

Dowaniya



Population:

3,000 (2000)
3,500 (2010)
4,050 (2020)

Countries: India

Buddhism: Theravada

Christians: none known

Overview of the Dowaniya

Other Names:

Population Sources:

3,000 in India (2000, P Hattaway)

Language: Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Jingpho-Konyak-Bodo, Jingpho-Luish, Jingpho

Dialects: 0

Professing Buddhists: 85%

Practising Buddhists: 45%

Christians: 0%

Scripture: none

Jesus film: none

Gospel Recordings: none

Christian Broadcasting: none

ROPAL code: none

Approximately 3,000 members of the Dowaniya community live in the north-east Indian state of Assam. They inhabit a number of different locations on the Assam plain, but many live in the district of Sibsagar, a short distance from the Brahmaputra River.

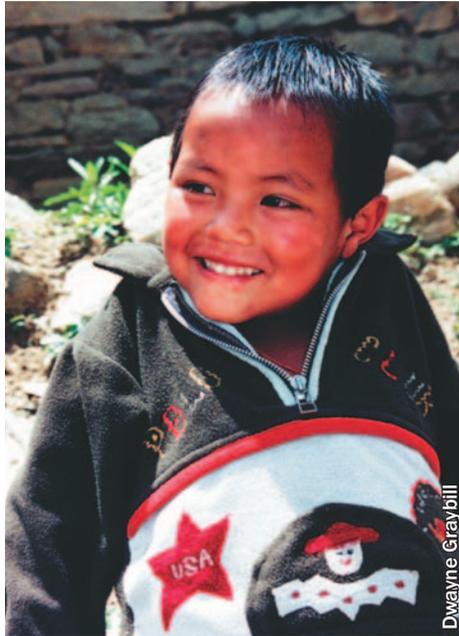
In India the government has not recognized the Dowaniya as a Scheduled Tribe, so their unofficial designation has caused them to be largely forgotten by the outside world. Knowledge of the Dowaniya's existence comes from the work of eminent Indian anthropologist K S Singh,

who included them in his massive project identifying nearly 5,000 distinct ethnic communities in India.¹

The Dowaniya have a history closely linked to that of the Singpho, a tribe of similar size who live in the neighbouring state of Arunachal Pradesh. The Singpho are cousins of the large Jingpo tribe of northern Myanmar and southern China, who number more than half a million people. The forefathers of the Singpho migrated from northern Myanmar (then Burma) to north-east India in 1793 to flee persecution and terror caused by the Ahom king Gaurinath Singha. The Singphos disposed the Khamtis from their land and settled in their present location.

The ancestors of the Dowaniya people were also among those early Singpho settlers. Singh comments, 'It is said that the mingling of the Singpho with the members belonging to several other communities, such as the Moran, Matak, Mishing, Kachari, Chutiya and Ahom, brought the Dowaniya into existence. In 1825 and

1826, Captain Neufville released several thousand Singpho serfs. The descendants of these serfs constitute the Dowaniya community. . . . In the Singpho dialect *dua* means leader or head, and *ni* denotes its plural form, hence, the word *dowani* means headmen or leaders.²



Dwayne Graybill

The Dowaniya language is part of the Jingpo branch of the Tibeto-Burman family. Despite coming from the same roots as the Jingpo, more than 200 years of separation has now made Dowaniya very different from its original form. The Singpho language in India today reportedly only has 50 per cent lexical similarity with Jingpo of Myanmar.³ The Dowaniya also speak Hindi and Assamese and use the Assamese script

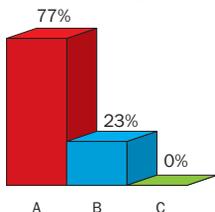
for writing.

The Dowaniya people retain their traditional customs to this day. They have managed to keep the all-pervading Hindu culture at arm's length, especially those Dowaniya living further away from the towns. One source notes that 'they are experts in woodcraft, basketry and weaving'.⁴

When the Singpho first entered India they brought their belief in Theravada Buddhism with them. Most Dowaniya have continued as Buddhists, although their faith is now mixed with Hinduistic and animistic influences. They have their own Buddhist monks, who preside over birth rituals, weddings and funerals, and are also entrusted with the preservation of the ancient Buddhist texts.

There are no known Christians among the Dowaniya people. Throughout their long and troubled history they have been waiting to hear the good news that Jesus loves them and has made a way for them to know the true God.

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