

# Beda



## Population:

400 (2000)

460 (2010)

540 (2020)

**Countries:** India

**Buddhism:** Tibetan

**Christians:** 15

## Overview of the Beda

**Other Names:** Bodh, Bhot, Bhotia, Jyali, Jyayi, Bedar, Beta

### Population Sources:

400 in India (2000, P Hattaway)

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

**Dialects:** 0

**Professing Buddhists:** 70%

**Practising Buddhists:** 40%

**Christians:** 4%

**Scripture:** none

**Jesus film:** none

**Gospel Recordings:** none

**Christian Broadcasting:** none

**ROPAL code:** none

According to Indian researcher S R R Prasad, the Beda tribe number approximately 300 people in Ladakh.<sup>1</sup> Their population has decreased over the decades. The 1931 census in India listed 414 Beda people, of which 70 stated they were Buddhists, and the rest Muslims. This religious adherence is the reason for the diminishing numbers of Beda people. Most of those who believe in Islam change their identity and start calling themselves Balti. An additional small number of Beda, perhaps 100, inhabit a few small villages of the Kullu and Shimla districts of the state of Himachal Pradesh.<sup>2</sup> The Beda in Himachal Pradesh are Hindus.

In 1989 the Beda were granted status in India as a Scheduled Tribe. The Beda in Ladakh have been living there for approximately 200 years, having migrated from the Lahaul and Spitti area of Himachal Pradesh.

In Jammu and Kashmir the Beda are thinly scattered in villages around Leh, the capital of Ladakh and former home of the Ladakhi monarchy. Because of their role as musicians and beggars, the Beda spread themselves out over a number of villages in order to obtain maximum exposure and economic benefit. Usually no more than a few Beda families live in the same village, alongside Ladakhi and people from other ethnic groups.

The Beda have been described as a 'wandering musician community of Ladakh. Their chief occupation is begging. They play on the *surna* (clarinet), *daman* (drum) or *duff* (tambourine) in public places or near a house. Usually the male members play . . . while the females dance on the beats of the tambourine. On the completion of their

musical renderings they beg. Due to their occupation of begging, they rank lowest in the Ladakhi society.<sup>3</sup>

In the past the Beda wandered over a vast territory, playing their music all the way to the Tibetan border.<sup>4</sup> They used to pack their belongings over mules and asses staying on the outskirts of Bot [Tibetan] villages for a few days before moving on to the next

village. They traversed throughout the Ladakh, Nubra and Zangskar valleys visiting far-flung villages in the course of their annual cycle of migration. . . . On the completion of their renderings they would beg collection food grains from Bot households . . . so that they could sell the surplus food grains in the market place in Leh

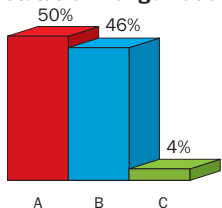


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and purchase necessary items like clothes and utensils.<sup>5</sup>

Despite their small population, there are Beda who follow each of the four major world religions. Nominally, the majority of Beda families believe in Tibetan Buddhism. Some are Muslims, and the Beda living in Himachal Pradesh are Hindus, while a few families are Moravian Christians. The Moravians first sent missionaries to Ladakh in 1852, and through bringing humanitarian aid they soon won the respect of the community. By 1922 there were 158 Ladakhi Christians, a few of which were Beda people.<sup>6</sup>

## 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