villages on the southern slopes overlooking the Khomachu River are also Khomakha speaking. The most prominent Khomakha speaking village is the village of Khoma itself, located on the Khomachu

see their identity and culture as completely intertwined with Buddhism.

At the town of Duksum, it is said that anyone who can climb the rock face to the top of the hill overlooking the Buddhist temple will be forgiven all of the sins they have committed up until that point. Few Dzala people have ever heard of the true forgiver of sins, who gave his life that they may be free. There has never been a church fellowship in this remote corner of Bhutan, and at present there are no known Christians among the Dzala people.

Status of Evangelization



A = Have never heard the gospel
B = Have heard the gospel but have not become Christians
C = Are adherents to some form of Christianity