

Tinan

Approximately 30,000 speakers of the Tinan language inhabit the central Himalayas on both sides of the India-China border. They live on the slopes of mountains that pierce the sky up to 7,000 metres (22,960 ft.) above sea level. The majority of Tinan are located in India where more than 24,000 live in the Spiti and Lahul District, which is situated in the lower Chandra-Bhaga Valley in the northern part of the state of Himachal Pradesh.¹ The main Tinan village in India is Gondla.

Smaller numbers of Tinan live in China. Linguists C F and F M Voegelin listed a 1977 population of between 450 and 1,600 Tinan living in western Tibet.²

Geographic and political barriers keep this small group separated from contact with the outside world.

The Tinan—who are counted under the Tibetan nationality in China—are also known as *Lahuli* and *Bhotia*. In India they are one of the ethnic components in the officially-recognized *Lahaula* tribe.³ The term *Bhotia* refers to people of Tibetan stock in general. The name *Lahuli* is also a generic term used to describe the inhabitants of the Lahul District, which was formerly controlled by the British.⁴

Although culturally there is little difference between the Tinan and other Tibetan peoples, their language is what qualifies them as a separate group. Tinan is a distinct language that is part of a group of several West Himalayish / Kanauri languages.⁵ Other Tibetans cannot understand Tinan, which has 56 per cent to 63 per cent lexical similarity with Chamba Lahuli, 32 per cent to 37 per cent with Bunan, 21 per cent with Spiti and only 13 per cent with Central Tibetan.⁶

The region inhabited by the Tinan people was part of the Ladakhi Kingdom in the 10th century. Border clashes in the area in the 1950s and 1960s resulted in the Chinese seizing a large tract of land from India. The region, which is home to the Tinan people who live inside Tibet, is called Aksai Chin.

Tinan men are skillful merchants and traders. The women are known for their independence. 'Since their husbands are usually off on trading expeditions, the women feel free to take more than one husband. The men trade salt, grain and wool to other people in the Himalayan region and in the process sometimes become quite wealthy.'⁷



The majority of Tinan people are Tibetan Buddhists, although a number of families have converted to Hinduism. The strength of Tibetan Buddhism in northern India depends to a great extent on the prosperity and generosity of the Tinan. 'They, in turn, feel spiritually secure because of the religious merit they gain by dispensing charity and

generously supporting the temples.'⁸

There are a handful of Tinan Christians in India, but none exist on the Tibetan side of the border. Few of the Tinan have ever heard of Jesus Christ. Mission work in Lahul began after Karl Gutzlaff challenged the Moravians to begin a mission in Tibet. 'The first missionaries, A W Heyde and E Pagell, settled down in Kyalang, a Tibetan village in the province of Lahul.'⁹ Scripture portions were translated into Tinan in 1908 but have been out of print since 1915. Gospel recordings are currently available in the Tinan language.



Population:
29,350 (2000)
34,400 (2010)
40,300 (2020)
Countries: India, China
Buddhism: Tibetan
Christians: 20

Overview of the Tinan

Other Names: Lahuli Tinan, Lahuli, Bhotia of Lahul, Lahauli, Lahouli, Rangloi, Gondla, Tinani, Teenan, Gondhla, Lahaula

Population Sources:

24,534 in India (1994, India Missions Association)
450 to 1,600 in China (1977, C Voegelin and F Voegelin)

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

Dialects: 0

Professing Buddhists: 80%

Practising Buddhists: 60%

Christians: 0.1%

Scripture: Portions 1908

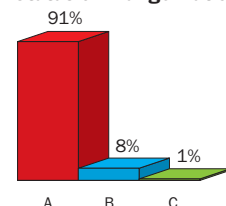
Jesus film: none

Gospel Recordings: Lahouli Tinan

Christian Broadcasting: none

ROPAL code: LBF

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